

Election Expenses Bill

other two being offered on August 28, 1970, and November 2, 1970.

Mr. Speaker, in committee I stated that I felt there was a potential conflict of interest here and asked the minister or his department to look into the matter. They reported on the investigation and said it had been found that this man was involved in the operations part of the department's programs in the Atlantic region and that any decisions or evaluations of offers and grants under the Regional Development Incentives Act were made by the incentives division of the department.

I accept the word of the minister and his deputy in this regard, Mr. Speaker, but surely the various divisions of the department have contact with each other. It is ridiculous to suggest otherwise. It was made quite clear that this man had been involved in discussions with McCain Foods Limited about their expansion plans, yet he went directly from the federal government service into the employ of McCain Foods Limited.

Mr. Cullen: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. The hon. member for Sarnia (Mr. Cullen) rises on a point of order.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. member is going to speak on the subject matter of the bill, or is he to be allowed to continue the smear comments that he has been making for the last five minutes?

Mr. Skoberg: You can't take it.

Mr. Burton: Mr. Speaker, the matters to which I have related in the last several minutes are matters of fact which have been stated in the committee by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) and his deputy.

• (1540)

Mr. Skoberg: Disclosure, my boy; that is what's wanted.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Burton: Here is a case in point, and I use it as an example to show that possible conflicts of interest may be involved. Of course, it may not be possible to answer some pertinent questions at this time, although it is well known that the firm in question has dipped into the public treasury to the tune of \$7.1 million. It is a well known beneficiary of and an active participant in the affairs of the Liberal party of New Brunswick. That is a matter of record and hon. members opposite cannot quarrel with it; it is a fact. Furthermore, these facts are known to the public. Mr. Speaker, the people know that some of these things are going on, even if the specific facts are not available. It is this process by which one political party is able to maintain itself in power that is leading to growing disillusionment in the democratic process.

Until we deal with the problem of identifying contributions, no matter by whom they are made, to political campaigns and political parties I suggest that we will not obtain effective legislation in the field of election expenses. Thus, I urge the President of the Privy Council

(Mr. MacEachen) who introduced this bill to look seriously at that particular part of it. I suggest that unless this area is considered, the people of this country will know that this bill is a sham.

I know the minister made the point that the bill follows the recommendations of the committee. I concede that point. I suggest, nevertheless, that some members of the committee disagreed with that recommendation. They wanted to make progress in that field. They came forward with their report because they wanted progress to be made. I suggest that we could go beyond that point. The time to do that is now, while this legislation is before the House. This is the occasion for dealing adequately with the matter. When the bill goes to committee let us give it further consideration and make sure that adequate provisions are included concerning the disclosure of campaign contributions.

Mr. Woolliams: That would be an interesting exercise.

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, legislation concerning election expenses and various regulations governing general elections in this country have come forward from time to time during the past 105 years. The legislation and regulations have been amended from time to time since then, but never to the extent that this bill proposes. Some of the legislation that was passed was designed to curb or control corrupt practices. The idea behind this bill is somewhat different. On the surface, it sounds like a democratic measure. Apparently it is aimed at giving people with moderate incomes the same chance to enter politics as is available to those with much higher incomes. It is difficult to argue against that principle if taken by itself. All the same, one must consider many factors about this bill before coming to some kind of logical and reasonable conclusion about it.

In 1873, I think it was, the first example of corrupt practices came to public view. That stimulated the introduction of legislation dealing with this matter which was introduced in the following year, 1874. Then legislation in this field was passed in 1908 but there was nothing further until 1920 when amendments were proposed by the prime minister of the day, Arthur Meighen. Those amendments were to the Dominion Elections Act and were designed to clarify a number of points in the existing legislation, such as exceptions to the rule that all payments must be made through the official agent. There was also a clarification of personal expenses and the amendment changed the penalty for default in publishing a statement of expenses.

The 1920 legislation expanded the scope of publicity by requiring that candidates disclose contributors and amounts contributed. Although this was an improvement, much of the usefulness of the new provision was made ineffective by two continuing failures, those being the nonrecognition of political parties and the lack of enforcement provisions for dealing with infringements of the act. Since 1920 no new laws of any significance have been brought down, although many pleas for reform from the media and the public have been expressed from time to time since then.

There is only one documented case of a member being unseated under the old regulations for corrupt practices; otherwise the law was not enforced. Some of the reasons