

Election Expenses Bill

The verve, the enthusiasm, the high gear of 1968 has sloughed and slumbered. The special committee reported months and months ago. People have been asking when we will have the legislation. The minister never told us it was in his pocket. I do not think it was in his pocket. I think it is impending, cloudy events which has caused them to look for something a little brighter perhaps than that which went before. I am not enamoured of that method. I find inadequacies in the measure and I propose, seconded by the hon. member for Huron (Mr. McKinley) to move the following motion:

That all the words after "that" be left out and the following substituted:

This House, regretting that government delay in introducing Bill C-211 prevents the full operation of a measure dealing with election expenses before January 1, 1973, and that the bill fails to provide for adequate reform, declines to pass a bill which does not take advantage of present day advances in the mass media and transportation which would provide for a shorter election period and thereby, amongst other things, substantially reduce election expenses.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) may appreciate that the Chair would have procedural reservations about an amendment of this nature. I have had occasion during the past few weeks, when there has been a proliferation of amendments of this kind, to indicate that to my way of thinking hon. members are really attempting from time to time under the guise of so-called reasoned amendments to bring in substantive motions.

Hon. members know well, or will find out if they study the history of procedure in the Canadian House and in the British House, that reasoned amendments are a very limited type which can be proposed and accepted procedurally. Traditionally, in our British parliamentary system there are really only very few amendments which can be proposed at the second reading stage, essentially an instruction to a committee or a three-month or six-month hoist. The so-called reasoned amendment is intended to give a member an opportunity to place on the record the reason he is opposed to the principle of a bill and why the people on whose behalf he is addressing the House will oppose the bill and vote against it.

I notice we have tended to stray from this principle to the extent that just recently we had a reasoned amendment proposed by a member of the House who later voted in favour of the bill, which is pure heresy so far as procedure is concerned. There is no doubt whatsoever that a reasoned amendment can only be an indication for the record as to why a member or a party intends to vote against the principle of a bill.

I find it difficult to recognize in this proposed amendment the essentials of a so-called reasoned amendment. Mind you, if we look for precedents we will find precious few because in the history of procedure in our House there have been very few reasoned amendments proposed. I suggest that for some strange reason it seems that in recent weeks and months hon. members have been taken with the idea that perhaps a reasoned amendment is a good way in which to propose a substantive motion which very often does not bear too much immediate and essential relevancy to the principle of the bill.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

I wonder whether that is a good practice. I fear very much that we could become involved in an entirely new principle or method of amending a motion for the second or third reading of bills. Before accepting this amendment I should like to look at it very closely. But before I do that I will be very pleased to hear arguments which might be submitted for the consideration of the Chair, either in support of the procedural aspect of the amendment or in opposition to it, which I would be glad to take into consideration.

• (2130)

Mr. MacEachen: Your Honour, I was notified this afternoon by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) that it was proposed to move a reasoned amendment. I indicated to him that probably because of the reasons Your Honour has mentioned—and he was aware of them—there might be some discussion as to the validity of the amendment. He put forward the proposal that we might defer any consideration of the arguments pro and con until he could be in the House tomorrow to deal with the procedural aspects for the opposition. That is quite agreeable to me and, I hope, to other hon. members.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: This is an excellent suggestion, because I feel that some day we will have to look at this idea of reasoned amendments and among ourselves agree whether it is the type of situation into which we want to get. I have serious doubts about whether we should allow the House to drift procedurally to the position where any amendment can be moved on second reading; I think this would be very regrettable from a procedural standpoint.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that discussion on the validity of the amendment is deferred until tomorrow because hon. members have been using up my time for the last five minutes. I begin by paying tribute to the special committee of the House which worked for over a year on this matter because, first, I thought it worked extremely well, extremely hard and with a great deal of harmony and, second, because I was a member of that committee.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Well put.

Mr. Benjamin: The chairman of that committee, the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Chappell), did a good job in guiding our deliberations. We had a great many discussions, and even arguments, but never with any ill-feeling. We tried to come up with a report that would be unanimous but unanimous in the sense that it would be a consensus and that each of us, if and when we received the legislation, could stand up and speak on specific points in the report with which we might have disagreed in our committee deliberations. Now, Mr. Speaker, after all the talk of politicians of all parties for so many years we finally have legislation to limit and control election expenses. This bill is welcome if for no other reason than that we are starting to do something about this situation.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has made many statements, one of which the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) quoted, and there are a number of