

Election Expenses Bill

thing be in the law of the land, I suggest they take a long look at the use of the word "article" because that word to me—and I have spent half my life in the news business of this country—would suggest news items. That being so, I suggest there would be a severe limitation on reporting in the final days or the last day of an election campaign.

Another point about this bill that bothers me is the prohibition of a time honoured practice of all of us in the House, the giving out of information as to places of voting. If we send out something purely for that purpose, we are guilty of an offence. I do not know what would happen thereafter, but you are guilty. This is one of the things I think is traditional on the part of candidates. This is a bond with the electorate and an attempt to be of service to the prospective voter. It is going simply too far to make an offence of an attempt to be helpful. If an attempt to tell some dear old lady that she votes at such and such a church hall is an evil intent, then this measure goes too far. I do not know why I should be subject to the wrath of God and the law of the land for trying to be helpful.

Another thing I do not like in the bill is that part which specifically prohibits advertising of a partisan political character on election day. In my part of the country, as I imagine in other parts, it is customary to put ads in the paper indicating transportation telephone numbers, numbers of party headquarters and other numbers in order that people can receive information. I do not see anything wrong with that.

Again, in my part of the country, and I think in other parts as well, political parties would be foolish if on the day of an election they bombarded the electorate with advertisements dealing with issues and the like. In most places I think there is maturity and parties and candidates let the issues settle themselves on the Saturday night or the Sunday before the election. Then on election day they put every sinew and muscle to work to help the people through the process of voting. The process of voting is still a frightening act for a good many people and one about which they are shy. Any inside or outside help given by agents and the like is very helpful.

The measures to which I have referred inhibit the proper discussion of issues as well as some of the sensible operations of a political party. I hope that when the bill reaches committee changes will be made in order to correct these matters.

[Translation]

Mr. Roland Godin (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-211 concerning election expenses covers quite a lot of ground and brings in several changes.

At first glance, one could say that it is an improvement over the existing act especially if, once it is passed, all candidates are placed on an equal footing and at the same time the people can find out who finances them.

We often hear that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The people will finally be able to see, at least in part, how the "old parties" run elections. Bill C-211 sets a ceiling on election expenses in ridings; however, the bill sets no limit on the parties' expenses on a nationwide basis.

I am pleased to support the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who goes as far as to say that this weakness in the bill will neutralize all its effects.

[Mr. McCleave.]

Mr. Speaker, considering the number of experts working for the government, it is obvious that what we have here in the bill is not a mistake nor an oversight but something that the government wished and wanted there.

I can hardly imagine a businessman controlling only 50 per cent of his staff or a manufacturer controlling only 50 per cent of his expenses; they would go bankrupt before long. As things now stand, we can see they want to control only part of the election expenses. I believe politics is the only place where we can see such things. Nowhere else, in business or elsewhere, do such things exist.

Moreover, this bill is aimed at controlling election expenses in advertising and broadcasting. But there is no provision to limit or control expenses for renting halls or cars; there is no provision either to control the salaries of the thousands of persons that could be mobilized by a political party. There is no provision in the bill to control the time paid by corporations or unions.

Really, Mr. Speaker, trying to make us believe that a candidate who has obtained 20 per cent of the votes will get a reimbursement of 25 per cent of his election expenses is nothing else but bluff to me, since the bill does not even refer to the big election funds of the old parties. Should the bill be passed, nothing would oblige an insurance company, for instance, that would have paid \$50,000, \$75,000 or \$100,000 to the Liberal or Progressive Conservative fund, to declare anything. In other words, this legislation will always allow a public corporation to contribute to election funds without being accountable to the public at large.

We admit that the bill features some suggestions made in the report of the Barbeau Committee on election expenses in 1966. However, we can realize that what we are being offered today is very little compared with what was provided in the Barbeau report. In fact, on page 21 of the bill, clause 99.1 (1) reads as follows, and I quote:

In the period beginning on the date of the issue of the writ for a general election and ending on Saturday the second day before polling day, each broadcaster . . . shall make available to the registered parties an aggregate of six and one-half hours of broadcasting time between the hours of six p.m. and midnight.

Under the control of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission, the party representatives should agree among themselves on allocation of time available, failing which the CRTC shall make a proposal for an allocation of time that will be binding if the registered parties make no objection.

Should any party object to the allocation of time proposed by the CRTC, the latter shall consult the party involved, change its proposal or simply confirm it after discussion, and its decision shall be binding on the party thus providing for compulsory allocation of time.

Mr. Speaker, we of the Social Credit party strongly oppose such a policy and, in our opinion, the allocation of time should be based on the principle of equality between the registered parties.

We believe that any registered party fielding enough candidates to form a government should have time allocated in proportion to their number.

At the present time, on the basis of past experience, we can say that if the bill before us is passed, according to