

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 30, 1969

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The house met at 11 a.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. MACQUARRIE—METHOD OF PUBLICIZING
POLICY STATEMENTS BY MINISTER
OF COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I rise on what for me is a rare exercise, namely a question of privilege involving a matter which impinges upon or could impinge upon the privileges and effectiveness of all hon. members of this House, and I intend to make a motion for referral of the subject matter to one of the standing committees of the House.

I have in my hand a document from the Department of Communications addressed to the news editors of the radio stations in Canada, which reads as follows:

Radio stations will soon be able to obtain, by simply dialing a telephone number, policy statements of national importance made in the House, at a press conference or in a speech, by the Minister of Communications, Eric Kierans.

The system will allow radio stations anywhere in Canada, where there is a telephone service, to get a recorded statement (60 to 90 seconds) preceded by a service message by dialing a government number in their area.

An hon. Member: His master's voice.

Mr. Macquarrie: The document continues:

The statement can then be recorded by the stations for use in their news broadcasts or saved for public affairs programming.

We will let you know soon the number you must call.

This is over the name of Frank Howard, Director of Information Services, Communications Department.

An hon. Member: 1984.

Mr. Macquarrie: This, sir, is a serious matter. The relationship of Parliament to the media is one of great significance at the present time. There are queries whether or not television should be in the House, on the

doorstep of the House, or in neither place. This is a time when we see a great proliferation of information officers in the departments of the members of the executive.

This is a matter of especial importance in that it involves the particular minister who has a special role and powers in reference to broadcasting in this country because, by Order in Council P.C. 1968-1305, those powers regarding licensing which once were vested in the Minister of Transport have now been vested in the Minister of Communications. So it is not a far stretch of the imagination to envisage that the news editors of the radio stations across the country, having dialed the number, may in certain respects expect to hear "his master's voice", as the old expression has it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Macquarrie: This matter, Mr. Speaker, should be investigated. If this is a proper relationship of a member of the House of Commons to the media, it should not be the exclusive property of the ministers or a particular minister. If it is an improper relationship with the media, if it embodies the concept, even remotely, of managed news, then it should be thoroughly investigated by the proper committee of this House and the practice curtailed forthwith. It may indeed be a proper performance or it may be a highly improper performance. But this relationship is of such significance in these days when we are told that the media is the message, that the situation could be very serious if the minister and the media are the same. I therefore propose to move the following motion:

● (11:10 a.m.)

That the conduct of the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications, as evidenced by a letter distributed from his office and relating to the availability of statements made by him or on his behalf to the radio stations of Canada be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker: I doubt very much whether it would be in the interest of the House to enlarge the debate on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Hillsborough. I have studied the notice which I received from the hon. member in accordance with the requirements of the rules. I have