

*Broadcasting House Proceedings*

I want to make two straightforward points about the advantages of broadcasting House proceedings. It will enable the people of Canada, by way of radio or television, to see the adequate or inadequate performance of government or opposition members. I have confidence that with the supervision of the proposed committee the proceedings will be covered in a fair way, but if they are not in terms of technical requirements, hon. members can be sure that the people sitting up in the gallery covering this debate today will make it known. If the government of the day which has administrative responsibility is somehow distorting from a technical point of view the coverage of the proceedings, that will become known. I have no fear on that score at all. The people of Canada would be able to see the good and the bad performances on both sides of this House directly through television or to hear them on radio.

Second, on occasions of very great political importance in the history of this country, too frequently in the recent past the Prime Minister has said he could not come to parliament first to make important statements. Either time has not permitted or there has been some other rationalization given requiring him to go directly to television or to radio, thereby denying an important parliamentary right. We often hear bogus and phony arguments about parliamentary rights and privileges. In my experience, 80 per cent of them are bogus and phony. However, some of them are not and one of these, in my view, has been the traditional practice in our kind of democracy, dating back at least 100 years, for the prime minister to make major announcements or statements in the House and to inform the leaders of the opposition parties of such statements in advance, normally giving advance copies so that they can have a minimum amount of time to prepare a sensible response, especially in times of national crisis.

As I have said, on a number of occasions in very recent history—the most recent one being the election of a Parti Québécois government in the province of Quebec—the Prime Minister did not make his initial statement in this House and receive the response of the democratically elected opposition, but went directly to television. I regret having to say that there were no advance copies given to the leaders of the opposition parties so that their responses on television at that time could be based on a careful analysis of what he had to say.

By bringing television and radio directly into the House, it seems to me that short of a response to a declaration of war—and presumably that should also be made in the House—I cannot think, off the top of my head, of any circumstances in which the prime minister of the day, once we get television and radio into this House, could not make his statement to this central, democratic body which is crucial to the democratic history of this country. If this is the argument the Tories were really concerned about—and I have no doubt in my mind that they were simply quibbling—and if they are concerned about parliamentary rights and privileges, the bringing of broadcast facilities to the House will heighten, not diminish, them.

There would be no excuse for the prime minister of the day to speak to the people by going outside this chamber. The technical facilities would be here. He would be able to get to

[Mr. Broadbent.]

his feet and make the government's case, and the leader of the official opposition of the time, and the leaders of other opposition parties, would then have the opportunity to respond in this democratic forum. The sense of real participation would be heightened because some 20 million viewers in the country would be able to see a democratic debate taking place in a way which has never been known in our history.

In conclusion, we support this motion. We will have nothing to do with the Tory hypocrisy. We regret the measure was brought in at this time instead of serious economic measures, but let us get on with the debate, let us pass the resolution and go on to more basic, important economic questions.

• (1630)

*[Translation]*

**Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, instead of advocating economic measures, the government is presenting this motion about the broadcasting of our proceedings as a high priority. The motion is as follows:

That this House approves the radio and television broadcasting of its proceedings and of the proceedings of its committees on the basis of principles similar to those that govern the publication of the printed official reports of debates:

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, it is without knowing neither the technical aspects nor the way our proceedings will be broadcast that we should accept such a measure in principle so that the Canadian public knows what is happening and what approach Parliament is taking to the various problems facing our fellow citizens.

Of course, our party is favourable, in principle, to an extensive broadcasting of the proceedings of the House of Commons. We are not worried at all by such a measure. On the contrary, the more Canadians realize the inefficiency of Parliament the more will they know that we spend days and days debating secondary matters whereas major problems such as those relating to the dairy policy, the review of the banking system or the unemployment rate are not discussed in the House of Commons but simply awarded. For example, the workers of the textile industry see that they are systematically losing their jobs, in Sherbrooke, in Quebec City, in Louiseville and in Drummondville—

**An hon. Member:** Because of imports . . .

**Mr. Fortin:**—because this government protects and encourages imports. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, the more Canadians will realize these facts, the better for democracy in our country. In the interest of our country, it is urgent that Canadians realize how we are losing our time in the House. I regret to say so but it is true.

Mr. Speaker, milk producers in Quebec are now systematically stopping their operations. They are penalized because they have worked. And instead of solving this problem the government goes on letting dairy products and secondary dairy products enter our country and gives high priority to measures concerning the metric system and the broadcasting of the proceedings of the House. Mr. Speaker, to my mind this is sheer inconsistency.