

Papers on Parliament No. 5

November 1989

**The Big Picture on the
Small Screen**

Jenny Hutchison

Published and Printed by the Department of the Senate
Parliament House, Canberra
ISSN 1031-976X

Published 1989, Reprinted 1993

Papers on Parliament is edited and managed by the Research Section, Senate Department.

All inquiries should be made to:

The Director of Research
Procedure Office
Senate Department
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (06) 277 3057

The Department of the Senate acknowledges the assistance of the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff.

ISSN 1031-976X

Cover design: Conroy + Donovan, Canberra

The Author

Dr Jenny Hutchison is currently Executive Director of Australasian Urban and Regional Information Systems Association. At the time she wrote this paper, she was producer and presenter of ABC Radio National's *The Parliament Program*. She has also been editor of *The House Magazine* since 1983. Before this, she lectured for many years in Politics at the then Canberra College of Advanced Education.

This paper was originally presented as part of the Senate's Occasional Lecture Series in November 1989.

October 1993

The Big Picture on the Small Screen

Jenny Hutchison

It was interesting to receive this request to speak on this subject in the Parliament. It inspired me to go back through some of the literature about televising. However, I do not intend to give a totally serious address: I intend to have moments of lightness, which I am sure you will be relieved about.

It is a truism that Parliament and the media need each other, and use each other. The nature of the relationship between Parliament and the media varies, especially in the eye of the beholder. Many politicians, for example, feel that the role of the media is merely to convey information. In other words they see the media as merely a channel through which they should be able to project themselves as they see fit. The occasional calls, for example, for a government newspaper, reflect dissatisfaction on the part of many Members of Parliament with journalists who refuse to take such a passive role with journalists who seek to interpret, to evaluate the message.

It should be possible to agree about the basic functions of the media. I would summarise them as providing information, explaining events and issues, recording activities and providing entertainment. But can Members and journalists agree on the priority that should be given to those functions? Would Members and journalists have the same criteria for determining which event or activity should be included? This is particularly a problem when looking at radio or television where there are significant time constraints.

For the media itself, by far the most important of the four functions is providing entertainment. A common perception of the media is that most people are not all that interested in politics, and that most of what happens in the Parliament is not very entertaining.

How many Parliamentary debates could compete with the disaster, a human anguish story or some such sensation? Proceedings in Parliament are adversarial and

off-putting, it is felt, especially to the uninitiated. Whether or not this view is justified, editors and producers feel they will not get much of a readership or audience, and, therefore, and here we come to the crunch, they will not get the sponsors. The media is big business. Leaving aside the ABC and SBS, the media has to succeed as a profit-making enterprise.

So from the viewpoint of the fourth estate, what is news? A news editor or producer, in making a selection from the myriad of available stories, will be biased in favour of:

First, stories which involve important or powerful people. A story from Parliament House is most likely to be about the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition or his main rival or some significant visitor, such as Sir Peter Abeles or Bill Kelty. The content of the story is far more likely to have an executive rather than a parliamentary flavour.

Second, stories are favoured which can be reduced into simple, preferably black and white terms with 'goodies' and 'baddies', proposers and opponents.

Then there are familiar stories, which are, in a sense, reassuring to the audience. If you have a story about a strike, there is the standard line about 'the inconvenience to the innocent public'. Another good story at the moment 'Members of Parliament wanting a pay rise when workers have been forced into restraint'. A wife or mother pleads for an escapee or an absconder to give himself up those sorts of stories do not normally come out of the Senate or the House of Representatives.

Finally, with concentration of ownership and aggregation, stories need to have a general, not a parochial appeal. That is an interesting aspect about much of Question Time and about many of the speeches that have been made in the last two weeks during the Appropriation debate. Members are very much thinking of their electorate back home. It is unlikely that a national network is going to want to show that much interest in this.

Seeing is Believing

So far I have been talking generally about the media. It is necessary to distinguish, from one perspective, a newspaper editor who has an easier job than a producer for the electronic media. He has the space to include in the one issue of his paper a range of articles, to easily cater to everybody, from footy fans to those interested in politics. Of course, importantly, also his audience, his readership can choose what they want to read and when. For both radio and television, time is at a premium.

As one American wag commented: If Moses handed down the ten commandments this afternoon the television lead would be: 'Moses today came down from the Mountain with ten commandments, the two most important of which were: ...'.

