

Private Members' Business

reason is that in the United States, in my Detroit, if we went door to door like that on a campaign, we would be shot and killed or attacked”.

I leave that thought with you. No matter what we do as MPs, we do live in a democratic society and a political environment that is absolutely second to none.

[Translation]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I guess things are not going my way this afternoon. I think there is not enough time for me to make my 10-minute speech. First, I want to comment briefly the amendment to the motion, which was put forward by a member opposite a few minutes ago and which would limit the contribution to a political party to \$1 per individual.

At first glance, this may seem like a very interesting amendment. For example, there were 85,000 voters in my riding during the last election. With a budget of \$1 per voter or \$85,000, I would have had a lot more money than the law allowed me to spend. I would have had something like \$20,000 more money, without having to do anything, no door-to-door campaigning, no electoral committee, no solicitation for volunteers to work for me. In fact, without leaving my house, I would have been able to receive \$85,000 from all Canadians for my election campaign, just like my opponent. And since I had four opponents, all five of us would have received \$85,000, at \$1 per voter.

This may seem interesting compared to the tax refunds the State has to grant to people who donated to a political party. I know that the tax refunds reached \$20 million, at some point in the last few years, but if the federal government has to reimburse \$20 million, that means that some voters decided, of their own free will, to donate about \$6 million to \$7 million. What is at the root of this action and very important for the preservation of our democracy is that, when, as an individual, I decide to donate even only \$1 to a political party, I get at least the chance to pick the party I want to support.

• (1430)

The effect of the proposed formula will be that I will give one dollar to my own party and one dollar to every other party. I will have no other choice but to finance all political parties, whether I like it or not, whether their philosophy is compatible with my own beliefs or not. It would not matter anymore, everybody would be entitled to some degree of financing.

I do not believe that it is the way to build a democracy. Democracy is based first and foremost on a personal commitment, a personnel decision to support one ideology rather than another. I would hate to see legislation giving the government the authority to take my tax dollars to finance anyone who would feel like entering politics. Although appealing at first, this

measure appears rather antidemocratic and would, in the short and medium term, cause people to lose interest in politics since they would be inclined to believe that it is no longer their business. They no longer would have to get involved. All those who would want to enter politics would have the money to do it anyway and to say what they want, whenever they want and to whomever they want, and they could stay quietly at home.

I am afraid that this is not the way to lay the foundation of a sound democracy, a democracy on the move.

To have to raise money during an election campaign has its positive sides too. The objective of today's motion is not to prevent people from giving money to political parties. Not at all. On the contrary, it is to allow private individuals to contribute, but to a reasonable level. The objective is to make sure that when individuals join a political party they can, irrespective of their wealth, express their free opinion, exercise their choice and be recognized.

We do not want any involvement of companies, unions and interest groups which exist for predetermined reasons. Companies, when they request a charter, state their objectives. Unions do the same, as well as professional associations. When they ask for a charter establishing their existence, they state their objectives, and what goals they aim for by forming an association. Most unions, most professional associations would say: to defend the interests of our members. It is not necessarily for the interests of the community, and not necessarily for the interests of Canadians in general, on the contrary. It is to protect the interests of their members. When they do, they do it well.

We should not allow these organizations, these corporations, these special interest groups to have disproportionate influence because of their financial means, in relation to the private citizen who, without a fortune, cannot have his opinion expressed and recognized by his peers in a democratic assembly because he has less influence, not having had the means to contribute as much.

Democracy is based primarily on respect of individuals. If we want to motivate people to work for our election, we should not do it only by asking them for money but also by giving them responsibilities.

It is when people take the time to work for a good cause that they get together and get involved in the political aspect of every day life. In this way, they take an interest in the operations of the organization not only during an election but in between campaigns.

This is a very good way for a political party to survive and to support itself, just as any good parent would find the money to support his or her family. Any political party should also have the decency and the ability to generate its own revenues so that it be truly democratic and allow its members to participate fully.