

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

next thing, of course, was that there was a debate on that motion. And then, all of a sudden, some other member turns up with a point or order that because the motion which set up our committee did not have in it the phrase, "the right to report from time to time", we could not make a report requesting television coverage without running the risk of that bringing on the end of our committee.

I believe that we on that committee have the right to say that this frustration has gone a little bit too far.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: We come back to the House and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) raises the point with the Prime Minister that it has been established that the committee cannot be televised unless it receives the authority of the House on the basis of your ruling. Then the Prime Minister stands up and says that that is just a private letter Madam Speaker wrote to a member of the House.

Surely things are a little more firm, a little clearer than that. This is a run-around and it is a case of being pushed from pillar to post. I say that if ever there was a case of members of Parliament being denied the opportunity to do their job as members of Parliament, it is on this issue of the right even to request radio and television coverage of the proceedings of that joint committee.

I am doing my best to stick to the procedural point. I am not getting into the substance of the debate in the committee, although I am tempted to do so after the things which I heard this morning in the committee as to the reasons why it should not be broadcast or televised, such as, "the lights would be too hot", "some people won't want to come", and "too many would come." We had the silliest arguments I have ever heard.

An hon. Member: All by Liberals.

Mr. Knowles: Do not condemn all the Liberals. There was one Liberal there who voted our way. Everyone was present, for the vote and even the non-presiding chairman voted. It was a clear gang-up. You may say, Madam Speaker, that that is up to the committee, and one cannot deny that the committee has the right to make the decision by a majority, but it comes only after we have been pushed from one position to another. First we are told the committee can make its own decision, and then we get into the committee we are told, first of all, that we cannot, then we are told that we can only have broadcasting if we get the authority of the House, and then we are told that we cannot even ask the authority of the House without causing the committee to die.

It makes one wonder if the drafting of the motion to set up the committee was not done so carefully as to leave out the right to submit reports from time to time. I submit that the authority of the members of the House to do their job is being frustrated and challenged by this position taken by the side opposite. The Prime Minister said that it is up to the committee, and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) has said the same thing. I suppose that the President of the Privy

Council will now say that the committee has decided by a vote of 13 to 11 that it does not want coverage of the proceedings.

Even if the motion had carried, there was still the other point of order as to how we may submit a report without bringing about the demise of the committee. Some Conservative said, "Let's submit it and get the committee over with." But surely this is not the way to run a free Parliament or a committee system. My leader said in the question period today that since the days of the referendum some of us have been doing everything possible on the side of redrafting our constitution and making headway in that area. My leader and the rest of us in this party have taken a certain amount of flak because we have found some good things in the proposition before us. I do not know how much longer we can take that flak from one side and take this kind of abusive treatment from the government of the day.

Just this afternoon my leader suggested that the Prime Minister might put a motion, today, to give the committee authority to have its proceedings covered by radio and television. The Prime Minister wondered why he should put such a motion when the letter written by the Speaker to the chairman of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped was only a personal, private letter, not an opinion.

Mr. Lalonde: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles: I believe that the co-chairman of the joint committee did not see the letter until some time around 11.30 or twelve o'clock this morning in the middle of the committee meeting. He had been told that there was such a letter. As I have said, on the basis of that letter the hon. member first of all said it was illegal, then he backed away from that once he received the letter and said that the motion was in order but it was clear that we could not proceed by ourselves, that we must go to the House. Surely this matter must be straightened out.

The Prime Minister could have straightened everything out today in a very few seconds by simply saying, "All right, the government will bring in the necessary motion giving the committee the power to have radio and television coverage." Your letter, Madam Speaker, made it quite clear that it is not determined for all time that television and radio are to be only in the House of Commons. Your letter makes it clear that, as the order now stands, coverage can be only of the House, but that it can be extended to the committees if the House so orders that a committee can have permission to have radio and television coverage.

Some of us feel that, in view of the importance of this issue, the Prime Minister should have grabbed at the opportunity today, but he failed to do so. Perhaps I am a little more worked up about this matter than I sometimes am on these issues, but it is because I sat through most of that committee meeting this morning. I was at a committee meeting chaired by you, Madam Speaker, for a while. Then I left it to go to the other, then I left that one and went to another, then I went back to it, and it was only an organizational meeting called for 9.30. I thought it would last for 15 or 20 minutes, but it was