

Election Expenses Bill

others on the record about his anxiety to place controls and limitations on election expenses. Since last June 4, when the report of the Special Committee was tabled, on several occasions I have asked both the government House leader and the Prime Minister when we would have this legislation.

It seems to me that if it was the government's intention, as is now apparent in the bill, to accept most if not all of the recommendations of the Barbeau committee and the special committee, the drafting of the legislation could have been done much sooner. It also seems to me that the arguments of the government House leader about the lack of time, pressure of business and the heavy legislative schedule do not hold water since we had time for seven weeks of recess at Christmas, two weeks at Easter and a long summer recess last year. Somewhere in those three periods surely at least two weeks could have been available to deal with this legislation.

I would have some worries and doubts about how much the government means it if an election were called tomorrow, next week or the week after that before this legislation is passed. If that happens, my worries and doubts will have been proven valid. We will then know that the intention of the government was not to have legislation passed before the next general election but to have a bill that its candidates could wave in the air during the campaign. In that event it would be the basest kind of political cynicism and political perversion. I hope I am wrong; I hope with all my heart that it is the government's intention to have this legislation passed.

If by chance no election is called until November, December, or January or February of next year, then there is no good reason why this legislation could not be in effect for the next general election, even though there is a provision in the Canada Elections Act that six months must elapse. I point out that there is an exception, that where the Chief Electoral Officer advertises to the effect in the *Canada Gazette* that he is ready to go ahead, then the provisions of this bill can be implemented in a period sooner than six months. I suspect that he would probably need at least four or five months to implement this kind of legislation.

My first remark about the bill itself are that we will support it in principle. I was pleased to hear the government House leader say that he has an open mind on this matter and that he would be willing to listen to and possibly implement worthy suggestions put forward by members in all parties. I was pleased to hear him say that because I want to point out to the House a large hole in this legislation, one mentioned also by the hon. member for Hillsborough. There is no provision in the bill to put any limitation on party spending. Mr. Speaker, that in effect nullifies the whole purpose of legislation to limit and control election expenses. If my memory serves me correctly, this is one item on which members of the special committee were unanimous, and in its report the committee said:

The Barbeau committee did not recommend any general limitations on expenditures by parties. However, your committee considers that imposing limitations on candidate's expenditures would not be as effective if limitations were not also imposed on parties' expenditures. Therefore, the committee considers that its

proposal to limit candidates' expenditures is closely related to its proposal to limit parties' expenditures.

Not limiting party expenditures not only nullifies the purpose and principle of legislation to control election expenses but it causes me to have worries and doubts about whether the government really means it when it talks about controlling and limiting expenses. I still have a fear that the old-line parties cannot bring themselves to part with their corporate bagmen, or at least reduce the amount that those bagmen need to get, because with no limit on party spending the bagmen can operate at full-steam as before.

We had a great deal of harmonious discussion on this matter, members of all parties expressed their concern about it and the committee recommended a limit of 30 cents per elector in the aggregate of the electoral districts in which each party ran candidates. If a party ran a full slate of 264 candidates, a limitation of 30 cents per elector in all of Canada, with some 14 million electors according to the June, 1971, census, would mean that each party would have a limit of \$4,200,000 it could spend. Surely that should be enough. In the committee I argued that 30 cents was too high and spoke in favour of 20 cents; other hon. members wanted 35 cents or 40 cents. We ended up with a compromise and recommended 30 cents.

• (2140)

Even \$4,200,000 would probably cut the Liberals down by \$2½ million or \$3 million, and the Tories perhaps by a million or a million and a half. At least it would put the limit on, because without that limit the party can spend money in any and all constituencies in the country without mentioning a candidate's name, for the aid and comfort of the party. I hope the minister and the government will agree to an amendment when this bill reaches committee to insert the recommendation of the special committee to limit party expenditures to 30 cents per elector, which can be a maximum of \$4,200,000. I may catch heck from some of my colleagues for this. I think that is really too much, but at least it is a limit. With rising costs it may well be that two or three elections from now it will not be too much, but surely at this time it should be enough.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, we limit candidates. The recommendations of the committee were adopted word for word in this bill and I am grateful to the minister and the government for that. I am sure all members of the committee will feel complimented that the government accepted the entire recommendations on the limitation in respect of candidates. I have a feeling that the minister's figures on how much the limits would be were slightly out for some of the ridings he cited. I do not think he was using the latest figures; I think they were 5,000 or 10,000 low for each riding, though I may be mistaken. For 60,000 electors the limit for the candidate would be \$28,750, for 80,000 electors the limit would be \$33,750 and for a riding with 100,000 electors it would be \$38,750.

Mr. Speaker, when the committee met I felt this was too generous and I said so, but others wanted higher limits. One or two members of the committee agreed with lower limits but we ended up with these. It may well be that two or three elections from now, with rising costs, those limits also will not be too high. It is a kind of political chicanery