Of course, the Moses story might not even make it onto the evening television news if the crew had not happened to have been there at the right moment when Moses came down from the mountain. This is another problem. Television puts to air what they have. We learnt from the epic movie of that name that just having Moses standing there holding the tablet would not be very exciting viewing sound and visual effects were needed. I can still vividly remember sitting in the very front row of the theatre watching the Ten Commandments and feeling I was personally being scorched. That is another interesting point with television you feel that you are part of the story. You also feel that you are seeing exactly what has happened.

As professional media watcher, the late Henry Mayer, commented:

There is a remarkable and quite mistaken faith in the truth revealing itself through your own eyes. Millions feel that if they saw that, it must be true and natural a fact without embellishment. Of all the media, television is the most crafted, artificial and constructed. There is no way in which film can simply be reflecting reality. But the belief in a contrast between supposedly unreliable newspapers and supposedly reliable and trustworthy television is now wide-spread.

Well, those comments of Professor Mayer are all too true. Surveys show that television is the most wanted and the most trusted medium. Young people in particular, do not trust newspapers. When asked, 'What would you miss most if you could only have one medium?', nearly 50 per cent nominate television, a third nominate newspapers and less than 20 per cent say that they would choose radio as their first preference.

When asked which medium is best for accurate and reliable news and information, just short of 50 per cent nominate television. The age factor is striking. Amongst 14-19 year olds, 68 per cent chose television. We should note also that responses vary in tandem with socio-economic status. Lower income, lower education profile equals heavier television viewing patterns. They also vary from city to city. The good burghers of Adelaide seem to be far more discriminating than the residents of Sydney.

Is televising of Parliament a good idea? A survey was conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, way back in 1973. It has not been a hot topic for surveying since. That 1973 survey revealed that 52 per cent of people asked felt that it

would be a good idea to televise Parliament. Once again, there was quite a variance in views depending on age. It was 52 per cent of all respondents, but it was 70 per cent of 21-34 year olds who were in favour of televised Parliament. Forty-six per cent said they would watch a half-hour summary program on sitting days, and 50 per cent said they would watch a summary program at the weekend. If even a third of that was true there would be a wonderful audience. The ABC would be absolutely hysterical if they were into that sort of audience size.

Perhaps the best answer to the question, 'Is televising a good idea?', is that it is inevitable. First, it occurs in most comparable countries – it is interesting to note that amongst the Commonwealth countries, Australia was beaten only by New Zealand in its decision to allow radio broadcasting of Parliament. But as in many other things, since we got the right to vote, we have collapsed in our radical zeal since then.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings has twice considered the question of televising – in 1973/74 and again in 1986. Some of the reluctance in Australia seems to be akin to the feelings of the British members of parliament when, 200 years ago, they debated whether to allow reporters into Westminster or the publication of any record of debates. One can not now imagine a life without Hansard.

The Pollies Speak

The ABC's moving of direct Parliamentary broadcasts off the major network is still a subject of great bitterness amongst some Australians. So it is perhaps intriguing that it has taken us so long to get close to gaining approval for televising. Especially so given what the current Parliamentary Library Political Science Fellow Greg MacIntosh has discovered. Greg interviewed all senators and members who were willing to be interviewed, on a vast range of topics. One of his 28 topics was the question of televising Parliament. He found that more than half of those he interviewed expressed an opinion on the statement: 'Parliament should be televised'. Of these, 65 per cent were in favour.

Sixty-five per cent of Senators and Members were in favour of televising; 25 per cent went so far as to strongly agree with the proposition. Australian Broadcasting Corporation Managing Director, David Hill, who directly contacted all Federal Members of Parliament himself arguing for permission for either live or delayed television rights for the ABC, claims similarly that he has had a three to one majority of respondents in favour of telecasts. These figures are rather intriguing, given that a decision has just been deferred.

I thank Greg MacIntosh for giving me access to his preliminary results. They reveal that the reactions of senators and members vary in terms of their partisan label, their chamber, their front bench/back bench status and length of Parliamentary experience. I will go through each of those quickly to summarise them – hopefully not, at the same time, falling into the journalistic trap of over-simplifying or distorting.

