

Election Expenses

Mr. Danson: I mean they have minor appeal. Until they have national appeal they will not become major parties. I would not be too concerned about that. If they can outperform us in elections, that is what elections are all about and may the best man win. We will be on a much better footing now and we will have to adjust to it. It will be a tough and realistic adjustment and one which is long overdue, but we will be better off under a much better system.

I find this very much like a breath of fresh air in the whole electoral system. We should look at this legislation as an opportunity rather than a restriction that is being imposed upon us. I hope it will take a great deal of the circus out of election campaigns—not the fun, but the circus aspect can be overdone. I hope, also, that it will create a much more serious involvement, because this bill is not just for members of the House; it is for the people of Canada. It may be a cliché to say so, but the people of Canada are sometimes inclined to get the governments they deserve.

An hon. Member: They have been very lucky for the last ten years.

Mr. Danson: Now we need their support to a greater extent than ever before; we need the people's active and personal involvement in the political process. Some people feel it is something from which one should stay away, but those who become involved in election campaigns are generally interested in the way the government is run, the way taxes are paid and where the money is spent. We can focus our attention now on the policies that are put forward by the various parties, on the parties themselves, their character, their leaders, the way they communicate and, of course, on the candidates themselves.

Elections are everybody's business and I think everybody should get involved. I think all of us feel that the person who does all the crying but never becomes involved in the election process deserves less sympathy than one who complains and is involved in it. We know people involved in campaigns are hard workers, but campaigns can also be a lot of fun. It is an involvement in the very best and most important sense; it is also a source of fulfilment for all who have worked in election campaigns, and for the candidates themselves. In my opinion and in the opinion of many others, among them the hon. member from the New Democratic Party who spoke yesterday, it is the highest form of service in which we can be involved. I am not sure we always do it for that purpose. When asked what is the motivation of a politician, I think the answer is varied. There must be a high respect for service. There is a certain amount of ego involved and also a certain amount of excitement.

● (1620)

I think more people in our country should be involved in supporting the political system financially and with personal effort. If as a result of this bill we can create this new atmosphere, there will be more open elections, involving many more people and attracting many more fine candidates of both sexes.

Mr. Benjamin: Would the hon. gentleman mind my asking him a question?

Mr. Danson: I would be delighted, if it is a question I can answer.

Mr. Benjamin: I just want to be clear on what he was saying about the "you vote at" cards. Was he regretting that there was not a provision in the bill for this, or did he want it to be left to the political parties to do it?

Mr. Danson: I was regretting that there is no provision in the bill.

Mr. Benjamin: If the hon. member will look at proposed new section 27.1 on page 14, he will see it provides for the returning officer to do just this.

Mr. Danson: I appreciate that clarification. I understood it was not included, and I am delighted that it is.

Mr. Terry O'Connor (Halton): Mr. Speaker, I listened with considerable interest to the speech of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) when moving second reading of this bill. I listened to his dispassionate recital of the thrust of the bill, of what the various clauses say or, more properly, what they are intended to say. Unfortunately, I do not share his optimism that they will achieve all the purposes he says they will achieve. I feel there is a considerable amount of work to be done in the privileges and elections committee to achieve the admirable purposes outlined by him, purposes with which I and my party agree.

I also listened with interest to the speech of the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) arguing what has become the somewhat tiresome line of the NDP, that they thought of all these improvements quite some time ago and they are happy the old-line parties are finally adopting their viewpoint. We have heard this ad nauseam. I often wonder why, if they are so right in all their viewpoints, they are not anything more than a minority party in this House. The hon. member then went on to undermine his credibility in this respect by arguing points of view that were distinctly favourable to his party and not to other parties, such as seeking a reduction of the vote requirement to 8 per cent or 10 per cent before a candidate could receive reimbursement from the federal treasury, and also his argument that there should be equal media time available to all the parties in this House.

It is encouraging to me, as someone who has been involved in the study of the funding of parties and candidates for a number of years, finally to see some action on this subject by the government. Not that the action proposed by the government in the present bill is the total answer. I harbour some serious reservations about some clauses of the legislation. However, I think most hon. members will agree that it does constitute a significant step in the right direction and a significant improvement over the hastily and ill-conceived bill introduced at the end of the last parliament.

The need for extensive revamping of the system of political party and candidate financing has been obvious for many years to those involved in the political process. Living on a shoestring from day to day is a painful and difficult, but familiar existence to those involved. But, more importantly, it is frankly democratically unhealthy to permit our political institutions to fall into the vulner-