

*Broadcasting House Proceedings*

I was among those who were opposed at first to this proposal. I was very vehement and adamant in my opposition to televising and broadcasting the proceedings of this House. However, Sir, the key word is relevancy. I fear that this place is becoming irrelevant. All we have to do is examine the record of the government during the past session.

A year or so ago the House brought in new standing orders which made possible under the rules of the House a practice that had been in fact a tradition of the House, and that was for ministerial statements to be made in the House with the right of members of the opposition parties to reply to those statements. The House obviously felt the need to regularize that procedure and tradition of the House in the rules, and we did so by Standing Order 15(3). Yet almost every time there is a statement of any consequence to be made, notwithstanding the fact that the House is in session, the ministers and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) go outside this House to make these statements, thereby depriving parliament of the opportunity of responding.

Reference has already been made to the Prime Minister's statement of November 23, probably one of the most important statements ever made by a head of government in this country, in the context of what happened in Quebec on November 15, what this would mean for the future of the country and for the future of federal-provincial relationships in the immediate future. The House was in session at that time but the Prime Minister went on national television, completely ignoring parliament in this most important statement affecting the very future of the country. I suggest that was contemptible on the part of the Prime Minister. I believe that if the House had provision for televising and broadcasting its proceedings this is the kind of abuse that could and, I suspect, would be stopped.

Again I could refer to the statement made by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Danson) on December 2. The minister made a very important announcement about the new search and rescue policy for Canada. He chose to make that statement outside the House, notwithstanding the fact that the subject had been the topic of debate throughout the last session of parliament and had become a matter of great concern here and throughout the land. Yet with the House in session, the Minister of National Defence elected to make his statement elsewhere than in this House, thereby depriving opposition members, especially members directly affected from both coasts and from Great Lakes constituencies, of an opportunity of having input to that new policy and an opportunity to react to it, or to question the minister on it as is provided under Standing Order 15(3).

Again, the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment (Mr. LeBlanc) on December 22, with the House in session, called a press conference to announce the management policy of the government in respect of the 200-mile limit which was proclaimed on January 1. If there ever was a statement that was relevant to parliament and that should have been made in this House it was this statement on a subject that had seized the attention of the House for several years, namely, the role of

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the government and its managerial responsibilities in connection with the implementation of the 200-mile limit. Yet that statement was made outside the House. We did not have an opportunity to question the minister on it or to react to it.

That is why I came to the conclusion that with the changes in the rules, and with this growing propensity on the part of the government to go outside this place to make announcements, whether by press conference, by speeches, or by federal-provincial conferences, this practice could possibly be arrested and in that context this place would become more relevant if its proceedings were televised and radio broadcast. That is why I changed my view.

I also had reason to change my view when it became evident to me that the government was somewhat less than sincere in its attempts to get the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization to change the rules of the House. Let us take a look at the rules. I have already referred to ministerial statements which, since December, 1974, have been provided for under the standing orders, with the growing practice of ministers circumventing that rule by making statements outside the House.

We should also take a look at the impact of television in the House on our supply procedures which, God knows, are already inadequate. I suppose this may bring on the necessary reforms to our supply procedures when we have cameras in the House, particularly if the country can witness the spectacle and humiliation of parliament having to rubber-stamp appropriation bills as they come before the House without having any proper examination of the estimates leading up to them. Indeed the standing committees of this House are so overloaded by legislation and so encumbered by the growing complexity of government estimates and the form of those estimates that there is never a year goes by when there are not a number of departments whose estimates never get to committee because of the guillotine supply procedure under the rules, whereby the estimates are deemed to have been passed and reported by the committees as of the end of May of each calendar year.

Perhaps cameras in this place would expedite the necessary reforms, which I believe everybody is now prepared to concede are long overdue, to give this place some control over government spending. If we had cameras here when we went through the procedures of dealing with appropriation bills, virtually having to rubber-stamp billions of dollars in government spending without adequate examination, that one spectacle would be worth having those cameras here. I believe that that would bring home to the people of this country more than anything else the spectacle of parliament having no control over government spending. For that reason I believe that television in the House would be an improvement.

● (2030)

What about the standing committees of the House? Would it not be logical that we should perhaps start by televising the standing committees? Certainly the rules have to be amended to change the procedures within the standing committees. I