

Canada Elections Act

appropriate that the House be informed that there may be a suggested amendment—I say there may be; it is not before the House at the moment—which would withdraw the Bill and refer the subject matter to a committee. I believe the Hon. Member for Dauphin is entitled to know that that kind of consideration is going on in the Chamber at the moment. I can say nothing further in that regard.

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad of the information which you have provided, but I would like to put on the record some of the concerns which we have with respect to Bill C-661. I will perhaps begin there, so that whatever does happen to this Bill, whatever is decided, perhaps some of the concerns we have regarding this Bill will be considered.

I would like to divide my remarks on form and content of this particular Bill. There are some concerns we have with regard to the drafting of the amendment in that there is not necessarily a very clear definition of what is meant by “the majority of the Provinces”. I realize a simple majority would be six Provinces, and if that is what we are talking of here, I do have a few questions because there seems to be an omission of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. For our part, we view Canada as including the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, which represents about two-thirds of Canada geographically. This might be one consideration which Hon. Members might want to note when we speak of this amendment in terms of the whole question of “a majority”.

In the wording “of a majority of the Provinces”, there does not seem to be any amplification. I know that the Hon. Member’s intention is to preserve the national character of the federal political Parties, but if we refer to things like the Constitution, there is a requirement that these Provinces would constitute, let us say, 50 per cent of the population. Therefore, if we are talking about a simple majority of the Provinces, one of the considerations would be the population.

If a Party, for example, had candidates in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, that constitutes six Provinces, but it would represent only 12 per cent to 14 per cent of the population.

So if the intention of the Hon. Member is that the national character of the country be represented, there is some question whether this amendment, as worded, actually does deal with that issue. For example, could we have one candidate in five Provinces and 45 candidates in one Province? Under the strict technical guidelines, would this not constitute a majority of Provinces? Is it still dealing with the intentions of the Hon. Member? We have some questions with regard to the form of this Bill because the complex question of how one divides up the country and how one legitimately apportions these candidates in the country is not covered by this amendment. So we do have several questions, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the form of this amendment, but if, as you suggested, there might be some disposition of the House to refer the matter to committee, I am sure the committee will take into consideration

my remarks. I happen to serve on the committee and I would make sure that these matters would be raised.

In addition to the question of form, Mr. Speaker, I would also like, for the benefit of the House, to raise some questions with regard to the content or key elements which are being brought into play here. Now, I know we would probably want to avoid undue extremes in legislation. By that I mean we want to make sure that we do not present any sort of artificial impediments to legitimate Parties which may have regional origins. History shows that Parties like the CCF began on the Prairies, a regional origin, and at the outset may not necessarily have had quite the same sort of national scope envisioned in this Bill. The Progressive Party began in the West. We have various parties with regional beginnings, and I do not know whether this proposed legislation necessarily excludes that; so we would have some questions on the content. On the other hand, I think we are aware that this legislation would permit almost all regionally-based Parties to be registered. I think we appreciate in one sense the intent of the Hon. Member in looking at the question of nationhood, federal Parties and Canada’s federal character, but I do want to point out these reservations as to content.

• (1540)

On a sociological basis, Mr. Speaker, we would also want to look at what is done in other countries with regard to registering Parties. For example, I note that the handbook of the House of Commons in Great Britain lists Parties such as the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Official Unionist Party, the United Ulster Unionists and the Ulster Unionist Party. What exactly their status is concerning registration is, of course, something which would require a little bit more research, but if the Mother of Parliament allows, as it were, regional Parties the opportunity to express their concerns and opinions, I am wondering whether we should not be as open-minded.

I know the Hon. Member has expressed some concern about the Pequiste Party in Quebec, but if some of their members were elected to this House, I wonder if rubbing shoulders with people from Manitoba, Saskatchewan or B.C. this would not give them some additional perspective. Before long they might see that some of the perceptions held by other Canadians are valid and some of them might have a change of heart or opinion.

I would like to examine on a philosophical basis whether we want these types of restrictions at this time, Mr. Speaker. We have just come through a very trying period with regard to our Constitution. Included in that Constitution is a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Everyone has the freedom of conscience and religion, the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media communications, the freedom of peaceful assembly and association. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we could include in freedom of association the question of political association. Would we be placing an unnecessary impediment in the way of people who wish to register a Party?