

government for its part will not object to their doing so, but whatever their decision, we shall respect it. We want to be consistent with the position that we have always held until now, namely that we should not interfere in the affairs of the committee nor give it any instructions.

What I shall do, Madam Speaker, is simply to be consistent with the procedural arguments that I held earlier today in this debate and with the position that the government has taken until now concerning the committee, and I shall not give any instructions to the committee on behalf of the government. No one can say, therefore, that we are for and against televising the proceedings.

We shall not take a stand on this issue and we shall let the committee decide for itself. I am simply going to speak to both co-chairmen and ask them if in the light of these new facts—if they judge that today's debate has brought up new facts—they want to take another vote or reconsider the matter. For our part, as a government, we have no instruction to give them; they may do as they wish. We respect the decision which has already been made and if they want to make another one, we shall respect it also whatever it may be. We want to keep our distances, as we have done since the beginning. Madam Speaker, we shall maintain firmly our position in this debate, but if you make a ruling, whatever it may be, we shall respect it as we have always done in the past and we shall act accordingly.

[English]

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I rise in response to the point of order raised by the government House leader, and perhaps he can correct me if I am being unfair. He knows I would not want to be unfair to his position.

I believe he has said that if it is the decision that the committee has the power to decide itself to seek radio and television coverage, the government would not act in any way to stop the committee from doing that. I am not sure that that reflects a great deal of reconsideration because, at least in words, that appears to be the position the government has been putting forward for some time.

We would like to be assured that Liberal party members on that committee will not be operating under a whip which urges them to vote against radio and television in the House. That assurance would be very helpful to us and, indeed, would serve the interest of the people of the country.

The question before the House remains: does the committee have the power to make that decision? We would not want the minister's statement today to be taken as the final indication that that power does rest with the committee. We have an abundance of rulings, including your own, Madam Speaker, that the committee does not have that power.

What we would like to have from the government House leader, as a result of the reconsideration he says he has undertaken this afternoon, is a very clear statement—in light of the fact that we have a ruling from Your Honour—that the government will introduce a motion to ensure that this House can vote as a full House upon the amendment of that motion

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

to allow the people of Canada to see and hear the constitutional deliberations on television and radio.

It is clear to us, although Your Honour has yet to decide and still has to respond to the question of privilege—that you have decided on the question of the competence of the committee that it does not have that competence, as you have stated in a formal decision.

The question before the House, then, is whether the government is going to accept its responsibility and bring in a resolution, or motion, that will permit the committee to have radio and television coverage of its proceedings. We would like to have an undertaking from the minister that such is the intention of the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I shall explain it very briefly to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark). There are five possibilities. First, that the committee refuses to reconsider its decision, in which case the government will not intervene. Second, that the committee reconsider its decision, take another vote and reach the same decision, in which case the government will not intervene. Third, that the committee decide to review its decision and, in fact, by way of a vote, change it, in which case the government will not intervene. Fourth, that you, Madam Speaker, give a ruling to the effect that the argument is founded according to which it is up to the committee to decide, in which case again the government will not intervene. And, five, that you rule that the House of Commons alone can authorize the televising of the committee hearings. As I indicated earlier, we have always respected the decisions of the Speaker of the House.

[English]

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, if what we heard earlier in the day was absurd, the Liberal government has just outdone itself.

If I understand the logic of the government House leader, he is saying that after great deliberation the government has not reached a decision. He is saying to backbench members—and I do not say that in any critical sense—to the regular members of the Liberal party on this committee, that they ought to humiliate themselves. That is the position—if it means anything. He is saying to members of that committee, “You deliberated carefully today. You came in with one decision and recommended it.”

Mr. Knowles: Thirteen to 11.

Mr. Broadbent: “With a 13 to 11 vote, but now we think you have the right”—big deal—“to reconsider the decision.”

I find that incredible, Madam Speaker. If the government is changing its mind on the question of televising the proceedings of this committee, as it ought to, then surely it ought not to humiliate its members of Parliament who sit on that committee. I am not criticizing the members for this, Madam Speaker. If this was a caucus decision of the Liberal party, or a