

Private Members' Business

not think that large contributions are made out of love for democracy. We must absolutely look at this issue.

I say this as the member for Gatineau—La Lièvre. I have had many discussions on this with my fellow citizens and they fully support the opinion which I have always expressed, not only in this House, but also in Quebec's National Assembly and before the Lortie Commission, to the effect that changes must be made. If we believe that we are a democratic society, then we must make changes to the financing of political parties.

I want to go back to the New Brunswick professor. I discussed this issue with him and, in fact, I had a question put on the *Order Paper* to get information to help him in his work. That person claims that only a citizen of Canada should make a donation and that the maximum allowed should be one dollar. One might say: How are we going to finance political parties? It is very simple. We are here to represent all Canadians; consequently, we should be elected only by individual Canadians and not by lobbies, law firms or engineering companies. Our fellow citizens should be the only ones allowed to financially help us get elected.

So, that person suggests a one-dollar limit. How would that be done? It is very easy. For all intents and purposes, one dollar per Canadian amounts to \$25 million. That \$25 million would be divided each year between the political parties. I will not get into technicalities here, but it would not be complicated. According to the professor, the procedure would be very simple—it only takes two pages—and the distribution would be done very democratically, thus ensuring that political parties would have the necessary monies to conduct their activities.

Subsequent to the conversations I had with this professor, I learned about the amount of tax refunds the government of Canada grants to people who donated to a political party. You have all heard about tax credits and other such things. I do not have to get technical and go into details. Suffice it to say that such contributions entitle to tax credits. In 1990, in particular, these tax credits reached \$20 million. And this does not take into account the management of the system, etc. In other words, it would almost amount to an economy for the state if people were contributing the funds needed to operate democratically the political parties of Canada.

This idea is very attractive and deserves careful thought. I submitted it to the Lortie Commission, which found it very interesting, but the opinion is divided on this issue. The principle is very simple.

● (1405)

If we believe in a democratic society and if we believe that one could represent people in this House without having to

accept contributions from anyone, this would be the ideal situation. That is the goal aimed for in our society, because we know human nature. There is nothing illegal involved, but such is human nature. There are people making contributions who are very sincere in their contributions to a party or a candidate.

However, we have to take into account that we always have to find means to keep it as democratic as possible. I personally felt that this professor from the University of New Brunswick had a magic solution to this problem.

We do not have all the data, but we could have a closer look at it. I would have liked to speak longer, but the principle, the notion is very clear that only individuals, the people, our fellow citizens, should finance our election to this House.

In concluding, I would like to put forward the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by substituting to the figure of "\$5,000" the figure of "\$1".

The Deputy Speaker: We have already dealt with the content of that amendment and it was considered in order. The clerk gave me that assurance. Is there an hon. member who wishes to second the motion? The hon. member for Hamilton—Wentworth is seconding the motion.

Debate on the amendment.

Mr. Ménard: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for my lack of experience, but could you explain to us the implication of this amendment on the unfolding of the debate? I would also like to know whether the mover of the motion, the hon. member for Richelieu, has been informed of the intent of our hon. colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Good question. In theory, the debate is on the amendment. Actually, it is on the motion and the amendment to the amendment. At the end of the proceedings today, that is at 2:30 p.m., we will still have one hour left when we resume debate next time. In theory, the amendment to the amendment can be adopted with unanimous consent, or members can vote it down. The decision is up to the hon. members. So, we will proceed with the debate on the matter before us. I hope I made myself clear.

The hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead has the floor.

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, I am here to stay. I am very pleased to take part in this debate. I know that we are now debating the amendment of the member for Gatineau—La Lièvre, but I would also like to mention that I totally agree with the motion of the member for Richelieu in its present form. Consequently, even though I endorse most of the comments made by the member for