

Business of Supply

At a further stage the report reads:

Your committee are of the opinion that the task of providing the full television and sound "feed" should be in the hands of a special unit to be known as the House of Commons Broadcasting Unit.

The committee of the British house was quite prepared then to let the broadcasters decide what parts of the material fed to them should be broadcast. On that point they commented in this way:

—the broadcasting organizations are under an obligation to present political matters with accuracy and with due balance and impartiality

I am sure that every effort would be made by the media here to do the same. This drives us to the question, with regard to broadcasting our proceedings: Is the house ready to undertake, first, to produce the tape or film and, second to prepare the programs from the tape or film? If the answer to that question is in the affirmative, this house would then be deeply involved in the business of broadcasting.

I would like to refer to another matter en passant. Serious thought would have to be given to this question. I refer to the effect of broadcasting our proceedings on civil and criminal liability, due to the fact that in effect what we broadcast would be privileged material. Hon. members no doubt would have parliamentary privilege regarding what they said in the house. But with the current state of the law, I think it is likely that the broadcasters would not. We might have to introduce legislation like the Australian legislation, giving the broadcasters some form of immunity from suit arising out of such broadcasts.

I have not dealt specifically with the broadcasting of the proceedings of the standing committees, but it seems to me that very much the same considerations would arise. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would not like to give the impression of dwelling too much on the difficulties. I believe it would be a positive step if we could find some judicious and generally acceptable way of presenting the proceedings of the chamber through broadcast by radio and over television. I hope that when the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization has dealt with the proceedings of the house and its committees to the satisfaction of hon. members, we might proceed to the question of broadcasting the proceedings of the house. Then, we could ascertain the view of the committee and the house on this question and what specific arrangements we should make.

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the proposals regarding the use of television and radio in connection with the House of Commons are not new in Canada. Discussion in this respect has certainly not been restricted to Canada. I suppose the arguments for and against the proposal really have been pretty thoroughly made, although not in the house. Therefore, I think it is an excellent idea to have an opportunity today to talk among ourselves about the pros and cons of this question.

I agree with the house leader—I am happy to find myself in agreement with him from time to time—that it is clear that the use of radio or television in this chamber would certainly effect some changes in parliament. I think it would be misleading to pretend anything else.

The use of these media here would bring about substantial changes. I suggest that our discussion today has to be on the assumption that there would be such changes, and any decision we make must be based upon a consideration of the nature of these changes and their exact effect upon parliament. Some of the effects of these changes have already been discussed.

I have personal reservations in this respect, in so far as I am a member of the House of Commons, where my own comfort is concerned and choice of working conditions. I would far sooner continue the way we are and not be subjected to the glare of lights, which would be the case if this proposal were put into effect. I appreciate the concern of other members about the effect these changes would have upon us workers, as people doing a day's work. I appreciate their concern about the effect that the introduction of television or radio would have upon the kind of chamber this is.

As the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) said, there is certainly a wide difference of opinion among Progressive Conservatives on this whole subject. I think this also applies to members of other parties.

• (4:20 p.m.)

I approach the question from this point of view, and this is why I am speaking in this debate. I think it is important that we recognize the effect that radio and television are already having upon this institution. It is just as important, and indeed very urgent, that we consider the consequences that would probably ensue for this institution if we continue to go on as we do in our present circumstances.