

Election Expenses Bill

confidence that elections that take place in Canada pretty clearly and generally reflect the popular will of the day. We cannot judge the popular will, though at times we might make comments about it. Certainly ever since I have been in this House and long before that we have had at the helm a Chief Electoral Officer who was a man of ability and integrity, a judgment which I am sure is universally held and widely shared.

There are some things about this measure which cause me immediate concern. I agree that there are advances in it, and not for one moment do I suggest that much good has not been produced in this bill. But I am troubled about many matters. In the first place, we do not really yet have anything like a limitation on what parties will be spending. The big, well-heeled party will still have the advantage over the other parties not so affluent, and I do not say that because I do not happen to belong to the most well-heeled party. But let us not pretend that we are putting a ceiling on election expenses when in fact it is something a good deal less substantial than a ceiling. We must note that we are limiting expenses to some aspects only, such as advertising, broadcasting and printing material. We all know there are many other areas than these.

I would not use the word that the minister used: the other expenses are not "static" and they are certainly not insignificant. Heaven knows, they are not lacking in costliness. The disclosure provisions are not such as to create a tremendous advance or to cause any real quaking and shaking. It is not terribly hard to form a corporation, shall I say. There are many ways whereby in its administration and its practical operation this measure will be something less than a gem of perfection.

Another thing that I do not see dealt with here and which concerns me is that if we believe that parties are important—and they are important—we must recognize that parties have to live between elections as well as at election time. I think this consideration should and could have been thought about. The minister mentioned that various new positions would be created and an auditor would be appointed. I presume that the Chief Electoral Officer will pay him too. I hope that this will not be a charge upon the local candidate. I also noted that in the picking out from the Barbeau report and the picking out from the special committee report we lost what I thought was a very good suggestion, that of free mailing. I think that would have been a useful and helpful contribution to the conduct of an election. Surely we should be able to facilitate contact between a candidate and the people he seeks to represent.

I shall not dwell long on the idea of the tax credit or discuss it in contradistinction to the tax exemption; I might get mixed up, as the minister did momentarily this morning on the radio, though he soon corrected himself. I am wondering whether perhaps somewhere along the line we might make it easier for the little man to contribute and help, because I believe parties should be as broadly based as possible, with as many people as possible helping to make that party something in which they have a part and a tangible investment. That is the way you make a broadly based, popular party and I believe that is a very good thing.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

• (2110)

When I get to the clause on broadcasting I see more evidences of haste than in any other clause. This is an area which will be filled with problems and which will require many amendments and reconsiderations. In the first place, what genius thought up the notion that prime time for radio is between 6 to 12 p.m.? That, surely, is not the kind of thing that people with this bill in their pockets since 1966 or 1970 should have let go by. That is not prime time for radio at all. In spite of the fact that we have spent millions preparing for satellites, there are still places in this country which depend upon the radio for messages of this kind and of other types. This bill lumps together TV and radio, and a little separation or surgery will be required there. In this whole area we find evidence of haste which would almost lead to sinister suggestions to which, of course, I do not want to give utterance.

An hon. Member: You are restrained in that regard.

Mr. Macquarrie: Yes, I am a very restrained man. As I read over the clauses I am wondering just how they are going to become operative. I am wondering what we are going to do with the broadcaster who has his prime time fully booked, yet the state tells him he must carry this and that. Who decides whether he cuts into Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola time? He may have a bit of a problem in deciding which one he should bump. Who copes with the candidate's strategy in preferring to concentrate his small, limited amount of time rather than spread it out? There you have another problem. I notice that proposed section 99(2) is very much in need of guidelines and I think this will have to be discussed in great detail and more explanation will be required. The minister was probably very wise in gliding over this subject pretty quickly.

I come to another problem in this whole area, in respect of what you do with newspapers during the blackout period before election day. We had grown accustomed to having 48 hours during which we had no TV or radio political messages. This time was cut down to 24 hours. We now have this inhibition moved to the written media, the newspapers. We read that any article, editorial, advertisement or announcement of a partisan political character in relation to the election or by-election, as the case may be, is an offence under this act.

Supposing the Leader of the Opposition goes to Toronto the night before an election and addresses a tremendous crowd of enthusiastic people. What do the newspapers of that city do? Do they blot it out altogether or do they send two reporters, one of whom might say that many people thought it was an enthusiastic meeting while the other might say many thought it was not? Perhaps they might say there were a number of people there but they are not able to disclose how many because that might look like something of a "political nature". I suggest you are going to make namby-pambies out of the press lest they be charged with the offence set out in the act.

How are they going to report a political meeting? This is still a legal operation for them which now, under this bill, they may not fulfil. I believe in this connection the bill extends a badly defined prohibition which had existed heretofore for broadcasters only. This extends it to the press, which is a much more difficult media to have