

Canada Elections Act

There are others who will argue that this is the wrong way of going about it. I do not want to start mounting a series of arguments that this is the only way to do it because there are other ways. Two things are required today of a candidate in an election. First, the candidate must deposit in legal tender or by certified cheque \$200 with the returning officer. Second, he or she must have the signatures of 25 electors on his or her nomination papers. Perhaps an alternative to my proposal would be to increase substantially the number of electors, say from 25 to 500. This would make it somewhat more difficult for the frivolous nuisance candidates to become involved. They would have to think twice if they required 500 signatures.

Therefore, if the House is disposed I would be prepared to have the same thing happen to this Bill as happened to the last one, namely to have the Bill itself withdrawn and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I am not moving this as a motion at the moment because I am aware that other Members of the House want to speak on the Bill and it requires unanimous consent of the House. I am not sure whether that unanimous consent would be forthcoming, but I would not want to deprive other Members who have views on the matter of the opportunity to express themselves.

This is one of the reasons for Private Members' Bills, so that the sponsors and other Members will have the opportunity to express themselves on various subjects. I would like to be able to say that the Government supports this Bill, but I am afraid it would be incorrect. At least, I hope the subject matter of the Bill will be discussed and given thought. If the Bill does not receive second reading today, or if the subject matter is not referred to Committee, at least the Chief Electoral Officer in his report, which I understand will be tabled at the beginning of the next session of Parliament, will, I hope, deal with the matter in a way that may find acceptance with the majority of the Members of the House.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I listened to what the Hon. Member had to say about a significant change he wishes to make in our electoral system, and although his comments were excellent, I could not resist giving some comments of my own that are very relevant to the foregoing.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that to represent the wishes of the people in Parliament is a noble profession. I believe it should be taken very seriously, and that this Bill reflects that attitude and deserves very serious consideration in view of the proliferation of fringe candidates running in every election. I would be the last person to prevent anyone from running for whatever political group he might choose. And I think that even for candidates who want to run as independents, as I have done, Mr. Speaker—and successfully, I may add—the proposal to raise the deposit from \$250 to \$2,000 is not excessive.

Some people will claim that we are thereby excluding some candidates who are not as well off financially, but I think that

any serious candidate who takes himself, and is taken, seriously, will have no trouble finding the initial support he needs to obtain those \$2,000, which could be raised through donations from friends or supporters. We take politics seriously, and I think all candidates should do the same. In this connection, I would like to point out that there have been a great deal of comments on our democracy, and I think the proposal made this afternoon constitutes an improvement to our democratic system.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would rather not waste too much time, and I shall simply say, in support of this kind of amendment, that I think it is an improvement to our present system. Such a measure would possibly discourage candidates whose attitude is not serious at all and who often make people believe, and they are a minority, I hope, that politics should not be taken seriously. The result is that some people think that politics is not worth the attention we think it deserves. I believe that any measure aimed at giving our parliamentary institutions a more positive character should not be ignored, and that we owe it to ourselves to support changes that will enhance the credibility of our political system.

It is therefore clear that as far as prospective Members of a Parliament or party are concerned, we have a responsibility to ensure that these people are acting in good faith and are prepared to represent their constituents with all due seriousness. I repeat that a deposit of \$2,000 is not going to prevent a serious candidate who is taken seriously from running for office. It is also extremely important for a person to be able to run under the colours of his choice, and the deposit would not prevent anyone from running as an independent candidate. However, I believe that too often, things have happened that made people laugh and endangered the credibility that is so necessary in an election campaign. We want serious representatives and the majority of voters would like to see candidates with a sense of duty that will make them deserving of the voters' trust.

As we said before, if people want to protest against certain candidates, they can spoil their ballots, and since this is made public, it is easy to see whether there is a serious protest on the part of a number of individuals who no longer trust the candidate running in a given riding. I believe that this measure which provides for a \$2,000 deposit might usefully be adopted in order to prevent people from indulging in these charades for the sake of political history, during an election campaign.

The number of voters who would have to sign the ballot is set at twenty-five. That, of course, is a very low figure. A candidate who canvasses two or three families and some of his neighbours can easily get twenty-five signatures. I think we should seriously consider raising this figure. Five hundred has been suggested, and I must admit that this figure does not worry me, because I would have no trouble finding 500 people to sign my ballot, although it is still a lot of work. However, there will not necessarily be a consensus on this figure. However, if the deposit increases from \$200 to \$2,000, the number