The first point I would make is about partisan labels. Smaller party senators and members are especially in favour of televising. Of the five Australian Democrats who responded, one was undecided, but the rest were very much in favour. The highest rate of approval was amongst National Party Members of Parliament. Of the other two major parties, 68 per cent of all Labor people, but only 57 per cent of Liberals, supported televising parliament. The second point, Mr Clerk, is that senators are responsive to and supportive of the idea of televising. Three-quarters of Senators were in favour, as against only 58 per cent of members. That same difference between upper and lower house members of parliament occurred at Westminster. The House of Lords first started televising in 1985; the Commons finally joined in this year and it is argued that the Commons only came to the party because televising of its proceedings had increased the profile of the Lords. They eventually decided that they did not want to miss out.

Backbenchers see far more to gain than frontbenchers from televising. In the survey, 67 per cent of Government backbenchers thought it was a great idea. Ministers were rather cooler; only 55 per cent were in favour. In the Opposition, there was not a difference between the front and backbenchers, which is another intriguing little thing about these statistics.

Incidentally, the largest category of opponents to the televising of parliament were Ministers – a third of Ministers are opposed to the idea. Again, not too surprising a result. As I said previously, television news is normally going to go for a Hawke, a Peacock or other top frontbencher over the member for 'Woop Woop', or the Independent senator for Uluru. So, live televising could give a backbencher a great boost. The Prime Minister and the others expect that they will be on the television anyway.

The final category that Greg MacIntosh isolated related to tenure in parliament. He broke down the responses on the basis of the number of years of service. The most recent entrants are significantly more in favour. Seventy-one per cent of those elected at the last Federal Election or thereafter, support televising. Seventy per cent whose term coincides with that of the Hawke Government are in favour. Only 58 per cent of those who have served 10 or more years think that televising of parliament is a good idea. Again, this is similar to the reaction of members of the House of Lords and Commons.

Prior to the more recent Broadcasting Committee Report I mentioned, in 1986 the Senate voted in favour of televising. Unfortunately the pressure of business meant that the House did not get to a vote. But inclusion of facilities for televising was inserted in the brief for this new Parliament House, a Parliamentary Audio Visual Unit was established, and members of that are present here today. That is really the clincher we have the equipment, it is installed, it is not being used; something that I am amazed that the Opposition Waste Watch Committee has not leapt onto.

What are the reasons for politicians going slow on the topic in Australia? Politicians, or at least successful politicians, rapidly develop a facility for determining winners and losers in any scenario in relation to any policy proposal, let alone one proposing change to the status quo. They are perhaps equally concerned about repercussions for themselves as individuals and for their political party. Their attitudes on a question such as 'The televising of Parliament' will therefore be assessments of what is in it for them and who will win their party or the other side.

Before I go any further, I should just make a quick distinction. When we talk about televising Parliament, there are two different possibilities that are commonly run together. Televising of all proceedings in the same way that we have broadcasting of all proceedings is what the ABC, and no one else, I gather, at the moment, is interested in. They are interested in the idea of being able to put to air, either live or edited later on, things such as Question Time, maybe significant debates, or maybe the Adjournment debate. The other aspect of televising is the excerpting from proceedings. At the moment you will notice on the television that you have the combination of a static picture with the live sound, and that is what has been agreed so far by the Parliamentary Broadcasting Committee. So there are two different things. The excerpting from proceedings is something that the commercial media are interested in and definitely want to get their hands on; the ABC too, of course. The commercial stations have, I think, made an assessment of the return on the investment, shall we say, and decided that perhaps this might not help their money-making desires.

The Case for Televising

Let us move on to arguments about the televising of parliament. What are the arguments in favour of this? Here I am really bringing together a host of responses from people in Australia and overseas, over quite a long period of time.

The arguments in favour could be summarised briefly as: first, the public has the right to know more about the parliament, to see more of the day-to-day business of parliament. Second, televising proceedings would reduce the communication gap

between Parliament and the people; it would enable greater participation in the political process and should encourage feedback. Third, the quality of debate would be raised. Fourth, televising daily proceedings should eliminate possible selectivity in the media and similarly affect interpretive television journalists. Finally, there would be an educational value.

Looking at the British experience, it appears that the initial audiences were far larger than anticipated. The special report on the BBC from Parliament Square, after the Profumo Debate, was put on at 10.15 pm and watched by nearly eight million people. Some members of the House of Lords argue that televising has enhanced the reputation of their House to the extent that it has ensured the survival of the Lords. A contrast to its long existence as a sort of threatened species, one might say.

