

Election Expenses

An hon. Member: Or, they may have supported the progressives and the conservatives.

Mr. Knight: Quite so. These people may not want to disclose their donation to another political party. The provisions of the bill in this regard may inhibit their so doing. People go to public meetings to listen to candidates; they do not always agree with the candidates, but they listen. If they give money, they do not always want it to be known. Of course, sometimes people give you \$10, \$20 or \$30; that is how much they throw into the campaign. Some of these people want a receipt for tax purposes. If receipts must be provided, it is possible that some people will be reluctant to contribute. In any event, I suggest that a local, electoral district agent will be in a better position to make sure that people get what they are entitled to under this legislation.

A local electoral district agent undoubtedly will be able to follow more closely the views of the local riding association. He will know what priorities the association has established. Unquestionably, the local electoral district agent will be someone with whom the local candidate, party workers and members of the party executive are familiar. In a country as big as ours, an official party agent working out of the national capital will not be in a position to know the idiosyncrasies of local riding associations and local candidates. For that reason, I am strongly in favour of electoral district agents.

The local riding association, of course, knows much more about the events in a riding than any officer at the national level. For example, in my constituency there are over 200 polls, divided among at least 50 zones. Each zone has a different method of operating. Also, workers in ridings like to stick by their traditional ways of working. In the last election, for example, the official agent for my party ran into immense difficulties. For 20 years or more some of the local committees across the riding had been prepared to pay for the rental of halls out of their own funds, and not bill those rentals to the agent. They were so used to doing things this way that on being challenged to send the bill to the official agent they said, "No. We have not done this for 20 years and we are not interested in doing it now." As a result, the official agent had to make many telephone calls and many trips by car in an effort to persuade such committee members that the Elections Act required them to furnish receipts. That is what will take place in the constituencies with regard to funding. That is the essence of my suggestion. I do not believe it to be a traumatic change in the bill.

● (1750)

In the manner in which I worded the amendment, the agent will be in a position to recognize that he is listed with the Chief Electoral Officer through his party, that he has a commitment to follow the outline of this enormously complicated bill and that he will be obliged to a certain extent to be in touch with national headquarters as to what is taking place in his constituency.

Many of the expenses related to the operation of this provision will fall on the political parties; it will increase election expenses rather than limit them. The electoral district agent, the man who will be in charge of the collection of funds in the local area, keeping track of them

and writing the official receipts for tax purposes, will become one of the most senior officials of the party in the local district. He will undoubtedly have a considerable amount of power and influence. Perhaps it is much better to have that situation at the local area than at the national level.

If we look at the urban centres, we will see there is room for a local electoral agent. In the past couple of years, we have seen the growth of a tremendous amount of community involvement in the large urban areas. That kind of involvement should also take place in the political realm. I believe the electoral district agent can be of substantial use to an urban constituency with regard to the collection of funds and ensuring that people get their receipts for income tax purposes. The great difference in the manner of gaining funds between an urban constituency and a rural constituency in the province of Saskatchewan goes without saying.

For example, I have colleagues who run in urban-rural constituencies in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina. No national agent of a party will ever be able to involve himself in the collection of funds in a constituency that is a combination of small communities, strictly farm areas and a large urban area. In that type of constituency, there are a number of factors to be considered. The first factor in the urban setting is that the collection of funds will be through direct contribution which a national agent may well be able to handle. There will also be collections at public meetings in the urban area where a considerable number of rural people, urban people and people from both urban ridings in those cities will be contributing. In the small communities in the constituency there will be the same kind of public meeting contributions, as well as in the rural area surrounding them, involving individual collections made by a local representative of the party.

All of this will complicate the role of the national party's agent. Therefore, I think it is incumbent upon the House to seriously consider the complications and administrative nightmares which can be created by the manner in which this bill is written. I have suggested these amendments which I hope will clear the air, at least in terms of the local constituencies versus the national office.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Chair might be allowed to interrupt proceedings for just one moment to refer to a point of order raised earlier today by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard).

When Bill C-203 was called on orders of the day, the hon. member for Skeena suggested that the report received from the committee was irregular in that the bill before us included amendments passed in the committee and parts of a bill which were not covered by the royal recommendation.

Since the point was raised by the hon. member for Skeena, I have taken some time, with the assistance of the Chair's colleagues at the table and in the Chair, to look at the matter very seriously. I am prepared to admit there is an interesting point which has been raised by the hon. member.

If I understand his argument, the first point clearly relates to an amendment adopted by the committee and