

Point of Order—Mr. Gauthier

Returning to Beauchesne's, Citation 304(2) indicates that a committee is bound by and is not at liberty to depart from the orders of reference. That, Sir, is what must be changed.

The Committee on Human Rights has served all committees extremely well today. It has raised a situation that cannot go unresolved any longer. We must act now and we must act decisively. The committee has emphasized that now is the time for the House to make a clear and unequivocal decision regarding the use of television in committees. We must decide when it can be used and under what conditions it can be used. Perhaps Standing Order 96(2) needs to be expanded by adding an additional section dealing with television.

I conclude by saying that there is in Canada a very wrong impression about Parliament. That impression is that everything of significance happens in this place, and, worse than that, that the only significant event in this House is the 45-minute Question Period. You know, Mr. Speaker, as do all Hon. Members, that much of the useful, valuable work and much of the service to Canadian citizens occurs when Members of Parliament attend committee to deal, often in a very non-partisan and objective way, with the important business of this nation. Not every single proceeding and not every single committee hearing should be broadcast, but it is a pity that on occasion Canadians cannot see the good work of Parliament in committees by way of the media of television.

Mr. Scott Fennell (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to rise until I heard one of the comments made by the Hon. Member who last spoke regarding the question of television in the committees. I would point out that too often a wrong makes a right. I cannot accept that a wrong having been done today proves that it is right to have television in committees. I would like to agree with the Hon. Member that there are times when committees should be televised. However, we should not change the rules because something wrong was done. We should change the rules if we feel it is right to have television in committees.

I agree that there are some committee hearings that should be televised and others that should not. We do not wish to leave the public with the dissatisfaction of a dull debate, something which would happen if we televised each and every committee.

I feel that today the committee did have an opportunity to disband officially and at that point to allow the cameras to run. This is one way the committee could have gotten around the rule. However, it did break the rules of the House and I object to that.

If you, Mr. Speaker, were to make a rapid decision based on the wrong that was done today, that too would be wrong. I would like to see, as submitted by my colleague, the Liberal Whip, a committee established to discuss what should be done, and I would like to see a full discussion involving the Whips because it is, to a large extent, our responsibility. We could discuss how and when committees should be televised.

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I also rise to speak to this same point. I would first observe that, as you know full well, Mr. Speaker, it is not possible for witnesses to be heard in this House. It is within the context of a committee that witnesses, Canadians and people from abroad, are called to give special information to Parliamentarians. Because of that, I would first like to lend my support to those learned dispositions made by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner), who talked about the need for the House to deal with this matter and to do so in as wise a way as possible. This is an electronic age and we know it is our responsibility to inform Canadians, to give them some knowledge of what we do here and to make ourselves accountable to them. Rather than seeing the media as a threat, it seems to me that the proper use of media is to provide an opportunity for people to be better informed.

I also rise because I was a member of that committee. I do not want to leave it to others to suffer alone whatever criticisms there may be. While the chairman was sitting as the chairman, it was the Hon. Member for Windsor—Walkerville (Mr. McCurdy) who moved the motion that the television cameras be allowed to be present on this very special occasion and it was I who seconded that motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

On occasion throughout history, we have seen the violation of rules, perhaps wittingly and perhaps unwittingly. Certainly the black woman who sat in the back of a bus in Alabama changed history by challenging the rules. Let us hope that this particular event will also have a positive end. Although the committee had no intention of challenging the rule, by bringing this into focus perhaps a change will come about so that we may better inform Canadians and provide greater accountability of the House of Commons to them. I feel that the chairman should not be held solely responsible in any way for what happened today.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could say a word on this matter because I had something to do with consideration of the matter as a member of the special committee on the reform of the House of Commons.

At least two things need to be said. First, by allowing its proceedings to be televised, the committee did go beyond its powers and I do not think there is any dispute about that. However, it was a manifestation of what can probably be found in more than just that committee, and that is the emerging consensus among Members of Parliament and committees collectively that there ought to be some provision for the televising of committees.

I would not want it to be said that if we were to proceed with the televising of committees it would have come about because of civil disobedience on the part of a committee. On this occasion it came about because the committee simply decided to take the Standing Orders into its own hands, so to speak. I think the televising of committees is something that