Possible consequences of televising could be more members in the chamber and we all know that there are lots of times when there are not very many members there at all, or senators. There could be an enhanced quality of debate, leading to a revival of the oratory of all involved to the extent that there ever was oratory in the past. There could be a change away from the focus of the current affairs style presentation of politics which we have at the moment. There might be improvement in the behaviour of members of parliament perhaps an end to the boarding school flavour of some debates. Speeches might be shorter, punchier and, hopefully, not so often merely read out. Opposition and backbench people might get more attention.

A final interesting point: ministerial initiatives might more often be announced in the Parliament rather than in the Australian countryside or where ever. Although, I should note on that point that this could be a mixed blessing. Senator Pat Giles commented to me the other day, 'Oh no, we have already got far too much to discuss, we do not want those as well'. So there is a two-sided approach to all of these points, I think.

When queried after the first year of televising in Canada, three-quarters of members said there had been an effect. Most stressed an improvement in decorum and in standards of dress. Some members, after seeing themselves on the small screen, embarked on rigorous diets and changed their barber. It was also felt that more speeches were better prepared. However, one-third felt, as a negative result of televising, that there was an increased number of primadonnas, which is something that rather appals me, as a personal aside. It certainly is an aspect of the case against televising, to which I will now turn.

The Case Against Televising

The standard arguments are trotted out I think that is a good word in this case

because they seem to be produced unfailingly but without much thought. Some arguments against televising are that the dignity of parliament would be eroded. That could lead to a rather hoarse chuckle amongst some people. Members might play to the camera, frontbenchers would dominate. It places a premium on rhetorical skills, which some members may not have. The audience would see lots of empty seats and wonder why, and the audience would not understand proceedings. In fact, I really feel that a lot of the negative arguments demonstrate a great deal of condescension on the part of politicians about the electorate and their level of understanding.

The negative argument centres on the fact that television would trivialise parliament by concentrating on appearances and not on the substance. Only ten years ago, in Canada, it was suggested by opponents that women members might be tempted to wear pretty hats and that cameras would want to focus on the hem lengths of women members. On the first day of televising in the United States, an amazing number of congressmen appeared in light blue shirts. The Deputy Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons was told to buy new eye glasses because his dark lenses made him look like the Godfather. Canadian members stopped their traditional rapping on the desk tops because it was felt that it would annoy or alarm viewers. It is rumoured that Margaret Thatcher was originally an opponent of televising because she thought the sight of her conducting vigorous exchanges with a sea of shouting male faces would not help her image.

We all know that attending the chamber occupies only a small part of most senators' and members' sitting days. There are other aspects of their work, such as attending meetings of parliamentary committees, taking care of constituents, participating in party meetings, attending Caucus Committee meetings. All these are necessary for re-election and for advancement within the party. The possibility of added television exposure may not be much help for that. Sir Billy Snedden, a great proponent of televising Parliament, countered that argument about empty seats, and I quote from him:

An electorate which has put somebody in Parliament on trust is entitled to see whether he is there or not. If he is not there, the electorate is entitled to say to the chap, "Why were not you there?" The member can then say "I was not there because I was doing this or that or something else". Then the electorate can judge whether that is a reasonable explanation or not.

On this point of an empty chamber, I am indebted to Rob Chalmers for the suggestion that the Parliament could copy the New Orleans Super Bowl, where there are random differently coloured seats which when filmed from a distance gives the effect of a crowd. Well, lots of people do not like the colour scheme in either of the new chambers

so his positive suggestion is a way out!

Other possible consequences of televising that people might be concerned about are: proceedings could be so boring that the audience would be very small after an initial period of interest. The broadcaster could get involved in defamation proceedings the whole question of privilege and so on is a bit of a hoary one. Debates other than Question Time could, as a result of televising, be infected with an adversarial tone that is normally not present. Frontbenchers might decide to script debates for the television audience and, therefore, there would be a loss of spontaneity. It could well be that our new Speaker and Deputy Speaker in the House would have a far more difficult job trying to maintain decorum and relevance when people know that the television camera is on them. It is an interesting point will members behave better or worse when they are going to be seen in everybody's living room? I think that it is very hard to come up with a definite prediction on that one; some might do one and some the other.

