

Election Expenses Bill

• (1430)

The act does not mention any expenditure relating to polling agents. This is essential if we are to obtain justice and equality for all in the field of elections.

As for the agents of political parties or candidates, it would be quite easy to solve this problem by considering them, for example, on the same footing as deputy returning officers and clerks and pay them directly in the same way as the special officers appointed on polling day.

It should be recognized that in addition to the deputy returning officer and the clerk, the candidates' representatives should be automatically paid for their services during that day by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, this point is so important that I would like to elaborate on it because this is a matter of votes in polling stations and it is extremely important that each candidate be represented.

Since elections take place either on Mondays or Tuesdays, it is sometimes difficult to find people to represent a party at the polling station without paying them. If elections took place on Sundays, this problem would not exist, but since the present law requires that elections take place on Mondays or Tuesdays it follows that candidates' agents at the polling station must lose one working day and when the candidate does not have sufficient funds to pay them, he is the victim of an injustice.

Moreover, if this essential question could be resolved as I suggested, this would ensure at the polling station a degree of honesty essential to fair elections.

It is, of course, easy for the well-organized parties enjoying huge election funds to give those people \$20, \$25 or \$30, as the case may be. If there are 200 polls, and if the average pay is \$25, the salaries of the party agents at the poll will amount to \$5,000. Since it is essential for a candidate to have an agent, then these special agents should be remunerated as are other officers in polling stations.

When the by-election was held in the county of Trois-Rivières, I had an opportunity of noting certain anomalies which are still prevalent although they should be weeded out, that is the considerable number of people and agents who are hired by some political parties in polling stations to monitor and inform.

In a church basement at Trois-Rivières, there were 17 polling stations. There were some 60 agents at the entrance who were paid by the Liberal and the Progressive Conservative parties and whose very presence intimidated incoming electors.

The law should provide that a candidate may, if necessary, have only one agent at the polling station. What are these so-called agents doing there since they are paid by the old parties? They only check the lists of electors to see whether the name of Mr. So-and-So has been duly entered and they ask him although they have no right to do that since they have no business being there. So, they intimidate the poor voter in this way, particularly if he is already a little shy. This could be considered as a final attempt to influence the vote. All this should disappear. But what should we substitute to it?

It would be very well for neutral officers appointed by the chief electoral officer or by his returning officer in

[Mr. Matte.]

each constituency to be present in every poll. These agents would be there simply in order to inform the voter when he arrives at the door and tell him where he must vote and if necessary give him the required information. But this must be done by utterly neutral agents. It must be considered here that voters are adults, since the right to vote is granted to adults. They are able to perform their duty by themselves, without being surrounded by squads of special agents appointed by some political parties.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, we consider it necessary in such a bill to avoid all the shortcomings and abuses which took place during elections. I think that our suggestions certainly deserve to be considered and carried out.

Mr. Speaker, there are peculiarities in this bill which, with your permission, I should like to bring to your attention.

For instance, on page 4, there is no indication as to the number of authorized agents a political party may have. I think the bill should be made more precise in this respect and specify exactly the number of authorized agents for each political party.

Paragraph (8) of clause 13.1 reads as follows:

(8) Every payment made by or through a registered agent in respect of any expenses of a registered party shall, except where the payment is less than twenty-five dollars, be vouched for by a bill stating the particulars and by a receipt.

What I find strange here are the words "except where the payment is less than twenty-five dollars". Thus only by distributing \$20 bills by the thousands, it would be possible to run up fantastic expenses without the necessary receipts. It should be noted that this might very well happen and there have been some such instances in the past.

In paragraph (11) of clause 13.1, there is also the matter of charges which must be paid within six months after they have been incurred. I think there should be a little more time in cases of this kind. If someone is willing to advance funds to a political party and willing to wait one year for reimbursement, I don't see why this should be forbidden.

In paragraph (1) of clause 13.3, it is indicated that auditors who are appointed for candidates or political parties must report to the chief agent who in turn has to report to the Chief Electoral Officer. I wonder, for the sake of security, whether it would not be appropriate that the auditor himself report directly to the Chief Electoral Officer.

• (1440)

Mr. Speaker, again these are suggestions. We shall introduce amendments, if need be, but if the minister would immediately consider these suggestions, he himself could move the proper amendments.

I would also speak to the 20 per cent of the votes cast, the required 20 per cent for a candidate to be entitled to a refund, to a fraction of expenses incurred.

Mr. Speaker, once again we must be practical and consider that in theory, it may happen that a candidate might get slightly fewer votes than the winner—100, 200 or 300—and still not have 20 per cent of the votes. This could happen. At the last provincial elections in Quebec, some