

BROADCASTING OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF PARLIAMENT

by Mr. Chr. Hadjioannou, Director General
of the House of Representatives of
the Republic of Cyprus

A subject which has been at the centre of long, protracted and intense debate in my country, especially during the last 4-5 years, is the question of the desirability of radio and television broadcasting of the proceedings of the House of Representatives.

I realise, of course, that this subject has preoccupied Members of Parliaments, journalists, radio and television officials and many other people in most countries of the world, developed or developing.

As far back as 1926 the British Broadcasting Corporation asked for permission to broadcast proceedings of the House of Commons (Winston Churchill's budget speech) though the issue of broadcasting parliamentary proceedings has assumed greater importance in recent years. As is well known, the House of Commons debated the subject repeatedly and extensively in the 1960s and 1970s.

It is not my intention to deal with the various problems that arise from radio and/or television coverage (technical, organizational, financial and others), but only with the substance of the issue, which is the desirability or otherwise of having broadcasts of parliamentary proceedings.

The pros and cons are considerable and amongst Members of Parliament and other interested persons opinions are generally divided. A case in point is the vote in the House of Commons (U.K.) on 24 November 1966 regarding a closed circuit experiment in sound and vision. The motion was defeated by 131 votes to 130. A vote on the same subject in 1975 had a similar outcome, with 275 votes to 263.

In Cyprus experimental full direct radio coverage of a parliamentary debate regarding a specific very important subject in 1982-1983 seems to have attracted a large audience. However, when it was discussed whether live radio broadcasting or proceedings should continue, there was a division of opinions with substantial arguments on both sides. This division of opinions does not only apply to Members of Parliament but also to the public and the press. It must be noted, however, that a scientific research or analysis concerning the impact of broadcasts from Parliament has not taken place.

The Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments has been dealing with the subject since 1973 in repeated meetings which resulted in the drafting of the relevant report entitled "Parliament and Audiovisual Media" which was published in this journal in the first quarter of 1978. This report was drafted by the then Secretary General of the Knesset (Israel) Mr. Netanel Lorch, who was the rapporteur on the subject, and was based on the replies of 22 Parliaments.

Since then developments that occurred have been very rapid and the contemporary trend is the more comprehensive and more extensive radio and/or television coverage of parliamentary proceedings and an increasing number of Parliaments are introducing radio and television cameras inside their Chambers.

In the context of the activities of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, last April at the Lome Meeting I undertook the responsibility of compiling a mini-questionnaire on this subject, which had been circulated to all Members of the Association and had read as follows:

1. Are the plenary meetings and/or the Committee meetings of your Parliament (Senate, Assembly or House of Representatives) televised and/or broadcast on radio?

If yes, is the broadcasting complete or selective? (summaries, extracts).

2. What is the legal status of the broadcasting corporation which is television or broadcasting on radio the proceedings of your Parliament?

Is it a public (semi-state) corporation or an independent organisation or a government corporation?

3. Who takes the decision for televising or broadcasting the proceedings of your Parliament?

The Parliament, the Government or the broadcasting corporation?
April 1985.

Up to December 1985 I received replies from 42 Parliaments of the following countries and the following 2 International Parliamentary Organizations:

Countries

Argentina, Australia (both Houses), Austria, Belgium (both Houses), Canada (House of Commons), Cape Verde, Denmark, Finland, France (both Houses), German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic (both Houses), Greece, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Italy (both Houses), Ivory Coast, Japan (joint reply by the two Houses), Republic of Korea, Malawi, Malaysia, Netherlands (Second Chamber), New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan (Senate), Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Spain (Senate), Sweden, United Kingdom (both Houses), United States of America (both Houses).

International Parliamentary Organizations:

Council of Europe, Western European Union.

By grouping the Replies the following results emerge:

- 1.(A) *In relation to the meetings of the House Standing Committee:*

- (a) In at least 3 Parliaments there is television coverage of the proceedings of House Standing Committees when they concern issues of exceptional interest.

In 4 other Parliaments there is regular selective television coverage of the proceedings of Parliamentary Committees in the form of summaries and/or extracts.

(b) In 5 Parliaments in exceptional cases there is full radio coverage of the proceedings of Parliamentary Committees.

In 4 Parliaments there is regular radio broadcasting with summaries and/or selective coverage.

It emerged from the replies received that in most Parliament Parliamentary Committee meetings are not covered by radio or television.

(B) *With regard to Plenary meetings:*

(a) In 3 Parliaments there is television coverage in full.

(b) In 15 Parliaments there is full live television coverage of the proceedings which relate to a subject of exceptional interest.

(c) In 24 Parliaments there is regular selective television coverage in the form of summaries and/or extracts.

Radio coverage

Full radio coverage of plenary proceedings takes place in 6 Parliaments while there is selective coverage with summaries and/or extracts in 26 Parliaments. In exceptional cases there is full live radio coverage in 8 out of these 26 Parliaments.

2. *Legal status*

In 22 countries broadcasting stations constitute public corporations, in 8 others they are state-run and in the rest they are of a peculiar status.

It must be noted at this point that in some countries there are more than one broadcasting stations which for the most part are independent.

3. *Who takes the decision for televising or broadcasting the proceedings of the Parliaments.*

In 18 countries the initiative and the decision on radio and/or television coverage rests with the broadcasting corporations. In 12 countries the relevant decision is taken by Parliament itself, in two countries the Government takes the decision while in 6 other countries there is consultation and agreement between Parliament and the broadcasting corporation.

However, it must be stressed that in cases where broadcasting corporations take the decision the approval of Parliament is necessary.

IN CONCLUSION

As it emerged from the Replies received in all Parliaments but two the plenary proceedings are broadcast one way or another. Only the United States Senate and the Senate of the Republic of Ireland do not televise or broadcast their proceedings. However, I was informed, that proposals for edited broadcasting on radio of the proceedings of the Senate of Ireland were under active consideration and that it was anticipated to be implemented in 1985.

The Committee meetings in most Parliaments, as it has already been stated, are not televised or broadcast on radio.

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It is the task of the Association to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing co-operation between the services of different Parliaments.

The Association also assists the Inter-Parliamentary Union, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association.

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