Technical Considerations

Before the move to the new Parliament House, there were also problems in accommodating cameras in the chambers and the provision of adequate lighting, but these are no longer relevant problems. However, there are some technical considerations. Members remain very wary of how proceedings will be edited. For many years, the Broadcasting Committee has agonised over the technical guidelines covering radio broadcasting, both live and excerpt form. More recently they have established rules for televising. These forbid, for example, any focus on the galleries so on the internal House monitoring system that people like me are lucky enough to be able to see in the press gallery, and which senators and members also have on the internal monitors there was no sight of the man who leapt from the public gallery recently. Now that is a restriction that has been placed by the politicians. Presumably because of the sensitivity about the sight of an empty chamber, there are restrictions on panning shots. The cameras are meant to focus on the individual speaker and then to do a broad backward view of the whole chamber, but not to move back and forth in the course of someone interjecting and what have you.

The picture, therefore, that is currently provided in-House by PAVU and I am not blaming PAVU it is not what I call very exciting. I mean if you have a half hour speech by someone, the camera is, for most of that half hour, purely riveted on Senator X. Indeed, overseas countries, in order to overcome this problem while still not allowing a crew to film as they saw fit, have discussed the use of additional special effects: for example, allowing members to incorporate charts, or tables or other sorts of information visually. We would have some poor person racing around with an overhead projector or using a suitable background or split screen. For example, if Mr

Beazley is on his feet talking about a matter relating to his portfolio, suddenly tanks or other defence equipment would appear in the background. I even read a suggestion that whenever a rural member of parliament was on his feet they could have a shot of a paddock with some sort of crop waving in the breeze. It could be quite amusing for a while but very boring afterwards.

Some other matters that have to be decided concern the technical staff. Are they to be employed by the Parliament or by the broadcaster? One interesting aside I discovered in my reading was that, in the United States, no technical employee involved in televising parliament can have a political affiliation. It would be interesting to see how one would go trying to introduce that here. There are other matters too, which the ABC in particular will have to consider if it wants live televising. Will there be equal time given to the proceedings in the Senate and the House of Representatives? Will we have gavel to gavel coverage, as in the United States of America and Canada, or only selected coverage; and if the latter, who is to select what is covered and which parts of the day will they choose? For example, take the adjournment debate which is not currently broadcast; will they televise that? Will committee proceedings be opened up?

Down the track when televising is introduced, one can forecast quite a few further pleas for change which will come from the broadcasters: for example, changes to the daily timetable to the extent that more debates would occur at fixed times. Twenty-four hours notice would be given of a subject of public importance debate so that viewers can be prepared. Another possibility is the call for superimposing procedural information on the screen so that viewers can understand what is happening.

Cleaning up the Language

In conclusion, it is hard to predict what the outcome of televising would be on Australian senators and members. One year after its introduction, the Canadians thought that it had made a difference. As I said before they felt there was a slight improvement in the standard of decorum and standards of dress. Reading the responses on that, they were not particularly enthusiastic. I am indebted to Senator Irina Dunn for the suggestion that the Broadcasting Tribunal might have to consider X-rating some debates so that parents will not be concerned about their children hearing what we officially call 'unparliamentary language'. However, after studying a paper compiled by Senator Amanda Vanstone, I think that occasions of such unparliamentary language provide exactly the excitement that television producers would want to have included. At the moment, only avid Hansard readers or parliamentary broadcasting network listeners are treated to some rather amazing little gems.

I will close with a few examples of the sorts of phrases that we might be able to hear

more readily. We all know of course that the most common insult hurled around the chambers is that someone is a 'liar', or the various alternative words such as 'hypocrite' and so on. In the past week, Mr Willis was having a lot of fun calling the members of the Opposition 'harlots'. The word 'fascist' is used quite a lot. The Treasurer, of course, has made an art form of the word 'scumbag'. 'Idiot' is also a common word. But I have some examples of the other exchanges that have occurred between members of parliament: if we take Senator Crichton-Browne, for example. Senator Crichton-Browne frequently gets excited by Senator Peter Walsh; and, in fact, so do most people. Senator Peter Walsh himself gets very excited in the Senate! Some of the descriptions that Crichton-Browne has hurled back to Senator Walsh include, 'You are a grub'; 'You are a greasy grub', and then finally when he got very worked up, 'Do I hear a gurgle from the gutter of the one man slum on my right', when Senator Walsh was trying to interject.

