

Election Expenses

That would mean amounts of money paid directly to help the voting procedure instead of money spent as one sees fit, by whoever seems to be appointed to spend them.

Many things are lacking in Bill C-203. Amendments could have been adopted, or still included much more specific clauses in the bill to give people the maximum of security and information concerning political options. But we have not been able to guarantee this to the individual except through election funds which, as we all know, always favour the strong recognized parties at the expense of the smaller ones, especially in the field of information.

On the whole, Bill C-203 is a definite improvement from an electoral standpoint. But, once again, I am waiting for the reports which will be made after the next elections concerning the application of Bill C-203 and the amended Elections Act. I await impatiently these reports to prove that Bill C-203 will not really solve the problem of dividing equitably information among all political parties, which would benefit the population during an electoral campaign.

● (1700)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, when the point of order was discussed it was suggested that the next speaker from our party should be given the opportunity to enter into something of a general discussion as the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), who opened for us, was speaking to his own motion No. 2. I do not intend to take advantage of that suggestion, but I want to make this contribution and all other interventions during this debate as brief and as close to the point as possible.

Speaking for the majority of my colleagues, if not all of them, I think that even though this bill has defects it is one that should be passed as soon as is reasonably possible. I do not mean that there are not reasonable amendments which could be made even following this stage: in spite of the over-all desire to get this bill passed, there may be some amendments required because in this free country and free parliament there are differences of opinion. I suggest that the majority of the members of our party will restrict their contributions to the debate in order to facilitate the early passage of this bill, and I intend to do so. Having said that, I now propose to turn to the amendment introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Skeena.

I, personally, do not accept or agree with this particular amendment, the effect of which is, as I understand it, to limit the words in the original bill as amended by the committee regarding the definition of "election expenses" to include the cost of goods or services provided by a government, Crown corporation or any other public agency. It is true, as the hon. member for Skeena has said, that the purpose of his amendment is to change the words in respect of the source of campaign expenditures by striking out the words "a government, Crown corporation, or any other public agency" and substituting therefor the words "Her Majesty in right of Canada". In my opinion that is a limiting amendment and I, personally, do not think it is good. It has the result of enabling—the hon. member for Skeena referred to this possibility—provincial governments and agencies to contribute directly or in-

[Mr. Caouette (Charlevoix).]

directly to campaign funds. If they do, I would ask why their contributions should not be considered as part of the over-all election expenses.

I do not remember which member introduced this amendment but I think it was a useful one. It purports to suggest that if governments choose to make contributions to an election campaign, they should be subject to the regulations, limitations and accountability provided for by the act. Because this is a limiting amendment which is proposed by my colleague the hon. member for Skeena, I do not propose to vote for it and I suggest to other members that they should not vote for it.

An hon. Member: Dissension in the ranks.

Mr. Brewin: Why not?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), I do not intend to take advantage of this opportunity to make a general speech on this particular amendment. I do, however, wish to express my agreement that one of the amendments proposed to this particular clause is limiting in its effect, and therefore it would be better for us to accept the amendment adopted by the committee which expanded the definition of "election expenses" to include the cost of goods and services, I believe the expression is "provided by a government, Crown corporation or any other public agency".

We took the view originally that the general definition included this particular elaboration or clarification. However, we are pleased to accept this new clarification as part of the definition and we believe it ought to be accepted in order that the bill can be maintained as proposed by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) and as accepted by the committee as a whole.

I stated I did not intend to make a general speech, but I do wish to express my appreciation to hon. members of the committee for the very long and tough sessions they endured in discussing, analysing and dissecting this bill. As the hon. member for Halton (Mr. O'Connor) has said, probably no other bill has received greater scrutiny in any committee than this bill which was considered by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. The spirit which prevailed in the committee was almost totally non-partisan. There were occasional flashes of partisanship, but they were quickly eliminated and the discussion continued on a very objective and non-partisan basis.

I took the view when the bill was brought before the House that it was of interest to every hon. member of the House of Commons in that it affected each one of us and, therefore, it was of a type that would probably receive very careful study in the committee and would benefit from the scrutiny of hon. members. I believe that to be the case and that the general framework of the bill has been maintained. The hon. member for Halton has outlined, probably better than I could at this stage, the general framework of the bill now before the House. Undoubtedly there have been some amendments which will improve the operation of this measure and probably will improve the definition of "commercial value," and so on. This matter occupied a good deal of the time of the committee.