

*Private Members' Business*

it is accountable only to these same people. Not to interest groups, not to corporations or multinational conglomerates, but only to the people whom it proudly represents. We are dealing with the very principle of democracy today. But what do the members opposite fear?

When the Parti Québécois introduced the legislation on political party financing in 1977, some feared that the Quebec Liberal Party would not recover. The party was cut off from most of its financing sources and had to make some adjustments. It had always depended on large corporations to fund its political activities. The party's financial position, although weakened at first, adapted to the change and is doing very well today, relying exclusively on private donations. Political parties in Quebec can survive without corporate financing, and it is much better this way.

What did happen for individuals to start making small donations to their favourite political party? It is simply that, once private donations were accepted, individuals slowly regained confidence in their elected representatives. Voters realize now that their 10 \$ or 20 \$ donations can make a difference. Quebecers know that election results and government decisions no longer depend on the mood of large corporations. The average Canadian, such as the one that we should be representing as parliamentarians, knows that he has a say in the state's business.

When in their ridings, members of the Bloc Québécois are not afraid of being asked THE question so feared by members of other parties, which is the following: "Whose interests are you promoting in the House of Commons?" the Bloc Québécois members simply answer: "The only interests that we promote are those of Quebecers". The least we can say is that the answer from Liberal Party members is likely much more complicated. If you look closely at who funded their election campaign, you soon realize that they are accountable not only to the people, but to others as well.

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To find out whom the Liberals are indebted to, one only has to look at Elections Canada's report, which reveals that in 1991-92, nearly 50 per cent of contributions to the Liberal Party of Canada's election fund came from businesses and from various commercial and other organizations. How can Liberal Party members say they protect people's interests when half their funds come from companies? Let us not delude ourselves: these big corporations do not give tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars to that party just because of its great democratic values.

French-Canadians used to say, "No taxation without representation." The Liberals and the Tories have made a few changes to this famous sentence over the years. Today their slogan would be: "No representation without contribution". Those who want their voices to be heard in Parliament should

realize that they must make substantial contributions to the election fund or else their demands will disappear under the millions of dollars given to the national political parties by the big corporations. So much for the great democratic principles Canada is so proud of.

Some companies do not take any chances, like CN, which gave tens of thousands of dollars to each of the two big parties last year. They expect something in return, such as favours, contracts or legislative amendments favouring them. We should not think that these companies, which are not used to spending their money needlessly, are motivated solely by noble intentions. If we let these corporations influence through their donations the results of elections in this country, the decisions our governments will make may be biased by their debts, moral or otherwise, to these very companies.

The political parties taking office in Ottawa are supposed to represent the Canadian people, but until the federal government amends, as Quebec did over 15 years ago, its legislation on political party funding, people will always wonder whose interests the government in office is trying to protect. Quebecers have understood the meaning of the word "democracy" for a long time. Today, the federal government has an opportunity to show us it understands it too. It is up to it to seize this opportunity offered by the Official Opposition to restore the democratic reputation of Canada as a whole.

**Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in the debate on this motion on party financing put forward by the hon. member for Richelieu.

One of the speakers opposite referred to the Lortie Commission, a commission which has investigated extensively and heard the testimonies of numerous witnesses who wanted to voice their opinions on political financing. At the time, I had seized the opportunity to very humbly submit a brief on party financing because this is a subject I have been interested in for many years, even before I had the privilege of representing the people of the riding of Papineau at the National Assembly. All this to say that my main concern was with the way political parties were funded. I maintain, and I am not the only one, that the way political parties are funded leaves much to be desired. I have read extensively on the subject and I have come across a solution I consider very practical, yet revolutionary. It is from a professor at the University of New Brunswick who was completing a doctorate, and the subject of his thesis was party financing in Canada.

● (1400)

In this thesis, it was demonstrated that indeed, the easiest and most democratic way of financing political parties would be to eliminate all contributions from companies, labour and other organizations and allow only individuals to make donations or contributions to political parties. No companies, no legal, architectural or engineering firms. We all know the gamut of contributors to party funds. There is no need to elaborate. I do