

*Canada Elections Act*

parties—and, second, there will be a limit on the amount of money spent on election campaigns.

My leader pointed out, in starting the second reading debate, that the amendments contained in Bill C-5 unfortunately seriously affected these two very important considerations. The deputy House leader of the government indicated today, certainly with regard to anonymous donations, that the government is prepared to entertain a motion. We offer our congratulations and thanks to the Minister of State (Small Business) (Mr. Abbott) who, through his contribution to the second reading debate, had a great deal to do with the government's change of attitude in this regard.

On the question of indexing, the whole manner in which the limits to election campaign spending were arrived at in the terms of the original bill at least contained a strong arbitrary component. Before we automatically attach spending limits to the consumer price index and index these limits automatically, there should be a much more careful examination than has previously been the case.

The third point I wish to make is with regard to the question of all-party co-operation. I had the pleasure of attending several meetings of the ad hoc, all-party committee which met with the Chief Electoral Officer. I know of the co-operation which existed among the members of the committee. It was something of a change from the type of attitude that sometimes exists in this House. It was, therefore, most distressing to find, when Bill C-5 was produced, that some of the recommendations agreed to by the all-party committee had been arbitrarily changed by cabinet. Every member of the House of Commons should promote opportunities for co-operation among all parties, for the common good of not only this institution but the country. It was disturbing to witness the type of action that was earlier intended.

The reaction of the government, in indicating it will reconsider these two provisions as a result of having heard the speech of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), is a welcome step in the right direction. I can state, on behalf of members of my party who participated in the committee proceedings, that we intend to co-operate fully, as we have to this point. This bill can receive expeditious treatment in committee, be returned to this House and passed at third reading in ample time for the next election, whenever it might come. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks.

**Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant):** Mr. Speaker, I, too, will be brief because the government is prepared to introduce an amendment to plug at least one very serious loophole in the bill as presented to us at second reading stage. I intend to participate in this debate when the committee reports to the House. This party has waited many years for electoral reform with regard to election expenses. For far too long the Liberal party and the Progressive Conservative party have received large sums of money from the big corporations. There has been literally no accounting whatever of those donations. I congratulate the government in finally seeing the light. We in this country must not only have political democracy, but economic democracy vis-à-vis elections. This bill will permit an ordinary

[Mr. Andre.]

income earner to contribute to the party of his choice or, indeed, more than one party.

With regard to the indexing expenses clause of the bill, this party is not totally opposed to that. However, we sincerely hope that the committee will take a serious look at this part of the bill to ensure that the indexing is kept to an absolute minimum. What is the point of trying to control election expenses if they are permitted to escalate at a very rapid rate from one election to the next? That is not fair to the smaller parties in this country.

The main point I wish to deal with is the anonymous donations section of the bill. This was amply dealt with by my colleague, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes). I want to make clear at the outset how we define anonymous donations. Some members seem to think that an anonymous donation is a sum of money in cash handed to a candidate or party, with no name attached; under the table, or however you want to put it. Obviously, that cannot be permitted if this bill is to have any meaning. I hope the amendment which the government will introduce, or which the committee accepts, will do away with that kind of chicanery, because that is all it is.

There is another very important aspect with regard to anonymous donations. In American campaign politics, in growing numbers we see full page ads asking voters to elect or re-elect John Smith, Joe Blow, or Mary Brown. Underneath the ad it states, "This ad is sponsored and paid for by the citizens to elect", or "re-elect", a particular person. Will that kind of underhanded tactic be incorporated in this bill? That slipshod method is just a gimmick to show that a certain party has the support of the clergy, labour, big business, small business, women's groups, or whatever. What they do is get token individuals from each of these major groups within an electoral district in the United States. It takes away from the rather harsh partisanship. I agree that many people today are doing that. The candidate is made to appear more accessible to the voters because these advertisements are sponsored by an anonymous committee which could be called together perhaps several months before an election.

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As members are aware, in the United States election dates are known in advance. I hope that under our system, every advertisement, whether on radio, television, in the newspapers or by way of leaflets or pamphlets, will be covered by the bill we are considering, to the extent that all such material would need to be publicly sponsored by a political party; it could not be sponsored privately and paid for by "citizens to back John Smith", and so on.

If such a provision is not in the amended bill, what is the point of bringing down a bill at all? As things are, the entire concept is nullified, because it would be very easy for a group of wealthy people to get together to organize a committee to support the candidate of their choice. What it really means is that a small group with a lot of money to spend on advertising could not contribute to the campaign of a particular candidate