

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



Contacts: Julia Ann Easley
WLU Information Officer
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2070

March 18, 1993
15-1993

Dr. Brian Tanguay (*Il peut parler le français.*)
Professor of Political Science
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2663
(519) 747-9185

Disenfranchised groups favor third-party advertising, professors find

Waterloo, Ont. (March 18) – Reformers seeking to ban third-party election advertising in the interest of fairness should be wary of muzzling disenfranchised groups, says a professor of political science at Wilfrid Laurier University.

In research conducted for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, Brian Tanguay and colleague Barry Kay found that those groups that felt most disenfranchised were most likely to favor relatively unrestricted spending as one of the few ways of voicing their concerns.

"This finding should give pause to those reformers who seek to ban third-party spending outright, in the name of greater electoral equity," they wrote in an article published in Volume 2 of Interest Groups and Elections in Canada.

A government-sponsored bill now before Parliament would limit third-party advertising during elections to \$1,000 per group. The bill is in keeping with the recommendations of the royal commission.

From the study of 89 interest groups in 12 federal ridings, the professors also concluded that interest groups have less influence on the political process than is generally perceived.

Almost 60 per cent of the groups stated that interest groups should not be allowed to spend money during elections to promote or oppose candidates and parties; about 40 per cent felt that there should be no such restrictions.

(MORE)

Surprisingly, organizations that might be considered critical of the status quo – trade unions, agricultural associations, environmental and peace groups, and those concerned with moral and ethical issues – were the only ones in favor of third-party spending. A majority of business groups, social service groups, and non-economic interests were opposed to the practice.

"It is ironic," says Tanguay, "that the groups with the least amount of money are in favor of relatively free election spending while the better funded groups prefer restrictions."

Third-party spending is seen by organizations unhappy with the existing political system as a "tool for offsetting the power of entrenched vested interests," the professors wrote.

Of the 35 groups that did not oppose third-party spending, one third recommended some mechanism for guaranteeing disclosure of funding sources or spending limits to ensure that more affluent groups do not dominate the electoral process.

The research article also includes a case study of Campaign Life, the most widespread interest group campaign during the 1988 federal election at the constituency level.