

Election Expenses

● (1620)

Motion No. 30 seeks to remove from page 21 of the bill, line 34, the word "government" and substitute therefor the words "Her Majesty in right of Canada". Part of section 63(1) of the act is to be repealed. Section 63 deals with candidates' returns on election expenses. The legislation has always required, as everyone in this House knows, a candidate to file at least one return on election expenses. Candidates are required to work closely with an official agent in attempting to assess what expenses have been incurred. Those expenses must be compiled, and receipts and records must be kept and filed with the returning officer. We all know what that involves. The bill will impose an additional burden on candidates and official agents. That additional burden will involve greater accuracy, greater detail and greater efficiency.

I am quite sure that quite a number of candidates' election expense returns have not been completely accurate. I do not mean to say that the candidates are not honest; I merely mean that the information contained in the returns is not accurate. In some cases the candidate and official agent is not able to discover in detail exactly how much has been spent on the election campaign, especially in areas where there may be a number of subsidiary groups of the political organization. For example, in some areas inhabited communities may be 100 miles or so apart. Naturally, there will be a separate political organization in each community. The organization may use volunteers. That is where the difficulty comes in. Being volunteers, those people do not always keep track of expenditures.

I know of instances where a devout party worker will say something like, "Don't worry about the rental of the hall. If you want a public meeting, I will pay for the hall and consider that my contribution." He pays for the hall but does not keep receipts. He does not make any contribution directly, yet that is his traditional way of contributing to the campaign. That may be an expenditure of which the official agent may not be aware. Therefore the official agent, not knowing about it, cannot include it in the return.

The provisions of the bill mean that in the constituencies there will need to be a highly centralized, authoritarian bookkeeping operation to keep track of every cent of income spent. Candidates will be required to supply receipts, to keep track of all expenditures, to keep copies of bills and vouchers, and so on, and keep all these intact in one place. In some areas this will impede the traditional way of running campaigns.

We were shocked, to put it mildly, in committee on hearing the testimony of representatives of the Canadian association of chartered accountants. I think that is the correct name of the organization. They tried to assess for the committee what would be entailed if a candidate were to meet the requirements of the bill and employ an auditor to go over all expenses. They said something like this, "Suppose, for argument's sake, we see in the committee room a billboard, a sign or a poster advertising a candidate. We would want to know where that sign came from. We would want to see the receipt for the sign and know who paid for it."

We conceived that the chartered accountants might attach themselves to the candidate at the beginning of the

[Mr. Howard.]

campaign trail. They might sit in every committee room, count every sheet of paper and keep close watch over all election expenses. On being asked how much this would cost, the representatives said, having been asked in a number of different ways, that they thought the cost of an auditor would run in the neighbourhood of \$5,000 for a campaign. One can see the concept involved. The accountant would be running around the country making sure the candidate had receipts for everything. If the candidate stayed overnight in a hotel, receipts covering that stay must be obtained. The provisions of this bill mean that constituency organizations must become centralized agencies and the bookkeeping requirements are more stringent than ever before. I can conceive that some requirements of the bill with regard to candidates will hinder the full and proper conduct of an election campaign.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the 40 minutes allotted to him under the Standing Order have expired.

Mr. Terry O'Connor (Halton): Mr. Speaker, after some 50 committee meetings which closely scrutinized nearly 150 amendments, Bill C-203 has finally been returned to the House. It has perhaps received more informed, practical, experienced deliberation than any piece of legislation considered this session. We are all experts. We are all so wise on the subject of winning elections. We all have some contribution to make based upon our actual involvement in the subject matter of the bill. Thus, the quality and quantity of inspection has been significant.

The official opposition, Mr. Speaker, is now satisfied that the bill, reprinted as amended and reported by the committee, moves a long way toward achieving the goals so long sought by the several parliaments which have considered electoral reform. During the debate on second reading I stated that I did not share the optimism of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) that the bill in its then form would achieve all of the admirable purposes he said it would. I pointed out that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections appeared to have its work cut out for it. This turned out to be a prophetic understatement. I congratulate all members of the committee who, I believe, worked long and sincerely in a co-operative effort at achieving workable and responsible electoral reform.

● (1630)

The bill now encompasses procedures for the disclosure of the names and amounts of all donors to political parties and candidates. I emphasize the word "all" because the original bill omitted any reference to the role in an election of governments, through their publications, their facilities such as aircraft, automobiles, advertising and their public service personnel. As we are all well aware, the use, usually surreptitiously and indirectly, by the party in power of such readily available weaponry can provide a significant and unfair advantage during an election campaign. Amendments introduced by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) and accepted by the committee will require the filing by the parties of details of names and amounts of money and the commercial value of goods and services provided from all sources, including governments.