

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

unanimous consent was not forthcoming. That was the reason we did not have televised hearings.

It is not good enough for the Prime Minister and the government House leader to say that your opinion, Madam Speaker, is simply a matter of opinion and that the committees have this power. It is a fact that parliamentary committees have been told consistently by the law officers of Parliament that it requires authorization from the House before the proceedings of a committee can be televised. So it is not simply your own ruling, Your Honour, but a matter of consistent rulings by the law officers, which have been expressed to a number of committee chairmen.

What the Prime Minister is doing is putting the Chair, the House and himself in an impossible position because he is saying it is not up to us, it is up to the committee. Then, lo and behold, in an act of totally spontaneous animation, the members of the committee suddenly agree that there will not be television. The reason for that is obvious. It is the policy of the Liberal party that this matter, rather than be handled in a tripartisan way will be changed from what was a positive package, which was an attempt to appeal to most people, into the policy and attitudes of one party at one particular time in our history. Only the Liberals could do this. When that happens, Madam Speaker, it is a very sad moment for Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Madam Speaker, I think I have a right to make a contribution in this matter. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the government House leader have made statements to the effect that it was up to the committee to decide about television coverage. This was a fatuous suggestion. It was totally and utterly misleading insofar as the House was concerned.

The question of television coverage of committees was before a committee and it was decided at that time that it should be a decision of the House. Anybody with any serious intention of passing on information knew that it was not possible for any committee to decide to televise its hearings; they knew that the permission of the House was required.

There has been a question raised with respect to the funding of coverage. Under Vote 5, that funding is within the control of the Speaker. The cost of televising and of reporting committee proceedings all comes under Vote No. 5. Also under Vote 5 are moneys which have been voted upon and allocated to interparliamentary relations. Some of the allocations which have been made have not been spent. As treasurer of one particular group I know that there is a quarter of a million dollars not expended from this year's allocation. There was a change in the nature of a conference early in September which was held here, rather than in the Conference Centre, and we were able to save close to a quarter million dollars. That money is available. It does not require an item in any supplementary estimate to transfer it.

There is also the question of whether Room 200, which is the present site of the committee, is not suitable for television

coverage as it does not have the facilities. There is the Conference Centre, which is all set up for television and broadcasting. I would like someone to suggest that the first ministers' conference, which dealt with the subject of the constitution, is more important than a joint committee of the Parliament of Canada considering actual changes to the constitution. Therefore, to me it is just as important that the joint committee meetings be held, for example, in the Conference Centre where there are the facilities, rather than being faced with the objection that Room 200 is not set up for television, which therefore would cause a delay in the time that is available to the committee before the guillotine falls upon the date of reporting. I suggest that if a diligent search is made in those other compartments in the Speaker's purse, sufficient money will be found for the proceedings to be televised and broadcast, because we have the proper locale.

● (1640)

The objections which have been raised are merely a smoke screen. It seems to me that it is now up to the government to put forward a motion which would permit the committee to televise its proceedings. It is as simple as that.

Madam Speaker: After hearing the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), I think it would be reasonable to cut off the debate, unless there is someone on the government side who wishes to have the floor, because I have not recognized many hon. members on that side.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I would like to refer briefly to a debate which took place during the summer of 1978 in the committee which was dealing with Bill C-60. It was a joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate, and it was examining the government's then proposals on the constitution.

At that time it was felt by that joint committee that it was imperative that its meetings and sessions be televised and broadcast to the country. At the time these committee meetings took place there was much debate on the subject, and motions were put forward to the effect that the proceedings should indeed be televised and broadcast. The difficulty which that committee found, and which it ultimately decided upon, was that it was in somewhat of a bind because, unlike the committee itself, the House of Commons and the Senate were not sitting throughout the summer. It was noted that it would be impossible at that point in the proceedings of the committee to go back to the House and the Senate for permission to televise and broadcast the proceedings.

There were some informal discussions between the committee and Mr. Speaker Jerome at that time. I believe that he personally was in agreement with the importance of the debate which was taking place in committee and felt that it was a very critical and crucial debate. Indeed, he suggested that it could be a pilot project for all committee hearings to be televised and broadcast, but that it would have to await the resumption of the House in the autumn to receive its approval to proceed