

Election Expenses

permitted to arise. Full public confidence will be accorded only if there is full public scrutiny. I believe our responsibility in this matter can be expressed in terms of a general principle. Private activities which have a public implication cannot be reserved from public scrutiny.

This leads me to the further point that legislation of the kind we are discussing here today by itself will not relieve the causes of public concern. We need to establish without delay legislation to require disclosure both by permanent and elected public servants, of all private interests which may be relevant to the execution of their public responsibilities. Disclosure of private investments and associations which may be affected by public decisions is as essential to the establishment of public trust as is the disclosure of the source of campaign funds. Comprehensive legislation to effect these purposes should be brought forward without delay. In every case in which we do not fully disclose our relationships with special interests we leave room for doubt and suspicion.

There are two other specific points in the bill which I wish to touch on. With regard to limitations imposed on spending by candidates, I would favour a much more stringent measure than that proposed by this government legislation. The provisions in Bill C-203 would mean allowable expenditures of approximately \$27,000 in my constituency. Rather, I would propose that the total amount of money spent by any candidate be limited to an amount of money equal to 25 cents for each enumerated voter in the constituency. If such were the case, my campaign expenditures would be limited to \$14,000. That is a far cry from the \$30,000 spent in my campaign last fall.

● (2020)

The reason for taking this more parsimonious approach with regard to spending is that, while it forces all candidates to cut their cloth according to the amount available to them, it also allows persons for whom the high cost of elections had previously proven a deterrent to offer themselves as candidates. This, I may say, is particularly applicable to women to whom access to financial sources is extremely difficult. This more stringent regulation on allowable expenditures, coupled with federal subsidies, would make election to public office a realistic goal for the many rather than for the few.

Further, as proposed in my private member's bill, I would like to see the present legislation amended so that federal subsidies are available to any candidate receiving at least 15 per cent of the votes cast in his or her constituency. The requirement of a higher percentage than 15 per cent of the total would, in my opinion, be particularly discriminatory to candidates in recognized national parties whose fortunes fluctuate regionally. With a percentage above this figure, the candidate who runs for the Conservative party in Quebec, the NDP in the Maritimes, or the Liberal party in the Prairies, might do his or her utmost legitimately to represent their national party, only to find their efforts are not to be reimbursed or recognized to the extent their colleagues' efforts are in other parts of the country.

There is one final matter I would like to raise. Our sincerity as members of parliament in this matter will be judged by our willingness to enforce this legislation.

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

Surely none of us is so naïve as to think that the spirit and letter of the present bill will be universally adhered to unless extraordinary ways are devised for enforcing them. The history of successful violations of many important features of income tax legislation, or in the field of industrial relations—and notably by the more powerful and affluent sections of the population—suggests that the best legal and accounting minds could be utilized to enable those who can afford them to ingeniously evade the intent of this legislation. It is therefore essential, if we are really serious about this undertaking, that we create at once a mechanism for the automatic, continuous and free review of the implementation of these measures.

At the same time—and the two tasks could be performed by the same person and his staff—we ought to establish an electoral ombudsman responsible directly to parliament to whom breaches, irregularities or simply actions contrary to the spirit of the act will be reported. This official should have powers to investigate and report on any developments or incidents deemed by him to impede the full implementation of the basic intentions of Bill C-203. The field of inquiry should be so defined as to permit investigation into areas not explicitly covered by the present act, such as, for example, the unfair use of government advertising, or activities by business, industries or unions constituting, in effect, electioneering although technically outside the scope of the proposed measures.

We should, in short, create the legal framework for a new public morality in the field of elections; and we should establish an officer of parliament with the authority and resources to strengthen our conscience and our conscientiousness at moments when these might be in danger of flagging under the pressure of excessive zeal and partisanship, however well intentioned.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I want to rise to say a few words on Bill C-203, the election expenses bill. I want to express congratulations to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) for bringing forward this bill. He has been much involved in this process ever since the special committee was established in the spring of 1971 and held its hearings and discussions during the winter of 1971 and 1972.

I believe that the bill before the House tonight is a stronger bill. It represents many more of the recommendations of the special committee and the Barbeau Commission than the bill which was presented to parliament last year. In fact, this bill represents the culmination of a great deal of public discussion on this matter which started in 1964 with the appointment of the Barbeau Commission by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Lester Pearson. I believe that this bill implements nearly every recommendation of the Barbeau commission report. It covers the point relating to making political parties legal entities, and it covers the points regarding the provision of a greater degree of equality among candidates. It seeks to broaden the range of political contributions through tax concessions to donors. It seeks to shorten the campaign period by placing limitations on expenditures on the mass media by candidates of parties, and it requires candidates and parties to disclose their source of income. It also implements the seventh recommendation of the Barbeau commission