

● (2050)

In some ways we are doing much the same with this bill. Some members say we are moving in the direction of reform. I say that all the election reform bills you can think of will not be worth the paper they are printed on unless real reform takes place at the constituency level. I come from the Nova Scotia, as does the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen). No member in this House knows more about abuses of the electoral process, and reforms which have been made without election reform bills, than the President of the Privy Council, in whose name this bill stands. He, and I, and certain other members, are aware of electoral abuses. Certainly, abuses occurred in many constituencies, but they were corrected because the people at the local level decided it was time to fight elections on a different basis. Yet there is a proposal before the House for parties to be officially registered. We are to create an agent who is to give out income tax receipts for money that is given to a registered party between elections. We are breaking new ground. Are we asking the public to pay registered parties and candidates who fight elections? As I say, we are breaking new ground but forgetting the people at the constituency level, the people who nominate and elect the candidate. Instead of working from the bottom, we are working from the top. I say that is the wrong way to begin.

How many members have looked closely at the implications of this bill, and of this part we are discussing? The Creditistes did not have a member in the committee while this part was being discussed. Do they know how the clause we are discussing would affect their problems with regard to leadership, since the leader of the party is supposed to appoint electoral agents? We have heard of individual members crossing the floor of the House. Even during the holding of conventions, some members crossed the floor. Yet, under this proposal, the national leader is given power to designate electoral district agents. I think that is wrong. I think all members want reform, but I do not see how, by changing the end of the totem pole, you will bring about reform. You will not bring about reform by ignoring people at the riding level, at the poll level. You will not bring about reform by creating a new structure which ignores them. If you call that reform, I say it is a deformed form of reform; there are many more things which could be said about it.

I hope other hon. members will address themselves to this clause. I do not think too many members are aware of the implications of these amendments, when taken together. Some members, I think, have suggested that instead of the leader designating the electoral agent, the constituency association should pick the electoral district agent who is to be appointed and send his name up to the leader for confirmation. That is the question to which we ought to address ourselves. I could say more on this point, but I had better not digress too far.

This bill will create basic deformities in our system and open up possibilities for fundamental abuse, unless we reverse the method of the appointment of electoral district agents. I hope we can do that in the spirit of Commons debate. Certainly, the bill is not perfect. One only has to see the number of amendments which were made in committee to realize that. Honestly, I do not know how many

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amendments were moved in committee. This is not a case of the Medes and the Persians. Amendments were proposed in committee because some clauses were impractical of application, some were plainly stupid and others incomprehensible. The bill was well amended in committee. I hope, in the spirit of Commons debates, searching attention will be given to the clauses referred to, so that the appointment of the electoral district agent can come from the people at the riding level rather than from the leader above.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I regret not having had the opportunity to attend the committee discussions on this bill. I take it that many changes were made and many worthwhile suggestions were brought forward. I should like to know exactly why it is proposed that an agent shall be appointed by a political party. Why were members interested in choosing the chief electoral officer in the manner set out in the bill? I can only surmise that much of the discussion was on a party basis, rather than on the basis on which each individually elected member could put forward his views.

It has always been fundamental in a democracy, I believe, that anyone who thinks he has a role to play in the political process of his country has the right to attempt to do so. Provincial governments, on many occasions, have dealt with this question in different ways, as have other countries. Normally, if a person in a democracy wants to become a political candidate, it is not difficult for him to do so. For example, when I was last involved in Ontario provincial politics, a man had to have only 100 signatures on a nomination form. No deposit was required, merely the signatures of 100 people who were willing to see you elected. Candidates in federal elections sometimes do not collect 100 votes. So, clearly, we have not made it too difficult for a person to participate in the political process.

I have been interested to learn that in the United States much attention has been paid to the pre-election period. I am looking at an article which deals with dollar politics, or the issue of campaign spending.

An hon. Member: Is it by Richard Nixon?

Mr. Peters: It is about Richard Nixon; I do not think he wrote it. It indicates that in the United States much of the spending begins prior to the election. The article also says that because of "Richard M. Nixon's extensive travel in 1966 on behalf of Republican Congressional candidates," he became a major presidential contender. The article goes on to say:

The 30,000-mile tour, including the salary and expenses of one assistant, cost \$90,000. The money was raised independently of the campaigns.

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Mr. Nixon's first campaign planning session for his 1968 presidential race was held in early January 1967. "Nineteen months and more than \$10-million later, Richard Nixon was the Republican nominee for President," wrote Alexander in his book *Financing the 1968 Election*.

Ronald Reagan's 1967-68 nationwide speaking tours contributed to his later candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, Alexander wrote, yet at the time they were also legitimate activities of the incumbent Governor of California.