

that the democratic process within parties should be guaranteed by the Canadian constitution. Even the United States constitution does not go this far, though in the American system internal political questions have sometimes found their way to the courts. Perhaps the best example of that was the matter concerning delegates at the last Democratic presidential convention that was referred to the courts last year. In any event, the constitution committee decided not to make this kind of recommendation if only on the ground that not all political problems can be dealt with by a constitutional document.

● (1710)

This bill deals only with the periphery of the whole area of party functioning. It nevertheless represents an important government initiative and innovation. Traditional election laws looked at individual candidates and not at parties. I have no doubt this results from the fact that parties developed in their present form only in the course of the nineteenth century, and in Canada only really since confederation, even though in Canada it is true that control of election spending came after the parties themselves had developed.

Perhaps because of the legislative control, abuses have been almost non-existent at the riding or candidate level. At least, I feel this is an assertion I can make which will be supported by most members of this House. Those abuses which have found their way into our system have been primarily at the national party level. It may be indeed that even at the national level there have been very few abuses apart from those already well publicized, such as the Pacific scandal and the Beauharnois scandal, which are an important part of Canada's political history.

The important point, however, is that we do not know; even those of us who spend our lives within political parties have no way of knowing, and do not know, the ways in which parties are financed at the national level. We do not know where the money comes from. We have some knowledge of what it is used for because we can see the results of that, but no accounting is made to us of party funds. Secrecy breeds suspicion and only the light of knowledge can enable the Canadian people to have confidence in the workings of our political system. That is why I strongly support the principal change between this bill and that proposed last year, the full disclosure of all contributions of \$100 or more.

I think the fact that there is a threshold at which the provision of full disclosure comes into effect, and which means perhaps a theoretical interference with the principles operative, is justifiable in terms of convenience. I do not think anyone would seriously contend that, even if there were any fear that a candidate could be corrupted or that a party could be corrupted, he or it could be corrupted by donations of less than \$100.

Turning to the other problem, that of assistance to parties, I must admit I have some reservations about the direct financing of political parties. Other members have expressed similar reservations. Of course, it is only partial financing of political parties and yet I think this still creates a problem.

Let me emphasize first that assistance to political parties has been too little understood as one of the necessities

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of our political system. Inadequate party financing is just as dangerous to democracy as is an excess of party financing. The party system demands adequacy of funds, and while it is not necessarily the duty of the state to see that those funds are obtained, it is also true that if we are to have anything like equality between the political parties which contend in our society, the kind of restraint, which in this instance is proposed to contributions is very relevant to the whole problem.

In my view, the best form of assistance would be the tax credit, which this bill of course also proposes. This to my mind is an innovation which is entirely to the good; I shall express one reservation in respect of it concerning the internal structure of the party, but I believe generally speaking this type of assistance to parties is entirely to the good. It will enable parties to make the broadest possible appeal. The man who contributes as little as \$2 or \$5 to his party will be able to have a credit for that, and this will provide an incentive to parties to go to people in great numbers, in the thousands or maybe in the tens or hundreds of thousands, to make contributions to the political party of their choice.

The Americans have tried a slightly different system using the income tax form. I understand it has not been very successful in their system, at least in their first year or two of experience with it. I think they have a kind of check-off system through the tax returns. I believe the proposal the government has put forward here is the best possible.

With respect to direct payments, I think the advantages, or the balance between the advantages and disadvantages, have not quite been clear. I recently sent a questionnaire to my constituents in which I asked the following question:

It has been proposed that the federal government should pay a portion of the election costs of political candidates in federal elections. Do you think this would be a good idea if it were accompanied by a limitation on what candidates could spend and a requirement of disclosure of contributions by parties and candidates?

Of those who replied, totalling 2,200 people, 50.9 per cent answered yes, that they would support such a contribution; 37.6 per cent said no, while the other 11.5 per cent were undecided. There was therefore a majority in favour of providing contributions. But the comments that many constituents wrote with their answers, especially on negative replies on this point, revealed that a great many of them had a lack of understanding concerning the type of thing which might be done. Their tendency was to regard this as a gigantic boondoggle on the part of political candidates, and primarily on the part of members of parliament. If we are to have such a provision it must be explained much better to the public than it was understood by the people at that time. However, my reservations about it are not really on that score. They are in respect of the extent to which it interferes with the true operation of the principle of democracy.

What I think is important is that all parties should have equal access to contributions. I believe that is ensured by the tax credit proposal. But, would it not be more desirable to have a situation in which the number and amount of contributions presumably reflects a party's appeal? With the guarantees proposed in this bill, which we hope will be