

Privilege—Mr. Gauthier

It is very important that we have such an order of the House. As my colleague, the opposition Whip, has made clear, that which happened last night illustrates the peril of not having an order of the House in place which sets down a clear and consistent set of rules. If the Chairman of the committee in question had prevailed, there may not have been equal access for all the media to the proceedings. Also, as the opposition Whip pointed out, there may well not have been immunity with regard to what was said, either for the witness or the media transmitting the remarks. And there would not necessarily have been equal treatment of all Members with regard to the broadcast of the proceedings.

If I am wrong in what I am about to say, I know I will be corrected, but I believe that in the Government's response to the recommendations of the McGrath Committee it accepted the recommendation that there be a system for broadcasting of committees. My recollection is that in order for this recommendation of the McGrath Committee to be implemented there must be an order of the House. Such an order must be presented to the House by the Government House Leader.

A number of months ago there was consultation about an order which would permit the broadcasting of committee proceedings. The Official Opposition was then and is now prepared to have that order put to the House and to give it speedy consideration and passage, likely by means of unanimous consent.

In conclusion, I would like to urge the new Government House Leader to consider this matter on a basis of urgency and present this order to the House to enable us to have a system of broadcasting our committees very soon consistent with the spirit of the recommendations of the McGrath Committee, which recommendations, as far as I recall, the Government accepted.

The observations of the opposition Whip will have been most salutary if they speed up the action of the Government to put before the House an order which would allow the broadcasting of committees. Such an order is long overdue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, in the past, I once authorized broadcasting the proceedings of a Special Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on External Affairs—I remember it was a special sitting on the occasion of a visit to Canada by Mr. Gorbachev, who, at the time, headed a parliamentary delegation from the Soviet Union—and I am therefore inclined to take a very cautious stand on the question before the House today.

As Chairman of the committee, and like several Hon. Members who referred previously to the Committee on Management and Members Services, I realize the McGrath Committee looked into this matter. I realize that the Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure would also like to look into the matter, but I submit, with respect, that this afternoon, at 3:30 p.m., I intend to raise this matter at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Management and

Members Services, mainly to get a few more parliamentarians involved.

Second, and I think that is the beauty of the debate, we do not necessarily have to agree, even within the same party, on how fast we should proceed. I remember, Mr. Speaker—and I am delighted to see you sitting as Speaker of our House, since I said you were our Speaker—that there was some criticism, not of your election as Speaker but about the way we proceeded, because I think a number of the details of this election were not understood by most Hon. Members.

So I would submit, as, shall we say, one of the most senior Members of this House, that we should proceed with a great deal of caution. I admit I do not make a habit of being cautious, but I believe that instead of making a speedy decision in this case, our parliamentary committees should re-examine the question and draw their conclusions, and then we should have a debate in the House as soon as the Government decides to table the matter. But again, I would like to see everything done properly. I realize that the distinguished members of the press gallery have an important job to do. I realize that an I have been approached several times with the request that perhaps we could consider allowing the proceedings to be broadcast and televised. And I have done so in the past, on a special occasion. I created a precedent, but I made it clear at the time that it was not to be construed as a precedent according to the British system, where it practically has force of law.

I therefore submit, Mr. Speaker, that what we and what I personally would like to hear from the Chair is that all chairmen of parliamentary committees be given instructions that they are not to allow proceedings to be televised at this time until a decision is made by the House as a whole.

● (1520)

[*English*]

I hope that the Government House Leader will remind Members who are presently chairing the various committees that they cannot, on their own authority, allow such deliberations. We will have total chaos, where some committees will do so and others will not, without even giving the House of Commons as a whole a chance to deliberate on the subject and make a decision. I am very anxious to hear your decision, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, being one of those who in the past spoke in favour of televising the debates of the House, obviously I would not want to object to it in principle. However it seems clear to me that it can only be done on the basis of specific guidelines. The House must have given consent. In addition, hopefully when the House will soon agree to televise committee proceedings, I maintain that the House and those who will make the decision will have considered all aspects of television broadcasting.