

*Election Expenses*

Mr. Speaker, as I see it, those who already contribute to electoral funds of old line parties will continue to do so, and they will do it in a more legal way, as a result of this legislation. Why then should we ask all Canadian taxpayers to pay for these expenses paid out of electoral funds?

Therefore, there is an ambiguous point in the spirit of this law and this point should absolutely be cleared up; otherwise, the reimbursement of election expenses will happen to be considered as a kind of reward. After financing the whole thing thanks to donations or contributions of various associations and private persons, we will be entitled to a reimbursement which will not represent something designed to pay out a debt but simply a kind of reward, a kind of premium. And we cannot favour such a system, Mr. Speaker, since it runs counter to basic principles of a healthy democracy.

Moreover, this bill does not seem to deal with some points, which could help every citizen to better exercise his right to vote. One of these points is the following: electors must be given all possible means to go to the polls. Someone did consider amending the Elections Act in order to set up temporary polls but if we check the number of people who exercise this right, this privilege, we must admit that there are not many, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, we should consider the introduction of another legislation which, in addition to being very efficient, might further facilitate democracy in the election process. All that would have to be done would be to make election day a holiday so that no one would have any excuse for not voting, and since that day generally comes around—and I say “generally” advisedly, Mr. Speaker—once every four years, it seems to me that it would be quite simple to make it a holiday. There could be no greater boost to massive participation in the elections by citizens and, in my opinion, this is a goal that should be aimed for in a true democracy.

In the light of these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that not only am I not enthralled with the bill, but I also believe that it should be completely changed. It by no means expresses the wishes of hon. members and, once more, a bill of this nature should have been drafted in collaboration with those who are most up-to-date on what is going on and who have the greatest interest in such legislation, namely the members of parliament.

I still wonder why hon. members' opinion was not more taken into account when drafting this bill. Of course, it may be amended but when one considers the objectivity which should have governed the drafting of this legislation one must conclude that it does not contain any provision fully able to solve the problem of election expenses.

This being the case, we must confess that we will not be able to support this bill and we urge the minister to think it over and give the government the time necessary to draft another legislation which would take into account the basic facts which I mentioned in my speech yesterday so that the bill would guarantee to the Canadian people a true, concrete and free democratic process. Thus, the election expenses would be limited fairly and justly and if my proposals were accepted we would have no reimbursement of expenses since all expenses would be paid objectively and the political parties and the candidates would have to pay only for their petty expenses.

[Mr. Matte.]

I think we should consider drafting another piece of legislation which would take into account those basic factors.

• (1550)

[English]

**Mr. Barnett J. Danson (York North):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this bill because I particularly welcome it. Like so many members of this House and those who have been active on the political scene for many years, we have been urging a requirement similar to this for quite some time. It is not everything we would wish, it is not perfection itself, it is not everything I would personally wish, and it is not likely that we will be able to provide legislation that will suit everybody in every particular case because the problems we face in our constituencies are different in various parts of the country. However, I do not think anyone would deny that what is presented in this bill is a vast improvement over the system which has existed heretofore.

This bill can create a completely new atmosphere in our electoral system, not that there was anything evil about what has been going on, although we could perhaps isolate instances. There has been a cloud over this question; everything never has been quite in the open. There is a certain amount of secrecy, and we do not talk about it very much. I think there is a great deal more misunderstanding than anything else. Some people have tried to imply that there is devious influence, but I have never really seen that influence exerted externally. I would not deny that we sometimes exert influence on ourselves, and I would not deny that when certain legislation came up members on both sides of the House did consider that perhaps funds would dry up if we opposed or supported the legislation.

Some candidates did not even know who was giving and would openly say so. I know that my opponent during the last campaign said he did not know who gave, and did not want to know. I make a point of knowing and wanting to know. I am not faulting my opponent for that, but I want to make sure that these funds come from sources which I am prepared to declare if that is necessary, and I want to be sure that nothing can be implied that might compromise me in any way.

What I really get upset about during election campaigns is the immense and incredible waste of money that we would not tolerate in normal life. Election campaigns cannot be run as efficiently as business, not even as efficiently as government. They are run almost by the seat of the pants and in a highly competitive atmosphere. What upsets me is this competition to spend more. We have all been through the pressures of a campaign when everybody is giving advice. They tell us that if we would just send out one more mailing, or put up 500 more signs, we would “have it made.” People tell us that our opponents have torn down all our signs, and their workers are saying we have torn down all theirs. I have never known an election campaign when one side has not accused the other of tearing down signs, yet I know of no candidate who would sanction such action.

People do not realize how costly all this can be. Just one extra mailing can cost several thousand dollars in the average constituency. One must also face the cost of com-