

Election Expenses

rural area, too. A new man coming into the game must spend a great deal of money just to get known, whereas a sitting member of this House has the advantage of franking privileges, stationery, constituency privileges and the great advantage of being reported by newspapers and other media. A new man coming along does not possess these advantages and to some extent he can only obtain them by the use of money. The bill before us treats everyone in the same way. I am not saying this is wrong, but I am concerned about this aspect and it is one which should be considered by the committee.

The difficulty confronting new candidates is increased by the provision limiting advertising to the last 29 days of the campaign. No doubt it is a good thing to limit the length of the campaign, but the sitting member is not prevented from issuing press releases about the things he is doing. The new man does not have the same facilities to advertise the things he would like to do.

Then there is the provision that volunteers are not counted as an expense. This business of volunteers has been discussed before; I believe it was mentioned by the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon). It sometimes happens that people are conveniently allowed holidays by their companies or by their unions, and they just happen to volunteer because there just happens to be an election in progress. Some of these people happen to be the kind of volunteers who are professional union organizers or professional sales people. They are very good at doing things. All of a sudden they appear in great numbers.

An hon. Member: Ask the NDP.

Mr. Blenkarn: The hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) would probably know about union organizers getting holidays on these occasions. Somewhere along the line the committee had better reach a decision on just who is a volunteer.

Then there is the question of the value to be placed on goods and services. We are supposed to treat as an expense the cost of services and the cost of goods. But what is the cost of an extra sheet of paper run through a Xerox machine, and what is the value ascribed to the use of a Gestetner whose owner was not using it after five o'clock? How does one estimate the cost of signs? Are they to be valued at the cost of acquiring them from a union printing shop or on the basis that one's volunteers make them in the shop at night? Is stationery to be valued at its cost in the store or is it to be valued at a distress price because it was surplus to some company's inventory? These are matters which must be examined by the committee in connection with the relevant portion of the bill.

How does one assess the value of the use of a car given to a candidate during the period of the election campaign, or the use of a truck in the same circumstances, or the use of some staple guns which happen to get lost after a sign has been put up? Or the cost of space which had not been rented before the election and which is not likely to be rented after, and which just happens to be available to the candidate? Somewhere along the line a clear understanding must be reached on the subject of these costs. Otherwise, the limitation placed on expenses will mean nothing. There is need to define what constitutes election expenses.

[Mr. Blenkarn.]

For that matter, we might ask ourselves just when we do, in fact, begin running for an election. This has already been mentioned by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) tonight. Some of my hon. friends tell me they start running for the next election as soon as an election is over. They say they are always running for election. The hon. member for Rocky Mountain went into detail about the way in which ministers of the Crown run for election. This bill must do something to control the full-page advertisement, the billboard with the minister's picture on it, the press release which is not a press release but, rather, straight propaganda to advertise the minister. That kind of thing is straight electioneering. In some cases it even goes on during election campaigns.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Blenkarn: Somewhere along the line this bill will have to control the activities of ministers of the Crown in the performance of their duty and limit the personal exposure practised by ministers of the Crown in the fulfilment of their functions. One of the worst features of our society today is continuing inflation. Indeed, these are times when one could almost use the phrase "galloping inflation" to describe it. Costs are advancing at a rate of 8.3 per cent on an annual basis. A study was recently made of Post Office finances by a well-known firm of accountants and they suggested that by 1975 the first class mail rate in this country will be 12 cents. To some extent the bill before us recognizes that this is the case and that the mail rate will not remain at 8 cents for very long, because the contribution made to candidates receiving over 20 per cent of the popular vote is expressed as 16 cents for the first 25,000 electors plus 14 cents for all others, to meet the cost of mailing a first-class letter weighing not more than one ounce. So clearly the drafters of this bill have foretold the Canadian people that the postal rates will not remain for long at 8 cents.

● (2120)

The question of escalation of costs must be taken into account. Indexing seems to be a popular suggestion these days and perhaps the committee might look into the question of indexing the costs. Because costs do rise. Certainly costs will rise if we are governed by a government which does not care about inflation. Presumably on that basis we must allow for increases in costs.

A peculiar paragraph in the bill is in connection with the "You vote at" card. Apparently it now becomes a crime to send these out, and for no reason at all. If the returning officer is to send out a "vote at" card to every person on the voters list, fine; but why is it wrong if some candidate wants to be foolish enough to use his limited electoral expense money in this way? Why should he be penalized because he wants to advertise in that fashion? The bill is a double kill.

If there is something wrong with the "vote at" cards then they should be banned completely, but why provide that the returning officer must send out the "vote at" cards and then forbid a candidate to send one out himself? If he wants to be foolish and demonstrate his stupidity, why penalize him further by making it an illegal act?