

Cover picture shows Indian Wigwam in lower Canada by Cornelius Krieghoff. See article on pages 8, 9.

Canada Today



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Politics

Parliament passes new election expenses rule

Canada's current Parliament of minorities has produced, after a gestation period of nearly ten years, the country's first comprehensive legislation to regulate and attempt to equalize spending by opposing candidates in national election campaigns.

The House Leader of the minority Liberal Government, Mr. Allan J. MacEachen, said the legislation gives Canada "one of the most democratic and open electoral systems in the world." If no one among ranks of the three opposition parties - Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats and Social Credit - disputed his claim, it was perhaps because members of every party in the House of Commons finally had a finger in the outcome.

The legislation was introduced in June 1973. It soon found its way to the Commons Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. Ideas for electoral reform had been under fairly regular study in Canada for nearly a decade, first by a royal commission, then by three parliamentary committees. There had also been examinations of the issues by academics and other interests. But the working politicians representing the four main Canadian political parties still found plenty of issues to settle in their committee deliberations.

The committee met more than 50 times and considered nearly 150 amendments to the original bill. Altogether, more than 50 changes were incorporated. Letting democracy be the determining factor on every issue, the Government made no attempt to revise changes in its original legislation made by the committee on a majority vote. When the bill finally came back to the Commons in January for approval, Mr. MacEachen indicated that the Government was content to accept the results of the committee's critical analysis.

Because it involved interests so near and dear to all members, Mr. MacEachen said he had expected the committee would give the legislation very careful scrutiny. He had not been disappointed. "Probably no other bill has received greater scrutiny in any committee than this bill," he said. He had not approved several amendments, but his efforts to persuade the committee of his point of view had failed. "However, I am quite content to accept the over-all judgement of the committee."

The chief spokesman for the official Opposition, the Progressive Conservatives, was Mr. Terry O'Connor, member for the Ontario riding of Halton. He pointed out one important change the committee had made in the legislation. This was a provision

that the disclosure of names and amounts of all donors to political parties and candidates must include governments. Governments, through their publications, their facilities such as aircraft, automobiles, advertising and public service personnel could give useful help to election candidates.

"As we are all well aware," he said, "the use, usually surreptitiously and indirectly, by the party in power of such readily available weaponry can provide a significant and unfair advantage during an election campaign."

In summing up his party's position, Mr. O'Connor saw the legislation as a chance to improve the public image of the politician and political parties in Canada. "The bill takes large strides toward alleviating the long and deeply-held public suspicion - in some cases it is an actuality - that politicians are crooked, that the system operates on the basis of patronage, of favours, of jobs and other amenities offered and granted in return for candidate and party funding."

Opens the books

The bill would open up books and records of parties and individuals through tough auditing requirements and the requirement that sources of all donations over \$100 must be disclosed. "It will allow every Canadian the opportunity to look over the shoulders of the backroom boys as they go about their often misunderstood task of raising the money necessary to convey the message of a party and its candidates . . . Long-held suspicions will then either be confirmed or put to rest."

He noted that the legislation also takes steps to reduce the escalating cost of elections by limiting the amounts candidates and parties may spend on a campaign. A candidate is limited to \$1 for each of the first 15,000 eligible voters in his riding, 50 cents for each of the next 10,000 and 25 cents for each voter over 25,000.

On the basis of 1972 voters' list, this means that in the constituency with the largest number of eligible voters - York-Scarborough, a Toronto-area seat with 113,642 eligible voters - a candidate would be limited to a maximum expenditure of \$42,160.50 on his campaign. In Yukon, the far northern riding with the fewest voters of any of the 264 federal constituencies, a candidate could spend no more than