

Canada Elections Act

then naturally one's perception of the economic means and abilities of those who will be running as candidates will be drastically different from one who comes from a different region of the country. The setting up of two categories of people—those who would be able to run and those who would not be able to run as candidates—is something we would not want to see in the Parliament of Canada.

At one time Abraham Lincoln said:

As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy.

To paraphrase what Abraham Lincoln was saying in different words, the minute we set up masters and slaves categories we take away the whole notion of democracy in Canada. Even if a person does not have the ability to set aside \$2,000 from his ordinary livelihood which is used to provide food, clothing and shelter to run in an election, we feel that he or she may have something to offer the country.

I am reminded of what Harry Emerson Fosdick said when he talked about democracy:

Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people.

I think this is our conviction, that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people, people who come from various working classes or various ethnic groups in society. We must realize that that type of mix is important in the House of Commons and that we should not have any kind of disincentive to prohibit such people from running for the highest office in the land.

Also it is important to stress what we in the New Democratic Party feel. There should be opportunity for true equality, which implies true equality in terms of the opportunity to run for elected office. Thomas Jefferson said:

The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favoured few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.

We do not feel that there should be inequality or that there should be this barrier of \$2,000 established so that people who legitimately feel they could run or want to run are not able to do so.

If there is a contest even for nomination, the people who run for it have to expend money for the nomination convention. Such things are not covered. There is an investment of time and other investments which have to be made. I think we would want to uphold this.

This Bill runs counter to the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1, which says the following:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

We ought to maintain that right in Canada so that anyone who wants to and is prepared to run for elected office is supported. In this country we ought to maintain the right that anyone who wants to run for elected office who is prepared to and who is supported by other people should have that right. I think there are enough disincentives. The rebate was mentioned. A person must obtain 15 per cent of the votes. If we wanted to eliminate some of the less serious candidates, or

those we perceive to be less serious, then there are opportunities to increase the number of voters who would be placed on a nomination list. That would be one way to deal with that.

• (1620)

We know that in this country there is enough financial inequality. All one has to do is take a look at the way political wheels are greased to see where and to which party the big bucks go.

I think it is important that we do not accept the suggestion made but, rather, that we defeat this Bill and follow the example in Manitoba. In other words, increase the number of eligible nominators. By doing that we would deal with the problem fairly and in a way that does not deprive us of our democracy, yet at the same time dealing with it in a way that addresses the question of equality and fairness.

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, Clause 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights reads:

Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein.

In the explanatory notes in the little red book the Government has published along with the Charter, I find this:

The tradition of democratic rights in Canada is specifically guaranteed by the Charter. Citizens will have a constitutionally enshrined right to vote in elections for Members of the House of Commons or a legislative assembly and to seek election to either of those houses.

There is the standard. Whenever we see a Bill of this sort we must measure the Bill against that standard. We must ask ourselves whether the Bill directly or indirectly hinders the spirit of that Clause. I contend that this Bill very directly takes a run at the right of some citizens to seek public office. As such this Bill should be rejected.

I agree with the Hon. Member for Dauphin (Mr. Lewycky) who has quoted from a variety of sources to back up that sentiment. I congratulate him for doing so.

I think this Bill reacts to a perceived inconvenience. Its intent is to erect a barrier to prevent people who somebody somewhere thinks are not serious from running for office. I do not believe that we have the right to decide whether one candidate is a serious candidate and another is not. I believe we should be removing these barriers to people's participation in elections. I do not think we should be raising new ones.

I can sympathize with the Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn). I was at an all-candidates meeting in his riding in 1980. About eight or ten of us were there. There were many people who worked for various parties. After the election I took a look at the results both in the Hon. Member's riding and in my riding. We went through this inconvenience of many candidates on the ballot, but after the election the people said it differently than we did. People did not think it was an inconvenience to have numerous candidates.

In the riding of the Hon. Member for Mississauga South 624 people voted for those who could otherwise be designated