

*Broadcasting House Proceedings*

● (1520)

Those are the observations of the standing committee of the House of Commons. These conclusions have formed the basis for the government's attitude and actions on broadcasting since 1972. Speeches from the Throne in January, 1973, September, 1974, and October, 1976, have repeated the government's intention to proceed; and for more than a year my predecessor, the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp), had on the order paper in his name a motion identical to the one now under consideration. At the same time, the government commissioned a number of technical studies, including a cost study tabled by my predecessor last June, and a half-hour videotape presentation in both official languages entitled "Broadcasting Parliament" which was shown to the party caucuses, the cabinet and the press gallery.

This is the background. It is now the government's responsibility to bring the question before the House for a decision. This we are doing, encouraged by the exhortation of members opposite.

Turning to the question of how broadcasting will affect the dignity, privileges and immunities of parliament, we must recognize that some action may be necessary but that there will be no sacrifice of existing privileges and immunities. One of the purposes of the special committee to be appointed on the adoption of the motion before us will be to examine this question. If the committee finds legislation on the matter necessary, the government will bring in the appropriate bill. Parliament would also, of course, ensure that the use made of broadcasts does not infringe the privileges of the House.

The broader question about the influence of broadcasting on the dignity of parliament is closely linked to the question about whether the House can stand the kind of exposure television gives. This is a matter of concern to all members. For my part, I do not subscribe to the view that the House cannot stand exposure. The purpose of broadcasting is not to provide entertainment, nor to convert the House of Commons to "show business"—although it displays such proclivities from time to time. The purpose is to provide Canadians with information and an archival and educational record of the proceedings. All members are aware that debate in the House is occasionally something less than scintillating, and that Canadians cannot be expected to remain glued to their television sets while we discuss such exotic things as bills dealing with consular privileges. But it is foolhardy to argue that Canadians will not understand the workings of the House and that exposure will be unhealthy. Indeed, exposure may well exert a healthy influence on the calibre of debate and the enthusiasm with which members put forward their views. It may also produce a better public understanding of the fact that a member's duties extend well beyond attendance in the House and often centre on the need to intervene on their constituents' behalf with the government and its agencies. In short, I have confidence both in the ability of this institution to adapt to new challenges and in the ability of Canadians to understand the workings of parliament.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

The experience in other legislative bodies which have permitted broadcasting supports these positive expectations. Any observer of legislatures around the world recognizes that broadcasting has not had the negative effects foreseen by its critics. Television broadcasting is carried on in the Alberta and the Ontario legislatures on an ad hoc basis by the media. Nova Scotia has permitted experimental television broadcasts. Recently, the Quebec government has indicated that broadcasting of the proceedings of the Quebec assembly may become a reality in the near future.

At the international level, broadcasting is even more prevalent. Television broadcasting has taken place at the United Nations for some time, and a total of 21 national parliaments permit either live or recorded television broadcasts. Radio broadcasting, still a very important facet of communication, has been permitted by a number of national parliaments in addition to those permitting television broadcasts. Members of the House will, of course, know that the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-the Islands (Mr. Douglas) deserves recognition as a pioneer of radio broadcasting for his role in initiating radio broadcasts of the Saskatchewan legislature over 30 years ago.

Turning to the matter of production and control of the "electronic *Hansard*", several points must be made. First, production is to take place on the same basis as the present production of the written reports; that is, under the authority of the House as exercised by Mr. Speaker. The standing committee chose this option over control by the media or some external body or enterprise. The reason is clear: only supervision of production by the House itself, through Mr. Speaker, can ensure that the record of the proceedings is complete and that parliament's traditions and procedures are respected.

The second point about the proposed system is that though parliament would assume responsibility for producing the official "electronic *Hansard*", it would not assume responsibility for the editing of broadcasts by the media. It would not be consistent with the freedom of the press for parliament or the government of the day to attempt to direct how and when use should be made of the broadcasts. Though some members may hold reservations about the impartiality of the media, it is clear that editing by parliament would create controversy and confusion and, at the same time, impose a form of censorship undesirable in our democracy. Thus, parliament would produce the basic material, in both official languages, as it now does the printed *Hansard*. But broadcasters, educators and researchers would use the material according to their requirements. This would, of course, be subject to insistence by parliament that its fundamental rights and privileges be observed, as it is now the case with the written reports.

My third point about the proposed system concerns the distribution of the "electronic *Hansard*". In the initial stages of the implementation of the resolution, parliament will be brought to Canadians primarily over the existing radio and television networks and private stations. The major Canadian networks have already indicated their interest, and it is reasonable to expect that they will fill the very valuable role of