

Election Expenses

Mr. A. D. Alkenbrack (Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): Mr. Speaker, this is the second opportunity I have had to speak on a bill of this nature. The bill before us is C-203; on May 25, 1972 I spoke on Bill C-211. When I learned that I was to speak on this bill today, I looked back at the remarks I had made on that earlier occasion and found that the portion of the legislation I criticized last year has not been changed. My attitude to some of the provisions of this bill also has not changed. Last year I stated that there should be a subtitle to the bill—"a bill to authorize political candidates to dip into the public purse". The provisions I objected to are still in clause 11 of this new bill.

In my previous remarks I said that I was opposed to the government's proposal to add the political affiliation of candidates to the ballot in a general election. I felt at the time that that provision was designed to influence voters to vote for the government candidate on the ballot. I drew attention to the practice whereby members are addressed in this House by riding and only their name appear on their desk. As it turned out, the gimmick for adding a candidate's party affiliation to the ballot appears to have backfired, because the government nearly went down to defeat; its majority was certainly cut down. I am convinced that some of the provisions of this bill will have the same effect if the bill is passed as now written.

Possibly some people will think from my remarks so far that I am against reforming the Canada Elections Act. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, some provisions of this bill I do not place in the category of reform. In fact, if this bill is accepted in its present form we may well be considering election reforms again in the very near future. I say that on the basis of what this bill will do in connection with the elections act.

We could sit in this House, Mr. Speaker, and put new laws on the books concerning election procedures for the next three or four months; however, unless the laws are adhered to by candidates that would be just a hollow gesture. My experience in the last election leads me to believe that the present laws are intended to control only the conduct of Conservative candidates in general elections. That is the conclusion I have come to from the experience in my riding of Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

All members of this House know that the present law requires that candidates file an accounting of collections and disbursements of campaign funds within two months after the filing of the official returns. I file my accounting within that time with my riding returning officer, Mr. L. J. McCann, in Eganville. Since then I have been watching for a notice in the press showing that the other candidates have filed their returns. Today, more than six months after the deadline, I know from checking with the returning officer that I was the only candidate who met the requirements of the law. I ask the leader of the Liberal Party, why did their candidate fail to file an accounting with the returning officer? If he had won, he would be sitting in this House. In that case, I wonder if he would have taken the trouble to comply with the law. I ask the leader of the New Democratic Party, why did the NDP candidate in my riding not comply with the election law? Does this mean that the law does not apply to those

[Mr. O'Connor.]

candidates? To this day they have not filed an accounting, they have not filed any disclosure and they have not even bothered to publish an explanation.

I ask the government House leader, what is so special about the disclosure provision in this bill that candidates shall file an accounting with the returning officer after an election, if those Liberal and NDP candidates did not take the trouble to comply with the existing law? I am not opposed to the new proposals with respect to disclosure, Mr. Speaker. I welcome them. If they become law, I will comply with them. However, I do not believe they will make any difference in the conduct of my election campaign. I know this provision will not make any difference. Also, it will make interesting reading to learn where the other parties get their campaign expenses.

Most of the provisions of this bill have my support, although I know very well that these new provisions will not have any real effect on the conduct of elections unless all candidates comply with the law. Again, in the case of my two opponents in the last election, and others who did not file, I cannot help wondering what they are trying to hide. I wonder why they failed to state publicly how much money they raised, how they raised it and how it was spent. It is obvious from my remarks, Sir, that I am in favour of tighter election laws and I am in favour of disclosure. But along with this I want an assurance that the election laws will be strictly enforced.

Now I should like to address myself to the part of this bill that I find totally unacceptable. I refer specifically to clause 11, under which a candidate will be able to apply to the Receiver General of Canada for reimbursement from the taxpayers of part of the expenses he incurred in an election campaign. I am surprised to see this provision back in the bill. I thought my opposition to it last year perhaps laid it to rest or helped lay it to rest. I would like to read the explanatory notes which explain what clause 11 is designed to do:

● (1650)

This amendment would authorize the Receiver General to partially reimburse candidates at an election who have complied with section 63 of the act and filed with the Chief Electoral Officer an auditor's report, return respecting election expenses and declaration respecting election expenses.

Candidates who are elected or who obtain a number of votes equal to 20% of the number of votes cast in the appropriate electoral district would be reimbursed to the extent of sixteen cents for each of the first twenty-five thousand names appearing on the preliminary lists of electors for their electoral districts and fourteen cents for each additional name, in the case of certain electoral districts an amount in respect of travelling expenses, and two hundred and fifty dollars.

All other such candidates would be reimbursed to the extent of two hundred and fifty dollars.

The last sentence indicates that any candidate who can get 25 names on a nomination paper would earn, whether he deserved it or not, at least \$250. The explanatory notes indicate to me that the following would happen in a sample constituency of 40,000 eligible voters. Sixteen cents each for the first 25,000 voters would give any candidate who received 20 per cent of the eligible vote \$4,000. Fourteen cents for each additional voter in a 40,000-vote riding would give him an additional \$2,100. Those two amounts,