Senator Chaney, also provoked by Senator Walsh, started to refer to him continually as 'the Minister for sleeze'. Senator Grimes, before he rose to the heights of ambassadorial level, accused Senator Durack of being a 'boring turd'; he also called Senator Mason 'a paranoid little twerp'. Robert Ray liked that phrase, so he then called Senator Michael Baume 'a patronising twerp' and 'a little pissant'. Senator Walsh called Senator Harradine 'an odious rodent'.

In fact, the use of animals as analogies is very common. Senator Archer once called former Senator McLaren 'a miserable rabbit'. There are some other amusing exchanges of that sort. I thought I would close with what was definitely my favourite of all these so called 'unparliamentary phrases' that Senator Vanstone collected. This is an interchange between the late Senator Allan Missen and Senator Janine Haines. Actually, Janine Haines does not say anything; she is just mumbling in the background. Missen responded to her interjection by saying: 'Be quiet Senator Haines, you talk like a jackass'. The President then called on Senator Missen, not actually to withdraw his words, but to address his remarks through the Chair. Missen's next comment was: 'I am sorry Mr President. I should not say such things because I am member of the Australian Conservation Foundation and a number of animal welfare organisations'. I am sure that Harry Hall (ABC television producer in charge) would agree that scenes like that could be amusing on the little screen. Thank you.

Mr Harry Evans

Unparliamentary language reminds me of the occasion when Senator Walsh, then in Opposition, was abusing Senator Cotton, bordering on unparliamentary language, and accusing him of every crime, political and personal, known to man. He decided to resort to irony and he said: 'And what does Professor Cotton have to say about this?'.

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Quick as a flash Cotton was on his feet and said: 'I want that withdrawn, I am not going to be called a professor'.

I now invite questions and discussion.

Discussion

Mr Noel Hicks My name is Noel Hicks and I am the Federal Member for Riverina-Darling. I congratulate you on your speech, Jenny. I am also a member of the Parliamentary Broadcasting Committee. Just a few things I would like to comment on. I know that you said there that we are a bit backward in having televising of the Parliament. I am one who believes that televising of the Parliament will come; there is no doubt about that. I think that we have to be a little bit careful in our approach and, perhaps, we may be being a little bit slow. I am one who believes that we are a parliamentary democracy, one of the very few in the world. I do not think you need all of your fingers and your toes to count the numbers in the world that there are, so we have to be very careful in how we approach this so that we do not bring any adverse criticism on the Parliament.

I know you said that perhaps the committee is looking it is a joint committee as you know and looking at it from the point of what advantage we can gain and what advantage will someone else gain. I can assure you from my point of view, and the other members of the committee who are of different parties, that is not what they are looking at all, really. What they are looking at is to make sure that the Parliament does not fall into any disrespect and that is our main ambition; to make sure that the Parliament does hold its status as the highest forum in the land and a very important forum to the people of Australia. So that is number one.

Number two, the point about empty seats in the Parliament. I am the Federal Member for Riverina-Darling; it is an electorate of about a third of New South Wales. Last weekend, I spent 27 hours in a car travelling around the electorate, so I do not think that is an argument. There will be empty seats in the Parliament; there will always be empty seats because if you do not have the opportunity to do the job when you are in the electorate you are going to have to do it while you are in the Parliament. I might say I feel that I am serving my electorate better by being in my office answering constituents' letters and talking to them rather than be sitting listening to sometimes rather boring speeches. I do not think that that is an argument. The Member for Kalgoorlie for example, has a third of Australia; there is no way that he can be sitting in the Parliament all the time. I think the people of Australia would have to realise that, in a continent the size of Australia, that is going to happen.

The third one is about the people. You would like to have some entertainment in the Parliament. For example, we had the gentleman jump over the balcony last week. Since I have been in the Parliament, we have had ping pong balls, rotten eggs, daffodils and paper. One man jumped over the balcony last year and broke both of his ankles and another gentleman jumped over this year and was fortunate he was not injured also.

But I think that if we started to allow that to happen you would have every ratbag in Australia trying to get some attention jumping over the balconies. I know that there is a security problem. If we had more than one person jumping over the balconies we would be very hardpressed to contain them, and whereas this time we might have daffodils and ping pong balls, next time it might be explosives. So I do not know if the ABC wants to get that on camera, but it is a possibility. We all know that to have a demonstration in the street you have two people there. The ABC, in particular, has the cameras on them; you would think that it was a national event, but it is not, it is two people out of a large population. I do not see the Parliament as being a place where we can allow that to happen.

