

*Broadcasting House Proceedings*

it is not good form to do so—what I said on February 10, 1967, as reported at page 12919 of *Hansard*, I said:

One of the things that has continued to concern me very much about this whole question is the fact that we have invoked in our political processes and parliamentary activity a kind of discrimination that I think would not be tolerated for one moment in any other sphere of human activity.

Then I went on to relate the double standard that existed in the House and its committees whereby those who serve the print media have had for many years now full access to the open forums of the House and its committees, yet when it came to radio and television another standard prevailed. In arguing ten years ago for a freer access, I said, and again I quote:

So I speak out for a new understanding of the nature and uses of mass media and ask that they not be used to expose for purposes of power or popularity any individual in this House or outside it, but to create a more genuine, a more thoughtful and a more purposeful dialogue between our activity in the House and the thoughts and desires of the nation.

I believe that that particular passage has stood the test of time perhaps better than other things that I have said in the intervening period, but certainly I have not faltered in my essential commitment to the idea that there is a basic principle at stake here. Indeed, for those who have some difficulty in accepting the principle—I know that all of us, even myself, are concerned at the serious implications here—there is a particular irony, I think, in reflecting upon the access of television and radio to the House and its committees because we are a most unusual country. We are of such massive geographic proportion in relationship to the people who inhabit this country, and the very fact is that in order for people to understand what is happening in the various parts of the country we do rely in a vital way upon the mass media.

We are not essentially drawn together in one or two centres of the kind that exist in many European and other countries. Although there are some major centres we are, in a way, a ribbon of population extending from coast to coast. There is a certain irony in that in the sense that many other nations have already introduced broadcasting access, and now we are finally taking the plunge.

In addition, it is obvious that in recent years one of the chief problems we have faced in this country is that of understanding and communication. Yet the very subject matter that is before us this evening is, in effect, whether or not we can improve the communications that take place not only between members of this House but between those of us who are here as representatives of our various electoral districts and the people who sent us here to represent them.

Therefore I believe there is a fundamental principle at stake. It is a fundamental principle in terms of the right of access on the part of all citizens in this country, no matter where they live, or what their particular state or condition may be.

I agree with those who have suggested that parliament will be affected by the introduction of a more comprehensive mass media. But I am not one of those who think that the impact of that will necessarily be bad. While there may be problems—indeed, I am sure there will be problems that we will have to work out in the coming months—I think that the possibilities

and opportunities that are offered are quite significant and positive in terms of improving and updating our parliamentary system and making it more relevant.

But if it is true that the parliamentary process will be altered, it is also true, I think, that the media itself will be affected. I have been somewhat intrigued by the ambivalent attitude that the media have taken on this issue. Some of us here are critical from time to time of the responsibility or the accountability that exists in regard to the mass media. I think it is true to say that if there is to be a change of situation for members of parliament, there will also be a change of situation for those who are reporters, journalists and editorialists, realizing that there is another avenue of communication through the forums of parliamentary discussion in this House or its several committees.

That, Mr. Speaker, brings me to my central point, that parliament is, after all, something very special in our traditions and heritage. It is not the government, as has been clearly enunciated on previous occasions. It is a unique institution, as the word “parliament” suggests, where a special kind of talk takes place, a talk that does not involve the use of swords, as was the case with our ancestors, but a talk that attempts to test and validate the performance of government and its ideas, and their service to the nation itself. Therefore I think if we believe in that kind of elevated talk of what parliament is meant to provide, this should certainly find its place within the over-all mass media, not on an indirect basis, which has been the case and as has been mentioned by others, but on a direct basis. I am not saying we will immediately like everything we see as a result of television and radio access to this House and its committees, but I think the principle and the possibilities are well worth our support.

● (2140)

There are other things that, if I were to take more time, I might wish to say, but I think it would be more important, because, as has been indicated, this is a matter that has been before members not only for months but for years, that we in effect achieve some measure of consensus on this issue and then move on to many of the important issues facing us in this particular session of parliament.

I have been informed that from consultations and in discussions that have taken place between House leaders, as a result of an earlier motion that was put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker), there is a general wish now, as indicated by Your Honour's earlier comments, to be open to a motion that I hope will find general acceptance with hon. members this evening. I would like to put it forward at this time, seconded by the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggan (Mr. Hnatyshyn), as follows:

That the motion be amended by changing the period after the words “of this resolution” to a comma, and adding thereafter the following:

“and in particular

(1) to examine the existing cost and technical studies of building, equipment, personnel and other requirements consequent upon the introduction of radio and television broadcasting of the House of Commons and its committees,