

*Election Expenses Bill*

party expenses, I tell him, "Rubbish". It just is not so. All he is doing is making it possible for the rest of the money to be used in such a way as to get media exposure without directly paying for it.

There is no reason why we cannot enforce a limit on party expenditures, unless we assume that the political parties in this country are thoroughly dishonest, will not obey the law and will find ways of evading it when they can. I do not make that assumption about any party in this House. I am confident that if the law requires limits, requires disclosure to be made, the political parties in this House will be meticulous in observing that law. If my confidence is misplaced, I am sorry for democracy in Canada. That is what we need, Mr. Speaker. So long as there is objection to enforcing limits on party expenditures as well as candidate expenditures, we cannot accept this bill. This, to us, in principle is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) spoke the other day he pointed out on our behalf that the reimbursement formula is totally unjust, that to put a formula on a percentage basis merely means that the public treasury gives more to him who has more. We have had too much of that from this government and from our society as a whole. We have too many laws, too much legislation, too many practices that give more to him who already has. The time has come to think seriously about giving to those who do not have. That is as true for candidates in elections as it is for anything else in a genuine democratic society.

I was not here at the time but I am sure my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is accurate, as I have found him to be, when he states that the minister said that if you do not make an allocation on the basis, for example, of the number of electors in a constituency and pay each recognized candidate a certain number of cents per elector, then you give money to somebody who cannot get money anywhere else. Mr. Speaker, I say, so what? There is a provision in the bill that before he is entitled to any reimbursement a candidate must have received 20 per cent of the votes cast. That is the requirement and that is high enough. Indeed, I think it is too high; it could easily be 15 per cent, without violating anything.

The point I want to make is that if a candidate is to receive at least 20 per cent of the votes cast before he is entitled to reimbursement, that is requirement enough. If 20 per cent of his constituents thought well enough of him to give him their support, surely the law ought to give him a reimbursement equal to the number of electors in his constituency. The amount of money he will have to spend, even if it is very little, is related to the number of electors in his constituency.

If the candidate is a member of a party which cannot give him very much money, or if he cannot raise very much money—perhaps my remarks are a little self-serving because we have some candidates in that situation—and he has to get 20 per cent of the votes cast, then I suggest that on the basis of principle on which reimbursement rests he should be entitled to reimbursement on a just percentage. That would mean reimbursement by a certain number of cents per elector in his riding.

What is the philosophy behind reimbursement? The philosophy behind reimbursement from the public trea-

[Mr. Lewis.]

sury, and I am not saying anything that every member of this House does not know, is obviously that for a democracy to function there ought to be an opportunity for the person who is poor, who does not have the means, who does not even have the sources to go to for the means, to be able to stand as a candidate. That is the philosophy behind it. Then the minister destroys that philosophy by saying that in order for a candidate to get reimbursement he must raise money outside and then he will be given a certain percentage—25 per cent of what he raises. If he raises \$30,000 for publicity—I think it is limited to publicity—then he will get \$7,500; if he can only afford \$2,000 for publicity, then he will only receive \$500, and if he can only afford \$1,000 he will receive \$250.

I ask the minister as seriously as I can, how does that jibe with the principle and philosophy of public reimbursement? If the people of Canada are going to make it possible for candidates who are poor and do not have large resources at their disposal to seek election, is that a just way for the people of Canada to act? I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that if you were to ask the people of this country—assuming that they agree to make any reimbursement, which is something I wonder about in view of the attitude that is sometimes prevalent in regard to politics and politicians—if they were in favour of reimbursement and whether they would do it on a more fair basis or on the basis of giving more to those who spend more, the overwhelming majority would say that the reimbursement should be just.

If I run in a constituency which has 50,000 electors and my opponents can raise as much money as I hope I may be able to raise in my campaign, they ought to be entitled to the same reimbursement as I because they have exactly the same constituency, the same number of electors, the same function to perform and the same job to do. That would be fair. The other method is not fair at all and it is another principle that we cannot accept.

The question of closing off partisan comment in newspapers, radio or television must be dealt with. There is one major difference between radio or television and printed material. It happens that as a young man I was national secretary of the CCF and represented my party on a committee which discussed the rules regarding broadcasts, including the question of blackout in the last 24 or 48 hours. At that time it referred to radio because television had not arrived at the end of the thirties. One of the reasons the radio people urged such a blackout was that on radio—this is also true of television—comment in the sense of editorial comment was not as frequent nor as important; the important thing was the public affairs newscast. So long as newscasts are not prohibited, radio and television can serve their purpose and function in society. Obviously, newscasts are not prohibited.

• (1720)

The Leader of the Opposition has already referred to the unfortunate incident of June 14, 1968, in Montreal that was carried all over the country on radio, television and in the newspapers. That incident may have had as much effect on the votes cast the following day as any other single incident. There is nothing in the rules to prevent television and radio carrying such a newscast. There is nothing in the rules to prevent a speech made by the