

about having a bias, a political belief, and making known your support and financial contribution.

There is nothing wrong with having a bias or a belief. There is nothing wrong in letting the world know what you believe in and that you are prepared to put your action and your money where your mouth is. But for some reason or other the person who is known to have a political belief and is known to support a political party is frowned on if it is known in a public way that he has made a contribution to a political party.

It seems to me that financial support for a political belief is as valid and as justified as financial support for a religious belief, a charitable organization, a fraternal society or a trade union. So in spite of some criticisms and complaints, which I submit may be justifiable, in respect of the activities of old-line parties and disclosure of contributions, that is not the main reason the New Democratic Party has asked, and the CCF before it since 1933, for full disclosure of political contributions.

The reason is that there is nothing to be ashamed of. If that contribution is made in support of a person's belief, and if there are no strings attached by the person who gives the contribution, why should not the world know about it and why not recognize the public's right to know? It has been suggested that some people may try to circumvent this bill giving \$100 rather than \$105, or by giving \$99.99 cents in order to evade full disclosure. Well, I am a follower of Nye Bevan. I am not prepared to go to the length my hon. friend from Dartmouth-Halifax has in relating all the possibilities people have of evading the law, or all the possibilities there may be of people deliberately going out of their way to circumvent the provisions of this bill. I think the overwhelming majority of the people of this country are worthy people, as Nye Bevan said, and that if you want the best behaviour from people the first thing you do is to give them a chance to behave.

Except for the few who would pervert the democratic and political process, the rest of the population of this country, including most of its politicians, will behave and will not try to circumvent this law. Those who do will face the wrath of the members and supporters of their own political party or their own constituents. I may sound naïve when I say that, but I would rather err on the side of trusting people. Because most of them will be worthy of that trust.

Another area that has been the cause of some controversy for a number of years is whether or not the public purse should reimburse politicians and political parties for some portion of the cost of elections. There are some who do not like this, and I include some of my colleagues. They do not like the idea of the treasury reimbursing parties and candidates for some part of the costs of an election. If the principle is to be applied in some sensible and fair manner without at the same time spending taxpayers' money on so-called nuisance candidates, then I submit that the floor in the bill which makes candidates eligible for reimbursement is too severe.

Again in the special committee I and others like me urged the committee and then the government that the eligibility for reimbursement should be set at the rate of 5 per cent, or 10 per cent at the most, of the popular vote. Others in the committee held out for 25 per cent, 30 per

### *Election Expenses*

cent or 35 per cent of the public vote. The committee recommended 20 per cent, and again this was something of a compromise.

I submit on behalf of the New Democratic Party that it is still too severe and adds weight to the argument of those who are opposed to public reimbursement of expenditures of candidates and political parties. If the floor is left at 20 per cent, this makes reimbursement the private preserve of established candidates and established political parties. I will be quite frank about it: it discriminates against people who might vote for the NDP, the Social Credit party or an independent candidate.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Or a Liberal in the west.

● (2120)

**Mr. Benjamin:** Or Conservatives in Quebec. If the floor is to be that high, then you eliminate candidates and possibly political parties from receiving a share of the reimbursement from the public treasury. If you have done that, then you have reinforced the arguments of those who are opposed to this in principle.

In a constituency where there is a four or five way fight and there are four or five hard working, fighting candidates, any one of them who gets 8 per cent or 10 per cent of the popular vote is a serious candidate. I agree that you need a floor in the legislation for the reimbursement of political expenditures, but surely the floor should only apply to the idiot who runs as a rhinoceros candidate and who gets 300 votes out of the 63,300 that are cast. Certainly the floor should eliminate that kind of candidate.

However, my colleague the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) pointed out the other day that a candidate in his constituency could under the provisions of this bill have received 8,000 or 9,000 votes and not be eligible for five cents reimbursement. It seems to me that any candidate, whether he is running for a political party or as an independent, who can get that sizeable a vote from a constituency is not a nuisance candidate. However, the other part of the provision is that the 8,000 or 9,000 people who chose to support that candidate will be asked to reimburse through their taxation the candidates against whom they have voted. That is why I submit that the 20 per cent floor is too high. I would like to see a provision under which any candidate receiving less than 5 per cent of the popular vote will not be eligible for reimbursement. The floor should at least be lowered to 10 per cent.

I am happy to see a provision in the bill, which may seem minor to the general public but which is serious to candidates and to political parties, under which from now on it will be illegal for all candidates and parties to send out to every voter a new voter card, half of which are wrong and as a result voters flood committee rooms with telephone calls. Now the onus is on returning officers to do that job. This will cut down on the expenses of candidates and their parties.

It has been suggested that the bill should make provision for a registrar to receive the financial reports of parties and candidates, rather than to saddle the Chief Electoral Officer with that task. I confess that I was one of