

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

such a decision of the House, the committees are without authority to broadcast their proceedings.

You concluded with the following:

Although I am personally very sympathetic to the endeavours of your Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped, it is my opinion that any committee seeking to televise its proceedings must first get the authorization of the House.

I refer to those reasons given in your capacity as Speaker of the House of Commons in response to a formal request for a ruling by a chairman of a special committee of this House, because I think it important that it be understood that your decision was not related to the nature of the committee from which the request came, nor to the nature of the request. Your decision was based, as your letter makes clear, upon the deliberations of the special committee which had looked into television and radio broadcasting, and its conclusions and the fact that there had not been an opportunity for a successor committee to consider any of those matters. I think it is important that that be borne in mind and what we in this party regard as a clear ruling by the Speaker of the House of Commons on a question on which her decision has been requested in a formal way by the chairman of a special committee of this House.

I think it will be useful for the whole House to know just how this letter came into the possession of the committee. Indeed, I was not clear from the response of the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (Mr. Joyal)—and I am sure it was my fault and not his—as to whether the letter was presented to him by the clerk of his committee. He indicates it was the clerk of his committee. It was not clear whether it was the clerk of his committee or the clerk of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped.

I think there will be some lively interest in this House as to how the clerk of that committee came into possession of that letter, a letter which had not been generally known about or generally circulated either to the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), to myself or—we have the word of the government—any ministers of the Crown. I think that will be something which we will all want to be informed about.

The government House leader made reference to the fact that the committee has itself taken a decision on this matter. I want to make only two, I hope, non-contentious points. The first is that that was very much a party decision. The vote was 13 to 11.

An hon. Member: Twelve.

Mr. Clark: Excuse me, 12 to 11? Thirteen to 11. I am reminded by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Evans) that I should not be referring to votes. I apologize for falling into the habit which has been practised by his government House leader. My colleague tells me that there is nothing improper with that, and I am sure you would interrupt me if there was, Madam Speaker. The point is that it was a party vote. The representatives of the Progressive Conservative Party and New Democratic Party on that committee voted for the right of the people to see and hear what was

going on. With the one exception of the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Mackasey), the members of the Liberal party of that committee voted against the right of the people to see and hear what was going on.

The other matter which is important to note is that the vote was taken in that committee after there had been a ruling offered by the chairman, then in the chair the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, indicating that the committee did not have the power to do what the motion was asking it to do. I think we can assume that there was at least the possibility that some of the members who voted against the motion did so because they thought they were being asked to do something which would violate one of Your Honour's rulings. I think it probable that on their minds was the fact that they would not want to violate a ruling Your Honour had made in your official capacity as Speaker in response to an official request by a chairman of a special committee of the House of Commons.

The government House leader made reference to decisions which have to be taken in the Senate and by the commission of internal economy. We naturally do not dispute the necessity of the other place's agreeing to this change in the procedures and the reference to the special joint committee, just as it has agreed to other terms of reference of that committee. That is obvious, and I hope that could be achieved speedily. Indeed, I have been impressed by the independence of thought of Liberal members in the other place and hope that that proves contagious in this House.

In relation to the commissioners of internal economy I simply want to remind the government House leader of his own words as reported at page 4162 of *Hansard*. He said, and I quote:

If the committee wishes to be broadcast, then all that needs to be considered is the financing. The financing will be allowed if it is requested through the commission of internal economy at this level.

The financing absolutely "will be allowed". In other words, there was no objection on October 28 on the basis of financing, in the words of the government House leader. I am sure that in the interest of consistency, since he had no objection then, he will have no objection now or later.

I think what is clear is that the decision is the decision which has to be taken by the government itself. It is a decision this House of Commons must take, and I am pleased that the government is pulling back from secrecy and is prepared to consider at least giving the people of Canada the right to see and hear the discussion on the Constitution of Canada.

I must comment quickly on the suggestion of the government House leader in relation to the interim report and the capacity of the joint committee to make an interim report. He is arguing that the terms of reference are either ambiguous on the question of preventing the special joint committee from making such a request. If that is so, I am sure that is an oversight. I would not want to believe, nor would the people of Canada, that that joint committee was deliberately denied by this government the right to make interim reports on matters important to it.