

Election Expenses

Radio and television stations will be required to provide six and one half hours of prime time during a campaign, apportioned equitably among the parties. The bill provides that, where there is any disagreement as to the apportionment of such time, the final arbiter will be the CRTC. I do not foresee any difficulty in the application of this principle, because, in the past, parties have been able to work out their apportionment of such time. Parties will be reimbursed from the public treasury for 50 per cent of the costs of purchasing allocated time. This is one part of the bill which contributes to the expenses of the national political parties.

In addition, local television stations whose coverage area lies entirely within one electoral district will be required to provide officially nominated candidates who are endorsed by registered parties with at least five minutes of prime broadcasting time, and radio stations at least 20 minutes. Officially nominated candidates who are not endorsed by registered parties will be provided with an amount of broadcasting time calculated on the basis of the number of non-endorsed candidates in the electoral district.

When the coverage area of a broadcasting station includes more than one electoral district the amount of prime time required to be provided to each candidate will be calculated on the basis of the number of candidates campaigning within the station's coverage area. In any event each candidate will be allotted a minimum of 30 seconds of television time and two minutes of radio time. This is really a provision to ensure that candidates have some exposure in the media, but they will be permitted, within their own limitations, to purchase additional time above the guaranteed minimum.

No broadcasting outlet will be permitted to sell advertising time to any party in excess of the allotted time; nor will it be permitted to offer free time to any party or candidate unless it offers an equivalent amount of free time to all other parties and candidates.

The bill provides for reimbursement from public funds of a portion of the campaign expenses incurred by candidates who obtain 20 per cent or more of the votes cast in their ridings. Such candidates will receive reimbursement to the extent of 16 cents for each of the first 25,000 voters in their ridings, and 14 cents for each additional voter, plus \$250.

As a rough rule of thumb, that in the case of a candidate who has a permissible ceiling of \$23,000 or so, provided he gets 20 per cent of the vote reimbursement of his total expenses would be in the order of 25 per cent. So the candidate is not entirely dependent. He first must attract a significant support in the constituency in order to qualify for support from the public treasury. In qualifying for that support he is reducing his dependence upon contributions received from other sources. At the same time, the limit that is imposed upon the candidate makes it rather easier for him to conduct a campaign with the knowledge that he can, with the assistance of the treasury and with the contributions that can be attracted through the tax credit, run his campaign more effectively. Of course, the provisions of the bill will not apply to the conduct of provincial or municipal elections.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

This bill really exemplifies an integrated approach to electoral reform in four major areas, and in a sense these are mutually supporting areas or proposals. Each of these major proposals works in accordance with the other three. The first is the limit on the expenditures by candidates and parties. Second is the limitation on the duration of the campaign. Third is full and complete disclosure of revenues and expenditures of political parties and candidates; and finally, there is government assistance in meeting the cost of election campaigns.

I have attempted to deal with the major provisions of the bill, Mr. Speaker. I will repeat what I said when I introduced a similar bill in the last Parliament, that I will be ready, and certainly the government will be ready, to listen to constructive suggestions made by hon. members. Everybody who runs an election campaign feels he knows as much as anyone else, and those of us who have run in a number of elections feel we are really qualified to judge a bill of this kind. Therefore, I acknowledge my readiness to listen to suggestions in committee, where it is possible to accept improvements to the bill. However, I do want to say, in concluding, that even though it has taken a good deal of time, and has travelled a long road of committee work, the present bill does involve a very big step forward in the area of electoral reform in Canada.

● (2030)

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to commend the government House leader (Mr. MacEachen) for his open-minded approach to a bill which finds essentially, I think, a very primary and basic welcome among all members of this House. I mention that because it is important that we approach something of such historical significance as this with an open mind. Notwithstanding the government House leader's bit of humour about all of us being the greatest experts in Canada with respect to election procedures, I hope that his assurance to us tonight that there are areas for discussion will manifest itself in the attention that this chamber and the standing committee, to which I understand the bill will be referred, will be able to give to it.

We welcome a bill that limits election expenses and provides for disclosure of donations to the various parties. The bill is long overdue, a point the minister touched on. The committee on election expenses which reported in 1966 recommended legislation providing for the limitation of expenses of candidates and parties, disclosure of incomes of candidates and parties as well as the expenditures made in both those categories, and also subsidies, to candidates and tax concessions to those who contribute to the political process in Canada and give their welcomed support to particular parties. We welcome these proposals, let there be no misunderstanding about that whatsoever.

In 1968 Canadians were promised electoral reform. On April 1, 1969 the then government House leader, now the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald), announced a comprehensive study of the election act, including proposals somewhat in the form of those now in front of us with respect to expenses. However, nothing was done by the present government until May 16, 1972 when an election expenses bill was given first read-