

Election Expenses Bill

under which we say at second reading that the bill be read a second time and referred to such and such a committee. We said in that commentary that the important vote on a bill should really be the final vote, the vote on third reading. We downgraded slightly—I emphasize the word “slightly”—the significance of second reading by saying that at that point we were really simply giving general approval to the bill and agreeing to discuss it at the committee stage.

I well remember in the sessions of the committee when we were dealing with this matter that we were trying to cope with the situation that had often developed when government members on the committee would say to the opposition members: “Why are you trying to change this bill? You voted for it on second reading”. Then opposition members used to say in the committee: “We voted for it in principle, in general, so that it could go to committee, but that does not mean that we have to support it in its exact detail”. I think I am being quite faithful to the commentary and the report of December 1968 when I say that we decided that the time had come when a vote on second reading should not be as rigid and final a decision that the bill is okay; it should simply be a decision that the bill is generally okay, subject to what happens to it in committee.

The change that we made was ever so slight, and I emphasize that, because if I am completely opposed to a bill, I vote against it on second reading and do not want it to go to committee. But there are many bills that come into the House that we do accept in general if only we can get some changes made to them.

I think it should be possible on second reading to move the kind of amendment that does not necessarily kill the bill but which makes it possible to put on the record the opinion that certain changes in the bill should be made. Perhaps this is not going to be very helpful to my hon. friend from Hillsborough as far as this day's amendment is concerned, but I wonder whether it would not be possible for us to develop a system under which at second reading, where the motion is that the bill be now read a second time and referred to a certain committee, it would be permissible to add to the reference to committee a phrase that would say “with the instruction that the committee give consideration to amending the bill, so as to”—shorten the election period, or what have you.

There are many instances where the opposition is not, in an outright sense, opposed to a bill in its entirety but where I think it would be good debate to have some of the suggestions made added to the reference to committee. I would hope that the next time the committee on procedure and organization gets around to considering procedural matters it might take a look at this question of the kinds of amendments that we can move on second reading.

Oppositions have trouble with all kinds of amendments. However, we know what we can do on third reading, and I think the batting average for third reading amendments is much higher than it is on second reading. But surely it is a matter of common sense that at second reading the opposition should have three choices. First, to support the bill outright. Second, to oppose the bill outright. And surely there is a third choice for an opposition, namely to say

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

that it goes along with the bill in general and it wants it to go to committee and be given further consideration, but that there are certain ideas not included in the bill which it wants to have included. In effect, that is what my hon. friend from Hillsborough is trying to do under the present rules and practices. I see the difficulty that he is having because of the traditions against this kind of amendment, but I hope that consideration will be given to this question in the future so we can have a little better opportunity at second reading than we have under the rules as they now stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. May I thank hon. members for their contributions to this very difficult procedural debate. May I first thank Mr. Speaker for the remarks that he made concerning the present occupant of the Chair, though I have grave doubts about some of his affirmations concerning me. As hon. members know, the occupant of the Chair does not meet on the way up the steps with the Holy Spirit; he simply does his best and at the same time has to abide by the rules of the House. I think all hon. members will agree with me that any occupant of the Chair has the advantage of having the present Speaker, pass on to him from day to day his knowledge of the rules and procedures of the House, as well as his humanities, which is very helpful. I do not know how much this is going to help me to make a decision that will satisfy hon. members, but before I give my decision I shall try to touch on some of the points that have been brought out by hon. members.

The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) referred to some remarks made last September by Mr. Speaker to the effect that the House, through its committee on procedure, should look at the evolution that had taken place over recent months regarding reasoned amendments in order to arrive at a change in the rules that would define the use of reasoned amendments.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker issued a warning to hon. members in his remarks following the amendment moved by the hon. member for Hillsborough. He said that the proliferation of amendments of that kind indicate that hon. members are really attempting from time to time, under the guise of so-called reasoned amendments, to bring in substantive motions. He went on, as reported at page 2412 of *Hansard*:

I suggest that for some strange reason it seems that in recent weeks and months hon. members have been taken with the idea that perhaps a reasoned amendment is a good way in which to propose a substantive motion which very often does not bear too much immediate and essential relevancy to the principle of the bill.

• (1240)

The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) referred to citation 382 of *Beauchesne's* in which it is stated:

It is also competent to a member who desires to place on record any special reasons 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 Committees, Commissioners,