

*Election Expenses Bill*

cal parties while making the practice of contributing to political parties more appealing. It should certainly encourage smaller contributors and reduce dependence among parties upon very large contributors.

We have chosen the tax credit system as opposed to an income tax deduction because we feel it to be a more equitable system and because it does not affect the tax base. Here again, there was a difference of opinion between the Barbeau committee and the special committee. The Barbeau committee recommended a tax credit; the special committee recommended a tax deduction. After considering the arguments for and against, we thought it was in the interest of equality among taxpayers and better for our political system to use the tax credit method.

I believe I have covered all the main items in the bill. Where we have departed from any of the recommendations of either committee I shall be glad, either on winding up the second reading debate or in committee, to go into further detail. But I am sure the principles of the bill, namely, the principle of disclosure, applicable for the first time to registered parties, the placing of a ceiling on election expenses of candidates and of political parties and, finally, the support of political activity through direct grants from the treasury to eligible candidates and through the provision of tax incentives will be widely supported.

I wish to apologize for the time I have taken in introducing this bill but I judged it to be of some interest and did not wish to miss any of the important points. I might add that I am approaching the bill with an open mind, in full knowledge that everyone in the House is an expert on the subject. We, the experts, in the House of Commons will finally determine the shape of this bill based upon what I consider to be the superior knowledge and experience possessed in this field by members of the House.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough):** Mr. Speaker, so impressed am I with the minister's very interesting defence of this bill that I am almost tempted to say "Amen" and sit down. But I will resist that temptation for a while. The minister is indeed a very plausible parliamentary practitioner when he wants to be. I must say I was more impressed by his presentation than by the bill he is presenting. As to the whole question of election expenses, I have long been an advocate—and I imagine most members of this House have been advocates—of introducing a measure of change. There is much that ought to be done; this is a very important aspect of our parliamentary system.

• (2100)

I think some of the general principles that the minister has recapitulated find general acceptance in the House. It is proper and appropriate that we officially recognize the tremendous importance of political parties to our whole parliamentary structure. Sixty years ago Lord Bryce declared that political parties are older than democracy and that no great, free, representative state ever worked without them. He was not able to see that you could work democracy without political parties. And so we must real-

ize that they are essential to the working of our system. Only too often do we hear the sordid suggestions that surround political parties rather than acknowledge the essential democratic function that underpins them.

I was immensely moved by the minister's invitation not to suggest that there was anything sinister about the timing of the presentation of his bill. I also noted his invitation to suggest why the separation of foreign contributions, which was recommended by the Barbeau committee, had not been included. I should not have thought that at this "grey" stage of parliamentary discussion that that kind of invitation would have been necessary or that such prompting would have been required.

I noted, too, that the minister said it would have been very difficult to get the measure through during all these many, many months, that even had he had it right in his pocket there may have been great difficulty about getting passage. I suppose had he never tried, he would never have known what parliament would do with his measure had he taken it out of his pocket. I have the feeling that it was not in his pocket until very lately, that this measure is a scissors and paste job, and that where Barbeau did not fit the minister used the special committee. Certainly the synchronization of the two does not strike me as the result of a long, careful series of legislative steps; I find a lot of disharmony in the piecing together of what Barbeau suggested and what our very fine special committee suggested. Therefore, I am not going to cast any sinister suggestions but I am just wondering whether there was a burning desire to produce yet another panoply of progressive excellence before a certain event, and to produce it in such a way that nothing really had to be done but produce it.

This is a discussion that has been going on for many years. The subject of election expenses has been a dreary story of sometimes shady dealings and worrisome suspicions. We have had many calls for reform down through the ages. Sir Robert Borden—as he later became—made his first speech in 1896 and spoke of nothing else but the outrageous, rotten practice that had put certain members of the other party into office. He made a very good job of it, too. There were a lot of crooked things done in olden days. For example, there was a certain sheriff who on nominating day did not tell the Conservative candidate where the nominating meeting was to take place, and the poor lad showed up after nominations were closed and there was a Grit acclamation.

I may say that my party was not free from iniquitous practice. We never forgot the Pacific scandal, though over the long course of history we were never seemingly able to become the masters at this sort of thing as another prominent and ancient party did. But it is not for me here today to throw two Beauharnois against one Pacific scandal; suffice it to say that there was room for reform.

But then, again, it should be said that down through the years as Parliaments have tackled this subject we have produced what by comparison with many states, indeed with practically any state, is a very fine parliamentary system. We have an elections act which I think compares very favourably with any I have studied, and I have studied a good many. We have improved the elections act and have in our own time, generally speaking, gained the