

Election Expenses Bill

On the same page the report gives figures indicating that the cost of an election to the treasury was estimated at about \$13 million and that "the last campaign, all told, will have cost about \$32 million to Canada." Mr. Speaker, \$32 million does not grow on trees. This statement gives the lie to some of the arguments to the effect that control of election expenses is not necessary. In 15 years, I have gone through five or six elections. In fact, elections were coming about once a year. This \$13 million is a fixed expenditure by the government, and I think it is an indication that we will have to do something about election expenses not only from the candidate's point of view but from the point of view of political parties. To some extent, much more important to the general public is the \$13 million that a general election costs the treasury.

Mr. Speaker, consideration should have been given to the establishment of a permanent voters' list in this bill. I am sure everyone will agree that the reason the government did not call an election for July is simply that they were aware it would be impossible, even with the expenditure that the government itself makes, to set up machinery that would function in the holiday period. I am sure that would have been true from the point of view of political parties and that the electoral officers in each area would have had considerable difficulty in running the machinery. An election in July would have been a calamity, in my opinion. I remember an election in August and there was considerable confusion about enumeration then. You had a list one day, but when you phoned the people about one-third were on holidays and another one-third were preparing to go. We should be considering the establishment of a permanent voters' list as a means of cutting down election expenses.

There obviously has to be control over political parties. I am only guessing, but I would say the nomination of a candidate in my riding recently cost as much, if not more, for newspaper and radio advertising than I would spend in a general election. I doubt very much that it was his own money, although it was very interesting that one of the candidates called it his nomination convention—it was not a Liberal convention, it was his. I understand that he received a sizeable amount of money from Ottawa and it was used for that purpose.

An hon. Member: A LIP grant!

Mr. Peters: I suggest that this is part of the problem. If we are not to control the contributions made to political parties, there is not much point in controlling the expenditures made on behalf of an individual.

Mr. Speaker, I can honestly tell this House how much was spent on my election because we had to raise the money. I can also state that the New Democratic Party works differently from some other parties because 20 per cent of the budget that we report for election expenditures goes to our provincial office. It is then distributed in some way in other ridings, so that for every thousand dollars raised 20 per cent or \$200 has to go to the provincial office. The more you raise, the more the provincial office gets. Of course this system has disadvantages as well.

Knowing exactly how much was raised and how much was spent in my riding, I still cannot be sure how much

[Mr. Peters.]

the party would contribute to my election in terms of national newspaper advertisements, in efforts made simply by allowing the \$200 deposit in some ridings where it is difficult to get a candidate with \$200 of his own. I do not know what the benefit to me may be in those circumstances, but there is some. There are advantages and sometimes disadvantages too, because you are not just running in a local campaign but have interference from other areas.

This matter of honest representation, it seems to me, will be more readily accomplished if we arrive at equality on the basis of the number of voters represented, the fee to be paid by the government, the allowance to be made for expenditures on T.V. and radio and establish a quota so that everybody participates equally. It is my opinion that it will not then be the coffers of the political party which will benefit; it will be the candidate chosen on the basis of equal expenditure and equal opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, other countries have looked at this matter very carefully. They have found and corrected the loopholes. If we had a government that really believed in equality, it would be trying to get the best legislation possible, not the least legislation from which they can get political gain. Using the title of this bill as a form of control of election expenses is dishonest. The bill does not do that. It puts certain limitations on the expenditures of candidates, but in my opinion it does not limit expenditures for elections and it does nothing to correct many of the abuses inherent in the present system.

This is new legislation. If the government wished, it could pick out the best sections of legislation across the country and surprise the Canadian people by accomplishing now what will likely be accomplished in 10 or 15 years. The government is always amending, always bringing in something that should have been presented in the initial stages of legislation. Mr. Speaker, surely the government will one day have enough backbone to introduce the kind of legislation that many people in this country will oppose because it does not suit their selfish ends but which will be applauded by everyone who looks at it in a non-partisan way as being the best legislation which will do most for the process of our democratic machine in Canada.

Mr. Drury: New Democratic machine.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, may I call it ten o'clock?

• (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

GRAIN—RAPESEED—LAYING OF CHARGES BY WHEAT BOARD AGAINST CERTAIN FARMERS FOR OVERDELIVERY—REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, I bring before parliament tonight a situation which involves