Canada Elections Act

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) or, alternatively, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fisher).

Mr. Fisher: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would love to hear what the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) has to say, so I will wait for him.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I just have a few comments to make on the Bill in order that we could get through this hour and not have this matter go any further. I disagree with the whole tenor of the Bill, that somehow we should decide what are frivolous political candidacies and what are non-frivolous political candidacies by employing monetary forms of measurement. I certainly feel, and I think all my colleagues here would agree with me, that that is an inappropriate way to decide what political Parties and what political candidates are to be regarded as frivolous or non-frivolous. That, Mr. Speaker, I would presume, is for the voters to decide on election day.

I believe it is indicative of the way in which our perception of things is coloured by our history that we have this Bill coming forward from a Liberal Member. And if I understand the situation correctly, there is support from the Conservative caucus with respect to having the matter go to committee. These are Parties which have existed since the beginning of Confederation in one form or another, and have, therefore, never had the experience, as our Party has, of starting really from scratch. I am sure that in terms of the monetary requirements this Bill would put on people who wanted to run for office, and the signatures which might also be required, many of the early CCF candidates at the beginning of our Party's history in the 30s would not have met these qualifications.

It is not surprising that we would have this Bill come forward from the Liberal Party, but I must say that it is surprising to me that this Bill comes forward from the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne), with whom I have had the privilege of working on the special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure. I believe that this Bill goes in a direction away from the kind of openness to the House of Commons which many Members want to see, and it is surprising that an Hon. Member who represents a riding in a have-not Province, wants to see these kinds of monetary restrictions placed on candidacy for the House of Commons.

I would like to comment, Mr. Speaker, on the role of so-called frivolous candidates, for instance, the Rhinoceros Party. I must say I was of two minds about that Party. I found it irritating on many occasions because I felt it did detract from the kind of debate I would have liked to have about serious issues. When I would arrive at a town hall meeting, the Rhinoceros fellow would be there. He had a good set of lines. He was funny. It was often hard to keep up what I consider to be an appropriate tone for a political meeting. The candidate from my riding, Honest Don Bergen was his name, always wore a top hat to the meeting. He was good at what he did, which was to make fun of all of us. I think there is a place for

humour in politics. There is a place for making fun of some of the stereotypes and caricatures that develop around political life. However, I must confess that at times I thought it was just nothing short of bothersome when this was done when I was there. I guess I am like everyone else, I appreciate humour about other politicians but I am not so wild about it when it disturbs a meeting at which I and others are trying to make a point. Perhaps I will just say that I will leave it to individual Members of the House to draw whatever conclusions might be drawn from the fact that the people who were bothered the most by the Rhinoceros candidate in my riding were the Marxists-Leninists and the Tories. They seemed to be driven to distraction by the comedy of Honest Don Bergen in my riding. I do not know whether there is some kind of internal psychological similarity between the two of these parties such that they are unable to see themselves critically or humorously, but I had a hard time staying bothered myself because I was so busy being amused by the reaction of the Marxist-Leninists and Tories.

● (1650)

In any case, Mr. Speaker, I think it was up to the people of the riding to decide who were the frivolous candidates. In my riding, they gave more votes to the Rhinoceros Party than they did to either the Marxists-Leninists or the Communist Party candidates. So the Rhinoceros Party was not last, it was second last, and I believe that even if these measures were to be implemented, we would still have Rhinoceros Party candidates. I think they could generate support to meet these conditions.

Mr. Peterson: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if I could ask a question of the Hon. Member. I would like to ask him whether or not he intends—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. First of all let us find out if the Hon. Member accepts a question.

Mr. Blaikie: Certainly.

Mr. Peterson: Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering if the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) is talking out this Bill in order that we not be allowed, as Members, to exercise our democratic rights to vote on the measure.

Mr. Malone: Talk it out.

Mr. Blaikie: I will be very surprised if I personally were responsible for this Bill being talked out. In fact, I intended to say that I thought the Rhinoceros Party would meet the conditions that were laid down. What we are really talking about is preserving the possibility and potential of new political options which are as yet unknown. We are preserving the possibility that those kinds of political options might come forward, not because they are able to meet these conditions, but because they might indeed have something to contribute to debate in this country. That is what we want to preserve.

As far as the Rhinoceros Party is concerned, as long as we in this House continue to act in such a way as to deserve some of