

made to this House, the joint committee would also cease to exist. Not only is it a difficulty in a "Catch 22" situation for members of the committee in terms of broadcasting, but it also raises serious doubts as to whether there arises any other need for clarification of assurances given by the government leader in the other place that the date was also a matter which could be examined by committee members and a report could come back to Parliament. On that issue as well members are now caught in a dilemma because should such a report be brought forward, the committee would end. I do not interpret Section 591 in that way at all because it refers to a final report, not an interim report. I believe that the interpretation as well is wrong.

What I am saying to you, Madam Speaker, is that these interpretations were given, quite apart from the assurances we have from the government House leader (Mr. Pinard) from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), and from the government leader in the other place that in fact this committee had the right to determine the presence of radio and television broadcasting.

With those assurances, and in view of the developments which have now taken place, I believe that my privileges as a member of that committee have not been respected. I believe that, before the committee can continue, this matter should be clarified. If not, the good will of which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre speaks, which was resident in the committee and which I believe is still there, will be eroded. I would think it is incumbent upon this House to clarify the matter now.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, since in any procedural debate, the letter and the spirit of the rules as well as the precedents must be considered, in order to be consistent with the position I have always taken in this House concerning the televising of committee proceedings, I wish to say immediately that I accept the request to reconsider the situation and that I hope to be able to report to my colleagues before the adjournment today on the position of the government, pursuant, however, to the Standing Orders of this House and to parliamentary practice.

Having said this, and without binding the government at this stage concerning the decision which might be made on this matter, I would still like to comment on the procedure to be followed if the government decides to abstain from getting involved in the decision of the committee.

Once again, I emphasize that these comments will be subject to the action that I will take in the next few minutes and the report which will be made later today, I hope, to the House of Commons.

First of all, Madam Speaker, reference has been made to a letter that you wrote to the chairman of a special committee of the House. As I said earlier during the question period, I was informed of this letter at two o'clock today. Before that, I was

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

not aware of its existence and even less of its contents. I read it while the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was speaking.

I should inform you that the Prime Minister specified in his reply to the House a little earlier that he had read this letter and had been informed of its existence only around 2.20 this afternoon.

So it is undeniable, Madam Speaker, that cabinet members—and I give the benefit of the doubt to opposition members. I presume that the Leader of the Opposition and his House leader, as well as the House leader of the New Democratic Party and his leader, the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent)—I give them all the benefit of the doubt and I take their word that they were not aware either before this morning of this letter. However, in spite of the answer given by the hon. member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith) to the effect that a copy of this letter had been handed some time ago to the committee members, to some backbenchers—

Mr. Lalonde: They had been informed.

Mr. Pinard: In any event, what I am saying should not upset my colleagues opposite since I say that I give them the benefit of the doubt as to whether or not they were aware of the existence of this letter. So as far as we are concerned, we were not aware of it. I do not think the Leader of the Opposition nor the Leader of the NDP was aware of it. Whatever the nature of this letter, Madam Speaker, and also in keeping with the reservations I expressed earlier regarding the openmindedness that we want to demonstrate, as the Prime Minister said so clearly, this letter does not constitute a ruling because it is just an opinion. It is so true that in the very text of the letter, the last two lines of the conclusion read as follows:

[*English*]

—it is my opinion that any committee seeking to televise—

And so on.

[*Translation*]

That is an opinion, Madam Speaker, which was expressed in light of advice given to you at the request of a member, and an opinion voiced without the benefit of arguments from either side of the House. So it is not a decision of the House after a procedural debate and, in my humble opinion, I do not consider that the opinion contained in that letter amounts to any kind of precedent whatever on which to base arguments in this instance.

In addition, and I say so with respect, Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the person who offered you that advice and, as I said earlier, it is obvious that my opinion on the subject is known. I have always considered that a decision of the House, the one taken in January, 1977, and approved by the House, did allow the televising of debates in the House and in committees, it is clear from that decision. I have always maintained and I still maintain that that decision of the