

The Address—Mr. Sharp

● (1440)

The report of the committee *inter alia* put forward the proposal that the television record should be produced as a kind of electronic *Hansard*, with production controlled by parliament and distribution in the hands of the final users, as is now the case with *Hansard*. It would appear to me that the House is in possession of sufficient information, both of a procedural and technical nature, to pronounce itself on the principle of television coverage and that the time has come for consideration of a motion to secure the judgment of the House in the matter.

In my view and the view of the government, it should be possible to bring to Canadians not only the opening of parliament, which is now in the way of becoming a tradition, on the nation's screens but perhaps one or two important episodes of parliamentary business on an experimental basis. I put this question to hon. members through you, Mr. Speaker: are we justified in continuing to delay the implementation of the kind of installations capable of bringing to Canadians a more vivid, more compelling and more complete record of our proceedings than has ever before been possible?

To me there seems to be only one answer to that question: we are not justified. The matter has been considered at length and I believe in this House there is an overwhelming opinion in favour of proceeding. This should be tested in the House of Commons by early consideration of a motion to approve the televising of our procedures. Whether the television record is distributed live through cable channels, educational television or existing national networks, or as a nightly or weekly summary of events in this chamber, is a matter for discussion. The overriding consideration is that the material should be made available both for purposes of public information and for future archival and historical use.

In opening its doors to the electronic age, parliament will be taking a step as fraught with historic significance and the possibilities of procedural evolution as the admission of verbal journalism in the eighteenth century. I am satisfied, for example, that some of the practices of this House—such as a series of statements on motions initiated by a minister—would not survive in their present form if they were conducted under the scrutiny of the television camera. It seems to me we could probably find a better way even before we permitted television into this House. Surely this is one of the procedures we should consider and improve.

It does seem ludicrous that television should be barred from the oral question period, but that ministers and critics from the opposition should appear outside the chamber to answer questions put by reporters in what amounts to a mock-up of the question period. Surely the public should be able to witness the real thing when the government faces its critics across the floor of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: None of that extramural TV.

Mr. Sharp: As one of those who has participated in many of these extramural encounters, Mr. Speaker, nothing would have appealed to me more than to appear on television answering the questions of the right hon.

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member for Prince Albert. It would have been a dramatic encounter.

Mr. Mazankowski: That is, if you had answered them.

Mr. Sharp: I wish to assure the House through you, Mr. Speaker—and I trust that what I have said reinforces this assurance—that the government wishes to proceed by way of consensus in reforming the procedures and structures of this House. In this connection, I should like to associate myself with the remarks made last evening by my parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid), and the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald), who expressed themselves as being in favour of having discussion of the rules of this place conducted in public so that the public can participate and make its input to the reform of our procedures.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sharp: Our concern is not so much the ability of the government to get House approval of its program, although this is a legitimate concern of any government, as it is to enhance the performance and reputation of parliament. No party gains if parliament falls into disrepute either because urgent legislation is unnecessarily delayed or because the opposition is prevented from discharging its essential critical function.

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate you upon election to your high office. I have no hesitation in saying that I know you will preside over this House in the same manner, with the same diligence and in the same conscientious way as was ably demonstrated by your predecessor. In the same vein, I should like to congratulate Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. member for Beauharnois-Salaberry (Mr. Laniel) upon the appointment to his high office. I should also like to congratulate the hon. member for Montmorency (Mr. Duclos), the mover of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, and the seconder, the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Lee), for the way in which they performed their respective tasks.

It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, that Canadian governments spend a considerable amount of all the income earned by business establishments and Canadian taxpayers. It has been established that this amount has now reached the 50 per cent mark. When I refer to Canadian governments, Mr. Speaker, I am including not only the federal government but municipal and provincial governments as well.

It is no secret that many Canadians share the opinion that we are today overgoverned, and in the last 25 years the size and power of government has grown in a most phenomenal way. In addition to the three levels of government, there are Crown corporations of many kinds, government-owned utility services, government-owned transportation services, government monopolies of alcohol, government-sponsored marketing monopolies, and government-financed broadcasting media and health plans.

The point I would make, Mr. Speaker, is that more and more power is being concentrated in the hands of government at the expense of the citizen. When all the government enterprises are added up, the rest of the Canadian economy is in a minority position. Most Canadians have