

Broadcasting House Proceedings

with us. I received a letter, today, dated Friday, January 21. It was not delivered to my office this morning, or on the weekend; it was delivered to me in the House today. It states:

In managing the business of the House, I have in mind that members can give effective representation to their electors only if they have adequate and frequent contact with them.

Has anyone thought that the government might have done a little bit of work at Christmas? After all, the government are paid extra salaries with respect to this matter. It then states:

If the House continues to move at its pre-Christmas pace, I fear that there will be even less time available for members to spend among their constituents.

Isn't that a great way to start off a session?

Mr. MacEachen: You had better table the letter, now that you have read it.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the letter. I have copies of it here. Unfortunately, I do not have it in both official languages, but it would be equally offensive in both official languages. It goes on to state:

As a first planning step, we should attempt to agree on the completion of the 13 items on which the House has already taken some time.

Historic sites—is that what the government House leader has in mind as business to occupy us in this period of restraint when, notwithstanding the platitudes of the government, people are having trouble with respect to the fight against inflation? Almost 800,000 people in this country are unemployed. There are 82,000 more people unemployed now than there were last August. Is that the issue of priority?

The first step is for the government to make up its mind as to what are its priorities. In taking that first step there might be other things more relevant than the particular matter before us today. This is management by the managers, the technocrats, the men and women who pride themselves on being able to manage the economy, the House, and people's lives, the so-called indispensables who have led us into an economic valley of the shadows. The government has demonstrated today its inability to solve anything, even to settle priorities for itself and rise to the challenges which face us. It cannot even order the priorities of this House responsibly. Even the most ardent apologist for the government is embarrassed by what has happened in the first part of this session, and equally embarrassed by the sense of priority shown in the designation of government business today.

● (1540)

It is important that the public should know the government's priorities. There is no evidence of any intention, for example, to bring forward a freedom of information act, which ought to be the cornerstone of the open government to which lip service was given in the pieties which have been expressed on the other side; this is something for which my hon. friend from Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has called repeatedly.

Let me make this clear: the prospect of the broadcasting of our proceedings has a wholesome, tantalizing effect upon me. Frankly, I should like to see such broadcasting started in the

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

public accounts committee when we are dealing with the foolishness of government, when we are dealing, let us say, with a report of the Auditor General. I would love to have seen the television cameras in the House when the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) was trying to justify the appointment of a royal commission on a royal commission. I would love to have seen television in the House of Commons when the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) asked the House to accept that the expenditure of \$740,000 of public funds was a worthy price to be paid for his meanderings across the country to preach the gospel. He could do this in living colour and we would catch the blush on his cheek. It would be a wonderful thing to see him standing there with all the apparent innocence of a newly-laid egg.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): If broadcasting is to be the order of the day, we must debate it. But I hope the government does not believe the people of Canada will be fooled by this parliamentary diversion. They see their country going to hell in a hand-basket, aided and abetted by a government which is suffering from an acute case of the political DT's.

It is obvious that television is, really, the meat of the debate. Television is a many-faceted medium. On the one hand, it trivializes matters of importance, and on the other it can elevate the rare or the unrepresentative to omnipresent reality. All of this is paid for by distorting our evaluation of our own needs and confusing our judgment as consumers. Yet the very people who curse at commercials and sterile programming assume that television's intrusion into everything is either natural or inevitable. That is the remarkable thing about the present debate: except for a number of concerned people in this chamber, a debate on the subject of broadcasting House proceedings could hardly be said to exist. Our constituents believe that television is coming to the House. They are not interested in the argument for it or against it. They want to be able to watch it when it comes—and many of us suspect they will probably turn it off soon afterward. I suggest it is this sentiment of inevitability, as much as any conclusive debate, which will bring television into this chamber.

With a considerable number of reservations which I and those who follow me will put on the record, we will support the main object of the motion. Indeed, it is difficult to counter the weight of the argument that the people have a right to see and hear what is happening in parliament. But there are some deep reservations felt in this place and elsewhere, and I intend to express some of them in the form of an amendment. In particular, we protest vehemently the manner in which broadcasting is being introduced. The motion amounts to a strictly "take it or leave it" proposition, and we know that those opposite have been instructed to take such an attitude.

There are two fundamental questions to be dealt with. First: If the proceedings of this chamber are to be broadcast, by what process will broadcasting be implemented, and how will the innovation be evaluated? Second: What will be the effect of bringing into a chamber, whose chief purpose is to deal