

Election Expenses Bill

beholden to foreign sources for campaign contributions, and the best remedy against this would be provision for full and adequate disclosure.

I wish to deal with just one or two other matters. As far as I understand the legislation, the present provisions with regard to disclosure by candidates and the reporting of sources of their campaign contributions remain unchanged. I suggest that is inadequate. We all know that under the present system campaign funds are lumped together and put in the name of a nominal contributor such as the riding association of a political party or a trust company, and that various other machinery is used to conceal the real source of contributions to candidates. If we mean business in this field we will ensure that the legislation provides that the real source of campaign contributions cannot be hidden in this way.

• (1510)

There is one other point. I understand this legislation provides for the reimbursement of candidates up to 25 per cent of their actual expenses plus \$250 which, as I understand the remarks of the President of the Privy Council, is designed to deal with the expenses of an auditor who is required under the legislation. I find this provision very unsatisfactory. Surely a fairer provision would not provide 25 per cent for an individual candidate but, rather, a basic allowance for all qualified candidates. In effect, this is a bonus for candidates who have the means and the desire to spend a large sum of money.

I recognize, of course, that there are limitations in various cases up to about \$30,000 for each candidate and therefore there is a limit on the amount of reimbursement he can receive. But I do not understand why a candidate should be reimbursed at a lower level for the needs of his campaign because he spends \$5,000 rather than \$25,000. If the purpose, as I understand it, is to equalize the situation, surely there should be a basic allowance for all qualified candidates rather than reimbursement based on what they spend on their election campaigns.

I was pleased that the minister said in his opening remarks that he is ready to accept suggestions and has an open mind. I remind him that this legislation is an historic step toward a more real and genuine democracy and it is of the utmost importance that it should contain all provisions necessary to that end. I want him to fill in the gaps. I hope he will proceed with an open mind and suggest that he should accept some of the recommendations of the Barbeau committee and of the special committee which are not contained in this legislation.

I hope, above all, that he will accept the proposition that if candidates are to be controlled in respect of expenditures, parties must also be controlled—because it is the parties which spend millions of dollars and which perhaps are unconsciously influenced by the source of campaign funds. Unless we do that, this measure will be a half-measure at best, and a sham.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I am glad an opportunity is now being given to me and other hon. members to participate in this debate, an opportunity which at one time we thought might have been denied us. Now, however, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has—I

[Mr. Brewin.]

believe most improperly—told the press, rather than this House, that there will be freedom from an election during this summer. We will now, therefore, possibly have a chance to consider this bill in detail.

I shall not comment, as I am not entitled to, on the statement of the Prime Minister, other than to say it appears he has yielded to the fears and tears of members of his party from Ontario and other parts of Canada and has postponed the election. However, I hope hon. members who appear to have something to say will now enter the debate and give us the benefit of their views on this subject.

First of all, I support what the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) said concerning the special circumstances of the constituencies in the far north and those parts of Canada which because of their area and access to means of communication present very special problems to candidates and voters in an election campaign. I recall the first election in which I was a candidate, I believe in 1935. I was too young at that time to know better; I was seduced into politics! In any event, I recall the various means of transportation I had to use, such as boats, aircraft and snowmobiles in an election campaign which lasted for months.

There is no question that the situation has improved since then. The means of communication in the north has improved. The scattering of isolated communities in the north and in the near north is such that I believe the eloquent pleas of the hon. member for Yukon should commend itself to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) and other people on the government side. I shall not suggest a formula. I believe the situation should be looked at and, hopefully, the committee is the place where this might be done. I hope that evidence will be called before the committee.

The President of the Privy Council may react by saying that the Barbeau committee had witnesses before it, and also the committee of this House. But now we have concrete, specific proposals by the government and I do not think it would do any harm to receive at least a limited amount of evidence or briefs showing a reaction to what is in the bill and, possibly, alternatives or additions to it. Certainly, such evidence or briefs should be directed to the issue raised by my hon. friend from the Yukon. There is no question that elections are costly in such a riding. There is the cost involved and the wear and tear on the people. These are such as to warrant special consideration.

I have campaigned in the Northwest Territories on behalf of candidates there. My own riding adjoins that area and I know what is involved. I do not know whether the situation can be resolved by taking the population plus the area involved, with special consideration being given to the means of communication. This principle has already been accepted by the House. The amendments to the Senate and House of Commons Act, made some time ago, place members from different constituencies in different categories in respect of expenses. That principle having been accepted, I would especially urge the standing committee which studies this bill not to forget the very special conditions which exist. Having been involved in election campaigns in such an area in the early days, I know the extent to which the situation has improved in