

Canadian Policy on Broadcasting

can hon. members approve the bill in principle? If we had this information the views of hon. members might perhaps be very different with regard to the principle of the bill. I draw Your Honour's attention to this unique situation with the assurance that you will give it consideration.

Mr. Speaker: I thank hon. members for their advice and interesting comments.

● (5:40 p.m.)

As hon. members know, this point is very often raised when hon. members from either side of the house have doubts whether they should vote for or against a bill and would like to see the bill referred to a committee before second reading is given. In such instances it has been suggested at times that the bill itself should be referred to a committee.

We have had numerous rulings over 100 years up to today to the effect that this cannot be done. I remember that just a few months ago when the same thing was attempted by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre he argued somewhat along the same lines as the hon. member for Peace River has argued today, namely, that our procedures should be changed, that this is the time to do it, and therefore Mr. Speaker should disregard the precedents, make law and send the house on a new course. Even on the one hundredth anniversary of the first day of the first session of the parliament of Canada I am not disposed to follow this advice.

An hon. Member: Be a pioneer.

Mr. Speaker: I suggest to hon. members that the rules are very clear and hon. members can do one of two things. They can vote for or against the principle of the bill. Hon. members are at liberty to make a motion exactly in the words mentioned by the hon. member for Peace River when he asked a question of the hon. member for Medicine Hat, that is, that this bill be not now read a second time but that the subject matter thereof be referred to a committee. This would be in order.

Citation 386 of Beauchesne, which has been referred to by the hon. member for Medicine Hat and other hon. members, is clear on the point. This citation says:

On the second reading of a bill, the house may decide to refer the subject matter thereof to a commission although the bill could not be referred to a committee of the house before its second reading.

In the last part of citation 386 (3) it is said:

The house cannot both refuse to give the second reading and refer some provisions of the bill to a committee. It shall have to make its choice. The amendment was ruled out.

Without going into too many details on the matter, I am sure the hon. member for Peace River will recognize the difficulty which faces the Chair at this time. Although I have every possible sympathy with the intention of the hon. member for Saskatoon, I do not think the precedents allow the Chair to make an exception to the rules that have existed for so long. For these reasons I cannot accept the amendment in its present form.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, before the matter proceeds I should like to ask the house leader and the minister whether, in view of the very serious and grave doubt raised and the very valid issue involved, they would consider giving unanimous consent to an amendment in this form being moved so that the house may be tested on it. I ask them to consider this request so we may obtain from the house an expression of opinion on this issue despite the ruling of the Chair. I am not trying to circumvent Your Honour's ruling, which I accept, but I wonder whether in this way we could test the house on the question.

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order, as one of the assistants in drafting the amendment I should like to say that I thought we would get the co-operation of the hon. member for Medicine Hat who is so anxious to reform the House of Commons. In addition, of course, the Minister of National Health and Welfare is similarly attuned to the present. I think the suggestion of my colleague is a way around the difficulty so that the Speaker will not have to strike out on a new course and establish precedents but rather that the house in a unique situation will give unanimous consent to adopting what is really a forward-looking move to improve the procedures of parliament and the use of its committees.

Mr. Ballard: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be no reaction from the government benches on this point of order, so I wonder whether as an alternative—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I doubt very much that there is a point of order. I think the Chair showed some leniency in allowing the hon. member for Peace River and the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre to