

*Canada Elections Act*

We, in committee, will be pressing very hard for these reforms. We want to see the act strengthened, not weakened, as indicated by some of the loopholes that the Liberal government has failed to close in the bill before us.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. C. A. Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments about the introduction of Bill C-5 following the study in committee recommended by the House. It is said in the recommendation that this bill provides for three main types of amendments. The first concerns the registration of political parties and election expenses, the second aims at simplifying the implementation of the administrative provisions contained in the act following the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer, and finally, amendments aimed at improving the material organization of the polls and completing the other administrative changes whose implementation is also recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time we have amended the famous legislation entitled the Canada Elections Act, mainly as concerns expenditures, political contributions, election expenses, the control of election expenses, and so on.

The legislation we passed in 1974 was so complex that some parties, especially the Social Credit Party of Canada, found it very difficult, first to interpret and even more to implement. At first, we went to those responsible for the legislation, that is the returning officer and the Minister of Revenue, to obtain some information and explanations about the legislation, and surprisingly, they could not give us the explanations we wanted.

Indeed, this is what it says here: Soon after passage in January 1974 of the Canada Elections Act, which, as everyone agrees, is somewhat complex, the Chief Electoral Officer called a meeting of the principal members of the national office of the various political parties represented in the House of Commons to form the committee that now exists to study a new reform. But after 1974, in order to clarify it, amendments were introduced, so that in 1975, they prevailed; but we were already victims of that so complicated, so obscure 1974 legislation; people had the impression that the Social Credit Party had benefitted from it in 1974, while we did not get any donations that year, not a cent, and our expenses were greater on account of our struggle with Revenue Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which was monitoring our offices. Our costs exceeded the \$1,000 left to us. That was the impact of the 1974 legislation enacted by the parties in power and for them, and they greatly benefitted from it. Further; they benefit from it every year.

Even this year, the Liberal party collected nearly \$6 million. Six million a year during four years make \$24 million to start an election. Not bad!

While we, in 1974, hardly collected \$200,000 and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was close on our heels right across Canada. If that is trying to do justice to all political parties, to have a bit of fairness there, I assure you, Mr. Speaker that we did not receive fair treatment. We have been continuously

harassed to such an extent that some days, as I mentioned here in the House, I would call the federal National Revenue Department to obtain explanations about the record of some citizens from my riding and get the RCMP at the other end of the line. I made an intervention in the House to ask you, Mr. Speaker, if you had given orders or if someone had given orders to the RCMP to answer calls made by hon. members to the Revenue Canada office. I think this is a year we are going to remember. This is why I would like to make a few suggestions to amend that famous Elections Act which was supposed to give justice to citizens, a far cry from reality. Today the Elections Act tolerates every possible injustice and allows parties with money to buy electors, to buy elections. It is for this reason that again today, before sending this bill to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, it should be referred to the committee of the House. I urge the members of that committee to add some more amendments to that legislation in order to bring some more fairness into it.

The amount of election expenses has already been set but today it is proposed to increase again those expenses because of the rising costs of living. If you go in some homes you will see that the income of people should be increased, but it is not increased for many people who are living below the poverty level. And now they want to freeze election expenses to allow big parties and not small ones because everything is done to discourage us, Mr. Speaker, to allow the big parties to get more millions; they got \$24 million, now they need \$50 million or even more to make elections. Mr. Speaker, if we cannot call on the intelligence of people at election time, if it is only a matter of money we shall always have to support the same consequences as today.

Now we are back to anonymous contributions. The 1974 legislation suggested that contributions would be limited at last or at the very least disclosed and that political contributions over \$100 would have to be disclosed and we approved of that as well as of setting a ceiling to contributions. What happens then? It is a well known fact that the Party in power, due to its close relationship with big corporations, banks and so forth, receives big donations. Let us take a look at the past year's record, namely the 1976 report. You will find contributions for the Liberal Party amount to \$75,000 given by banks, \$80,000 given by multinational corporations and so on. A total of 6 million dollars means a lot of contributions, but at least we know where they come from now, but at this stage of the game they do not want to name names any more. They ask for anonymous contributions. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am against such practices. If we are going to be fooled, let us know at least who is helping the Party in power fool us. It would be some kind of consolation, but if you have anonymous contributions, it will be impossible to know who is funding the major parties. This is precisely what we do not want, Mr. Speaker.

I also feel a financial amendment should be introduced if we want to get honest elections. We have pressed for it for a long time. They claim that limited amounts are set for the sake of justice to all voters. But if we really want honest elections, there is only one way, namely a mandatory identification card.