

Canada Elections Act

a view which is totally acceptable to the members of my party.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gilbert: Nevertheless, it is a view that I think should be put forward because, when you reduce the voting age from 21 to 18 years, you are imposing on young people a social responsibility. We must make sure that they are ready to assume that responsibility and are mature enough to vote and participate in the affairs of the community.

My last point relates to election expenses. My colleague, the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) has set forth the position of my party on election expenses and on the necessity of implementing the recommendations of the Barbeau Commission. I submit the time has come for us to take active steps to implement the recommendations of the Barbeau Commission concerning election expenses. I submit that the bill relating to that subject ought to have preceded the bill we are discussing.

I read "The Shape of Scandal" by Richard Gwyn. It deals with the trying time the government faced as a result of scandals during the early and middle 1960's. In the epilogue are two paragraphs bearing on the subject of election expenses which I should like to read to hon. members. The author writes on page 242:

Only one element of the content of the scandals deserves lasting concern and that is what Pearson, after the publication of the Dorion Report, called, "the sinister and growing involvement of crime in politics." The connecting link appeared to be the election fund. The traditional system of fund raising and fund spending by both the major parties has in the past been based upon an obsessive and impenetrable secrecy. Rarely has this secrecy hidden anything more ominous than the understandable wish of business firms to conceal their political affiliations from their customers, some of whom are bound to be supporters of the unfavoured political party. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the winter scandals, secrecy is an invitation to misuse and, to the public, it invites the assumption that misuse is commonplace.

The importance of money in elections has been consistently over-rated, particularly by the professional organizers who approach the subject with the reverence of acolytes. Under-financed parties, such as Réal Caouette's in 1962 and John Diefenbaker's in 1963, have been able to rise above empty war chests, while over-financed parties, such as Pearson's in 1963, run the risk of arousing public resentment. Nevertheless, as the realistic Israel Tarte said of Laurier's victory in 1896, "Elections are not won by prayers alone." At election times money is a useful adjunct to virtue, but the present system of collecting has outrun its usefulness.

• (4:30 p.m.)

The solution is relatively obvious and has already been effected by the Government in Quebec. A proportion of the election expenses of all the national parties should be paid out of the public treasury and all election expenses should be subjected to rigorous control and scrutiny. As the *Toronto Daily Star* commented, "Having the taxpayers pay the bill of political candidates may seem a strange and unpleasant idea at first sight. But it is surely preferable to having the tab picked up by people like Lucien Rivard."

I hope that the President of the Privy Council will be very active in setting up the committee to consider election expenses. I hope he will do this forthwith. On that note, I end my comments on this particular bill. I will have more to say at the committee stage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roland Godin (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to take part in this debate on Bill C-215, whose purpose is to modernize the Canada Elections Act and to promote democracy in this country.

Democracy is a form of government which originated after monarchy, that is after the period when kings and queens inherited the throne through succession. In democracy as we know it, the people become their own king and appoint their representatives through elections.

All citizens are equal in a democratic election. Each citizen has only one vote to cast in the ballot box and the majority decides which members are elected. It is the principle of one man, one vote. In an election, this principle of the citizen's equality and quality constitutes the basis of democracy and it must be respected by everybody.

Why should a member of Parliament have to make his backers known? Why does this obligation not apply also to political parties with considerable campaign funds? Why are privileges granted to the powerful and refused to the little, the weak, the members of small political parties or still to independent candidates who are always free to express themselves during an electoral campaign? Why not require of the large political parties that they reveal the sources of their campaign financing? We ask the question as bluntly as possible in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

Why are the small political parties compelled to disclose the names of the contributors to their campaign funds, while the two large ones do not have to do so? Why is it possible for the large parties to conceal the