

Election Expenses

of the views that are expressed in the next two or three days, certainly not later than Thursday of this week, barring the intervention of other government business. We want the bill to be referred to the committee so the committee can give it the reflective consideration it merits, and in order that the country might be better off as a result of this long overdue and very warmly welcomed piece of legislation.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I suppose this could be called an historic day in terms of new legislation and a new departure from Canadian political practices. I want to begin by saying something I have always felt, at least for many years, and something that has been felt by most members of this House and most of the people of Canada.

In spite of some of the things we hear said about politics and people involved in politics, I consider politics the most honourable and worth-while occupation in which a citizen in a democracy can engage. Of all the professions and occupations in our society, it seems this one is the most honourable of all. Whether we like it or not, politics affects every man, woman and child in this country 24 hours a day, every day of their lives. In fact, politics affects people before they are born and after they are dead.

We have laws which prescribe what will happen to women when they are pregnant, and what will happen to infants prior to, and immediately after, they are born. We have laws that lay down certain rules and conditions in respect of what happens to us after we are dead. So politics has an effect on us all our lives. Given that kind of a premise, which I think most people will subscribe to, what we are doing tonight is a departure from the normal practice in the Canadian political system developed since 1867 and before.

I know that my good friends and colleagues to my right and across the floor will say: Here come those puritanical, holier than thou NDP members again. I cannot resist making this suggestion, and I know my hon. friends will forgive me. There has been a 180 degree turn in respect of some of these items in this bill since a little over a year ago. Far be it for me to say "I told you so" to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) or to my good friend the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), but some of the things I tried to persuade them of a year and two years ago were not too acceptable then. I am proud to be counted among them tonight in supporting some of the provisions of this bill that were not acceptable a year ago.

Another thing I say with some reluctance is that the tragedy of this legislation is that it is not the result of practices and activities of politicians here, but rather something that is presently going on in another country.

Mr. Stanfield: Baloney.

Mr. Benjamin: I have remarked, as have others, during the past several months about the strange and sudden interest there is in supporting full and open politics and the financing thereof by people in very strange places. Only since Watergate have some people in this country finally realized that the people will no longer stand for the

[Mr. Forrestall.]

kind of thing that has taken place in Canadian politics over the past 100 or more years. I submit that the tragedy is that it took something that happened in another country to bring this to a head in Canada.

An hon. Member: It would have happened here with the NDP.

Mr. Benjamin: Last year in May and June we were dealing with government Bill C-211, I believe, in which there was no provision for a limit on how much parties could spend, in spite of pleas by myself as a member of the special committee, and many others in the government party and the official opposition, all of whom refused to consider anything in the legislation that would place a financial limitation on parties.

Mr. Stanfield: That's not true.

Mr. Crouse: You are talking about yourselves; you are supporting the governing party.

● (2110)

Mr. Benjamin: I welcome the fact that they are now supporting that kind of provision.

In respect of the limitation on parties, as I recall discussions in the special committee of 1970-71 and 1972 I and a few others proposed a limitation of 20 cents per elector. Some of my colleagues on that committee from other parties proposed a 40-cent or a 50-cent limitation per elector. The committee recommended an amount of 30 cents per elector. That was something of a compromise reached in the special committee.

At this point I want to pay tribute to that special committee of the House of Commons under the chairmanship of the former member I believe for Peel, Mr. Hyliard Chappell. We arrived at a consensus, even though some of us disagreed with some parts of the recommendation. I want to repeat now, however, the representations I made and the caveats I entered at that time in respect of the proposed 30 cents per elector being too high. Given 15 million electors in the next federal election this would mean a limit of \$4½ million on a national party.

I hope the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) will reconsider this provision in this bill and on his own volition at the committee stage bring in an amendment that would lower the limitation on parties to 20 cents per elector. If he wants to wrestle with me or whoever else happens to be on the committee, we may end up with 25 cents, but 30 cents is too high.

The other loophole in the bill last year was that there was no provision for full disclosure by parties. The disclosure provision remained as it was in the previous election act, which all of us knew was a farce. The 180 degree turn applies in this area as well. While I have some prejudices and some opinions about full disclosure, based on my experience in my party, with relation to the activities of other parties in the past ten years—and I shall not throw out some of those examples now because I think I should be statesmanlike and friendly tonight—for some reason or other for generations in our country, and I suppose in a number of other countries, there has been something bad