I know that we are going to have problems because we have the camera on the member and someone behind is picking his nose and another one has got a stomach that is about three beer barrels bbig and he is reading the newspaper. It looks bad on national television. I know, and it will smarten up the act. Members will have to smarten up their act, there is no doubt about it, and I believe, as I said, that television is coming. But what I would hate to see, and I think we have had enough of it, is cellophane members of parliament, where you have to be a film star to be a member of parliament. I think that would be a shame and perhaps we would not have the Chifleys and the Curtins and other people, the Clive Evatts and all that, in the Parliament if that happens to be the case. It has problems and as a member of the parliamentary committee I am not talking on behalf of the committee because we have not discussed this but I am just one individual member who is just putting a few little points of view. I do congratulate you on having the forum and raising the matter. When television comes to the Parliament we must make sure that we maintain respect for the Parliament and that we elevate the position of the Parliament above what it is at the moment.

Dr Hutchison I think that the sensitivity is a point that will not go away and it is one of those problems that, after televising has been introduced, people will start to be able to approach the matter a little bit more easily. I am sure that will happen here too. I do not think it would be too bad if the standard of dress improved at times. We might even get Senator Schacht to wear a tie one day.

Mr Chalmers In my view, unless the Parliament agrees to televising, it will continue to be less relevant, or less significant in Australian life, than it is today. The disaster to the institution of parliament occurred when we allowed the television cameras into this building and the administration the Ministers discovered to their delight that, rather than having to face the Parliament, they could hold these cosy press conferences in the building which provided these expensive television rooms for use for the television networks; whereas I think, with the televising of parliament, it would encourage Ministers to go back into the Parliament and make their statements in the Parliament. From the televising point of view, it is a much more interesting setting to

watch and hear a Minister or a debate in the parliamentary chamber itself than a very dull television press conference setting. That is the only point I would like to make.

Dr Hutchison Yes, I am not sure if Paul Lyneham has realised that his performances in his little studio might be under risk if the ABC actually went into full scale televising. It certainly would be, I agree with that, a very different atmosphere than the rather false atmosphere that is set up at the moment on current affairs programs where you just have a couple of talking heads and a commentator or an interviewer.

I think the actual debate in the chamber I mean anybody who has seen footage from televising the major debates in the UK and so on apparently can be very riveting television. I would reiterate the point that I made before, that the Parliament would undoubtedly be asked to consider its program of business in order to accommodate the desire of broadcasters. I can see the Serjeant-at-Arms looking very worried, puzzled and concerned about this.

But I think it would be certainly one thing that would happen, that the broadcasters would want to both have some predictability, some foreknowledge of what is happening, so that they can get their best program.

Attachment 1

Results from Survey - Televising Parliament

Statement 28: 'Parliament should be televised'

1. Aggregate

Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	40%
Undecided	12%
Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	10%

2. By Party

ALP	68%	Agreement
	8%	Undecided
	24%	Disagreement
LIB	57%	Agreement
	17%	Undecided
	26%	Disagreement
NAT	84%	Agreement
	0%	Undecided
	16%	Disagreement
DEMOCRAT	3 Agree and 1 Undecided 1 Strongly Agree	
INDEP.	1 Agree, 1 Disagree	

3. By Chamber

REPS	58%	Agreement
	12%	Undecided
	29%	Disagreement
SENATE	75%	Agreement
	11%	Undecided
	14%	Disagreement

4. By Position Held

MINISTERS	55%	Agreement
	11%	Undecided
	33%	Disagreement
SHADOW MINISTERS 61%	61%	Agreement
	23%	Undecided
	15%	Disagreement
GOVT BACKBENCHERS	67%	Agreement
	10%	Undecided
	22%	Disagreement
OPPN BACKBENCHERS	61%	Agreement
	10%	Undecided
	29%	Disagreement

5. Years Experience to Parliament

1 to 3	71%	Agreement
4 to 6	70%	Agreement
7 to 9	67%	Agreement
10+	58%	Agreement

Source: Survey conducted by Greg McIntosh
 Political Science Fellow
 Parliamentary Library, April/May 1989

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