

*Canada Elections Act*

to be dealt with. Many of them are of particular importance. They will be of some help to incapacitated voters. There are references to special voters' lists, and there are changes in relation to advanced polling which will make it more possible to ensure that every individual who wants to vote, and has the right to vote, can vote. Those are all very important matters and we are delighted they have been brought forward by the minister.

I noticed that in the remarks of the minister he said the proposed amendments received the unanimous support of the committee. I think it should be clear that the proposed amendments of which he was speaking were those proposed by the all-party committee prior to the introduction of this legislation to the House. I think the minister will agree that was his intention. In other words, he was not suggesting that the amendments incorporated in Bill C-5 have the support of all members of the House of Commons. The fact is, they do not have the support of this party when it comes to one or two important particulars.

● (1532)

**Mr. Cafik:** I want to make it clear that I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. I did not at any time indicate directly, nor did I intend to imply indirectly, that there was unanimous support for every single point related to this bill.

**Mr. Clark:** I am pleased to have that point clarified. The fact is that in the movement from the all-party committee to the House of Commons, through the cabinet, or perhaps through the boardrooms where the campaign managers of the Liberal party sit, two profound changes were made in the law as against what was agreed to in the all-party committee. I make the point that they have adulterated, they have seriously changed and weakened those proposals, with grave consequences not simply for the electoral law of Canada but also for the principle of open, honest elections in this country.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** They are departures which we in this party are not prepared to accept. The Minister of State should know that. He and his colleagues should understand that if this were a minor matter, we would be prepared to let it go. But the two changes smuggled into this bill not only profoundly change the electoral law of Canada, they betray the spirit in which the elections act was introduced.

I shall not detain the House for long on this matter, but I want to make our reservations and concern very clear. The first of these departures from the all-party agreement relates to the proposal by the government to increase the spending limits applicable to political parties by the rate of inflation since 1974. The second, which is the most ominous, the most dangerous and the most destructive to the principle of open government, is the provision which will explicitly allow anonymous contributions to be made to political parties. Someone behind me asks, "Why not go back to the old system?" Well, the all-party committee made a recommendation which I shall be commenting upon in a moment. This would have made it

[Mr. Clark.]

clear and certain that we would never in this country return to the old system.

That recommendation, which was supported in the committee by representatives of all parties, was struck down by the Liberal cabinet and does not find a place in the bill. What this bill does is take us back to the bad old days of election financing in this country when it was possible for contributions to be made under the table. We in this party want an end to that system, and in our approach to this bill we shall attempt to ensure the introduction of an amendment which would have that effect.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** I turn, first, to the question of indexing the limits of possible expenditure so as to take account of inflation since 1974. There is some history involved here. This step was first proposed in the all-party committee by representatives of the Liberal party. It was extensively discussed and the proposal to increase the limits of expenditure was voted down. We thought the matter was dead, since it had been agreed by all parties that it would be put aside. Nevertheless, in July of this year we saw the earlier edition of the bill before us and we noticed that the proposition which had been voted down by the all-party committee had been brought back by the cabinet and that there was, indeed, a proposal to index—though only back to 1976.

That was bad enough, but apparently the political manipulators of the Liberal party got together during the summer and decided that the extra money made possible under that proposal would not be enough. What they did was introduce, in this bill, an indexing provision taking us back, not to 1976 but to 1974. I want to explain what this means to the House of Commons, to the political parties and to the public treasury. Under index ceilings, each party will have the opportunity, now, to spend in an election campaign—I am speaking of national parties here—in the neighbourhood of \$5.3 million. In the absence of indexation, the limit would be in the neighbourhood of \$4 million. So what we have here is a difference of \$1.3 million imposed upon the electoral law by the Liberal party for their own narrow partisan reasons.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Clark:** This proposal will mean that each candidate would be able, on an average, to spend some \$7,600 more than the amount set forth in the election expenses legislation. There is a further aspect. Officials in my own party headquarters inform me that on the basis of tax credits granted by the government in respect of \$100 donations, and on the basis of advertising rebates from the treasury provided for in the act, government revenues would be decreased by fully \$11 million. That will be the loss to the treasury if this indexing proposal is allowed to proceed. So this is not merely a change in the election law designed to benefit the sponsoring party; it will also mean a serious drain on the public treasury. That would be the cost if there were to be a general election in 1978. It might cost the public a great deal more if the election were