

Privileges and Elections

these things are important. But one of the dangers which faces democracy particularly in this age of modern methods of advertising and the huge sums of money spent on advertising is that men's minds can be bought. In a very real and subtle way, elections can be bought and unless we do something about election expenses real damage can be done to democracy as we know it in this country.

It is now several years since the government of Mr. Pearson set up a committee on election expenses which made a very important and voluminous report. This report went into this whole question, dealt with the issues at stake and made some clear and precise recommendations. Year after year, Mr. Pearson promised us that once this report had been made it would be referred and that something would be done. Time went by and nothing was done. When the President of the Privy Council raised this issue during the last session, I suggested that he divide it into the two questions of general routine matters on the one hand and election expenses on the other. He graciously accepted that suggestion and has confirmed today that the proposal is that the terms of reference now before us are such that all the other matters would be dealt with by this committee and that a special committee would be set up to deal with the question of election expenses. I still support that proposal. But, unless we get the first job done, unless we get the routine things out of the way, Parliament will not get at the other job and there is a real danger it might not be completed in time for the next election.

This is the reason I urge that the committee deal with these present problems with expedition and that it get these matters out of the way so that it can get at this question of election expenses. I address this challenge, if you like, not just to the members of the committee but to the government itself. I listened very carefully to the words of the President of the Privy Council. I was not quite sure what he meant. If he wishes to interrupt and correct me he is free to do so. I see he is wide awake now. He talked about legislation by the end of the session. I take it he meant by next June. I had the impression he was referring only to legislation that would be based on this present motion. I think the government should state whether its goal is to have legislation in respect of the elections Act generally and legislation with regard to election expenses both passed through parliament by the end of this session, let us say by the summer of 1970.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

If we are to go into the next election, whether in 1972 or 1973, with a new approach to the question of election expenses, we must know about this not just the day before dissolution but months, perhaps a year or two, in advance. This involves the whole question of how much people are to be permitted to contribute to various parties, the whole question of disclosure, income tax deductibility, the whole question of how much out of public funds should be spent in terms of broadcasting, printing and mailing and so on, so that there may be equality among the parties.

● (4:50 p.m.)

If we are going to go in for that kind of a régime—and I think we have to if we are going to keep democracy democratic—then it is no use coming out with that kind of legislation just a month or two before the dissolution of the present parliament. The goal for a complete package of both routine matters and legislation on elections expenses should be no later than next summer. Therefore, I call upon the committee to get these routine jobs done as expeditiously as they can. I call upon the government to bring in the other motion to deal with election expenses not later than on our return after the Christmas recess, and that it set a goal for that as well, so that the total job can be done.

As people who are involved in elections, we are all very conscious of all the various details. We are particularly conscious of the people who lose their vote on election day because the lists were not made up properly, because they were ill, away, or for a dozen other reasons. Our machinery should be amended to take care of all these grievances. But over and above all of that is the big question of controlling elections expenses in such a way that elections cannot be bought. Our elections should be run in such a manner that they really reflect the democratic views of a democratic society.

Therefore, we are happy to support this motion to give the committee this important job, but we call for the other important job to be done also with the greatest possible expedition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with the remarks of the previous speaker. Naturally, we cannot but approve the government's decision to review the Canada Election Act. We all know that there