

Government Orders

beginning with the members of the committee themselves.

Mr. Prud'homme: Name them all.

Mr. Hawkes: Name them all. The members of the committee represent competing political interests in the country and those in the House. They also share a common feeling about the importance of electoral law in Canada, the importance of our democratic traditions and the importance of the continuation of those democratic traditions. That shines through in the degree of willingness to sit long hours, to consider carefully the alternating and different points of view from all committee members and some of those who substitute from time to time, to listen carefully to the staff and to consider recommendations and points of view that are advanced by them.

• (1910)

They deserve a lot more credit than they are likely to get in their home constituencies because the consideration of a report is the primary activity. It is certainly not as public an activity as many other things that could engage our time and attention but it is fundamentally important and I want to recognize that reality in these Chambers.

I would also like to say thank you to those who were witnesses before us. There have been more than people might realize. Even as we drafted the reports we issued an invitation to Elections Canada to be present for the bulk of the time we spent together. At some cost to them in terms of their personal lives and certainly in terms of the resources of that institution, they have complied with our request and have been very helpful to us in providing their experience and their expertise as we consider alternate ways of making recommendations to the House and in particular to the wording to come forward to the House.

It is not often that a committee has an adequate chance to measure its success but I think in this particular instance committee members can feel justly satisfied that their work has been paid attention to. Bill C-114 is remarkably similar to the committee's third report which was our first substantive report laid before the House on December 11, 1992. There are a few deviations, most of them of a technical nature, with some advice from the

Department of Justice. Most of those changes I think are things that committee members could agree with.

There are one or two elements which have been introduced from cabinet discussions on which committee members are not solidly in agreement, but I am sure others will discuss those at a later point in this debate.

The result of the committee's report and the subsequent legislation is a document of 114 pages in length which simply amends part of the Canada Elections Act. For those who are listening tonight who have never examined 114 pages of legislation let alone 114 pages of amendments, they might be surprised at the level of detail and complexity which is involved. It really is quite remarkable.

What is also remarkable is the Canadian way of reporting news. If you examine the proposition before the House, 112 of the 114 pages deal with how people should vote and who should vote. The changes are rather substantial and we think very positive. I will come to some of those details in a minute.

There are a few clauses that deal with some other issues that in a timing sense needed to be dealt with now. The committee preferred to have them dealt with now rather than in phase two and the press attention has centred on that. Those things are rather minor in the total scheme of things compared to what the bill is all about.

I know from my own experience I have had difficulty convincing television, radio and print media to do an article or a think piece or a news piece on what the bill is all about. It is almost as if it did not exist, not because it is not important, but simply because it is not as interesting perhaps as some other things which are less important but perhaps more exciting for their audience.

This bill in its main focus answers the question of who can vote and how they will vote. They are major changes. Let me just list some so people can consider them.

First, in all of Canada's urban areas if you do not get your name on a voter's list by 17 days before voting day there is no way for you to vote. All of us who have run for public office have been in contact with hundreds and hundreds of Canadians who simply were out of the country or out of their riding when the enumerators went by their homes and they did not get on the list. They did not know they were not on the list. They show