

to facilitate administrative procedures under the act as recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer; third, a group of amendments, also recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, which will improve voting facilities and supplement the other administrative amendments.

Shortly after the passing, in January, 1974, of the Election Expenses Act which we all agree was a complicated piece of legislation, the Chief Electoral Officer convened a meeting of senior members from the national headquarters of the political parties represented in the House of Commons. Following that meeting, an ad hoc committee was set up, chaired by the director of election expenses of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. This action was at the request of the parties involved, with the objective of reviewing the new election expenses provisions.

Over a period of a year or so of productive discussions by the ad hoc committee there was developed a substantial number of suggested amendments concerning the registration of political parties and the election expenses provisions of the Canada Elections Act. I understand that these proposed amendments received the unanimous support of the committee. I am pleased to add that in the main these proposals have been included in the bill. Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate the members of the ad hoc committee for the open and congenial spirit in which they carried on the work of their committee.

On February 13, 1976, pursuant to subsection 59(1) of the Canada Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer transmitted to Mr. Speaker a substantial list of amendments, which, in the words of the act, he considered "are desirable for the better administration of this act". Those amendments were referred to and considered by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. Except in respect of one or two minor points, the suggested amendments were concurred in by the committee. The standing committee also recommended that consideration be given to some further amendments stemming from a number of private members' bills which it had at the same time considered. All amendments approved by the committee are included in the proposed legislation, with the exception of the committee's recommendation respecting a shortened election period.

With regard to the third category of proposed amendments to improve voting facilities and provide further opportunities for electors to vote, the proposed amendments were developed and recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer as a result of a number of representations he received from many sources. As an example of the extension of voting facilities, provision will be made for the casting of ballots in the office of the returning officer in the two weeks or so preceding polling day, where the elector will be absent and unable to vote at an advance poll or at an ordinary poll on polling day. The Chief Electoral Officer included some further amendments of a quasi-administrative nature to supplement the ones he proposed in his February, 1976, supplementary report to Mr. Speaker.

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Taking into account the foregoing, it is evident that the bulk of the proposed amendments stem out of recommendations from the ad hoc, all-party committee chaired by the director of election expenses, and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. In respect of the other amendments as developed by the Chief Electoral Officer, as I have already indicated, they are of a nature to facilitate the opportunity for electors to vote. I feel confident that these amendments will be favourably received by all parties, and that the spirit of co-operation which has prevailed in the ad hoc committee will ensure the early enactment of these proposed amendments.

In light of the deliberations of the committee of the House of Commons in respect of this important matter, preceding the introduction of this bill, it is my hope and the hope of the government that the House will readily pass Bill C-5 on second reading and refer it to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, so that members of all parties may have an opportunity to review the amendments which have their basis in either the recommendations of that committee or of the Chief Electoral Officer.

In the event that there is any discussion of specific amendments, hon. members would have an opportunity to debate them in committee and bring forward their views if there are any modest disagreements about what I think is a widely supported bill to amend the Canada Elections Act.

**Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, I think I can say, on behalf of my colleagues in this party, that we are happy to have the amendments in relation to the Canada Elections Act and election law before the House. We are particularly pleased that so many of the proposals made in the all-party committee referred to by the minister have been accepted. At one time I had the privilege of serving as a member of the standing committee of this House which originally dealt with the election expenses legislation. I also had the opportunity to represent my party on the all-party committee that was designed to repair any matters which had been overlooked in the original legislation.

I think it would be entirely appropriate for me, on my own behalf and on behalf of all members of the committee, to extend our appreciation to the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. J. M. Hamel, for the way in which he presided over the discussions of the all-party committee, for the guidance he gave to all members, and for the very reasonable and effective suggestions he has made from time to time regarding the way in which we can improve the election law of the country.

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

**Mr. Clark:** I should like to say, for those who are accustomed to occasional conflict between members of different parties, that a rather welcome spirit of co-operation was exhibited by members of all parties on the committee working on amendments to the Canada Elections Act. Some 40 amendments were proposed by that all-party committee. The majority of those amendments are in the bill now before the House,