

Election Expenses

those in the special committee who thought that the Chief Electoral Officer should have total charge of this. People in my party and in other parties, I suppose, have succeeded in persuading the government that it is proper to burden the Chief Electoral Officer with this task—he is like Caesar's wife—and to place upon him the responsibility of making the expenditures public and possibly laying charges where necessary.

I think that this is something that the committee should consider. I hope the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) will consider an amendment which will make provision for the appointment of a registrar, who could work under the Chief Electoral Officer and would have authority in that respect. When he is not satisfied with the contents of a financial report or has reason to believe there was some hanky-panky in the financial reports submitted by candidates or political parties, he would have authority to investigate those reports and to report publicly on them through parliament. Then it would be up to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang)—although not the present one—and up to any citizen, political party or candidate, to follow that up by laying charges.

With regard to the media, I want to suggest again for the umpteenth time—I will not get agreement from my friends in the Liberal and Conservative parties but I know I will get it from my friends in the Social Credit party—that in the allocation of the six and a half hours of broadcast time during the period of an election campaign, that time should be divided evenly among the candidates of recognized political parties.

An election campaign is like any other race in the sense that all the candidates and parties start from the same place. They may not end in the same place, but everyone starts off even. We recognize that, in between elections, broadcast time provided free by the media and particularly by the CBC should be divided in proportion to the representation that political parties have in legislatures; but during the 28 days of an election campaign the six and a half hours of broadcast time should be divided evenly amongst the parties. There are some parts of the country where the Liberal party has trouble getting the time of day, let alone a vote, and there are other parts of the country where the Conservative party is almost extinct. Similarly, there are a number of parts of the country where the NDP and similarly the Social Credit party cannot get the time of day. But in the national context the six and a half hours broadcast time that is allocated during the election campaign should be divided equally among parties and candidates.

Some people, including one or two of my colleagues, have raised the matter of no limit on candidates in terms of the purchasing of broadcast time. I am not too hung up on that one. I am not sure that there should be a limit. I think the state should intervene to the extent of limiting expenses and requiring disclosure of the sources of contribution. The state has a right to intervene because the public has the right to know, but how the candidate spends that money and on what he spends it surely should be his business and the business of his constituents and party organization. If he has a limit of \$25,000 and the damn fool chooses to spend it all on television time, surely that is his business, and I suspect the voters will catch up

[Mr. Benjamin.]

with him anyway. But I do not think that the state can intervene to the extent of knowing what the money is spent on.

The President of the Privy Council, in discussing full disclosure, spoke about anonymity and the preservation of the anonymity of people who make contributions of \$100 or less. I want to tell him that in my opinion, if this bill were to follow through on the policy of the NDP, and the CCF before it, there would be full and total disclosure of all contributions.

I do not say that lightly, Mr. Speaker, because I have a terrible fear that if that provision were contained in this legislation it would hurt my party more than any other party in this country. As I said at the outset of my speech, this reluctance on the part of the public, because of what is said about politics and politicians, to let it be known that they contribute to the party of their political belief—and I have a fear that this is what the full disclosure provisions as limited as they are will do—will cause some people to at least hesitate if not refuse to continue to contribute to the support of their political beliefs. But we have to start some place, and while this provision is not as far reaching as we would like it to be, it is at least a beginning.

There are a number of businessmen in my constituency, most of whom do not vote for me or my party but a few of whom make a contribution to it, and the ones whom I know who made a contribution in support of my campaign in Regina-Lake Centre have done so on the basis of a contribution by their business to the democratic process. In no way, at no time, under no circumstances, were there any strings attached to it, and there was no subsequent request for some special favour or treatment. Any businessman who makes a contribution to a political party on that basis should never hesitate to make his contribution public. I believe the same thing should apply to a trade union or any other organization. Individual citizens should be proud to say whom they support with contributions.

● (2130)

For years members of this party have talked about allowing income tax deductions for political contributions. I welcome what is in the bill in the form of a tax credit. In fact, it has caused my colleagues and I to giggle about it. When we talked about the Carter Commission report on taxation, and of using tax credits as a way of providing exemptions to people on low and middle incomes, we were always told that it could not be done. But when it comes to the matter of contributions to political parties, all of a sudden the government and the official opposition welcome tax credits. I will not complain about that. I look upon it as the thin end of the wedge. We have begun with tax credits in of all crazy places a bill to limit election expenses.

I am glad to see the changes that the President of the Privy Council has announced from the bill that was introduced a year ago. The present bill will be much more fair and useful to the smaller contributors to political parties. I just hope that if a tax credit for contributions to a political party is valid, this means a substantial change in heart on the part of the official opposition and the governing party