

Privileges and Elections

It is possible to achieve this result. For instance, we are all required to contribute to the financing of the C.B.C. Why should we not use the services of this corporation when it is a question of an election or simply of politics so as to avoid useless expenses?

I would be very glad, for instance, if the C.B.C. put every week a free period at the disposal of all the parties, in an equitable way, in relation to the four parties represented in the House of Commons. During a quarter of an hour a week, for instance, the political parties could express their opinion on what is happening in the House of Commons, on the bills, etc., in order to inform the public and to keep in touch with it in a certain way. It could be done without any expenses involved, on either side.

The C.B.C. which is so often criticized should devote one hour every week to each and every political party. During an election campaign, extra broadcasting time could be allotted to all, thus doing away with those times when he who had the money won the day. Can you dream of anything more ridiculous? Should we not rely on the ability and honesty of the individual, when we are about to elect a member of parliament, rather than entrusting it to the electoral fund?

In my opinion, the real problem of the Elections Act lies with sections 62 and 63 for, even if we do change all the others, the problem shall not be solved for that matter.

It could happen, Mr. Speaker, that both go together. I do not quarrel with that. We know that citizens in some areas of this country are able to recognize the merits of certain political opinions, whenever they are given the opportunity to be told about them. If the various political parties had a better opportunity to express their political ideas, in a fair way, the government would be a little more balanced.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, six years ago, when I was first elected to this place, I served on a committee which was charged with the responsibility of reviewing the elections Act. That committee reported and made a number of recommendations. Unfortunately, because of the way in which the business of the House was conducted at that time and with the log jam on the Order Paper, the difficulties with the procedures were such that its report could not get priority translation into legislation.

[Mr. Matte.]

I am sure the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), to whom I listened with some interest some time ago, would be the first to admit that today we have a reasonable prospect of this legislation being enacted in the near future, thanks to the improvement in House procedures and rules, thanks to the new life which has been given to committees, and thanks to the active work of the committee in the last session of this Parliament under the distinguished chairmanship of the hon. member for Montmorency (Mr. Laflamme).

I had the privilege during the month of September and early October of serving with the committee when its members made a trip to speak to some of the electoral officers and to do some first-hand investigation of the problems, dealing particularly with the matter of lowering the voting age and of absentee ballots. I am sure that the hon. member for Hillsborough, who seems to feel such a trip was not productive, would at the very least concede we had most informative sessions with the electoral officer in the province of Quebec and, with his assistance, assessed the documents and information given to us. There was a full and frank exchange in a closed session that would have been almost impossible if the hearings had taken place in Ottawa, as some hon. members seem to think should have been the case. I am sure the hon. member for Hillsborough will agree with me that members of the committee were most conscientious in attending, with one or two exceptions. Certainly, the information and experience gained will be most valuable to the committee in bringing forward its recommendations.

• (5.10 p.m.)

There is one small point, Mr. Speaker, however, which I do not believe has received attention to any degree and which I would ask the committee to consider. During an election a candidate has the right to name an agent who may go into every polling booth to act as a scrutineer. This is provided for very conscientiously in the Act which spells out the form of the oath, the candidate's admission record to be given to every such agent, and so on. However, I have had the experience, having requested that such agent be placed in the returning officer's premises on election day—the most important single place in that riding on that day—of being told by Mr. Castonguay that the Election Act did not provide for the agent of a candidate to be