

BROADCASTING ACT

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked why building national unity for this diverse, bilingual, multicultural, multiracial country was not a worthy goal. In particular, I asked why national unity is now to be excluded from the new Broadcasting Act.

In response, the government said that "national unity mandates for broadcasters exist only in totalitarian regimes like South Africa and are not appropriate for democracies like Canada."

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. As national unity has been part of the CBC mandate since 1968, is it this government's view that we have not had democracy in the last 22 years, and in particular in the last six years of the Tory government? Is that what the government means by removing the national unity clause?

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I reminded the hon. member yesterday that she had voted for this particular change. The change was made in the original bill, Bill C-136, which was before this House in 1988. I have not had the opportunity to check the voting record, but I believe the hon. member supported the change at that time.

There has been a tremendous amount of criticism of the presence of such a clause in the bill. Among those who have criticized it have been many civil libertarians across this country who regard it as appropriate to a regime that controls its media. We have an arm's length relationship with the publicly owned broadcasting corporation and that will be maintained.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, freedom of expression has never been interfered with. It is guaranteed under the Charter of Rights of this country. I did call for change. Change has taken place in this country. When there is a mood change in the country I think the role of the government is to respond to that mood change.

Will the government tell Canadians why, in its new broadcasting bill, it establishes two separate standing committees at the CBC, one on English language broadcasting and the other on French language broadcasting, creating two Canadas within the CBC? Why is the government undermining a vision of a united Canada?

Oral Questions

What is wrong with Canada? Why can't government help it grow?

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the proposal to have standing committees of the CBC board to deal with the problems of French and English broadcasting is a very constructive move toward national unity.

I would draw to the hon. member's attention the wonderful program that appeared just a few nights ago. There was a combined broadcast of *Le Point* and *The Journal* on which national unity issues were discussed.

It is to try to find the devices to bridge the two solitudes in this country that the proposal to establish the two standing committees of the one board of the CBC under CBC by-laws is in the legislation.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture knows that there have been serious design flaws in the Canadian Crop Drought Assistance Program, flaws which resulted in prairie producers getting bills of \$1,200 to \$2,000 and demands for immediate payment. The minister knows that the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds recently signed a letter to producers in Saskatchewan explaining that they have no course but to pay up and thank the government for the good job that it has been doing.

How can the Minister of Agriculture justify sending bills to prairie producers when what they really need is assistance? Will he immediately withdraw this demand for payment and ask his government to properly address the immediate financial concerns of prairie producers?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has any specific cases in mind I would be pleased to look into them.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the Legislature in Saskatchewan unanimously supported an emergency resolution calling on this government to provide up to \$900 million for cash starved Saskatchewan producers.

Is the Minister of Agriculture prepared today to stand in this House and accept this cry for help that he has now received from every single elected MLA in the province of Saskatchewan? When will the minister accept the fact that there is a serious agricultural crisis on the prairies?