

Proposed Broadcasting of Proceedings

I am talking about the decision making which affects the lives of the Canadian citizens. It is in that sense that the people feel cut off. I think it stems from being unable to participate in and know and see how in fact we represent them in deciding the affairs of state which affect their lives. So, if we are thinking of this place in terms of its sacred quality, or in terms of its importance to the country throughout history, then let us not give it a narrow interpretation but rather a broad and realistic one.

The second argument I think against broadcasting in this House of Commons relates to costs. I see figures, particularly those given by people writing in the newspapers, concerning how much it would cost. Surely the small cost in comparison to what it would do in terms of public enlightenment would indicate that we are being penny wise and pound foolish. The small amount of money that would be necessary to have set aside for the establishment of permanent radio and television equipment I do not think is a cost which we should bother ourselves about. Surely not, too, when we will be spending this year \$140 million for one year's operation alone of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Also, as has been mentioned this evening, there is the concern some have that there would be some acting, if you like—some role playing, some playing to the gallery. Mr. Speaker, I suppose all of us to a degree are actors; otherwise we would not have gained a seat in this place. We have had to be adequate enough performers in our own area to convince a majority of the electors that we are necessary to them. I believe, however, that when we think of people who are playing to microphones or television cameras, we should not think only in terms of the negative effect but also we should think of the positive effect. Surely members will be conscious of the radio and television facilities in this house. Surely, when they rise to ask a question, make an interjection or make a speech, they will be conscious that their face and voice are going out across the country. That will be a good thing. Then maybe we will be able to cut out many of the questions and comments which have not been well advised. It may tend to eliminate some of the time which, in truth, I think is wasted in this place.

Perhaps, if great portions of the proceedings are broadcast—and frankly I do not argue for that—the people will be conscious of the fact that we spend too much time

[Mr. MacDonald (Prince).]

debating matters of procedure and in allowing ourselves to be caught up in and concerned with matters of procedure rather than in dealing with the essential issues. I do not think it would do any harm at all to allow the public to have a much more constructively critical eye on how we govern ourselves in this place.

In introducing the resolution, I believe the hon. member for Waterloo South (Mr. Saltsman) suggested that a channel should be set aside for the continual televising of our activities here. I believe the experience of countries which have attempted this with radio is that this is not a necessary step and in terms of its reward in fact might be too costly. I do not think there are many newspapers which furnish verbatim accounts of everything which goes on in this house. Even the best newspapers we have in this country and in others at best give a precis of the highlights of a day's session.

This is the kind of thing I should like to see presented both on television and radio. This, too, I think is an area in which people become concerned about the editing. Questions were raised in the British parliament, and have been raised here in discussions concerning this question, about who would do the editing, and who would get to appear on the national news at eleven o'clock to ask his or her questions. Surely we do not say to any of the representatives of newspapers in the gallery, "Be sure to submit your copy to us in advance so that we will know you have given us a fair representation". We would rather have the opportunity to complain about it the next day, when we could read the papers for ourselves. We do not believe in effect that we should exercise this kind of censorship, because it is not in the interest of our system or concept of freedom. I think it might be a good suggestion made by the hon. member earlier to follow the procedure of a press council, such as obtains in Great Britain, where there is some kind of self-discipline imposed; but I would abhor any attempt on the part of parliament, government or any group arbitrarily to edit the news. These people are newsmen and they know what is news. They know what in fact will be of major importance to the public; and I think if we believe in the freedom of the press, this kind of decision should be left ultimately in their hands.

● (6:50 p.m.)

Naturally we know all too well from experience that when this freedom is trespassed and when licence rather than freedom exists in the press there is recourse still left in this