

Election Expenses Bill

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, having just come into the chamber and listened to the previous hon. member giving his views, and in view of the fact that I have had some experience in elections over the years, I felt I might say a few words about the bill now before the House.

No one disagrees with the fact that election costs today are skyrocketing to such extent that they constitute a denial to many people of the opportunity to participate actively as candidates through inability to meet the tremendous cost. Over the years I have not been a spender in elections. I have tried to mobilize opinion within my constituency and secure voluntary workers. I have succeeded in doing that by challenging each and all of them to join with me, not on the basis of what the return will be to each of them individually but on the basis of giving them an opportunity to serve their country, through the medium of participation, and to support those principles in which they believe.

I have found that this works. I have found that if you go to the Canadian people, and in particular to young men and women, and ask them, desirous as they are to bring about changes, to mobilize on behalf of those principles in which they believe, it is amazing the reaction that takes place. As I say, I have participated in quite a large number of elections, four or five unsuccessfully but ten in a row successfully, and in no case have I ever permitted expenditures beyond those that are absolutely necessary to ensure that the constituency is organized. Generally, excepting the officials, those who join in assisting in the campaign give of their time without remuneration.

I believe we must do something to impose a ceiling on expenditures. From my own knowledge of the United Kingdom's system I can say that the rules there permit expenditures to be made by political parties in advance of the issue of the writs, and these in no way enter into the computation that is made in imposing the ceiling on expenditures. There the expenditures are tremendous. Political parties are organized—two of them, in any event—in a way that we cannot begin to imagine within our own country. We speak of organizations in the various constituencies, but generally they are weak and almost inactive though they have a president and a secretary for each area.

I am sure that the experience of my friend from Ottawa East (Mr. Richard), the sub-dean of this House who has been a great credit to the parliamentary system, is the same as mine. I have lived quite close to his constituency and know something of the manner in which he conducts a campaign. I think he will be generally in agreement with the fact that large expenditures have not been the reason for his long-time success.

Having said that some action should be taken, I now come to a very short, almost cryptic reference to this bill. I think it is designed to fool the people in the coming election. It reveals a Machiavellian acuteness and craftiness that can only be attributable to a great deal of thought being given to a subject realized as being attractive to the people. But, Mr. Speaker, look at the bill. It is a sham and a delusion. It is worse than that: it is an endeavour to obtain from the Canadian people in the

coming election, under false pretences, support for a general proposition that is not embodied in the bill.

As far as I am concerned, I am not going to join in support of the bill. I am favourable to the general considerations that it has in mind, but the manner in which it has been brought in indicates that it is believed members will suddenly join in support of something, the general principle of which they believe in. Pass this bill and you pass nothing. Nothing in this country is improved by it. As I say, it is a sham and a delusion.

• (1630)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I am probably risking a great deal in rising to speak at this moment because I realize that once this amendment is put, if it is put this afternoon, we move on to the motion on second reading which can constitute another debate. So I am going to attempt not to inflame the House at this point, though I am seriously tempted to respond to some of the comments made this afternoon.

I must congratulate the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) on the first part of his speech. I wish the same quality had been continued until the very end, but there was a lapse which did not appeal to me very much. I stated when introducing the bill on second reading that I intended to listen to hon. gentlemen in the course of the debate with an awareness of the fact there was no single person with a monopoly of wisdom or knowledge in this field, and that each Member of Parliament brought a great deal of experience to the question of election expenses. Therefore, I was prepared to consider changes in the bill in committee which could be justified on the grounds of improvement, changes which were workable and would contribute to the objective we have in mind.

There are three principles in the bill. The first is the principle of greater disclosure to the public about the affairs of political parties and their candidates. There has been a demand over the years to open up the books, so to speak, of political parties and candidates. Suggestions have been made to show where we get the money and how the money is being spent. This bill, in so far as disclosure in respect of political parties is concerned, follows exactly the recommendations of the expert Barbeau committee and the recommendations of the special committee. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) agrees with that principle as embodied in the bill. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) disagrees and states we ought to go further. In this particular field we have followed the recommendation of both the Barbeau committee and the special committee.

In respect of disclosure of candidates, which also attracted the support of the Leader of the Opposition, we have followed in substance, but not totally, the recommendations of the Barbeau committee and we have retained the present law as recommended by that committee. We have not followed the recommendations of the special committee because that committee recommended, in my opinion, a relaxation of the present disclosure provisions. That is what we are doing about disclosure, and it has the support of the Leader of the Opposition.