

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The time provided for consideration of Private Member's Business is now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1) the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT—CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER'S REPORT—COMPOSITION OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, in rising to participate in this debate I would remind Hon. Members that the question under consideration tonight was raised by me in the House of Commons on April 18, when I asked the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) a question concerning the report of the Chief Electoral Officer which had been tabled the previous day. In my question, I asked when the Government would act to implement the recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer. The answer that the Deputy Prime Minister gave in part was:

The opposition Parties failed to concur with the Government on that particular issue and they bear the responsibility.

I was speaking about the Government's failure to deal with Bill C-79 which had been introduced during the course of the last Parliament and was not dealt with.

• (1800)

The Government's failure to deal with this Bill is entirely the fault of the Government. The Government controls the order of business in this House. It is the Government that dominates the proceedings, aside from the Private Members' Hour we have just completed. The Government has the right to call its business as it sees fit. I want to recall the proceedings that took place in respect of Bill C-79. That Bill was introduced in June 1987. It sat on the *Order Paper* and absolutely nothing happened until March 16, 1988 when it was called for second reading. During the second reading debate, Bill C-79 was debated for a total of two hours and 17 minutes and was not passed. Nothing further was done with that Bill throughout that session.

Adjournment Debate

Last summer the Government, having done almost nothing during its previous three years in office, decided to pass some legislation so that it had some sort of record to present to the people of Canada in anticipation of the election later in that year. For that reason, Parliament sat through most of the summer and well into the fall, in fact until the election was called in late September in order to permit the Government to do something so that it could say to the people that some legislation had been passed. One of the items it did not deal with at that time was Bill C-79.

I was not a Member of the House then, so I am speaking in part with the benefit of information provided by my colleagues who were in the House and were privy to discussions that proceeded between all Parties in relation to the passing of this Bill C-79. I acknowledge and respect the fact, and I think it is important that this continue, that amendments to the Elections Act are normally dealt with by all-Party agreement. That is an important principle. It is one I respect and the Government ought to continue to respect it.

The Government was able to arrange agreement on many points of that Bill. On others, it could not arrange agreement. Any sensible approach to this problem would require that once you reach agreement on certain points, you proceed with those and pass them into law. Items not agreed to are left out, particularly with respect to election reform when the question of passing the amendments enfranchised Canadians who had not previously been enfranchised or had no right to vote.

There was an editorial in *Le Soleil* on April 19. I want to quote a brief paragraph from it.

[*Translation*]

Under the Elections Act, 50,000 mentally handicapped people, 25,000 prisoners, 500 judges appointed by Ottawa, 295 returning officers and 2 million Canadians living abroad are denied the right to vote. They could and did contest the 1977 legislation before the courts.

[*English*]

That was the issue that the Chief Electoral Officer purported to deal with in his report. Many of the items that would have permitted these persons to vote had been agreed between the Parties during the course of the session. They were ignored by the Deputy Prime Minister. Instead of making this Bill a priority, he set it aside and said it could be dealt with at another time. It was constantly shoved aside by other matters that the Government considered more urgent.