

Private Members' Business

Gatineau—La Lièvre, I am not in favour of the \$1 limit. I will explain why later on.

Before I do that, however, I would like to indicate why I wished to speak in this debate. There are three main reasons: the first is that, being a long time member and militant of the Parti Québécois, it was an honour, naturally, for me to see that the first thing the Parti Québécois, under the leadership of René Lévesque, did when it was elected in 1976, was to pass a law on political party financing. Mr. Lévesque and his government wanted to solve this thorny problem at the time because integrity was at stake. They enacted such legislation, and I believe it is a fundamental reason, to control the financing of political parties in order to ensure that the people would be able to believe in their elected representatives.

• (1410)

Everybody knows, and I will not elaborate further on this, how much the credibility of elected representatives is in question, for all sorts of reasons. They wanted to assure the people, in this regard at least, that elected representatives were democratically elected and that they did not have special ties with any group of society, be it business people, unions or professional corporations. That is the first reason why I wanted to speak in this debate.

The second has to do with François Gérin, my predecessor in this House as member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, who proposed the idea of popular financing to the Conservative Party. Unfortunately, in spite of all its promises, the Conservative government never delivered the goods.

I would, however, like to underscore the considerable efforts of the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead at the time and recall the words spoken by Mr. Gérin when he appeared before the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, the Lortie Commission mentioned a few moments ago by the member for Gatineau—La Lièvre. Mr. Gérin stated the following: "Limiting donations to individuals will restrict the number of bagmen, the real political parasites who wield a disproportionate amount of influence within their party". He also had this to say: "Canadians now demand more transparency from their government and morals standards that are beyond reproach".

"The lure of a reward is undoubtedly a very human reflect, but it is inconsistent with the political ideal of serving the common good". Lastly, he stated: "Companies do not vote. Neither do associations nor labour unions. There is no longer any reason for these groups to have a dominant role in our electoral or political system by virtue of the fact they fund more than half of the activities of Canadian political parties". This is how the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, appearing before the royal commission in 1990, justified the need to

move as quickly as possible to a system whereby political parties are funded by individuals.

As I mentioned earlier, this funding method was adopted nearly twenty years ago in Quebec. It is well known and enjoys widespread support from all sides, not only from members of the public, the vast majority of whom support this approach, but also from businesses. Oddly enough, a survey conducted in 1988 by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which had over 80,000 members at the time, showed that a majority of directors of companies and small and medium-sized businesses were also in favour of this type of reform. And, like all the members of this House and even people outside this place, the majority of editorial writers who comment on the political arena have spoken most highly and favourably of such reform.

• (1415)

Just a word on the amendment moved by the hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre. As I said earlier, I think his colleagues from the Liberal Party should read his remarks over carefully, draw inspiration from them and make them their motto, their theme with regard to party financing in the months to come.

I have a small problem however with the \$1 limit on contributions. I think it comes from the right place, but the bottom line for these democratic bodies known as political parties would be near-paralysis.

Obviously, our electoral legislation—the hon. member for Rosedale referred to it earlier—both federally and in the various provinces, already provides for using public funds to refund in part the expenses incurred by candidates or political parties which have presented a number of candidates with a minimum of success. And that is perfectly all right.

However, political parties must continue to function between elections. They must be able to operate, consult their membership to seek advice on the general business of government and, to do so, naturally, they need money. So if we put a \$1 limit on individual financing, it would be very difficult, in my opinion, to support an organization efficiently.

I think what the point of the motion tabled by the hon. member for Richelieu—and on this I agree with the hon. member for Gatineau—La Lièvre—is that political parties must be financed by individuals and not by corporate entities such as companies, unions and professional corporations of all kinds. We already allow a democratization of political party funding.

I am proud to repeat this since I feel I was part of this effort, the example that the Parti Québécois always gives, the fact that all political parties in Quebec are now financed by individuals in a popular and democratic fashion because of the law passed at the beginning of 1977 by the Lévesque government, speaks for itself.