

Election Expenses Bill

So, when I speak of loud and intensive publicity which may warp the thinking of the electorate, I am speaking about something true, about something real, about things that do happen during an election campaign. Basically, the bill should be aimed at preventing such a situation for God knows how the members of the Social Credit in particular had to suffer from these enormous electoral machines—steam rollers you might call them—whose money is crushing everything in its way.

Mr. Speaker, does the results of the work of such an electoral machine honestly and sincerely reflect the Canadian voter's opinion? Certainly not. This is why fundamentally any policy in respect of election expenses should prevent political parties from having recourse to high-gear and noisy publicity aimed at misleading voters.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the first impression we gather from this bill is that it still rests on the underlying and hypothetical principle whereby the percentage of votes obtained by a candidate or a party is proportionate to the expenses made. I think this is what the situation is now and has been in the past.

However, what is it that should be done? To disappear? By virtue of what rights or privileges would the elected representatives of the House of Commons be so elected, if not on account of their ideas and beliefs, but exclusively on account of election expenses?

This, Mr. Speaker, is something which must absolutely be corrected through this bill, that is, to find out the true opinions of voters on a percentage basis according to election expenses. This is a mistake and this bill should not make the same mistake again.

Mr. Speaker, if the citizens of this country are to be treated fairly and equitably, we must first of all, as mentioned in the bill, examine closely this limitation of election expenses.

• (1420)

While studying the clauses of Bill C-211 concerning this limitation, I found that it is still much too high because there would still be many ways of obtaining good results without having to make that kind of expense.

Mr. Speaker, I am all the more pleased to emphasize this because once again we of the Social Credit party have proved beyond all doubt, that elections can cost practically nothing. Consequently, we set precedents in this modern age where we have been able on the sole strength of our principles and convictions, to win people over to a particular cause. It is not necessary to spend \$25,000, \$30,000 or \$50,000 in order to avoid, as I was saying a while ago, distorting the results of an election.

We have therefore proved that it is possible to restrict these election expenses and I find that the limits provided in the bill are perhaps still too high considering—and I emphasize this—that there should not be any member who has been elected because money made up for his lack of personal qualities. No member of this House should be elected because of the amount of money spent in a given constituency.

For this reason, the authorized limits should be closer to a minimum than to a maximum and as I say this is possible. We have proved it ourselves during the last fed-

eral election in the constituency of Champlain, for instance, where the Social Credit candidate spent \$1,344.50 while \$32,000 was spent by the Liberal candidate.

Mr. Speaker, that, I suggest, is very concrete proof that stricter limits can be placed on the expenses authorized during an election campaign.

Another point involved in achieving greater fairness and justice in election campaigning for all concerned is the subject of newspaper, radio and television publicity. The bill deals with that, and even stresses the point, quite justifiably. However, I should like to add that such publicity, in newspapers as well as on television and radio, should also be equal for all parties or at least distributed according to a fair proportion. When I say "fair proportion", I want to point out that I mean almost equal proportion.

In fact, because of the extreme importance achieved by the media, television and radio as well as newspapers, particularly the dailies, it is imperative that justice be exercised for all parties in the matter of publicity.

That is why I feel that under no circumstances should time limits be exceeded. The bill indicates that a certain number of hours between a given date preceding the elections up to the day before the eve of the elections would be shared between political parties, with the government reimbursing 50 per cent of the cost.

Mr. Speaker, that would be right in principle, but I suggest that an absolute limit should be set on this time, not to be exceeded, so that things would not reach the last point I want to make, rowdy, intensive publicity which can be misleading. Then, we are working towards a more equitable allotment if we limit exactly the advertising time allowed to each political party or candidate.

As the mass media, specifically radio and television, have secured their broadcasting rights from the CRTC, it seems to me that they should provide free of charge all the political parties with the time they need to inform the public of their respective programs, and I repeat, "free of charge".

They operate under privileges and rights granted to them by the federal government. Considering the amount of stupidities one hears and sees on a number of these stations, I think that, when election time comes, all of them should make free air time available to the candidates. If those periods cannot be had free of charge, then they should be reimbursed fully and not only to the extent of 50 per cent as provided for in the bill.

Mr. Speaker, this is a basic principle, and if we want to stick to the basic principles which should prevail in a democracy, if we do not want the power of money to elect the members of parliament instead of the power of conviction, we must reach the point where all expenses for publicity over television, radio and in the press, at least the dailies, are reimbursed in full and not only up to 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, one point has not been mentioned in this bill although it is of major importance: we know that it is of the utmost importance for every candidate to have a representative at the poll during a general election. That is essential if reasonable supervision is to be exercised and abuse avoided.