

*Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*

I must congratulate the Hon. Member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve for the uncanny timeliness of his private Members' motion. Even as we speak, Mr. Speaker, several Members of the Progressive Conservative Government are meeting with the special task force to review Canadian Broadcasting policy. The Hon. Member will know that Mr. Gerald Caplan and his co-chairman, Mr. Florian Sauvageau, along with a distinguished group of communicators, are spending nine months crossing the country, consulting with all sectors of the Canadian economy and discussing with a wide range of interested groups and individuals matters relating to the future of Canada's broadcasting system, which will bring about the first fundamental review of Canadian broadcasting in 15 years. My hon. friend can see how this debate can only contribute to the information gathering process of the task force on broadcasting. In that regard, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for Eglinton-Lawrence (Mr. de Corneille) and the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) for some of their very timely and constructive remarks. Although I cannot agree with everything that was said, I do appreciate their contributions.

That being said, I can say on behalf of the acting Minister of Communications that he is interested in the proposal of my colleague.

The process for the recent revision to the Broadcast Program Development Fund and for the review of French language television services was undertaken in December, 1984. This clearly illustrates that the ministry is always interested in contributions to the ongoing dialogue in the evaluation and development of broadcasting policy. It is in this light that I see the motion placed before us.

To suggest that the affairs of the "Holy Mother Corporation" have most Members of this House writhing in an earthly hell from time to time is something of an understatement, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, Members on this side frequently get apoplectic about the CBC's daily programming and management practices, and so it is not surprising to see motions, such as this one, recommending the implementation of extreme and extraordinary measures to examine the CBC.

There are two immediate responses that I would offer the Hon. Member in connection with his motion. The first is that whatever our concerns and complaints, no matter how much we castigate, slam and damn the CBC, I am one Member of Parliament who fervently believes in the viability and continued existence of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It was after all, a Progressive Conservative Government which created the CBC in the 1930s. It will not be under a Progressive Conservative Government that we will see the CBC dismantled or put up for sale. Second, I would say to my hon. friend that this is a time for fiscal and economic restraint.

The acting Minister of Communications, following the lead of his immediate predecessor, the Hon. Member for Frontenac (Mr. Masse) is working on the Government's review of the communication portfolio and the future of broadcasting in particular. If we were not undertaking such a complete review, and if the special task force on broadcasting was not at this

very moment carefully examining the future role of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the over-all context of this country's broadcasting system, then the need perceived by the Hon. Member to establish a subcommittee, such as the one he described, could easily be confirmed. In such a case, it might well be useful for it to have a broader mandate such as to suggest ways and means to determine the optimum support and allocation of resources to cultural activities in the communications portfolio, while paying special attention to the role and activities of the private sector and provincial Government in the cultural development of the country.

I must oppose this motion, Mr. Speaker. Our Government, whose first goal is the reduction of the deficit, would probably find the establishment of such a committee, as described by my colleague, too onerous. It would also be duplication of work done by the Auditor General of Canada, who performed a comprehensive audit of the CBC in 1982-83, and by work that will be done by the task force on broadcasting policy whose establishment the former Minister of Communications had announced before the Hon. Member brought this motion forward for debate at this time.

May I remind this House of the size of the CBC? The CBC English-language division is made up of 31 AM radio station, 15 FM stations and 18 television stations. In addition, 15 AM radio stations and 26 television stations are under an affiliation contract with the CBC. The French-language service groups, 15 AM radio stations, six FM radio stations and 13 television stations, while seven AM radio stations and five private television stations are in affiliation. Simply put, the CBC has over 150 broadcasting facilities. To this we must add the CBC northern services, CBC international, this parliamentary channel and all other related activities.

How expensive would it be, I ask the Hon. Member, to visit the large number of CBC facilities spread throughout the country, especially if a group of persons were involved? Would it be prudent to hire additional experts and knowledgeable support staff when the Government is trying right now to control its own expenditures of personnel and already has people in place to study relevant issues in the entire broadcasting industry? Would it not be easier for the Standing Committee to request from the CBC the numerous studies it has commissioned itself?

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but what I want to make clear is that expenditures such as these must be clearly justified. Is it really the case with this proposal? Can we believe, I ask the Hon. Member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, that we really need another committee to scrutinize the operations of the CBC? Frankly, there are other ways to satisfy the Member's need for current information about the CBC. What immediately comes to mind is the CBC's parliamentary services. This service was instituted to answer the questions Members could have regarding the activities of the CBC. Any Member can use it for his or her benefit.

As for visiting CBC facilities, I suggest that Members of this House might wish to visit CBC facilities located in their