

Canada Elections Act

The third section of the Bill of Rights includes the provision that every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of Members of the house of Commons or legislative assemblies and to be qualified for membership therein. If I were to dovetail the freedom of association with those democratic rights, I wonder whether we would be in violation of those freedoms if we were to place these kinds of restrictions in legislation. I mentioned before that one of the most important positions in this land is that of a private citizen with the right to vote. So on a philosophical basis, Mr. Speaker, I do have some questions as to the content of this particular Bill.

In addition to that, I would point out that in some ways Canada is a democratic model for other countries. I think if that is true we ought to be an ideal model, one that no one is afraid to copy, one which gives the greatest expression to democracy through our political Parties. Keeping that in mind, I wonder whether this particular amendment might not be somewhat restrictive. I know that last night, Mr. Speaker, at the Canada-Europe Association we talked about this whole question of having a conference on democracy and Canada's participation. If we want to use our own Elections Act as a model for democracy, then perhaps this amendment is too restrictive at this time. We may want to reconsider it at some other time, but I am just wondering about it at this time.

The Hon. Member who spoke earlier talked about the problem of certain political Parties being able to receive donations provincially and federally. I am sure that if I talk to him more specifically on this, I would appreciate a bit more the particular problem he is raising. However, we do have provincial Elections Acts which allow us to contribute to the provincial Party as well as the federal Party, so that I can and do contribute to the NDP both federally and provincially. We issued tax credit receipts for both political Parties. However, I cannot claim that twice. I think there are ways of dealing with this to make sure that the taxpayer is not penalized and I am sure other Provinces have similar provisions in their Elections Acts.

● (1550)

I have mentioned our concerns about the form of the Bill and the fact that there is no recognition of the Yukon and Northwest Territories which is especially relevant in light of what is happening today at the conference dealing with aboriginal rights. I think that is a serious omission.

We also have questions about the content of the Bill and the difficulty of trying to relate it to the history of the country and to what is happening in other parliaments. We have been trying to understand our democratic role as citizens of Canada. I wonder if the Bill might not be a little too restrictive. I may not be aware of all the problems at this time but we feel that this may not necessarily be the wisest thing to do.

Should Hon. Members choose to have this matter referred to committee, I would be delighted to raise these concerns at that time. I am sure answers will be forthcoming to the questions that I have raised. Perhaps we would all be satisfied to have the matter dealt with expeditiously in that way.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts on the Bill this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Restigouche): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the discussion on Bill C-661 this afternoon. I want to begin by congratulating the distinguished Hon. Member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle) for bringing before the House Bill C-661, an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act in regard to the registration of political Parties. In my view, this is the very essence of the Private Members' hour being used in a productive way.

One observes that there is the possibility of a conflict of interest between the provisions of the Bill and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly Section 2 which guarantees the freedom of association and expression, and Section 15, which prescribes equality of treatment for all. Even if the Bill were compatible with the Charter, and assuming it was adopted by the House, there is no guarantee that it would achieve its purpose because it would be relatively easy to comply with the new requirements.

On the other hand, Party registration is a problem which should be considered at this time, especially as we are faced with a proliferation of political Parties in the country. There are ten official federal political Parties, some of which are not interested in having candidates elected. The cost and administrative difficulties which they may engender force us to reconsider the whole question of registration of political Parties.

I want to recognize the contribution to the debate this afternoon by the Hon. Member for Dauphin (Mr. Lewycky) and express appreciation for the indication that there is a disposition to have the subject matter of the Bill referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I had a conversation earlier with the Hon. Member for Laval (Mr. Roy) and he pointed out that the Parti Québécois is only interested in matters within the boundaries of the Province of Quebec, yet it is registered across the country and can take advantage of the provisions of the Income Tax Act. One might even say it is an unfair advantage. That is a classic example of why it is important to try to stop that type of thing from happening.

In form and substance the Bill is very important. In order that the proceedings of the House may not be delayed any longer, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following therefor:

Bill C-661, an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act in respect of registration of political parties, be not now read a second time but that the Order be discharged, the Bill withdrawn and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

I hope there is a disposition to have this matter referred to the Committee with dispatch so that it can discuss the subject matter of the Bill and not the Bill itself as presented this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said amendment?