



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Different rules for them, you

The weathered lawn signs are all that remain. Another federal election in Canada has come and gone.

On June 2, you made your decision. But did you know that you were required to give a financial contribution not only to the candidate and party of your choice but also to all the others you didn't vote for?

Few Canadians realize the extent to which their wallets are held hostage at election time. It's time for the mugging to come to an end.

Any candidate in this year's federal election who received 15 per cent or more of the vote will have fully half of their election expenses reimbursed by the public treasury. And the parties will be reimbursed 22.5 per cent of their expenses, if they spent at least 10 per cent of their election expense limit.

After the 1993 federal election, taxpayers forked over \$14.9 million to candidates and another \$8 million to political parties.

That's right, almost \$23 million of your tax dollars were divvied up to help pay for the campaigns of Jean Chretien, Lucien Bouchard, Preston Manning, Audrey McLaughlin, and Kim Campbell. The total was up 22 per cent from the 1988 campaign and the take will likely be even higher with this year's election.

It's part of the hypocrisy surrounding election campaigns. The people governed by the rules are the same ones who write them.

These rules also represent a gross double standard. Take the treatment of tax-deductible contributions. A \$100 contribution to a charity entitles the donor to a 17 per cent tax credit. But that same \$100, if given to a political party, entitles the donor to a whopping 75 per cent tax write-

Let's
Talk
Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

off.

You never hear those sanctimonious politicians, out hustling your vote during an election, squealing about political parties not paying their 'fair share' of taxes.

In all, tax credits for political contributions means the federal treasury can be expected to forgo more than \$20 million in an election year. Coupled with the grants they receive, select parties and candidates will scoop about \$45 million from the political pork barrel in handouts and inducements at the expense of Canadian taxpayers.

So why is this allowed to continue?

It's because few Canadians know what's going on. And those who do are in no rush to tell you. It's simply not in the interests of those who are benefiting from the rules to change them.

Now that the election is over it would be interesting to put the candidates who were haggling over your vote to a real test of accountability. Ask them if they're prepared to lead by example and send their expense reimbursements back to Ottawa.

Chances are they won't. Because in politics, membership has its privileges.

Haggling hubby always gets a bargain

Kuta Beach, Bali, Indonesia, 1977. Hubby was on a roll.

A week on the island and already he considered himself an expert at getting the best bargains.

He loved haggling and on this particular afternoon, he was quibbling with a street vendor over the price of a blue batik shirt.

He was relentless. He even went as far as to walk away from the stall, but the vendor, caught up in the heat of the moment, made him a final offer and hubby took it.

I always wonder whether the poor Balinese fellow made any profit at all on that sale.

I discovered to my embarrassment that hubby has not lost his competitive edge. Last Saturday morning, I witnessed the man at work.

It started at the luggage shop. On the previous day, I had gone out scouting for a garment cover and a shaving kit for hubby's travels. Foolishly, I offered to accompany him to the shop.

"Do we get a Saturday morning discount?" hubby asked the clerk as she approached us. I cringed.

"No," was her firm reply.

He brought the subject up again as he placed his intended purchases on the counter.



On the
Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

"Well," he said, as he handed the clerk his credit card, "since I don't get a discount, I'll charge it so it'll cost you." I was trying to ease my way out of the shop by then.

Our 11-year-old had witnessed this transaction by his model father. He was all ears and eyes.

That same young one was in a rush to get to the department store. He had a wallet full of cash he had received for his birthday on the Thursday past and he was keen to see it spent.

He headed for the toy department, while hubby dragged me into the appliance section, asking me if I would like a rice cooker since I always fail miserably at producing fluffy rice.

Looking Back ...



Bratislava Castle Park was in the midst of creation near Kilbride during August, 1967. The 50-acre park was being developed by the parishioners of St. Cyril's Methodist Church in Hamilton. Here, Mary Geoghegan, Maureen Bonny, and Brenda Geoghegan show off a cannon which sat before the park's miniature castle.

She's way out in left field

The new Municipal Act was recently discussed at a committee of Halton council.

Halton Hills Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson said local councils should meet in private to informally discuss weighty matters without having the prying eyes of the media present.

She said actual decisions are never made in private so a little freewheeling discussion could bring about some good ideas.

Excuse me?

No decisions made in private? Council routinely goes into closed-door session at even the slightest hint of litigation, personnel or property concerns. Items are discussed, and decisions made in private all the time. All the public gets is the result, with no information as to how it was reached.

Ms Serjeantson said federal and provincial governments meet in caucus to discuss issues without media scrutiny. All she wants is that same privilege. Of course both upper-tier governments have to face organized opposition in question period. They have to defend every piece of legislation they put forward in debates.

To Ms Serjeantson I would say, fine, you



Reaume
with a
View

with BRAD REAUME

have your private meetings but in exchange I want a public seat at the council table where citizens can take part in the proceedings with the same rights and privileges as any elected person.

I was surprised other committee members did not pick up on this. After the meeting at least one councillor indicated he would have said something, but Ms Serjeantson never formally requested committee's consideration. When no support came for the idea it was dropped.

The system is set up with checks and balances. Without opposition at municipal council, the Municipal Act stipulates that business must be conducted in public. While I can understand the need to keep some discussions private, local councils are too quick to go into closed session.

In passing: Why did Milton's chief executive officer David Hipgrave try to filibuster the Municipal Act? If someone told him to take more control of the agenda, they should reconsider.

After presenting a written report on changes in the new Municipal Act, Mr. Hipgrave saw fit to provide Milton council with a line by line expansion on his report. Councillors, having already read the report, reacted like he was reading War and Peace — in Russian.

Heads bobbed, whispered conversations shifted topics, people stared politely at the ceiling, then their fingernails, then at carpet lint. Only 45 minutes later it was over, everyone too polite to put him out of our misery.

Then he did it again the next week when Milton council was approving its position on the Municipal Act. Not one to drive the agenda, the normally unobtrusive Mr. Hipgrave usually offers only to answer any questions councillors may have.

He does get red faced when sound system malfunctions occur, likely because he just kicked the sound box which sits under his desk. One time he took a phone call at his desk during a council meeting. I hope he remembered to pick up the milk and loaf of bread.