

President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada. I am wondering if we may look forward to the publication of a press release relating to the discussions, the conclusions and the decisions arrived at at that conference, prior to the arrival of the President of the United States in Canada.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government): That is a question that should be addressed to the President of the United States, since it was not the Prime Minister of Canada nor the Canadian press officials who made the premature release to which my friend is obviously alluding.

[Translation]

STANDING RULES AND ORDERS

COMMITTEE REQUESTED TO STUDY AUDIO RECORDING AND BROADCASTING OF PROCEEDINGS OF SENATE COMMITTEES

Hon. Fernand-E. Leblanc, pursuant to notice of Tuesday, March 12, 1985, moved:

That the Standing Committee on Standing Rules and Orders be requested to consider and report upon the question of the audio recording and broadcasting of the proceedings of Senate committees.

Hon. Senators: Explain.

Senator Leblanc (Saurel): Honourable senators, this motion refers to a problem that arose on February 18 at a meeting of the Standing Committee on National Finance when we were considering Bill C-11.

Senator Corbin raised a point of order when he noticed that a member of the public was taping the committee's proceedings on a cassette recorder. As I was chairing the meeting, Senator Corbin asked me for a ruling on the acceptability of recording the proceedings of this committee by persons not on the Senate staff.

The person concerned then identified himself as representing a newspaper, stopped his recording apparatus and apologized.

It was agreed that the chairman would not give a ruling until he would be able to respond to the point of order raised by Senator Corbin.

I believe this point of order raises two questions: Is it necessary to obtain permission for recording the public proceedings of Senate committees? If so, does the committee have the authority to give that permission?

It seems that at the present time, there is no unanimity on the subject. The Senate has a specific instrument for examining such problems and for changing the Rules, if necessary, and I am referring to the Standing Committee on Standing Rules and Orders which, and I quote:

... is authorized to propose to the Senate, from time to time and on its own initiative, amendments to the Rules of the Senate.

I believe that we have here an authority that is qualified to examine the issue of audio recording and broadcasting of the proceedings of Senate committees, and I am seeking the

support of honourable senators for this motion in order to clarify this point and to provide an answer to the point of order raised in committee.

Hon. Eymard Corbin: Honourable senators, I would like to comment briefly on the motion, since I raised the point of order on the committee that was considering Bill C-11 a few weeks ago.

If honourable senators decide to refer the matter for study and consideration to the relevant committee, I think it might be a good opportunity to consider as well the possibility of allowing live radio or television broadcasting of the proceedings of this chamber. I think all these questions are related. If the committee should recommend that the Senate allow the proceedings of a committee to be recorded, I think this chamber would be in a rather difficult position with respect to the radio or television broadcasting of its own proceedings.

I do not intend to move an amendment to the motion of Senator Leblanc but, unless I am mistaken, I believe the House of Lords in England—and God knows I do not want to draw a parallel between this institution and the House of Lords, they are altogether different and so are their origins—is or has recently been experimenting with direct broadcasting of its debates.

Being a component of the Canadian Parliament, we ought to consider the possibility of adopting a permanent procedure for this House and its committees as well.

As I said before, I am democratically minded. I do not see that we have anything to hide. God knows we get wide coverage when we are going through periods of crises, or so-called crises. Once they are over, we are totally ignored. A glance at the press gallery today will convince anybody. Whenever a minor controversy arises, we are swamped by reporters, we trip over cameramen and their blinding spotlights. After everything has died down, we are completely forgotten and our future is left in the hands of others. What is lacking in this institution, it seems to me, is a more direct link with the public, for it has a very fuzzy perception of the role, function and traditional heritage of the Senate.

Honourable senators, if the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders is to consider whether or not committee proceedings ought to be televised, I suggest that at the same time, without the need for me to move a formal motion, it should consider and make recommendations on the advisability of broadcasting and televising the debates of this house.

Those are the comments I wanted to make.

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. John M. Godfrey: Honourable senators, I should like to say a few words on this subject. I note that this motion refers to audio-recording alone. I think the motion should include television broadcasting as well. We have had experience with television broadcasting when the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee was considering the marijuana bill.