

Election Expenses

ing. The bill died on the order paper when that particular Parliament was dissolved in July of that year.

The step we are taking today, as the minister has said, is of great historical and, indeed, I suspect social importance. We are about to change 100 years of practice and, I hope, rid our political system of a 100 year old myth—that is, fear of the way in which Canadians support their political parties.

We on this side of the House have always supported legislation dealing with the limitation of election expenses. On May 24, 1972 the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), speaking in Regina, discussed at some length the present government's record in this matter and described it, justifiably, I think, as a bit of a sham. If I may quote him very briefly, he said:

And speaking about pretence, what shall we say about the Trudeau government's sudden interest in legislation about election expenses?

Last February—

He is speaking of February, 1972, a year and a half ago.

—the Prime Minister assured us in Parliament that there was no practical possibility of taking effective action on election expenses before the next campaign, even if that campaign were to be in the summer of 1973.

Later on in an appearance on the program "Question Period" on October 15, 1972, the Leader of the Opposition indicated very clearly to the Canadian people that he was in favour of disclosure. If I may quote him very briefly again, he said:

I am very much in favour of a contribution toward the expenses of parties and candidates from the public treasury. I think this would be very constructive and certainly, too, I want to see a ceiling on the expenditures of parties in Canada.

But for a technical reason we might very well have had a forceful dissertation on this subject during private members' hour today by the distinguished hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forrestall: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, this party has absolutely no intention of delaying passage of this bill through its stages, as we deal with it now in principle and in committee. Our party is quite prepared to bring this debate to an end not later than Thursday night, or earlier if it is the will of this chamber. This matter is one of significance and importance. I mention that because of the derisive comments that have been made by some of my colleagues to my left with respect to what they seem to feel is their own particular and private preserve.

Mr. Benjamin: Right on!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker: Their heads are going to blow up and cover us all with sawdust.

Mr. Forrestall: I am sure of that. We want during this limited period, certainly not more than three days and hopefully a little quicker than that if our colleagues to the left can contain themselves and restrain their sometimes verbal affliction, to thoroughly discuss the bill. But we will not consent, Mr. Speaker, to too rapid passage. We

believe very firmly that members of the standing committee are entitled and are required to consider the views of the members of this chamber on the principles embedded in this somewhat historic document. Members of the committee must have the benefit of our views. These views are necessary in the context of what the minister has indicated is a somewhat complex bill although the basic principles may remain easily identifiable. We have some questions and may have some reservations. We will require a tremendous amount of interpretation, not to delay the bill but rather to ensure that the Canadian people can go into the next general election and successive ones more confident than they are today or have been in the past in the electoral procedure that is the foundation of this chamber and our country.

In this connection, for example, we want from the government, and will ask for it both on the debate on second reading and in committee, a firm commitment with respect to the date when this act will become operative. Clause 24(1) provides that it will come into force on a day to be fixed by proclamation. This quite effectively removes any control that Parliament could have over the act and puts it entirely at the government's disposal. The government could proclaim this act whenever it wishes to do so. That being the case, we argue that we should debate this bill so that we know when it will come into force or when the government intends to proclaim it.

● (2040)

There must be time to debate this bill. Again I argue that there is not much sense in rushing through the debate, as was suggested to our House leader a few days ago. We should not simply, at this stage, not put up speakers and refer the bill to committee, where it would be given the traditional examination, and then bring it back to the house the next day and approve it. There would not be much point in doing that if there is a danger of this bill sitting on the shelf and gathering dust and not being proclaimed at the earliest opportunity.

There are precedents showing that bills have not been proclaimed as early as they might be. For example, the consumer packaging and labelling bill which this House passed in June, 1971, has still not been proclaimed some two years and a few weeks after being approved. That is bad. We are afraid that the government could react in this way, and when I speak of "the government", I mean not only this government but any government. The Fish Inspection Act was passed by this House in 1949, but was not proclaimed until November 1, 1967, 18 years later. That is an exaggerated example, and sometimes we do exaggerate to make a point. But we must be prompt in proclaiming this legislation. The government should give an effective explanation as to what it intends to do with respect to proclamation.

Further, even if the bill were passed and the legislation proclaimed tomorrow, it still would not have full effect. The explanation of this is to be found in section 24(2), which provides that the records of party agents with respect to contributions and expenses are to be tied to "taxation years commencing after the coming into force of this act." Also, a person cannot get a receipt until that point, because the agent is not able to give receipts.