

Election Expenses Bill

if we limit candidates but do not limit parties. Parties can spend more on many things in provinces, regions and constituencies. Money can be spread around and cannot be proven to have been spent on behalf of any one candidate. What saddens me is that in traditional fashion the Liberal government can take a good principle, bring in legislation incorporating that principle and then proceed to pervert it with the provisions in the legislation.

Another item I should like to talk about is reimbursement. At least this provision is in the bill. Since 1933 my party has been advocating controls on levels of election expenses and reimbursement from the national wealth for election costs. What the government proposes is of most benefit to the well-heeled candidate; the poor candidate benefits least. A candidate is eligible for reimbursement if he receives 20 per cent of the valid votes cast. The committee recommended this, but I felt that 20 per cent of the valid votes cast was too harsh; I held out for 10 per cent and then for 12½ per cent, and got to 15 per cent but was unable to persuade my colleagues on the committee. So 20 per cent of the valid votes cast was agreed upon.

Mr. Speaker, I contended then and I do now that any candidate who receives 10 per cent, 12 per cent or 15 per cent of the vote is not a nuisance candidate and should be entitled to some reimbursement. I regret that the government did not accept the committee's recommendation for the formula of reimbursement and I hope that it will when the bill gets to committee. The formula proposed by the government is intrinsically unfair, I think. The bill's formula proposes reimbursement in the aggregate of one-quarter of the candidate's election expenses and in the schedule III ridings, travel expenses plus \$250. The committee recommended reimbursement for one first-class mailing per elector, which is eight cents per elector, three cents per elector for printing costs, five cents per elector for other campaign expenses for the first 25,000 electors, and three cents per elector for all over 25,000 electors.

Let us take my own constituency of Regina-Lake Centre as an example. As of June last year there were 63,036 electors 18 years of age and over. I might also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is a terrific, wonderful riding, with wonderful people—it also has 373 more women than men. Candidates in my constituency will be limited to spending \$29,500. Under the government's formula for reimbursement they will be eligible for \$7,625 if they spend the maximum and if they receive 20 per cent of the valid votes cast.

Under the committee's formula, Mr. Speaker, the qualifying candidate who received 20 per cent or more of the vote would be eligible for reimbursement of \$8,070, about \$400 more, provided the reimbursement did not exceed the total amount that the candidate actually spent. Therefore, a candidate without financial resources who received 20 per cent of the vote and who was only able to spend \$5,000 would be eligible for a \$5,000 reimbursement and still might lose his deposit of \$200.

Surely this is fair play, Mr. Speaker; it equalizes the fight between candidates who have little or no financial resources and those who have all the resources they need. I submit that this is also a cheaper way of doing it, for the voters will pay through the national treasury less than they will pay through the corporate contributions given to

[Mr. Benjamin.]

the old parties in this country. It would help to provide more freedom and equality in our electoral processes.

The third item I wish to mention is disclosure. I said that my party has advocated this since its founding in 1933. On the basis of political contributions honestly given, there is nothing to hide. My party has always prided itself—maybe sometimes we have sounded somewhat obnoxious and pure about it, but we think it is justifiable pride—that since 1933 we have printed annually the financial statements of our national party, the provincial sections of the party and provincial constituency associations of the party right across Canada. We have not made public the names of individual contributors unless they do it themselves. I hope no one will think that makes us sound hypocritical because we have always advocated full disclosure. However, we have always felt that it would be unfair to disclose the names of our contributors when there is no requirement on the other parties to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, the committee recommended a modified disclosure. I personally accepted the recommendation of the committee, though again I may get heck from some of my colleagues for that. There is one other thing that should be in the modified disclosure. Where reports are sent to the Minister of National Revenue for those contributions which would be eligible as tax deductions, and to the Chief Electoral Officer where the two reports do not jibe and where there is an obvious and blatant evasion of the elections act, the names of the contributors to that particular candidate, that particular party and that particular constituency would have to be made public. That in itself would serve as a deterrent of sufficient degree to cause any party or any candidate to be extra careful and ensure that there is not any hanky-panky with income tax receipts. There would be no juggling of books as between what was reported to the Chief Electoral Officer and what was reported to the Minister of National Revenue.

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The committee recommended that contributions from foreign corporations, unions and foreign citizens be prohibited. We made that recommendation because we felt it was consistent because the elections act provides now that no non-resident corporation or individual may participate in a federal election campaign. I hope the minister will agree to an amendment in the area of contributions from foreign corporations, unions and citizens so that they will not be permitted and not be eligible for tax deductions. These should not be allowed in any case.

I submit that where violations occur when the Minister of National Revenue and the Chief Electoral Officer are comparing the two sets of reports, under the law the Minister of National Revenue should be allowed to disclose the names of contributors. The glare of publicity and shame that would fall upon that candidate and his party would be sufficient for then and ever after to prevent violations of the law as it pertains to election expenses and living up to our election legislation.

We are generally pleased with the provisions for broadcasting. This is another way of limiting the costs of election. There is one area where the paste-pot missed. In this, I agree with the hon. member for Hillsborough. While