

*Election Expenses Bill*

That is why we feel this bill is a hoax. That is why we take the position—and we take it as a party that has been advocating control of election expenses from the time it was farmed—that it would be better to have no bill at all than to have this one. If this bill passes and becomes law, it will be a long time before anything is done to make it effective, so we think it would be far better to stop it right now and prepare a decent and effective bill.

I welcome the comment made this afternoon by the hon. member for Peel South who was chairman of the Special Committee on Election Expenses. He said that the bill ought to be sent back to the special committee, that the special committee should be reconstituted so that it might participate in the drafting of a better piece of legislation. That deficiency in the bill, namely, that it does not provide any real or effective control on the limit that can be spent in an election campaign, is in itself enough to condemn this piece of legislation. A candidate in an election is limited in what he can spend on certain kinds of projects but not on all the things on which he can spend money, and the parties are not limited at all. Therefore I suggest the bill is so deficient on that point that we have to say that its principle, commendable as it is, is nullified by the terms of the legislation.

• (2020)

The second weakness in the bill is one that we feel very strongly about—although in some quarters of the House our view may not be shared—and that is its failure to require disclosure of campaign contributions. We recognize quite readily the difficulties that would arise if full disclosure were called for; there are some contributions. But I suggest that in terms of the effective working of democracy those problems are minor compared with the problems that are created by a situation in which powerful corporations can make sizeable contributions to the parties of their choice, knowing that there need be no public disclosure of those contributions.

May I remind hon. members of the House that this statement of mine—a statement that was made many times from this part of the House—about contributions to the older parties is supported by a statement that was made on February 14, 1972, here in Ottawa by Mr. R. G. Renkin, the Ontario provincial chairman for the Liberal party red carnation fund. The statement was very clear and very true. It was in these words:

The Liberal party has operated for many years on the support of 95 major Canadian corporations.

I urge very strongly that that kind of situation must be cured. It has bedevilled Canadian politics for a long time.

**Mr. Yewchuk:** What is wrong with it, Stanley?

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** What is wrong with it is that it makes it possible for vested private interests to control the affairs of this country by making contributions which enable parties to have so much money to spend that they can capture the vote of the electorate at election time.

**Mr. Yewchuk:** Where is the evidence for that?

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** If my hon. friend had not moved adjournment of debate this afternoon he could have continued his speech and given us the evidence one way or the other, but it is a fact of Canadian history. There have been scandals in the past and there have been valleys of humiliation over this very fact of the kind of contributions which corporate interests have made to the two old parties of this country. We feel very strongly that if we are going to do anything about election expenses we should cure this evil. Let us cure it by requiring that there be full disclosure of campaign contributions.

That recommendation has been made at various stages in the study of this matter, but when the government brought in this bill it did not see fit to include it. We think it is somewhat odd that in reference to the income tax credits to be allowed for contributions, reports have to be made in secret to the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Gray). It continues to puzzle me how the Minister of National Revenue can have this information in that capacity, know what contributions have been made to this party and to all the other parties, and yet as a politician, a member of the government in power, to be assumed not to have this information.

If there is to be someone to whom this information has to be reported, we suggest that it should be an independent officer of parliament rather than a minister of the government. That, I may say, is in passing because the main point I am making is that in our view a bill dealing with election expenses in the year 1972 which does not touch the question of disclosure does not deserve the support of this House. A bill that does not do that should be given the treatment suggested this afternoon by the hon. member for Peel South, although let me make it clear that he did not suggest it for this reason but for several others. Such a bill should be sent back for redrafting so that it will deal with the problems we face in this field.

Another area where we feel this bill is deficient is in the area of reimbursement, and I should like—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel):** Order, please. The hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Yewchuk:** Mr. Speaker, I wondered if the hon. member would allow a question. I am curious to know if, as the hon. member states, corporations making contributions to parties leads to corruption, how disclosure of their names would necessarily stop that.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the light of day cures a great many things. Dare I say that some people love darkness because their deeds are evil. I have said it anyway. What you can do in the dark can be a lot more evil than what you can do in the broad light of day. I suggest that if the information of who was supporting the Liberal party, the Progressive Conservative party, the New Democratic Party or the Social Credit party were made public, the country would at least know the source of that support and some things that are now being done would not be done. The people of the country would be much more free and able to make