

Broadcasting House Proceedings

restricted in what we say, and to what extent? Conversely, what protections will other Canadians have from televised slanders? There is a vast difference between an intemperate remark in this House which may be buried in *Hansard*, on the one hand, and an insulting or libellous phrase broadcast on national television.

Where, too, is the chance for us to determine whether this is the most cost-effective way of providing broadcast facilities? The government House leader says the sum of \$3.5 million will be the cost, but it will probably be more than double that. One million dollars is required for operating expenses. I hate to use the word, but I am sure it is a "conservative" estimate. What we are doing here, Mr. Speaker, really is subsidizing the networks. We have no idea whether MPs will be happy with the facilities or whether or not the networks will use them to any significant extent. Are there no cheaper alternatives? What chance have we to ask the networks how they plan to use the films? Does the government intend to ask the networks whether they plan to contribute to the cost so that the burden will not all fall on the public purse?

Not only do we have no committee stage before we are faced with the motion, but the motion itself in its very terms is a study in obscurity. It proposes to establish broadcasting "on the basis of principles similar to those that govern the publication of the printed official reports of debates". What are these principles, Mr. Speaker? Obviously, not all the principles that apply to *Hansard* can apply to broadcasting. MPs cannot send the electronic *Hansard* out to their constituents to provoke interest or clear the record. There can be no in-House editing. We cannot append anything to it. An electronic *Hansard* is primarily for the use of the media, and not the member, and there can be no greater deviation in principle than that. It is something that this House as an institution ought to consider.

According to the motion, we also get a committee, not to estimate the need or set the method, not to evaluate performance or hear complaints, but simply to supervise the implementation. Is that the only term of reference? When is the implementation stage deemed to be finished? More seriously, we wonder if its deliberations are of any use at all because the Privy Council, in making the technical decisions, has probably now decided the ethical questions as well.

Why cannot we make what may be a far-reaching change one step at a time? Would it not be more logical to discuss this fully in a committee with the power to make judgments on whether we broadcast at all, and if so, how? It does not seem right to me that the executive should make, on behalf of the House, a decision which could have an enormous effect in its outcome on the way the House, is proceeding.

A committee of parliamentarians should have been established as a first step. Some will say, as the House leader said, that a committee was established in 1972. He said it in such a way as if that committee had finally and completely made recommendations respecting not only the principle but now it was to be implemented. If that is what he meant by what he said in his speech, then I say with regret that he misled the House, though I am sure he did so inadvertently. I ought now

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

to remind the House of what in fact that committee did recommend in 1972. I will simply read that committee's recommendation. It was as follows:

Your committee, while agreeing in principle with radio and television broadcasting of the proceedings of legislative assemblies and their committees, believes that certain further steps should be taken before a final report is made and therefore recommends:

(a) That a cost and technical study of building, equipment, personnel and other requirements consequent upon the introduction of radio and television broadcasting of the House of Commons and its committees be undertaken in consultation with this committee—

This has not been done. No subsequent committee has been consulted, and the technical studies are internal documents. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, not one member of parliament has received those internal documents, yet we are asked to deal with this matter.

Mr. MacEachen: They have been tabled.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The second part of that recommendation—

Mr. Reid: They have been tabled.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): All right, so they have been tabled. The recommendation continues:

(b) That closed-circuit experimental broadcasts by radio and television of the proceedings of the House and its committees be undertaken in consultation with this committee—

I think that is an equally sensible suggestion, but it has been ignored by the government in this present proposal. The recommendation continues:

(c) That your committee be authorized, in the light of the above-mentioned studies and experiments, to make further recommendations to the House for ultimate decision.

Not the executive branch, Mr. Speaker, but a standing committee of the House of Commons. I think the committee hit on the logical sequence. The tabling of those documents may have taken care of the first, but the second and third remain outstanding and are relevant. First, careful study by a committee of the implications of broadcasting, followed by an experiment. We might have tried radio and then television, for their advantages and disadvantages are by no means identical. Finally, we should have a chance to evaluate the experiment—not after people have forgotten about it, not when new initiatives must be taken to raise the topic again, but before expensive, long-term commitments have been made and after people have had a chance to watch it, conscious of its status as an experiment.

The committee on procedure and organization of the twenty-eighth parliament was worth listening to only when it proposed changes in the rules that would accrue to the advantage of the government. Apparently it was not worth listening to when it declared the virtues of careful thought and cautious progress.

● (1600)

In supporting this resolution in principle we on this side of the House are hoping that the most optimistic predictions