

*Election Expenses Bill*

involved because I cannot see papers being blanked out altogether.

It is always a difficult thing to choose a good, general objective such as we have but I am inclined to believe that perhaps this bill suffers from a little too much hasty and ill-coordinated particularization. There are some other jurisdictions which have a limit on expenditures but which allow the parties and the candidates to decide whether they shall put "X" number of dollars of effort into radio, into television or into print, but in this bill we have a series of inhibitions which will be extremely difficult to sort out.

Probably we might achieve the objective more easily and more efficiently if we allowed a choice within the framework of expenses. There still is a great deal of diversity in this country and a campaign which would work for the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), for instance, would not be the kind of campaign which would work for an hon. member such as the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) whose riding is quite different. So you cannot apply judiciously and wisely a too rigid formula as to how a man or a party makes an appeal to the electorate.

Of course we have the right to say there are certain things one cannot do, and this is said in the elections act. We have the right to suggest that we bring a degree of equity into the measure of assistance. I think that is all to the good. The only danger here, of course, is that we might find that the contribution which comes from the state will become a kind of a floor and that over and above that the same needs and desires to collect and raise funds will still be required. Perhaps if there is any misconception in the mind of the public it may be more difficult to attain them.

If I speak only half as long as the minister it does not mean I am only half as interested, but it is hard for me to get over my habit of laconic brevity even in a matter of this kind. One of the most important things I looked for and did not find was a reference to shortening election campaigns. I think election campaigns in Canada are far too long, and when we have people who have the right—and our system gives one man this right—to decide when a campaign takes place, this prolongs them still further. This adds still more complications to our efforts to shorten election campaigns. I am not the only one who thinks that. At page 48 of the Barbeau report we find this passage:

Modern communications and transportation, in the committee's view, render unnecessary the present length of campaigns. The duration of campaigns now not only imposes a heavy burden on the finances of the parties and candidates, but also on the stamina of the leaders and candidates as well as the electorate.

The committee recognizes that the time necessary to enumerate electors under the present machinery may make it impossible to shorten the period between the issuance of the election writ and polling day, without the introduction of a permanent list of electors. The committee also recognizes that considerable planning and preparation are required by parties and candidates immediately following the dissolution of parliament, and there is no intent on the part of the committee to suggest a restriction on this type of activity during any prescribed period. The committee suggests, however, that the campaign period need not coincide with the period needed for the establishment of the election machinery.

The report goes on to suggest that parties and candidates be prohibited from campaigning on radio and television before the 29th day before election day. I would presume to go even further than this illustrious body and accept the minister's invitation to constitute every one of us here as an expert. I think this is a good suggestion which was carried through by the special committee on election expenses. They pretty well recommended the same thing, except they declared it should be 29 days.

• (2120)

The report recommended that parties and candidates be prohibited from campaigning, as distinct from preparation for and holding nomination conventions, advertising for workers, and so on, on radio and television, and from using paid print media including newspapers, periodicals, direct mailing, billboards and posters prior to the twenty-ninth day before polling day.

I think both groups have missed a significant point. Once the writ is issued it will be terribly difficult to deal with the days before you would formally commence your campaign. What would you do? Would you go home and knit, or draw pictures in some private book? I believe if the recommendation of the Barbeau committee or of the special committee were followed we would have two campaigns, a kind of phony war for a month and then the real thing for the next month. Both would be costly. I say, and I have said this before, that the time has come to adopt a permanent voters list. It would cost money, of course, but so does enumeration and so will all this legislation.

The permanent list works quite well in other countries. I think with a permanent voters list we could have an election within a month. With modern technology I believe a month is plenty of time. I am convinced that with the campaign period cut in half we would have not only a better and more sustained campaign, as well as a more highly intensified voters' interest, but we would also be able to cut down expenditures across the board, which is what we are after. This, I think, is a more effective way in which to reduce the cost of campaigns.

I propose to move a reasoned amendment in respect of this measure. Before I present it I wish to reiterate that for the good that is in this bill, we are thankful. We are thankful for the things which are useful, valuable and adaptable. Under reasonable terms and under efficient administration we will lend our support. I regret profoundly that the whole measure has been surrounded with cynicism. I shall not go back into history and into other efforts to reform in this manner, but this particular situation is shocking. This reform began in 1964 when the Barbeau committee was established. The report of that illustrious body was ready in 1966. We had all sorts of appeals to the government in between. What happened? On April 7, 1968, a most auspicious day, the then new Prime Minister was asked this question:

I wonder if you could tell us, coming back to this election expenses matter, whether you intend to do anything about implementing the report of the election expenses committee. It seems to me this is rather fundamental to the just society which you mentioned.

The year 1968 was the year of the just society. This was the Prime Minister's answer:

I agree. Top priority. Next Speech from the Throne.