

Privileges and Elections

Mr. Benjamin: I said that. I said this was one instance where there would be ample justification. I doubt very much that the entire committee of the Ontario Legislature would be willing to come to Ottawa. But I do not see any justification for taking the entire committee from Ottawa into those three provinces to hear three people, though I am not questioning for a moment the value of hearing those three people.

On the question of electoral expenses, I think hon. members will agree that we have often found it difficult to keep this subject apart from our considerations of the elections Act generally. The chairman has been very lenient—

Mr. Francis: I am afraid I did not put my question well. The Ontario committee made a trip to Australia which is a substantially greater burden on the public purse than anything contemplated by this committee.

Mr. Benjamin: I never mentioned anything about Australia, Mr. Speaker. I did mention that proxy voting was a subject we might have to consider, and that this subject has already been studied in depth by another legislative body whose findings we could quickly obtain without putting the federal House to additional expense. This is an area in which a short trip to Toronto lasting a day, or two days at the most, would be justifiable.

As I was saying, the subject of election expenses kept creeping into our discussions while we were dealing with other sections of the act. It is difficult to keep the subject out of our discussion of other provisions in the legislation. This is a hazard which the poor chairman of the committee will have to live with—some aspects of this topic are bound to be discussed because of their direct relationship with other sections of the act.

I mention this as a reminder to the President of the Privy Council that it will not be easy to get through this work quickly before we deal in any manner with election expenses. I would point out that the report of the Election Expenses Commission, which has been gathering dust now for three years, will take a great deal of examination. It runs into two volumes. More than two years ago the political science department of the University of Saskatchewan held a two-day seminar to which it invited representatives of political parties, of the radio, television and newspaper media. One member of the commission was

[Mr. Francis.]

present, together with a number of the commission's staff. Mr. Speaker, we found loopholes in that report that one could drive a tank through. I am not criticizing the commission; it was impossible for them to take account of every variation involving election expenses. This work will take time. I submit it is necessary to set up a special committee now, so that we can get moving.

A while ago I used the word "bi-partisan". At this point I want to say we have a good chairman on our committee—in addition, he is a nice fellow and he is very patient. Our committee is moving in a good direction when it comes to bi-partisan activity in the field of electoral reform. When we held our first meeting, purely for organization purposes, a member of the Official Opposition, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) was elected vice-chairman. I want to compliment the hon. member for Sudbury (Mr. Jerome). I feel he was quite sincere when he moved that the election of the hon. member for Edmonton-Centre be made unanimous. He did not say this because he knew he could not win election; I believe he said it because he was sincerely anxious to have the best possible work done by the committee in as bi-partisan a manner as possible. In saying this, I in no way denigrate the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) or disagree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles); I would be the last person in this House or anywhere else to question for one moment the capability of the hon. member for Hillsborough to be chairman. I just want to tell the House that the committee now has a vice-chairman at least from the Official Opposition.

I suggest that the President of the Privy Council ought to amend this motion by deleting from the committee's terms of reference the clause pertaining to the lowering of the voting age, since the government's intention has been made clear already in the Speech from the Throne. The matter has already been decided. For all the committee knows, the necessary legislation has already been drafted and is ready to be brought to the House for first reading and subsequent reference to the standing committee. In these circumstances, it is pointless for the committee to continue to deal with the subject of the lowering of the voting age. The intention of the government is perfectly clear, and I hope it is unchangeable. It has decided to bring in legislation lowering the voting age and in these circumstances this reference, too, in addition to those concerning sections 62 and