

little point. Suppose that had been captured indelibly and forever on the screen?

There are two variations of what is going to happen in the House once it is televised. One is that a powerful committee would see that nothing untoward is ever turned out over the television system. We have the other voice, again embraced in the last speech, that there would be an enormous file of tapes kept forever. I can imagine! The cabinet cannot keep a thing secret for a moment. The leaks from that place are notorious, and have been for years. What security we would have that some unflattering and some misleading tape would not appear I do not know. However, those are minor matters compared to the really important points about the proposal to televise this place.

Everyone who comments on televising the House of Commons admits that it will change the House. Many say it will change it greatly. Again there is an assumption that needs examining. It is assumed that the changes will all be to the good. Television is seen as a broom sweeping clean, reforming, brushing away the irrelevant, the tedious, polishing up the debate, shortening it, illuminating the decisions, and improving the legislation. What a hope!

There are things that can be done to do that. Some have already been mentioned. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) could make his main statements here, as could cabinet ministers.

Anyone appointed to or recognized by the press gallery should be required to spend at least one hour of each working day listening to the debate in this place and commenting on it. One of the reasons why the level of debate has fallen so badly is that nobody does this any more. So no score is kept as to who is an effective debater, as to who can hold the attention of this Chamber, as to who is capable of saying anything relevant. That sort of change has come about in the 11 years since I first took my seat here.

There are things which need to be done, and those are two which would help enormously to improve the quality of debate.

● (2110)

Surely, too, we must look at other aspects of Canadian life which have not benefited from television. Can any hon. member point to one institution in North America which has benefited since the advent of television? Hockey has greatly changed since television, but has it really been improved? It is interesting to note that when the television of hockey began we were told the days of the commentator were ended, that Foster Hewitt was finished, that he would not be needed because people could see and hear for themselves what was going on. How wrong that prediction has proved to be.

There is very little about televising an institution such as this which is predictable in advance. I suggest there is nothing predictable in advance about televising this place. Already we can see the game being played by the government, and perhaps by the opposition too: it will damage you but it will enhance us. That line is being handed back and forth, but we cannot predict such a result with any certainty because the results of

televising any institution are bound to be unknown until the attempt has been made.

Violence in hockey is attributed to television by many thinking people. Violence in the House of Commons is virtually unknown now, but could it be kept out of a televised House? Ratings are the important thing about television, and what would improve a rating more than if an hon. member from one side or the other were to run across and punch somebody in the nose? It would mean a dramatic increase in public attention, no doubt. But would television in the House really favour the genuine over the phony?

I suggest we seriously consider the quality of what passes for religious broadcasting in North America today. I am glad the previous speaker mentioned theology because we are now into the province of myth, theology and blind faith. We have heard a variety of blind faith expressed here already this afternoon. CBC drama has not been confined to parliamentary language. Would it be possible to refrain from bolstering a weak speech by the profanity which bolsters so much weak writing for television? I doubt it very much.

There are some on the other side who think they would be marvellous performers and stars of the show. I know the Prime Minister sees television as providing a restorative to his fading career—that he sees himself as the Mother Dexter of Parliament, over the hill and prone to profanity. After the speech we have just heard there is a danger that the Minister of Communications (Mrs. Sauvé) may become the Carol Burnett of this place.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Johnston: We are called to this assembly as members of parliament to debate and to legislate, and, increasingly, to act as ombudsmen. If the government wanted to bring in any measure which would improve the ability of members to perform their tasks it could have introduced a bill to fill the long-awaited post of ombudsman for the national administration. That would have been a worthy bill and it would have freed members of parliament from much of the work they must perform along those lines. We should always be conscious of the need to improve our performance in any of our roles as debaters or legislators, but if the House is televised we shall face a new demand, not for better legislation, not for better debate, but for better television. I submit that the changes forced upon us would be toward that goal. We would end up with our own cosmetologists, our own lighting men, and our own stars.

We have been sent here to represent our constituents. My constituents are the people for whom I speak. I am sure it is not my job here as the member for Okanagan-Kootenay to speak for the nation, and I can see many ways in which my role in this House would be complicated if every time I rose in this Chamber I had to contend with the thought that I was speaking not to my fellow members assembled here as legislators but to the nation. I am afraid that is a task which does not thrill me and one which my ego, such as it is, does not appreciate.