

Election Expenses

means that will enable to people to express themselves more freely, in order that we may find in this House the true expression of the people's will.

If third parties including ours are not more represented in this House, Mr. Speaker, that cannot be attributed only to questions of limits on expenses, questions of money. That is why we must examine and scrutinize this bill with the idea of reaching a genuine objective favouring the expression of freedom for all Canadian voters. So there is I think an ideal to be reached, and we have the possibility of reaching it, but I wonder to what extent the provisions of this bill will reach it.

I think the ideal we should propose in order to have that complete freedom for voters would be to have voluntary co-operation during elections everywhere so that the result of elections would represent exclusively the influence of ideas, the influence of principles and the genuine expression of the wishes of the voters.

In that respect, we would have to consider total equality for all recognized parties. And as the hon. member who spoke just before me said, there is room for improvement in several cases, particularly during elections; all recognized political parties in Canada should be considered on an equal basis notwithstanding the number of members previously elected to this House.

Equality for all recognized parties simply means allowing once again voters across Canada to make a more adequate and freer choice.

As to equality at the riding level for all candidates within the restriction relating to parties, of course all candidates should once again be given equal chances. And if we are to reach that ideal, Mr. Speaker, election funds will have to be eliminated. As a matter of fact, if they could be eliminated entirely we would have succeeded in giving back Canadians the freedom when they need it most, that is when they exercise their freedom, because is it not during elections that the citizens of this country are called upon in the most tangible way to exercise their democratic right to freedom? So, the elimination of election funds would enable us to be fair to all people.

I realize that this may be hard, that tradition and present practices lead us to believe that it is impossible to get rid of election funds.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that this is not only a matter of good will, because all of us, no matter what party we represent, should enjoy the same opportunities which could be obtained through means other than election funds. Here, I should like to seize this opportunity in order to list some of these ways.

Mr. Speaker, if, for instance, in polls we put the agents of a candidate on an equal basis with any other election officer, this would be an expenditure that political parties could avoid. Why should the representatives of a candidate in the poll not be paid as the clerk or the president of the poll? Why not simply pay the officials of a recognized party? Then election funds would not be required to reimburse, at the constituency level, \$5,000, \$6,000 or \$10,000. And yet at \$30, as it seems to have been the amount required during the last election to pay a poll official, if there are 250 polls, that amounts to \$7,500 for those officials alone. Let us eliminate this election fund payment to

the political parties and simply entrust it to an elections branch. Thus, a lesser amount of election funds would be required.

I would suggest to the minister that he introduce amendments himself, as was done in the Quebec legislature and we should simply agree that poll officials be reimbursed as the other election officers.

Moreover, if we want our fellow citizens to be truly free, we should consider eliminating the practice of polls in private homes. Generally, the party in office simply gives to the chief election officer of the constituency involved a list of the people in whose homes the polls may be installed. It is still another way of indirectly influencing the voters.

My party has had to deal with officials or election officers who, unfortunately, had not been appointed objectively. From the outset, where there are 250 polls, it must come face to face with 250 returning officers liable to belong to a political party and, therefore, should they influence at least three members of their own family, they end up with over 700 persons. If to this we add the clerk, that means 750 others. And if polling stations are also added up—besides this was the case in my constituency—which for most were still in private homes, this results in quite another large group of citizens, so that at the start 5,000 to 6,000 people are likely to be influenced by such a situation.

This should be clarified once and for all. The elections branch should be given the chance of being entirely and completely objective at the level of enumerators, returning officers and clerks, and independent as well from political parties. That would be one way of democratizing things further, and by adding the representatives of the candidates, we would no longer have to think of that fraction of the expenditures caused by the representation at the polls.

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Mr. Speaker, something else could help us reduce the influence of election funds and, consequently, help all parties in their work, whatever they might be. When we speak of expenses and limits on television, radio and newspapers expenses, we agree fully. But we forget to mention that those expenses must be the same for all recognized parties. We would agree on the number of candidates. As for the number of candidates for each party, once again, that matter could be settled without election funds.

Why could we not pass a law to specify that the state radio, for instance, would have to give so much time to each political party during an election campaign, according to the allotment we ourselves could choose? Then no more money would have to be given to pay for television. The same control could take place and the CRTC could order all private television and radio stations to provide the same service during an election campaign. It would be the easiest thing in the world. All radio and television stations, private or not, should know during election time that they must provide for all political parties so much time allotted according to a legislation that could be drafted.

[Mr. Matte.]