

Broadcasting House Proceedings

achievements in the way of getting the people nearer to their representatives and their work.

I believe that if we try this, people will rediscover Parliament. In so doing we will do Parliament a service, because we dared put it in better perspective. It takes daring indeed to broadcast our debates. This will put Parliament in better perspective, and as in Ferme-Neuve people will come to us in greater numbers. Canadians will rediscover that here, in Canada's Parliament, are people who want to serve them.

• (2100)

[English]

Mr. Howard Johnston (Okanagan-Kootenay): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight as the member from Okanagan-Kootenay and nothing more, representing a geographical area and sent here for the second time as the representative of the 100,000 or so people who occupy that specific geographical area. I speak as one who has opposed the televising of the House of Commons on principle through both my terms in parliament. It was lonely back in 1966 and 1967 at a time when television was new and seemed to offer some of the hopes expressed by the minister who has just completed her remarks. However, it is not so lonely now when a great and rising chorus of voices has been added to the people who see television as something less than it has been portrayed to us in the address we have just heard, and in other remarks on the subject.

I would like to begin with a quotation that is cynical. It was written by a British Columbian who, according to some speakers, should be thirsting to have this place televised. He writes for the Vancouver *Sun* and for *Maclean's* magazine, Allan Fotheringham. He has not been any particular friend of the Conservative party or myself. I do not share all of his cynicism, but I think the lines with which he begins his column in the latest issue of *Maclean's* are significant to this debate this evening. He states:

The essential invention of government is the myth. A party in power that can take fantasy and sugar-wrap it into a guise resembling fact is a successful operation. It is why, as the House of Commons opens its lungs for 1977, the Liberals are decorating their legislative list with the machinery to televise parliament. There is a very good reason why the Liberals, after shying so long from appearing naked before the curious public eye, are being so vocal about this selfless act. It is now quite harmless to televise the Commons because nothing of importance happens there anymore.

I do not quite believe the last line, but I suspect the opening lines have much to say about the real purpose of this activity in which we are now engaged. We heard a great deal about opening up, but I trust Mr. Fotheringham more than the remarks we have just heard.

Televising the House of Commons should not be seen as a simple technological advance. It strikes at the heart of our democratic government. I believe that our form of representative government under constitutional monarchy and responsible to the elected representatives is the best guarantee for democracy yet invented. It should be appreciated and guarded for its own sake.

In that regard, it should be recalled that the original House of Commons was not secure until it was powerful enough to

[Mrs. Sauvé.]

exclude a variety of people from its premises. I know that some of the most ardent advocates of televising this Chamber would fight to the death a latter day intervention in this Chamber by direct intervention of monarch, governor, or even member from the other place. Why they should welcome so enthusiastically and uncritically a technology and technicians who would wield an enormous power over each one of us, I do not know.

This proposal, if effected, would alter the privileged status that we as members have long enjoyed. There are important questions of privilege that must be settled prior to any televising of this place. I trust others will develop that particular point as this debate continues.

A popular belief holds, however, that representative democracy is inferior somehow to direct democracy. We had it rephrased again this very evening. The idea persists that long ago in a golden age direct democracy developed in Greece and that, somehow, any subsequent variety has been inferior to the original. As with any golden age it cannot be contemplated without nostalgia and a longing to retrieve the irrevocably lost.

Television with its awesome power to hold attention and to entertain is seen by many as the vehicle through which direct democracy can be returned to the people of a vast and populous land.

During the twenty-seventh parliament, when the question was raised and the advent of TV in the Commons seemed imminent, I was asked by a reporter, "Wouldn't you like to talk to your constituents through television?" His tone indicated no possibility of a negative answer. Yet implicit in the question are two assumptions that need examining. First is the assumption that my constituents would ever see me via television. I have been excised from enough reporting emanating from this place to know that one's chances with the press are slender indeed. I hold no hope that photographers and editors of film would do better by me than do reporters.

There is, however, an essential difference between television reporting and newspaper journalism. The member, ignored by the journalists, has several methods of presenting himself to his electorate. He can attend local events, speak at his own meetings, write for the local papers or write letters to the editor, and, as a last resort, he can even buy advertising space in the local papers. The printed *Hansard*, too, serves as his court of last resort, proof that he has been present and has participated in parliament.

But television is something else. If the member was excised from everyday's televising over four years' time, his re-election would be virtually impossible. And what recourse would he have? Who could afford to buy the time on national television to counter the impression that either he had never been there or had never been worth televising?

The second assumption is also important. What guarantee would I have, as a member, that what was televised back home was flattering to me or even neutral toward me? On one or two occasions in this House I have even fallen asleep when some member on the other side has carried on at great length to