

Election Expenses

for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett) and motion No. 38 in the name of the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters). Then we could go on to a couple of motions of the hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Harney). At the moment I cannot proceed beyond motion No. 38. I would request that the motions to which I have referred be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Is it agreed that motions Nos. 36, 37 and 38 be withdrawn?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motions Nos. 36 and 37 (Mr. Barnett) withdrawn.

Motion No. 38 (Mr. Peters) withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: We are now on motion No. 39 in the name of the hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Harney).

Mr. Harney: Mr. Speaker, I take it that we are now on motion no. 41.

Some hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Harney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move this motion.

Mr. O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My copy of the order paper indicates that motion No. 39 stands in the name of the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett). Could you read the motion so we could clear up the confusion as to whose amendment it is?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Harney) moves motion No. 39 as follows:

That Bill C-203, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Income Tax Act in respect of election expenses, be amended in clause 14 by deleting in line 37 at page 29 the period and adding the words:

“,providing

(a) none of the allocation is to be used in amounts of less than four minutes of broadcasting time where the broadcasting undertaking that he is licensed to carry on is a television station, and

(b) in any other case, no more than one third of the allocation is to be used in amounts of less than five minutes of broadcasting time.”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this amendment for a few minutes, mainly because most of the debate on the amendments to this bill has not dealt with the section of the bill which deals with the Broadcasting Act. This motion, and another one standing in my name, consists of only two amendments which have to do with an extremely important section of the bill and I think that the point of the amendments at least should be put before the House.

As the bill stands now, the Broadcasting Act would be amended to provide that 6½ hours of broadcasting time on radio and television be allocated among the parties. Of this time that is taken up by the parties, the cost as to 50 per cent shall be reimbursed by the public. I think it is important to note that this is certainly a major departure from past practice in Canada. For the first time in our history the public will be subsidizing the propaganda activities of the political parties over the electronic media.

I think it is important to realize that a considerable amount of money will be involved. In the last election I

think it is fair to say that close to \$2 million was spent by the political parties on advertising on radio and television. If that pattern is followed, and even assuming no increase, we can expect the public will have to subsidize the propaganda activities of the political parties to the tune of \$1 million. Political parties being what they are, and particularly given the kind of feelings that they have during elections, find themselves forced to try to counter the activities of other political parties to the utmost.

If the political parties know—and they will certainly know—that their opponents will be spending as much as they can on television and radio, and if they know that what they are spending will be subsidized to the tune of 50 per cent, we can expect there to be virtually full use of the 6½ hours allocated and allowed under the bill.

In the last election, the Canadian public was exposed to a rather new and disturbing phenomenon. In elections before the 1972 election it is true that political parties made use of spot ads. I refer to spot ads to distinguish them from top time on radio and television. In the last election the political parties, one in particular, vastly increased their use of spot ads. A spot ad lasts from 30 seconds to a minute and it is operated and produced in much the same way that a soap commercial or a toothpaste commercial is produced. The whole idea is to get a name across, to get a brand sold. All that can be done in 30 seconds is to try to influence the voter into some kind of preconditioned reaction.

We all know how advertising works or is supposed to work, and we all witnessed in the last election a considerable increase in the use of that technique. The justification that has been presented for the subsidy on the part of the public purse for radio and television time is that this radio and television time used by the political parties would allow the voters, first of all, to become aware of the issues in the elections and also to know what stands the various parties take with regard to these issues.

I would say that is a very laudable justification. We all agree in the House that it is good for the public to be appraised of the issues during an election; it is good and necessary for the public to know where the parties stand on these issues and to hear the parties explain why they stand where they do. On the basis of these justifications, I am sure no one would object to a subsidy given to the political parties so they can inform the public about the issues and about their stands on the issues.

However, in this bill there is no provision which would prohibit, or even lessen, the use of the spot ad, and it could be possible—I suggest that it certainly will be more than possible; it will be highly probable—that the political parties, and I include my own, will bend to the advice of those people who advise us all in matters of publicity, namely, the advertising agencies. Their advice will be simple and clear. It will be to this effect: Use whatever time you are given in spot ads because the radio or the television talk does not have that kind of impact. With spot ads you, the political party, will be able to saturate the voters' attention.

I think it is important to point out that if the political parties proceed to use this time in spot ads, toward the end of the election the voter, when it comes to watching television or listening to radio, will hear very few com-