

I may also say there were several amendments with which I did not agree, and my efforts to persuade the committee were not acceptable on a number of occasions. However, I am quite content to accept the over-all judgment of the committee and it is for that reason I did not put down any amendments to change in any way the conclusions of the committee. In all cases in respect of amendments, they were carried in the usual way by the committee. I note also that the hon. member for Halton, whose party lost some amendments, did not propose any amendment at the report stage to recover ground that might have been gained in the committee. That makes it easier for us to move ahead in dealing with this bill. It is my firm expectation that the bill can be passed and can receive royal assent before we rise, whether by adjournment or prorogation, and that this very important area of electoral reform will have been dealt with by this twenty-ninth Parliament of Canada—probably a good parliament in which to deal with it because it is a minority parliament in which no party could succeed in imposing its views on a minority. This could be the result of the deliberations in the committee and the result of the bill, hopefully accepted by all the House, having been proposed by a government which has a minority of members in the House.

• (1710)

I wish to say, before concluding, that I really did get an eye-opener in respect of the operation of the committee system in the House of Commons. I attended, it seemed, an endless number of meetings. I noticed that most members of the committee were very faithful in attending to their duties. It did involve an enormous amount of time and a great deal of industry on the part of members. It took them away from the House and their offices. My eye-opener leads me to conclude that in the future we ought to do two things: we ought to do something to even further systematize and reform our committee system in order to reduce the burden of members of parliament which is very great at the present time, and certainly we ought to consider in the future what additional assistance should be made available to members of parliament to allow them to operate even more effectively as members of standing committees of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: So, Mr. Speaker, I conclude by thanking those who were on the committee. I entrust the bill to the chamber in the expectation that we can make good progress quickly and give the bill third reading later.

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my contribution at this stage will be brief. I was very pleased to hear the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) speak with such pleasure of his experiences before the committee. I know all of us in every corner of the House hope to be able to arrange in the not too distant future an opportunity for the minister and several of his colleagues on the front bench to spend a great deal more time in our committees.

I want to say, also, I was very much heartened, as I believe all of us were in this House, to hear the words of the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin). We can only express the hope that those words will be matched by

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the actions of his party as this bill proceeds through the House. I think it is worth noting that the great number of amendments which appear on the order paper in two waves are sponsored by a great variety of members from his party. The name of the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) is associated with a number of these amendments. Other amendments stand in the names of people who hold official positions in that party, including the whip. I do not think that should be lost sight of in proceeding with the debate. We would hope that no party would direct its attention to stonewalling this highly desirable legislation.

With regard to this particular amendment, I believe it would be a very serious limitation to exclude from the ambit of the legislation reference to contributions of goods and services of provincial governments. I think that while there may be concern, as the hon. member suggested, about the means of enforcing that particular provision relative to the provinces, it should be pointed out that there are other reasons for having penalties and prohibitions in this legislation that are not easily enforceable. While it might be difficult to prosecute a province, it certainly is a fact that this object could be achieved through the substantial weapon of publicity by publicizing that a particular government controlled by a particular party was abusing its trust in a partisan issue. I think this is a highly important addition to the bill and I say with suitable modesty that I shall vote against the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Skeena.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, amendment No. 30 which stands in my name is really consequential on amendment No. 2 introduced by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard). Therefore I feel they quite properly can be discussed together. I think the nub of the matter has been mentioned by one or two people who spoke in disagreement of the amendment. The really important issue was raised by the hon. member for Skeena in his remarks. It seems to me that this amendment to the clause of the bill which for the first time will insert in the Elections Act a definition of what are election expenses is indicative of the fact that the thrust of this bill will result in very major changes in the whole approach to the conduct of elections in Canada.

It may surprise some people, if this discussion comes to their attention, that over these years we have managed to function successfully, more or less, in the conduct of elections and in an orderly manner without any definition of "election expenses." Our official agents have been able to file summaries, keep accounts, and so on, to the reasonable satisfaction of the general public, at least in many areas of the country. I know that over the years my returning officers have said that no one came to their door asking to see the documents filed and offering to pay the 25 cents they must pay in order to have a look at those returns.

The point which I should like to stress is that if one looks at the proposed amendment to subclause (h) which is in the definition section, it will be seen that it refers to the cost of goods or services provided by a government, and that it refers back to sub-clause (c) which says that "election expenses" means, among other things, the commercial value of goods and services donated or provided.