

Point of Order—Mr. Gauthier

should be done, not by default and not after it has become common practice, but something that should be in a positive way and in response to the recommendations of the special committee on the reform of the House of Commons. In those recommendations are guidelines with respect to how this can happen. I think it is time that all the people who have the authority to bring this into effect got together to see that this recommendation of the McGrath Committee is brought to fruition.

I believe that televising committees could have a positive impact in terms of broadening Canadians' knowledge of where work goes on in Parliament. People could see through television, on which many people depend for information about the political system, what goes on in committees as well as what goes on in the House.

If this occasion has done nothing else, it should provide an opportunity for the House, through you, Mr. Speaker, to say to the committee that it has acted beyond its powers. This should also be an occasion for Members of Parliament and the House collectively to find renewed initiative to get on with the recommendations of the special committee with regard to the televising of committees.

● (1540)

I hope this will have a positive effect on the future of Parliament. There is no guarantee that it will. It does have its down sides, but I think it is something of which Members of Parliament, the media, and everyone else concerned must try to make the best.

Mr. Reginald Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, as the chairman of the committee which is under discussion I would like to make a few points very briefly.

First, I doubt that any member of the committee was aware that the committee, in making this decision, was countering the rules of the House. There was certainly no intention to be other than respectful of the authority of the House. If we acted beyond our authority and rights as a committee, then so we did. It is possible that we are not the first people in the history of the House who have made a mistake. However, if a mistake we made, we made it without intending any affront to the House or its officers.

The second point which I think needs to be considered is that the committee made this decision unanimously. I think the decision was welcomed by all members of the committee, regardless of Party, as an opportunity on this occasion, and this occasion only without precedent being set, to provide the people of Canada with an opportunity to hear the message of a distinguished human being who was in this country, in this city, and on this Hill, as she may not be again. She had already given an inspirational address to a large number of people who were fortunate enough to be in the hall where she spoke. To the best of my knowledge there was no opportunity for that message and presentation to be shared via television with the larger public of the country. This was an opportunity for the

people of Canada to receive something which I still believe, with respect to this debate, would be welcomed by the people.

I think it should be noted that for the purpose of the Human Rights Committee today's decision was not to be regarded as a precedent, that it was being done for this time only and in recognition of the special circumstances of the meeting which had been called to hear an outstanding human rights advocate. I submit that to you with respect, Mr. Speaker. If we have broken the rules, it was done without any intent to show other than respect to you and the House.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I want to add a few points to this very important discussion. We recognize that the privileges of the House extend to the committees by and large. The committee reports and the verbatim transcripts of committee hearings are documents published under the authority of the House and are entitled to the same absolute privilege as are House documents. The point that ought to be made is that when the events of the committee were televised with the potential for rebroadcast there was the possibility that an individual's comments could be considered slanderous or problematic and, therefore, open to some interpretation by a third party.

I submit that by convention the same thing exists in this House. While Members of Parliament are protected under the privileges that exist, we are being broadcast throughout the country and would be subject to the same situation if a person were able to put forward a slander suit or something similar as a result of the broadcast of the House of Commons.

By convention Members of the House of Commons have agreed and assumed that that which is said in the Chamber is subject to immunity under the appropriate rules of the House. If that immunity exists here, I fail to see why the same thing would not exist in committees. As I said, there is an understanding that committee reports and the verbatim transcripts of the committee hearings are documents published under the authority of the House which are entitled to the same privileges. Presumably convention in the House of Commons ought to apply equally to the committees of the House of Commons. For that reason I do not believe that the privileges of Members of the House have been breached.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker: First, I want to say this is very important. I thank the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for his intervention and also for the various points he made on the present position. It is clear. There is no objection to the principle of television in committees, but to a decision that shifts the authority, the power, against the rules. It is not appropriate for a committee to have televised broadcasting of its proceedings.

[*English*]

No one is pretending for a moment that what was done was other than a breach of the rules. There have been suggestions made that certain circumstances justify breaching rules. I