

*Election Expenses Bill*

• (1450)

I would draw to the attention of the government that not only are these two northern areas—the Northwest Territories more so than my own riding—lacking in road networks, railroads and commercial air services, which places a financial burden on the shoulders of any campaigner, but in addition they suffer from a lack of conventional radio networks and conventional television networks as established here in the south. The burden placed on campaign organizations to finance other means of communication is very great. We do not reach the majority of our voters by radio and television but by means of printed material which is published in the form of flyers, booklets or letters, and postage is another factor that has to be taken into account.

In view of these differences, I suggest that the government seriously consider amending the bill before us and making exceptions of these not more than half dozen ridings in Canada that are handicapped as I have described. I am sure that the matter will be raised in committee, and in discussing it with the House leader a few moments ago he was not averse—in fact, he was quite amenable—to considering the exceptions that I drew to his attention. But without such amendments, and without limiting the expenses that can be laid out in an election campaign, the provisions set forth in the bill almost mean that candidates may as well stay at home.

Another of the limitations set forth in the bill is the \$1 for each of the first 15,000 electors on the list of eligible voters. There are in excess of 15,000 eligible electors in the Northwest Territories but substantially less than that in the Yukon. So not only is a burden imposed on campaigners in northern ridings in regard to transportation costs, but because of the smaller population we also are severely limited under the \$1 per voter formula.

The election campaign expenses in the Yukon that have been filed following the last three to four elections have varied between \$20,000 and \$25,000, and I am sure a similar amount would have been spent in the Northwest Territories—indeed, it should have been substantially more. I can see no reason for not limiting these expenses to a sum in the order of \$15,000, and in the Yukon \$5,000 should be set apart for transportation and the other \$10,000 split between printing costs and other expenses. In the Northwest Territories, a ball park figure would be of the order of \$25,000 to \$30,000. What it would be for Coast-Chilcotin or Grand Falls-White Bay-Labrador, I am not prepared to guess; I am more familiar with the two northern ridings.

Therefore, I suggest there must be a reassessment made regarding the section of the bill that (a) limits expenses on the basis of number of voters in a riding, and (b) limits reimbursement of travel expenses in light of the lack of conventional communication facilities in the north compared with those in the south. With those remarks I hope that the government will reassess their position in the matter, reconsider the provisions of the bill affecting the two northern ridings and one or two others in this country, and introduce the appropriate amendments at the appropriate time.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

**Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood):** Mr. Speaker, the Barbeau committee in its report on the history of Canadian election expenses legislation had this to say at page 13:

The legislative response to the problem of money in elections throughout Canada exhibits a consistent but melancholy pattern.

I must say that the latest chapter in this history, Bill C-211, has not escaped that pattern. It is still a melancholy pattern full of gaping holes, and the largest and most glaring is the failure to deal with what is the nub of the whole question of election expenses, that is a firm limitation of expenses by parties as distinct from candidates. Any legislation that purports to control election expenditures by candidates but neglects to control election spending by parties is, at best, a halfway house and, at worst, a sham and an evasion.

What should be the aim of legislation in this field? In my view, genuine democracy involves equal rights and opportunities for all citizens without regard to the size of their bank accounts. A system which provides for the financing of election campaigns through large and secret campaign funds from corporate interests and other wealthy interests is a denial of genuine democracy. It involves the purchase, indirect though it may be, of influence for the chosen few. Any system that depends on financing from a corporate elite which already have enough power breeds public apathy and disillusion. It means that while we have what is partially a democratic system, it is in essence a system of plutocracy. This is what I find today and the legislation before the House does nothing to alter it.

I agree that some democracy is better than no democracy, but what we need is a more perfect democracy, and this can only be obtained if our representative system is fair and just to all. If parliamentary democracy, for example, can be regarded as a race for the honour of representing the people, then the present system handicaps the poor and bonuses the rich. When the race starts, some candidates are miles in front of others. The parties and individuals that possess the necessary money to advance their cause before the voters have a tremendous advantage over those who do not. In North America, this system has reached the point where to be a candidate for high office in the United States you have to be a millionaire. Indeed, perhaps I am behind the times and you have to be a multimillionaire in order to succeed.

• (1500)

In my view the Barbeau committee report is an excellent report, one of the best I have read on this subject. I want to read to the House some of the recommendations in that report which I think ought to be incorporated in legislation in this field. These recommendations are found at page 37 of the report and read as follows:

Political parties should be legally recognized and, through the doctrine of agency, made legally responsible for their actions in raising and spending funds.

I take it that “legally responsible” means they must be controlled and checked in that function. The second recommendation reads:

A degree of financial equality should be established among candidates and among political parties, by the extension of certain services and subsidies to all who qualify.