

Election Expenses Bill

way (Mrs. MacInnis) would be able to go ahead with one of her two notices of motions for production of documents. She was, in fact, prepared to do so and we on this side were prepared to reply. However, there has been a late scheduling change. A committee of which she is a very active member was called into session this afternoon. I refer to the health and welfare committee, which is dealing with the family income security plan in which the hon. member is very interested. Accordingly, at the last moment, without any opportunity for advance notice to be given either on her part or on our part, it was necessary for her to withdraw from the arrangement and she will not be moving her motion this afternoon.

As a result, we did discuss the possibility of using this hour, or a good portion of it, to conclude the debate on the measure that has just been passed. That being so, I think there might be a disposition among hon. members to call it six o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Does the House agree to call it six o'clock?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): It being six o'clock I do now leave the chair.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

• (2010)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**ELECTION EXPENSES BILL****AMENDMENTS TO CANADA ELECTIONS ACT AND INCOME TAX ACT**

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council) moved that Bill C-211, to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act in respect of election expenses, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

He said: Mr. Speaker, before beginning to set out the details of this particular bill I might make one or two comments about the question of election expenses, the background to this bill and my approach in bringing the bill before the House of Commons. As you will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, every member of this House in a sense is an expert on election expenses because each member has met the difficulties and responsibilities in a financial way of contesting a general election. Therefore, everyone here has knowledge that probably is at least equal to the advice that is received from all other sources concerning what we ought to do about this difficult problem.

[Mr. Jerome.]

First of all I might mention that this bill follows in the main, if not entirely, the recommendations of the Special Committee on Election Expenses which reported to this House in June of last year. That was an all-party committee which met frequently and heard witnesses. In so far as can be determined, its recommendations to the House of Commons were unanimous. That report in turn benefited from the study which had been made previously by an expert group, a committee which had been appointed by the Pearson government and headed by Mr. Barbeau, known as the Barbeau committee. The membership of that committee included two former distinguished members of this House, Mr. M. J. Coldwell and Mr. Arthur Smith. In addition to the three gentlemen I have mentioned, the other members were Mr. Norman Ward and Mr. Gordon Dryden.

To a great extent, as did the report of the special committee, this bill for its guiding principles rests on the main recommendations of the Barbeau committee. There are some divergencies. I will perhaps later be prepared to explain why I am not recommending to the House the implementation of every single item that was put forward either in the Barbeau committee report or in the special committee report, although I repeat that we have followed in the main the principal recommendations.

We are keeping an open mind in respect of the details of this bill. I shall be listening to the views of hon. members on all sides of the House, and if perhaps persuasive arguments can be made and if gaps can be revealed in the bill, then certainly I will be ready to accept changes to it. As an example of that approach I might mention that the Barbeau committee recommended that in the disclosure provisions, registered political parties be obligated to report contributions received from foreign sources. There was no reason given at any point in the report concerning the basis for this recommendation, the extent to which in the view of the committee it felt political parties were financed by foreign sources or, indeed, why from a public policy point of view foreign sources ought to be segregated from domestic sources.

The special committee did not follow the Barbeau committee in that regard but recommended that non-resident individuals, corporations and unions be prohibited from making contributions to registered political parties. Again, in the report of the special committee I have been unable to find any reasoned argument in support of this particular proposal. In the absence of any compelling argument in favour of either of these approaches, I have not included any such provision in the bill. However, I certainly will be listening to the observations of hon. members on this point and if good arguments can be brought forward indicating the inclusion of such a provision would be an improvement to the bill, I would be prepared to accept an amendment along those lines: likewise in respect of other details of the bill, except that I am not prepared to depart from the main principles which underscore this bill.

The bill itself incorporates three main principles which have been widely discussed since the last electoral reform on this subject in 1920, namely, the limitation of election expenses, the disclosure of sources of contributions and the need for financial assistance by candidates and politi-