

*Government Orders*

thinks about it. I regret that he cannot be with us, considering he is always very partisan in his remarks and this would have been an opportunity for me to reply. At any rate, my point is that this bill has finally been introduced in this House, after a four-year wait.

[English]

The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing was established in 1989 or 1990—a very long time ago, as my colleague from Saint-Denis says—as an excuse for the government to do nothing in respect of electoral reform.

We regret very much the government was unable to act more expeditiously on this particular dossier. Instead, as my colleagues on the other side know, the government dragged its heels and shilly-shallied and dilly-dallied until now when we must scramble to try to get through some changes to Canada's electoral law.

It is fair to say that members on all sides have been pressing for changes to bring the law up to date at least. Instead we have had inaction. The government sat and did nothing. We have made offers before to expedite the matter to get election law on the floor of the House, discussed and referred to committee, but the government said no, that we had to wait for the report of the royal commission.

We in this party participated actively in the affairs of the royal commission from the very beginning. The royal commission had public hearings. The parties were invited to attend and make presentations, and we did so. We recommended to the royal commission that an interim report be presented to the House dealing with routine changes to the act that would update the Canada Elections Act so that it could be in place and workable in time for a general election.

Unfortunately the royal commission ignored that advice. The royal commission went on and on, as the hon. member for Saint-Denis says, and presented its final report a year ago now. Once that report came to the House it was referred to the special committee on electoral reform. That is what we have been working on since that time.

As everyone knows the referendum intervened and the Chief Electoral Officer indicated in no uncertain terms and quite understandably that as long as he had a referendum campaign to conduct he would be unable to deal with any changes to Canada's electoral system. We

had to sit back and wait until the Chief Electoral Officer had completed the referendum campaign and its immediate aftermath. There was a very lengthy delay in our committee's work. Although we had started off ambitiously things got held up.

• (1935)

Here we are finally, over four years after the last election. One is due. If the government was not so contemptuous of democracy in this country it would have called an election. We are now debating changes to the electoral law to try to bring it up to date and make it something that will work in the forthcoming election.

Hopefully the law will survive court challenges that the current law is subject to under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government has elected to allow the committee to do its study on this bill. Indeed, it has given the committee a great deal of freedom.

The committee has seen fit to work through the royal commission's report, adopting provisions that it can accept to propose in its own report to the House. I may say that the report of the royal commission took the form of four volumes. There has been some criticism that our committee did not adopt volume three, which was a draft bill prepared by the royal commission as the basis for proceeding in this House.

As members of Parliament who are charged with making the law of the country we looked at the new draft bill that the royal commission submitted. Large pieces of the royal commission's report could not be in place for an election since it was so late. It was not late according to its own schedule. It was just that the government should have introduced something like this back in 1989 instead of waiting. I do not intend to criticize the commission in that respect.

Given that we could not implement the bill, it hardly seemed reasonable for us to embark on a study of a whole new act where we would have to pull chunks out, put in pieces of the old legislation and redraft them in form that fitted with the bill that the royal commission had prepared.

Rather than do that, we decided that the best policy was to seek to amend the existing Elections Act in order to make changes that would adopt those parts of the royal commission report that we could proceed with and make other necessary changes in order to make the act one that complied, at least for the most part, with the