

Private Members' Business

Some groups and individuals recommended that limits no longer be set for some expenses, in particular administrative expenses, office rental and volunteers' expenses.

The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform should publish its report very soon. I think that we would be well advised to wait for the commission's results before taking a position on the question before us today.

Before I conclude, I would like to tell you that there is some question as to whether persons loaned by a company or a union at election time should be considered volunteers or full-time staff. The present law is ambiguous on it. This point was raised with the commission and many Canadians have questions about it. I think that on this score, I will wait for the commission's recommendations to clarify the situation. If he did the same, my colleague from Churchill might avoid remarks from some members of this House that he does not appreciate but which reflect reality.

One may wonder whether someone who takes a position as a volunteer but is officially paid or could be considered to be paid should be counted. I think that the commission should answer all those questions.

In conclusion, I come back to what I said at the beginning. I think it is somewhat premature and may show disrespect for the royal commission, which was created in 1989 and is to report on its work shortly, if we try to set up another parliamentary committee to study exactly the same issue as the royal commission.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. member for Portneuf and I regret that he finds it impossible to support the bill introduced by my friend, the hon. member for Churchill. The reason given by the hon. member is the same one we heard earlier today from the government House leader. We asked the government to introduce the enabling legislation for referenda and the government House leader said that he and his government were waiting for the report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform.

I regret that the government House leader should have a problem on this. The government had promised to do it and now it might be withdrawing that undertaking. I believe it is a problem for everybody, but the fact

that a commission is studying the matter is no reason to stay idle when faced with the difficult questions raised by the bill in the name of the hon. member for Churchill.

[*English*]

The bill is one that I want to support wholeheartedly. The principle of disclosure of campaign expenses is a sound principle that we have supported before the royal commission in presentations that the president of the Liberal Party of Canada made, that the acting leader of our party at the time made and that I made as critic for election reform matters of this party.

The hon. member for Churchill in introducing this bill is advancing the cause. In his speech he referred to the fact that in our presentation to the royal commission we plagiarized his former bill on this subject as a definition of election expenses.

The term "plagiarize" is an unfortunate one that I know he did not intend. It suggests that somewhat what we did was improper. He ought to have said that we imitated his bill because after all imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. We agreed with the hon. member in his definition. We thought it was a reasonable one and we adopted it and in our presentation we said it was his. We acknowledged that it came from that source. We were not seeking, in any way, to claim credit of authorship. We simply adopted what clearly had been worked on by the hon. member as a good definition and said we supported it.

• (1730)

We believe that the election law of Canada ought to be developed in a non-partisan way. We believe that it should be developed in this House primarily by all parties acting in concert in trying to achieve very significant and substantial agreement on what the law should be.

It is clear, in our view, that if there is no such agreement, if one of the parties in the House has a majority at the time runs roughshod over the others or, indeed, if two parties gang up on the third party and run roughshod over its rights in forming the electoral law, then we will undermine credibility in our electoral system which, of course, is not in the interests of anyone in this country.