

Business of Supply

eventually killed. I do not want to see parliament further downgraded. Therefore, I think it is very urgent that each member of the house consider very carefully whether the danger is great, as I think it is, and what is the most appropriate solution. I agree that this is a matter that has to be approached with considerable care. I am not suggesting that we should go from the frying pan into the fire, but I would very much like to help the house get out of the frying pan which, I am afraid, will cook parliament to death unless we do something about it.

Mr. Robert Stanbury (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this debate today and I am glad to have the company of so many more members in proposing a study of the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings since the opposition members have joined our ranks. I have been in favour of the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings since I came to this chamber more than three years ago.

I beg to differ respectfully with the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) when he says that there is a danger that television will kill parliament or even downgrade it. I believe only those who sit in this chamber can do that. What people generally lack is an insight into the processes of parliament. I was happy to see the advent of television into parliament on September 12 last on the occasion of the opening of parliament. People were able to get a glimpse, at least, of the process.

● (4:30 p.m.)

Mr. Stanfield: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was not suggesting that television in the house would kill it. I was suggesting that what is going on now would do so. I do not want the hon. member to misunderstand what I said.

Mr. Stanbury: I think I understood the hon. gentleman. I am suggesting that television coverage either inside the house or outside parliament will not kill parliament; if it is killed it will be the fault of those who sit in it, not the fault of the news media, electronic or print. As an experiment, the televising of the opening of parliament was not, in my opinion, an unalloyed success. Members of Parliament perspired and squinted under the extra illumination which brought more of both heat and light to the house than the members had ever been able to generate. Sunglasses sprouted from parliamentary brows, eyes smarted, heads ached and shirts

[Mr. Stanfield.]

dampened. The relief was unconfined when those lights finally went out.

But the walls of parliament did not fall; the institution was not noticeably undermined; its members survived the experience unscathed except for a few scorched retinas. It was a quiet, tentative step, but in the parliamentary context it was a precedent of almost monumental proportions. It may have been accepted calmly by the viewing and listening public, who now take for granted that everything, or almost everything is televised. It may have looked like a modest gap in the electronic barrier around parliament, but I believe it was an historic step in the campaign which some of us have been waging to give democracy new visibility in Canada.

The party conventions of the past two years, brought as they were into the living rooms and even the taverns of the nation by radio and television, gave millions of Canadians their first real insight into the political process. With the help of a few fresh and fascinating personalities, the electronic media ignited a popular interest in politics and gave them a new relevance for the average Canadian. He was there at those conventions and he probably saw more of them than we who were physically present. Where does he go from here? He has chosen his leaders; he has picked his parliament. Now, he wants to see and hear them and it in action.

Will he be able to do so? I am sure we shall have to do something about those lights, but I have a feeling that broadcast coverage of parliamentary committees at least cannot be held back.

An hon. Member: There would have to be a quorum.

Mr. Stanbury: After that, it is surely only a matter of time before parliament recognizes radio and television fully as information media, with all the rights and privileges of the other, older media.

Some parliamentarians shudder at the thought of television or broadcasting. I have heard some of them today express feelings of this kind, though they have not yet got up to speak. I think the introduction of television would encourage a more responsible approach to debate. Why should not the most modern media be used to strengthen communication between parliament and the people? If we want mass involvement in our politics, what better means could there be? More than ever our democratic institutions are important to us. We crave involvement and we need it. But