

Election Expenses

of electioneering and the amount of money required to campaign.

There are other amendments that are required. I hope I am not out of order by speaking out on this matter, but we have opened up the elections act so at the same time we should look at other aspects of elections and their implications. It was clear in the last election, although it was not understood by many people, that the intent of the voter was not really the thing that counted, although I had that impression prior to the amendments to the elections act when we dealt with it previously. There is no doubt that the interpretation of how a person voted is arrived at in a very restrictive and technical way. Whether a person intended to vote for a particular candidate or not is almost incidental. That matter ought to be dealt with and the form of the ballot to be corrected. At the present time it is printed black on white. It should be printed white on black so that when a person puts an "X" on the ballot it can go only where it properly belongs. At present it can go anywhere, and it is not counted unless it is exactly in the place which is technically prescribed. This situation should be corrected because it is important that democracy should work and that people who express their opinions in a normal way can be sure of their acceptance.

● (1540)

There is another point which occurs to me. I am not sure how it can be dealt with. In most cases, if people put an "X" against something, it means they are against it; but in the polling booth an "X" is a mark of favour or support. Some people become confused by this procedure and end up marking an "X" against the name of the candidates they do not want, and none against the name of the candidate they wish to elect. We seem, traditionally to have become locked into a situation in which we ask people to make a mark on a piece of paper in the opposite way to the way in which it is normally interpreted by many citizens.

Moreover, there are a number of terms in the act which are inconsistent with each other. For instance, the instructions to voters are, in a couple of instances, diametrically opposed to the instructions contained in the elections act. This should be attended to. The instructions given in the polling booth are not in line with some of the prohibitions contained in the elections act.

One fear I have with regard to the bill before us is this. I am afraid that because of the restrictions it contains, we are likely to approve provisions which would benefit the dishonest politician. The bill, as I read it, contains many loopholes by means of which people can undertake expenditure over and above that permitted by the spirit, at least, of the legislation, and get away with it, or do so with only very modest penalties for their misbehaviour. For example, provision is made for a fine in cases where a candidate spends more than is permitted: the party or the candidate would be fined \$1,000. To a lot of people, this is peanuts. It does not mean very much to a man who is willing to spend an extra \$5,000 or \$10,000 to buy himself a seat: he will not be worried about such a provision. I was impressed by the British practice mentioned by the hon. member who preceded me. He indicated that in Britain the consequence of serious violation of the legislation is loss of the seat. I think this is the only procedure which has

[Mr. Cafik.]

real meaning. To fine a person \$1,000 is no deterrent if he makes up his mind to thwart the act.

Another matter which concerns me is the question of expenditure by groups or individuals other than political parties for the purpose of obtaining support for ideas held on an issue of public policy, or for the purpose of advancing the aims of those groups or individuals. This means that pressure groups can arise during the course of an election, inspired by opponents of a candidate or even by candidates themselves. They could direct their efforts toward a major issue and, in effect, they would be campaigning for one of the parties running. I do not believe this is acceptable. It would lend itself to a great deal of abuse.

I am sure everyone in the House agrees that individuals or groups should be able to put forward their views at any time, but we are talking about a very special time—during the course of an election—and I do not think it is proper to allow pressure groups to spend any amount of money they wish in favour of advancing their views on any issue they may choose, something which might well exert specific political influence in the election. If a provision of this kind remains in the bill—and I doubt very much that it should—a further provision should be included under which an injunction could be taken out against such a group in the event it could be shown it was acting for political reasons. The committee should look very carefully at this problem.

There is another matter to which consideration might be given. It is the whole question of the remuneration paid under the elections act to district returning officers, clerks, scrutineers and others—really, servants of the government—who look after the mechanics of an election. The establishment of a permanent voters' list would, of course, remove the necessity of a great deal of this work or, at least, I would hope so. But in the meantime, in the absence of such a list, I think it is high time we began to pay these people a suitable amount of money for their services. I think there is no doubt that if we were to count the number of hours spent by these people on the job, we would find that none of them earned the minimum wage as laid down under federal jurisdiction. This situation should be corrected.

Another matter concerns me. The intent of the bill appears to be to limit the possibility of people making major contributions to political parties or candidates and, as a result, exerting undue influence upon them after an election. I subscribe to this approach. But surely we cannot have it both ways. The bill is designed to achieve this purpose, and it is also designed to encourage poor people and those with moderate incomes to participate fairly in the running of an election. If we talk in terms of, say, 50,000 voters in a constituency, the maximum expenditure permitted would be \$26,250. In these circumstances, the permitted contribution from the public would be \$7,750, leaving a balance of \$18,500 to be taken up by the candidate, his supporters in the riding or the national party. To my mind, this does not really hurt a person who can rely upon outside support or funds from his own pocket. However, many candidates will still experience difficulty in waging a reasonable campaign against a man