

Election Expenses Bill

suspect that corporation would have difficulty in getting a DREE grant. Just imagine the situation if the minister were sitting in cabinet and a number of his colleagues made a great pitch for company "X", he knowing that the company had not contributed to his party and that his vote would be influenced by this kind of information. This difficulty could be overcome by establishing a registry in which to list contributions to political parties, where the lists could be publicly inspected.

There is another side to this donation business, Mr. Speaker. Under the provisions of this bill a company may donate \$1,500 to a political party and one third of that, a maximum of \$500, is tax free. In other words, a company may deduct that amount from its tax; and we must bear in mind the fact that the tax structure at that level is about 30 per cent. If we want to keep people honest we should know which orchestra is being paid and who is paying them. In that way we will have a better idea of the tune that is being played. Further, this registry should list contributions made to all candidates and not only to elected candidates. It should list annual contributions to political parties.

The Barbeau report recommended a total prohibition on public opinion polls during election campaigns. If public opinion polls did no good and were of no political value, I should be able to convince some of my leaders that we should not conduct them. In my opinion, the Gallup poll has on occasion influenced elections unduly—in fact, on at least two or three occasions during the last ten or 15 years. The Canadian people deserve better electoral reform legislation than they now have, and I think the general public is in favour of electoral reform in order to make the democratic process as effective, as efficient and as painless as possible.

• (1550)

I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett):

That Bill C-211 be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned this afternoon with the subject of electoral expenses and reform, the financing of elections and the financing of political parties. It is unquestionably a subject of the greatest importance: the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), who led off the debate for our party, emphasized this. He pointed out a number of inadequacies in the bill and mentioned that there were at least three factors of particular importance that the bill touched upon: one, the matter of contributions to electoral expenses of parties from the public treasury; two, the control of the expenses of parties and candidates; three, the question of the disclosure of the source of funds.

I do not know how much good the provisions in the bill relating to disclosure will do, and I do not object to them nor to the question of disclosure of category. I realize that there is strong feeling in the country in favour of disclosure of names of individuals or corporations. I say quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that I do not endorse the suggested requirement of individual disclosure because I have con-

siderable respect for the power of government to bring influence to bear upon those who are opposing it.

It has been said, of course, partly by way of joke, that under this bill with its provision for the deduction of contributions for tax purposes up to a certain point, the government would have the best of both possible worlds; that by virtue of the disclosure that would have to be made to the Department of National Revenue, the government would know who was making contributions without having to make any disclosure itself. I see no alternative: if one is going to encourage contributions by allowing tax deductions, these of course have to be claimed through the Department of National Revenue. I am not as cynical about this as the hon. member who just spoke, and I hope my comments in this regard will be justified when some such measure becomes law. I put it that way because I wish to make it very clear that I am not supporting the bill which is before the House at the present time.

The question of contributions from the public treasury toward legitimate candidate and party expenses is an important one. It is a principle which I favour with great zeal, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of important reasons for supporting legitimate contributions to serious candidates, under proper conditions, in elections. One of these reasons is that it provides a better opportunity to candidates who do not have substantial financial backing; it gives them a chance to get their point of view before the electorate and to mount an effective campaign.

Secondly, the provision of a reasonable contribution from the public treasury toward expenses of parties and candidates reduces the dependence of these parties upon any one source of funds. When I say that, I am not for a moment subscribing to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) with regard to chain stores and the attitude my party took the other day. It might have occurred to him, upon reflection, that the suggestion contained in the resolution with regard to the reason for the high price of food was a little simplistic in attributing this to chain store profits. A day or so later somebody else suggested quite emphatically that with the present price structure many grocery stores, not necessarily chain stores, were going broke.

I do not believe that contributors influence party decisions in that respect. I think it is very desirable that all parties have this additional source of public funds from the public treasury under appropriate conditions. I think it does, to that extent, tend to increase the independence of bona fide political parties in this country. I therefore emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that I very strongly support the principle of a contribution from the public treasury under proper conditions. I favoured this when it was done in Nova Scotia, although I was not responsible for it. I think it was a marked step forward. In many of the reports I have received in respect of the province of Quebec it has been seen as a marked step forward.

The conditions, of course, must be that candidates and parties are serious and receive a certain percentage of the votes cast. I would think, also, that any contribution from the public treasury must be related in some way to contributions from other sources; in other words, it should not be a fixed contribution but should be proportionate to the contributions made to the party or the candidate from