

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, the adoption of this motion will have a direct and important effect on the democratic process in Canada. In this debate we must face head-on questions about the precise role of this House in our democracy. We must decide whether broadcasting will enhance that role and whether it will do so without sacrificing any of the fundamental rights and privileges of parliament.

Broadcasting raises a number of important questions, but we must begin with a clear appreciation of the functions of this House and how broadcasting is likely to affect them. To begin with, the House of Commons, with the other place and the Crown, makes the laws of Canada. Broadcasting will in no way affect the legislative function of parliament. It will not alter the role of the House as a law-making body. The House has, however, a number of equally important functions on which broadcasting will exert a direct influence. First, the House is the forum in which the government must defend both its legislative proposals and its administrative actions. Second, the House provides a framework in which the opposition parties expose their views and prepare to take over the role of governing. Third, the House is the body to which Canadians send their representatives, not only to support or oppose the government of the day but to intervene on their behalf.

Clearly, broadcasting will influence these functions. It will inform Canadians about what the government is doing, about what the opposition is proposing or exposing, and about the manner in which members represent their constituents and play an integral role in the governing process. In short, broadcasting will let Canadians know better what is being done here on their behalf. This cannot but have an important influence on the role parliament plays in Canadian democracy. In this age of communications, those institutions which fail to communicate their objectives and purposes lose both relevancy and meaning for the public. It is not enough for parliament to be flexible, for governments to be responsible. Achievements must not only take place but they must be seen to take place for the public to retain its interest and confidence.

Broadcasting is certainly the best way to ensure that Canadians, particularly young Canadians, understand what we are doing here and how we are doing it. And if Canadians are well informed they will better be able to respond and will keep our democracy dynamic by letting us know what they think. This could in the future have a direct impact on the way we meet our many challenges in the constitutional field, in social and economic policy, in communications, in transportation and in the many other areas of government activities. On the fundamental question, therefore—the question whether broadcasting will strengthen Canadian democracy—my answer is an unequivocal “Yes”.

Now I should like to deal with a number of other questions which the motion raises. First of all, like any proposal for a major departure, it raises not only the question, “Why?” but also the question, “Why now?” and, “How will the operations of the House be affected?” A short historical comparison provides good guidance. As late as 1874 the Canadian House

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of Commons did not publish an official report of its proceedings. Observers of parliament were obliged to rely on what Sir John Bourinot referred to as “partial imperfect reports in the newspapers”. The opponents of printing the debates cited arguments now familiar to us. According to them, the publication of debates would drastically alter the nature of the House, leading to more and lengthier speeches, grand-standing and further domination by the occupants of front-bench seats. They feared that printed reports would be distorted by their political opponents, and they argued that the technical expertise—presumably they meant shorthand reporters—was not available or, at least, was priced beyond the means of the government. Their ultimate assertion was that nobody would pay attention to the printed reports anyway.

Publications of our present *Hansard* began in 1875 and the opponents of publication were quickly proved wrong. I doubt if anyone today would seriously propose that we abandon the printing of these reports. The technological developments of the last 100 years have transformed the debate over a printed *Hansard* into the present debate over what can best be described as an “electronic *Hansard*”. Not surprisingly, we must now answer, again, many of the questions answered 100 years ago: Has the broadcasting proposal been thoroughly studied? How will broadcasting affect the dignity, privileges and immunities of parliament? Will parliament be able to stand the kind of exposure television gives? Who will control the production of the electronic *Hansard*? What use will be made of the productions? What will be the cost?

The broadcasting proposal has been thoroughly studied. Television first appeared here in 1957 when parliament was opened by Her Majesty. The right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) merits the credit for this first step. We have had it back temporarily for special events since then. Proposals for broadcasting parliament have been discussed on many occasions. On June 5, 1967, there was a debate on a private member's motion by the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltzman). A similar motion was debated on an allotted day motion by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) on March 26, 1969. There was a debate in February and March, 1970, on a motion to refer the subject to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, and the adoption of this motion led to a two-year study by the committee. The result of the committee's deliberations was a report to the House on June 30, 1972, which recommended the implementation of broadcasting as an electronic *Hansard*. It is perhaps worthwhile reminding the House of some of the observations made in the report, as follows:

Radio and television and particularly the latter have become the most important media of mass communications and exert a powerful influence on public opinion.

If parliament excludes itself from access to the broadcasting media it may well deny itself the opportunity of making its most effective public impact.

Parliament represents the people: and one of its prime responsibilities is to inform the people. The people therefore have a right to see their parliament in action and through television coverage this right could become a reality for all people from coast to coast.