

*Business of Supply*

One of the important facts about our debate today is that, for all intents and purposes, we are already being televised in a certain sense. Of course, the television cameras are kept outside the doors of the chamber or they are in studios downtown. I am certainly not suggesting for a moment that the use of radio or television for the purpose of interviewing members outside the house should be restricted in any way. I want to make that very clear. I do not suggest that, even if we had television and radio in here, this should prevent the members of the house from appearing before the television cameras outside the house, nor would it be desirable to try to prevent them from doing so.

My point is that we should consider whether there would not be a more accurate representation of what goes on here if radio and television were allowed into the house, because sometimes, of course, radio and television outside convey the opinions of hon. members of unquestioned probity and judgment like myself and at other times a minister is televised giving a different answer than the one he gave in the house. I have no intention of criticizing anyone when I suggest that, in the corridors of the house, television and radio interviews are often so condensed and selective that they convey perhaps a false impression or a caricature of what goes on here. This is perhaps in one sense an abuse of television as a medium of communication because of the special capacity that television has to convey an event rather than to convey a report of an event. As a result of what is going on, parliament is made to seem more hectic and more partisan than it actually is.

I am participating in this debate because I am concerned about what is happening to parliament. I am concerned about the fact that in the minds of the people of Canada the discussions they know about, and the discussions that have their impact on them, are not those that take place in the House of Commons or in parliament but those that they see or hear on television or on radio. In other words, I am concerned about the fact that what is going on now is downgrading parliament. I think that parliament has been downgraded in other ways, but I also think that the way in which radio and television is being used now is downgrading parliament. I think that we, as members of parliament, have to recognize that if this continues, parliament will become less and less important to the people of this country. All the members of my party agree and are concerned

about parliament being downgraded for this or other reasons. We are certainly not all agreed on the solution, but I am convinced that if what is going on now is allowed to continue, it will kill parliament as an effective deliberative institution in this country.

I say with all the emphasis I can that, although I recognize that there may well be differences of opinion as to what is the proper solution, we have to find a solution because it is essential to the continuing vigour of this institution.

The question we are discussing now also involves to some extent the right of the public to know and to follow, in as direct a way as possible, the conduct of public business. We should at least consider the prospect that, with proper safeguards, radio and television might well improve public understanding of our Canadian institutions and our political processes and might very well allow Canadians to be better informed about the public business. It will encourage them to become more involved in public life and in the discussion of public questions. I like to think at least that parliament would become more respected if it were better known. I suggest that there might very well be less criticism of parliamentary debates if there were more opportunity to hear this house debate important measures. We might very well reduce the suspicion that parliament is isolated from the country if there were a better opportunity for citizens to hear their representatives speaking in parliament.

We have in this medium a potentially great instrument of education and information, a medium which has to be treated with great respect because of its great impact. I emphasize that this is not a matter into which we would want to rush. Other hon. members have referred to some of the matters that would have to be considered, and I certainly do not propose that we should suddenly open all of parliament to television. However, I suggest that we should begin experimenting, either by using radio or television in a committee or in some other way. I think also the whole house would certainly want to consider very carefully, perhaps through a committee, the best way to begin. We are having this discussion today to give hon. members an opportunity to express their concern.

I will not take more of the time of the house because I really have only one major point to make, which is that if we allow radio and television to be used outside the house only, parliament will be diminished and