

Private Members' Business

There are a number of myths that I would like to explore connected with elections and election expenses.

• (1750)

The first is that there is a correlation between the amount one spends and success in an election. I do not have to look any further than my own constituency and the last federal election to disprove that point.

In the last federal election expenditures in Halifax West, my own constituency, by the New Democratic Party candidate exceeded the expenditures made on my behalf in the election campaign by a considerable amount. I think it well may be that New Democrats saw the possibility of victory in their own defective way and that caused them to spend the amount of \$44,434 on the election. Whereas in my own case the amount was \$36,535. It was a very modest amount considering the limitation applicable to Halifax West, but here is the point that I want to make.

In 1988 the number of votes acquired by the New Democratic Party in Halifax West dropped to 9,011 from 11,626 in the 1984 election. That drop represented a decrease from 20.8 per cent of the entire vote to 16.3 per cent.

I can understand in a way why members of the New Democratic Party are concerned about election expenses. It is because they proved, at least in the case of the federal constituency of Halifax West, that the greater effort in terms of expenditure of funds did not produce the electoral result they presumably wanted to achieve. Their vote dropped in terms of numbers and percentage and their election expenditure went up very dramatically.

We ought to recognize that there are a number of aspects and factors involved in expending money on an election campaign. If I had my own desire, the amount that one could spend would be dramatically limited. Some items could even be excluded such as signs on lamp posts and other public places that are an annoyance in some cases to the public and contribute very little to the electoral process.

I think we should be considering some of those items. What is an appropriate object of an electoral expense? This can be done by a group like the royal commission on

a non-partisan, objective basis. That would result in a better election law for all candidates and in turn for all Canadians.

If we review the current definition of electoral expenses which we all agree is inadequate and causes amazing difficulties, I do not think anybody would support continuation of the exact provisions of the current definition of electoral expenses. But whether the provisions proposed by the hon. member for Churchill in his Bill C-283 are an appropriate change and reform is another question.

Let me give one example. The member for Churchill mentioned that under the current definition one could expend money on election day to provide financial assistance to workers. Provided it was below a percentage of the minimum wage it would not be considered an election expense. I think that determination is fraught with error. I hasten to point out, in case anybody is interested, that my largest election expense included in that very modest amount of \$36,535 was \$14,000 for that exact service, to defray the cost of those who worked on election day knowing that they had to pay for child care, knowing that they had to incur expenses for meals, knowing that they had to provide transportation. In the case of each poll we provided a modest amount of money to defray those kinds of expenses. The total of all that expenditure was \$14,000 and was over a third of the total expenditure.

When the member says that amount does not have to be included in election expenses, I wonder what other members did with respect to the reporting of their election expenses. The point I am trying to draw from that is that there is a definite lack of uniformity in accounting for election expenses.

When we look at the division and the classification of election expenses as we go over the report of the Chief Electoral Officer respecting election expenses, we are left in the dark in terms of what exactly was expended and for what exact purpose.

As I have clearly indicated, an item that was a major item in my election expenditure is not even considered an election expenditure by some other candidates because it involves a modest amount paid to party workers to defray their expenses.