

Election Expenses Bill

Speaking on the point the President of the Privy Council raised, I suggest that nothing would be more futile than for any member of the standing committee to attempt to achieve these changes by amending this bill in committee, because we would be told at once that those amendments run counter to what is laid down in the recommendation of the Governor General. I contend, therefore, that we have the right on second reading to say we are opposed to the bill, to give our reasons for that opposition and to bring forward a reasoned amendment. That, Sir, is what we have placed before you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Before I examine the procedural acceptability of the amendment, perhaps I should again read the amendment to the House:

That Bill C-211 be not now read a second time, but that it be resolved that in the opinion of this House the government should give immediate consideration to the presenting of a bill that will provide effective control over election expenses, by establishing reasonable limitations on the amounts parties as well as candidates may spend, and by providing for the full disclosure of contributions to political candidates and parties both at the time of and between election campaigns.

• (2050)

As it has been stated many times from the chair, reasoned amendments on second reading are among the most difficult of our parliamentary proceedings. In the past few years hon. members have sought to make greater use of such amendments and, indeed, have sought to go beyond the recognized forms—the six months' hoist or a reasoned amendment to second reading.

I wish to thank the two hon. members who contributed to the procedural debate; Points made by both participants are of interest and value. The President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) expressed the view that the amendment we are considering puts forward proposals which might be made in committee. The minister referred to citation 389 of Beauchesne to which I also refer.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) referred to the limitations of the Governor General's recommendation, suggesting that the Chair by previous decisions had limited the possibility of going beyond the recommendation or the possibility of altering any of the proposals covered by the recommendation. The hon. member referred to citation 382 dealing with the subject of reasoned amendments—a citation which was used last Friday, I believe—under the terms of which an hon. member can put forward reasons for not agreeing to second reading of a bill.

That having been said, there are a few questions the Chair must ask in its desire to proceed in accordance with the practices of this House. The Chair has to decide on the procedural acceptability of the amendment. I find myself wondering at this point whether the amendment before us does in fact oppose the principle of the bill. I refer to citation 382 and shall read it to the House:

It is also competent to a member who desires to place on record his special reason for not agreeing to the second reading of a bill to move, as an amendment to the question, a resolution declaratory of some principle adverse to, or differing from, the principles, policy or provisions of the bill, or expressing opinions as to any circumstances connected with its introduction, or prosecution; or otherwise opposed to its progress; or seeking further information in relation to the bill by committee or commissioners—

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

I have great doubts about this amendment and its effect on the bill. I am tempted to conclude that the amendment is not really opposing the principle of the bill. Although the hon. member in his speech said he could not accept the measure because it did not contain certain provisions, his amendment does not oppose the principle, the subject matter within the proposal before us.

I am wondering if what appear to be the reasons given by the hon. member in his amendment are proposals which might well be the substance of another bill. On the other hand, the President of the Privy Council has suggested that the proposals contained in the amendment could be put forward at the committee stage. The minister referred to citation 389 of Beauchesne where it is stated:

A motion opposing second reading of the bill must not anticipate amendments which could be moved in committee.

In that regard the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre made a point as to the recommendation of His Excellency which in his mind set a limitation on the capability of the committee, or the House at a later stage, in accepting such amendments. In the opinion of the Chair, after looking at the recommendation attached to the bill, it is in general terms and would appear to be wide enough to permit hon. members to include the changes suggested in the amendment moved by the hon. member. Hon. members cannot, of course, expand the measure beyond the limits of the recommendation of His Excellency, but I do not see any limit on the possibility of providing for a restriction.

The arguments of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, based probably on previous decisions, were to my mind more particularly concerned with moneys involving expenditure by the treasury. The precedents are quite clear on that point. When we are speaking of expenditure or appropriation of money, this limitation of course applies. But when it comes to the possibility of proposing amendments to a bill, it is my impression that the recommendation we have before us is wide enough to enable the committee to accept such amendments, although of course the Chair is not prejudging what could be done in committee.

• (2100)

In conclusion, basing myself on the point that I stressed at the beginning, that the amendment should clearly oppose the principle of the bill and that it might be anticipating at the same time amendments that could be made at the committee stage, I hold that the amendment cannot be accepted at this time.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. For clarification's sake, are you now ruling that it will be permissible at committee stage to move amendments revolving around the subject matter of the proposed amendment of my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles)? Are you saying that we can do that in committee? Because if that is not what you are saying, we will have all sorts of difficulty in the committee, especially when members such as the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) want to give their directions about opposing these moves. I think it would be just as well if you indicated what are our rights and prerogatives in committee.