

Election Expenses Bill

for that lack of enforcement are, first, that the established parties have been unwilling under the old legislation to initiate action against each other; second, that the trouble and cost of contesting an election suit about election expenses is prohibitive to the private citizen; third, that no organized, non-political agency has felt itself responsible or has been made responsible for prosecuting candidates violating this law on election expenses and, finally, that no governmental agency has felt itself responsible or has been made responsible for prosecuting candidates violating the law on election expenses.

The two main weaknesses of the legislation first enacted in 1874 and subsequently amended were, first, the failure to recognize political parties as essential units of political finance and, second, the failure to provide effective machinery for enforcing the law.

A long time after that the Coldwell commission studied this whole problem and made seven main recommendations which were not, so far as I know, ever included in the legislation. Those seven recommendations were as follows: first, that political parties should be legally recognized and, through the doctrine of agency, made legally responsible for their actions in raising and spending funds. Second, a degree of financial equality should be established among candidates and among political parties by the extension of certain services and subsidies to all who qualify. Third, an effort should be made to increase public participation in politics by broadening the base of political contributions through tax concessions to donors.

Fourth, costs of election campaigns should be reduced by shortening the campaign period, by placing limitations on expenditures on mass media by candidates and parties and by prohibiting the payment of poll workers on election day. Fifth, public confidence in political financing should be strengthened by requiring candidates and parties to disclose their incomes and expenditures. Sixth, a registry under the supervision of a registrar should be established to audit and publish the financial reports required and to enforce the provisions of the proposed election and political finances act; and, seventh, miscellaneous amendments to broadcasting legislation should be enacted to improve the political communications field.

I think it is fair to say that the art of democratic politics and the evolution of the communications media have always been closely linked. The increased use of mass media as a form of political propagandizing has become an accepted and necessary element of present political campaigns. The forbiddingly high cost of media advertising has become one of the main problems facing prospective and nominated candidates for public office. Hence, the principle behind this bill is, as I indicated at the beginning of my remarks, that it will bring greater equality between individuals in terms of their eligibility for public office.

• (1550)

First—and I think this is the main reservation that should be considered—is the fact that in general terms the amount of campaign funds that a political party can collect can be considered as a fairly accurate reflection of the amount of popular support that party has in the country. Because of that it is quite easy to see why my

[Mr. Yewchuk.]

friends to the left are constantly suggesting that election expenses be limited. It appears they have difficulty collecting any significant amount of funds except by compulsory means in keeping with their compulsory philosophy. Not having very much public popular support and not being able to collect very large amounts of funds for campaign purposes, they are taking the alternative which is to limit the amount the other parties can spend. This has the same effect as increasing their own funds.

I was slightly baffled by the pious self-righteousness of the hon. member who spoke before me when he talked about conflict of interest between parties and their potential donors. I think it is quite well known that the party to my left depends largely on compulsory contributions from unions, some of them foreign-dominated and some of them not. It seems to me that it is no different from the point of view of conflict of interest when a union boss tells a member of that party what to say, when to say it and how high to jump, then it would be for someone from a corporation to tell other parties or try to get them to say what they want said. If you examine the structure, that kind of self-righteousness is not justifiable.

Mr. Burton: We will lay the cards on the table.

Mr. Yewchuk: Naturally that party will lay its cards on the table because the contributions are compulsory; they are deducted from the cheques in the same manner as income tax. There is absolutely no way they can get away with hiding this as a voluntary contribution. I recognize that workers have the right of opting out of this, but they do not usually do so if they want to survive. When we consider the remarks of the leader of that party and the decision made a day or two ago by the Canadian Labour Congress that they are going to throw their open support behind that party, we see that that party does not really reflect representation of the general population of this country when that might be considered as a conflict of interest.

We in our party have been subject to some criticism by the party to our left. They have criticized us for being puppets of big business—paid for, owned and operated by big business. This is a myth which I am sure any intelligent individual can recognize immediately. Evidence of this is the kind of constituencies we represent in this House. Just look at where the members of my party come from. Almost to the last man we represent fairly poor, economically speaking, constituencies such as rural ridings and ridings where—

Mr. McBride: You even have poor members.

Mr. Yewchuk: That is right. I will not reflect upon who they are, but I am looking at one right now. The point I am trying to make is that this party is by no means controlled, owned or operated by big business. As a matter of fact, it is controlled and operated by the average man in this country; the average wage earner, fisherman, farmer as well as the average businessman and occasional physician and lawyer. Unfortunately, we do not have any wealthy lawyers in our party, but I am sure that if we work at it we will be able to attract some of them.

We have a good deal of support from the rank and file of unions. I am sure this will be seen if we examine the