

studied the introduction of the broadcasting system in the House.

There was some confusion which arose the other day, but I have ruled on that particular circumstance. I repeat, the console operators make no decisions. They activate the microphones on my instructions, and I still control members who may or may not speak in this House. Should there be an error, I have the possibility of correcting that error by turning off the microphone.

Moreover, it is quite clear and I reiterate that a chairman of a committee may answer a question; but he may also not answer a question if he so chooses. The Speaker has no way of forcing or obligating a chairman of a committee to answer a question. A chairman of a committee remains free to express himself or not to express himself in the House. If he does not want to answer a question, even though the question is narrow enough that the Chair should allow it, a chairman of a committee is free not to answer the question.

If last Wednesday the chairman of a committee had been a member of the opposition, it is possible that a member of the opposition would not defer as readily to a member of the government. But that is not of the making of the Speaker. The other day we had a situation where the chairman of the committee deferred to a minister of the government. If it had been a chairman who sits on the opposition side, perhaps he would not have deferred so readily to a minister of the Crown. The reasons for that would appear obvious to anyone who sits in this House.

I am grateful to the hon. member for Yukon for raising these points because it is always good to question certain practices; but it seems to me that the system has been working very well and I cannot accept the points raised by the hon. member.

The hon. member for Yukon has raised a number of hypothetical questions, such as if it had been the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) or a chairman on the opposition side, etc. I have to remind the hon. member that the Chair cannot rule on hypothetical questions. However, it is beneficial to look at hypothetical questions because they might occur exactly in the way the hon. member has described them today. I would be happy to give them some thought in case I had to rule rapidly in the House on one of those questions.

I find I have to rule him out on privilege on the matter he has raised, but if he would like the question to be studied further, his motion is quite appropriate and he could move a notice of motion to be discussed in private members' hour. That would be the proper time to do it. But on the question of privilege, I must rule that I do not find a prima facie case.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Madam Speaker, I certainly do not want to follow the course of a private member's motion. Since it affects all hon. members, I consider the matter to be serious enough for me to ask that perhaps it be placed on the agenda of the next House leaders' meeting to see if we cannot get an all-party agreement after we return from the Remembrance Day ceremonies.

### *Plight of Home Owners*

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I was rather curious to learn that the decision to establish the sound system here as part of our House of Commons function was made some time before the setting up of the broadcast services, the TV and electronic taping, and it was kept separate under the switching function called, I believe, the switching branch under the jurisdiction of the Chair. On January 2, 1981, the whole function of the sound system of this place was transferred to the jurisdiction of the broadcasting service of this place. I have not been able to trace the history and authority for that. I assume it would have been under the authority of the Chair, but I was wondering whether this decision had gone before any standing committee or special committee of the House before it was made, or even if my predecessor, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), had been consulted. That is a point which concerned me as well.

**Madam Speaker:** I cannot answer that question. I would assume that the consultations were had because that broadcasting commission—no, I think it was dissolved a little before that date, so I do not know about the consultations. I still feel that the decision that the Speaker remain entirely in charge of the broadcasting system is the right one. I am sure the hon. member does not want to question that.

● (1550)

There is just one other detail I want to discuss with the hon. member. He mentioned that before we televised the proceedings in this House, the sound system operated by zones. We have the same thing today. When an hon. member rises, sometimes two microphones are switched on. When an hon. member stands in the aisle, the microphones on either side of him are open. That does not mean two members in that zone can speak at the same time, but in order to produce a more effective sound the console operators apparently create a zone when an hon. member rises. Another microphone is switched on. This is not always so; it depends on where an hon. member stands. If he stands in front of his seat, I notice that only one microphone is open, but if he stands in the aisle, sometimes microphones on either side will be open. Zones are created because that is a necessity if we want quality sound, and I suppose we have to leave that decision to the operators at the console because we do not know much about the quality of sound and they do.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### PETITION

MR. JELINEK—PLIGHT OF HOME OWNERS

**Mr. Otto Jelinek (Halton):** Madam Speaker, I happen to be the first member to present a petition since your new ruling