

Election Expenses

able position of not knowing with certainty from where, or even if next month's rent will be forthcoming. The need for revamping the system has been known to the public for a considerably longer time, in fact ever since there has existed the suspicion—and in some cases the actuality—of a political system operating on patronage, favours, jobs and other amenities offered and granted in return for party and candidate funding.

However, any attempt to improve the financing of political parties and candidates and free elections must not, on the other hand, jeopardize the fundamental democratic principle that the individual ought to be free to influence the choosing of the form of his government and those in government, that is, the individuals who exercise direction and control over so much of his existence. The individual should be free to choose to support a particular person, a particular party or a particular political philosophy and, just as important, to choose not to support any particular one.

Further, his method of support or non-support, provided of course it is peaceful, should also be his choice. He may wish merely to vote for a party or man, do volunteer work, actively campaign, write or speak in favour of or against a candidate, offer himself as a candidate, or contribute money in lieu of personal effort or time. The individual freedom to make a choice is best guaranteed only if the choice is actually his and is free from the scrutiny, comment and possibly the derision of others.

The secret ballot principle is an example of democracy's attempt to protect the individual's freedom of choice. By guaranteeing the voter's privacy during and after the casting of his vote, the possibility of others unduly influencing the vote is eliminated. Of course, some of these methods of supporting a party, an individual or philosophy are public and are intended to be public. Perhaps in conflict with this necessity of protecting the individual's freedom of choice is the necessity of maintaining a financially sound political party system and, further, one that engenders public confidence in it. Acts done and decisions taken secretly create suspicion as to motive in the minds of those not party to the secret.

Canadian political parties and candidates have traditionally relied upon donations from individuals, corporations and associations, and indirectly from governments, to finance their activities. The practice in some countries of political parties operating businesses, publishing newspapers and magazines, owning land and other income-producing enterprises has never been used to a great extent in Canada. The private donation has been the single, most dependable way of financing political activities. However, it has also become the source of some controversy and the cause of considerable mistrust of our system among large segments of society.

The high cost of carrying on an effective election campaign is not appreciated by the general public, which of course is not closely associated with a political party or candidate and does not realize the costs involved. The distrust stems from the suspicion that political parties maintain close liaison with corporations, associations and pressure groups that make large donations in return for favourable legislation, jobs, contracts and other amenities. The public tends to feel that either the parties do not need

further financial assistance or that politics is a crooked business anyway, and they do not want any part of it.

● (1630)

As I mentioned earlier, those involved in the process know that it is an obvious and painful fact of everyday life that parties and candidates are poor. Party and candidate financing has always been a precarious undertaking at best. When one realizes the tremendous responsibility the system places upon candidates and parties, especially opposition parties, to communicate to the people the meaning and effect of the myriad decisions and acts taken daily which directly affect their lives, the low priority our political institutions are given in terms of financing is incredible. It has been noted that Canadians spend more on chewing gum each year than on support of their political party.

The task, then, of this House and of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections is a delicate and difficult one indeed. We must formulate legislation which will achieve three important and sometimes conflicting goals. The first goal is to improve the financial plight of political parties, the second is to improve public confidence in our party system, and the third is to ensure that while achieving the first two, the freedom of each Canadian to choose not only the man and the party or philosophy which appeal to him but also the manner in which he may wish to support them, is totally safeguarded.

To assist in this task the government has had available to it a plethora of studies, reports and practical experiences in at least three Canadian provinces which have enacted legislation similar in intent to this bill. The time for studies, reports and analyses is past. The time for legislative action is now, prior to the next election.

Without dealing in specifics, which will be done by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, I should like to make some general comments about several areas of the bill which I feel fail to satisfactorily achieve what should be the three aims which I just mentioned. In the area of candidate and party subsidies, once, we have accepted the proposition that it is proper to use public funds to assist in the financing of a political system then the formula, and ultimately the amount to be involved, must be very carefully thought through. I feel that the emphasis should be on keeping public financing to a minimum, the absolute minimum necessary to ensure that serious parties and candidates may present their ideas and positions to the public. Further, public subsidies should not be related to any specific method of expenditure of the subsidy; that is, the grant of public funds should have as few strings attached as possible. I think the hon. member for York North (Mr. Danson) made reference to the argument in this respect, but I do not recall that he endorsed that position. He simply stated it was a position to consider, and it certainly is.

The legislation should not attempt to dictate how and when such funds should be used. It should leave to the candidate or party the greatest possible degree of freedom to decide in their own minds how to expend the funds. Each candidate and each party knows best how to run the election. The candidate knows what his electorate will listen to and how to communicate with them, and he