

think everybody will concede that under the rule changes under which parliament now operates the standing committees do a reasonably good job in examining legislation. Legislation is given proper examination clause by clause, and indeed in many cases legislation is improved by the committees when it is reported back to the House. But the rules of the committees have to be changed to make the committees more relevant in terms of their ability to examine government spending and to call ministers to account for overspending their estimates, and indeed committees must be given the power to take the necessary initiatives, when they deem it advisable, to look on an ongoing basis into government spending, notwithstanding any rules of the House which may make it necessary to have estimates reported back to the House on a certain day.

We should take a look at the impact of television in the House on the most important part of our parliamentary day. A part of our parliamentary proceedings which has assumed a new importance and a new relevance as a result of the new supply procedures, the only part of the parliamentary day when we can hold the government accountable, is the question period. But the question period is at best an ineffective instrument to hold the government accountable. However, it is all we have. I believe the question period procedures in the House can be improved, and indeed I believe they will have to be improved before the House can agree to having television cameras in this place.

I believe that these reforms cannot be looked upon in isolation, just as I believe that by having this matter referred to a committee after the House has voiced its opinion on the principle—which I believe will find certain majority support—the committee will then have an opportunity to examine the need to change the rules in the context of the new situation which will emerge as a result of televising the House or providing, as the government House leader likes to say, an electronic *Hansard*.

There is one part of the government's proposal that has me somewhat troubled. The government has departed from the recommendations of the committee in one very important part. The committee recommended that the televising of the House be done on an experimental basis. I believe that to be eminently sensible because obviously we will have to look at the effect of television in the House on the rules of the House. Consequently I believe that before we put any permanent fixtures in place, before the House adopts any permanent procedures, it would do well to think that it will do this first on an experimental basis so that the procedures can be worked out as we go along. But in order to get at this in the context of the rule changes, in order to give all members of the House an opportunity to reflect on what this will mean to them individually in carrying out their responsibilities in this place as representatives of their constituents, it would be eminently sensible to have this matter referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, not in isolation but in the context of an examination and a reassessment of our standing orders and procedures in the light of the impact that television will have on these standing orders and procedures.

Broadcasting House Proceedings

I hope that the government House leader will agree to this proposal—if in fact Your Honour finds it admissible, which I hope and believe that you will—so that we can get on with the real priorities of the House and of the country, the priority of jobs and the priority of the future of confederation itself.

● (2040)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jeanne Sauv  (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me and enabling me to take part in this debate on the introduction of television in the House of Commons. I hope to be brief. I shall just take the time to underline the advantages I can see in televising the debates of the House of Commons.

As far as I am concerned, I think that we will derive greater exposure from the process, and exposure being the essential quality of politicians in the twentieth century, I think we need it more and more in our trade. Televising the debates of the House of Commons will thus spotlight government policies and motivations in the establishment of its programs and I think it will enable the Canadian people to have a much better perception of their representatives in the Parliament of Canada.

The measures we are proposing now will enable us directly to address the people, better than all the other measures which have already been taken such as the opening of the galleries of Parliament to the public and to the press, and the introduction of written *Hansard*.

I admit, Mr. Speaker, that I found it difficult to convince myself when speaking before a necessarily restricted audience in the House of Commons, and I understand the difficulties of having better attendance in the House. It remains that hon. members must address an audience which is necessarily very restricted.

I for one can hardly imagine that I am speaking to the nation, that all Canadians are listening to what I have to say, while a great many hon. members, who are overworked, must of necessity carry out their business in the House and listen to me only absent-mindedly.

Thanks to television broadcasting, we will be able to speak to the Canadian public as a whole. In my mind, this proposal to have our debates broadcast is certainly a new and most important progress of democracy within our society. If you will allow me this return to the past, Mr. Speaker, this bring us back to the "agora" of Ancient Greece, the open air meeting place where people would get together to obtain first hand information, without the assistance of intermediaries or, for that matter, translators, and where they could judge on the spot the effectiveness, sincerity, wisdom and what have you of their elected representatives. Little by little, the "agora" went indoors. Even during the last centuries, the proceedings took place in assembly halls such as this, their walls adorned with silk and velvet drapes, their floors covered with thick carpets, in certainly splendid, even impressive surroundings. However, gradually a protocol and a decorum quite foreign to the people was introduced in those rooms and the atmosphere so created could induce the governors to govern cautiously.