

Canada Elections Act

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Amendment agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, as amended?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Accordingly, the order is discharged, the Bill is withdrawn and the subject matter thereof is referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Order discharged and Bill withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Pursuant to Standing Order 24(2), it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this point and to ask for the consent of the House that all orders listed on today's Order Paper under Private Members' Public Bills preceding Order No. 155 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

AMENDMENT TO INCREASE AMOUNT OF CANDIDATES' DEPOSIT

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi) moved that Bill C-355, to amend the Canada Elections Act (deposit), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is relatively rare that one has the opportunity to debate his own Bill in the House unless one is a Minister of the Crown. I am therefore pleased to have the opportunity to at least debate this Bill this afternoon.

The purpose of the Bill is to increase the deposit of candidates in general elections or by-elections from \$200 to \$2,000. I suppose many people will ask why this should be done. To my knowledge, the \$200 deposit has been in effect since Confederation.

• (1600)

I am sure all of us have noticed that in recent times there has been a vast proliferation of candidates particularly in general elections. In fact, in the last several general elections we have seen the phenomenon of more than one candidate representing the same Party in the same constituency. This is an indication that people are trying to make a farce of free elections.

I do not think, whatever one may think of a Government or a Party, one should have the inexpensive opportunity to poke fun at elections, because free elections are the very basis of democracy. Therefore, candidates should be prepared, if they wish to stand for election to the House of Commons, to demonstrate their sincerity by putting a substantial sum of money on the line. Today \$200 is not really a substantial sum of money when it comes to an election deposit. It is not very

difficult for any individual, unless he is a complete loony, to find ten people who will put up \$20 each so that he can put his name on the ballot. It should be made much more difficult for people whose only purpose in an election campaign is to obtain some publicity to achieve that rather spurious purpose.

There are other reasons as well. It has become noticeable of late that many fringe candidates—in fact, I would go so far as to call them lunatic candidates—indeed do disrupt election campaigns.

Mr. Blaikie: You should not talk about Members of your Party that way.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): I might say that this has not happened in the riding I have represented in all three election campaigns in which I participated as a candidate. There were not any of the so-called nuisance candidates. If the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) is not careful, I might describe a certain Party candidate that way.

I believe as well that this causes a considerable amount of confusion to the public. Certainly it would seem to me that under no circumstances should we allow two candidates to use the same Party label. That game is being played in some constituencies by the Rhinoceros Party. In at least one New Brunswick constituency in the last election there were two so-called candidates representing that so-called Party.

Also the proliferation of candidates has a tendency to add to the cost of elections. I am not one of those people who would argue that elections cost the country too much. In fact, I do not believe they do. If we cannot afford elections, certainly we cannot afford democracy; but I do not see any reason for unnecessarily adding to the cost of elections.

Other people will say that every individual has the right to protest the system, protest policy or protest whatever he wishes by seeking election to the House of Commons. I would agree with that, provided the individual were serious enough to show his sincerity by being willing to place at risk a substantial sum of money, which is not required under the present Canada Elections Act.

If a candidate is only looking for an opportunity to protest, there is a simple way of doing it. The simple device would be for the individual to spoil his ballot, and he would not have to go through the rigours of a campaign. Of course, some people will argue that if he spoils his ballot, or particularly if he expresses a personal complaint by writing his name on his ballot, his vote will no longer be secret. This is true, but many of us give up our right, in a sense, to the secrecy of our ballots in election campaigns. It would seem to me that everyone who stands for election indicates how he or she will vote by so doing. Also it would seem to me that those people who participate actively in campaigns and have officials with campaign positions indicate publicly how they will vote. While the ballot is still secret, it is really not any secret how such people will vote.