

*Privileges and Elections***EXCISE TAX ACT**

Hon. Herb Gray (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-155, to amend the Excise Tax Act be read the first time and ordered to be printed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS

REFERENCE OF CANADA ELECTIONS ACT AND REPORT OF REPRESENTATION COMMISSIONER TO COMMITTEE

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections be empowered to study the following matters and to report to the House such proposals as the Committee may deem advisable:

1. The Canada Elections Act, exclusive of Sections 62 and 63;
2. The Report of the Representation Commissioner on Methods of Registration of Electors and Absentee Voting, 1968, made pursuant to Section 9 of the Representation Commissioner Act;

And that the evidence adduced by the Committee in its study of the aforementioned items during the First Session of the Twenty-Eighth Parliament be referred to the Committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to go into the substance of the motion since it is moved really for a procedural purpose, that of empowering the committee to study and consider all those aspects of the Canada Elections Act except the two sections which are related to the question of election expenses. As the House will recall, a previous motion in the last session empowered the committee to consider questions under the Canada Elections Act. On that basis the committee carried out hearings. The purpose of this motion really is to continue that mandate.

Some of the questions of greater significance will involve the voting age and absentee voting. At the same time, the committee will have the opportunity of hearing the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer on a number of changes in detail which he is proposing to the Elections Act. To review the timetable, it is the intention to refer the question of election expenses to a special committee of the House to be established when this study is completed. This particular study is important, and comes first, principally because of the nature of the changes contemplated and the time which will be needed by the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare the electoral system for an election in 1972 or 1973. Extensive changes in the electorate and in election procedures may be required,

[Mr. Speaker.]

involving the electoral officer and creating a time problem; changes in the regulations would be called for, and it would be necessary to ensure that all returning officers had been advised of the new procedure. It is, therefore, important in our minds that, if possible, the committee should arrive at a determination of its deliberations before Christmas, or, at any rate, as soon as possible, in order that the amending bill founded on the committee's study can receive legislative sanction by the end of this session.

I might refer to the position of the Representation Commissioner which, under the terms of the legislation establishing his office, should be considered during the current session, and, indeed, to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act in addition to a number of other electoral matters which are of interest. It would be the intention of the government after the first two studies, the current one and the study of election expenses, have been completed, to undertake an examination of these further questions to determine whether changes in legislation are necessary.

I shall conclude by saying that it is hoped the committee can proceed with all deliberate speed in its work and that in due course, later this session, we shall be able to look at a draft bill founded on its recommendations.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): This is an important matter, dealing, as it does, with electoral machinery—a vital issue in any functioning democracy. Certainly, this motion cannot be considered as in any way premature. There was a fairly well established tradition in this House that after general elections the Elections Act would be sent to the committee for review. Often this procedure allowed for the remedy of errors, omissions or inadequacies which had become apparent during the exercise of the franchise by the voters of Canada.

Not since the election of 1962 has there been a complete overhaul of the Act. The elections of 1962, 1963, 1965 and 1968 were conducted on essentially the unrevised Act of 1961. Those who have been in this chamber for some time will recall how often I and other hon. members have urged that the committee be set to work. I noted from the comments of the minister that there now seems to be a great hurry; we must function, deliberate and recommend before Christmas. But there was no hurry in the past. I had the honour of chairing the committee which, in a sense, gave birth to the present act and I have