

WITH **Sidney Green**, Lawyer, former Cabinet Minister and Retired Politician



**Sidney Green** – Since his call to the Bar on September 30, 1955, Sidney has been an active litigation counsel and has appeared in all courts, including numerous appearances before the Supreme Court of Canada. He was appointed Queen’s Counsel in 1969.

Sidney served as a Bencher of the Law Society of Manitoba from 1996 to 2004 and in May of 2004 he was appointed a Life Bencher. He has participated in numerous seminars sponsored by the Bar Association and the Law Society, and lectured for four years in Labour Law at the Law School. He has figured prominently in community affairs – as a staff member and board member of the YMHA, President of the University of Manitoba Alumni and the Winnipeg Film Society. He was the Director of B'nai Brith Camp on Town Island, Ontario for two years. Sidney also served as a member of the Legislature and Cabinet Minister from 1966 until 1981.

He was interviewed prior to his Breakfast on the Frontier speech in Winnipeg on May 13, 2008.

**Frontier Centre: What is the moral case against public funding of political parties you were mentioning?**

**Sidney Green:** It’s the same moral case which calls for the separation of church and state or public financing of religious schols. The people should not be asked to finance beliefs which they are opposed to or any beliefs. The people who believe in something should finance their beliefs. If they have an organization which supports their position that organization should finance their beliefs.

**FC: How dependent are political parties on these types of subsidies and how do these subsidies change political parties?**

**SG:** They are now very dependent. I think I used as an example the New Democratic Party getting something like \$10 million a year, the Tories perhaps 3 times that much during election campaigns. And their own democracy, the administration, would say they can’t survive without it. They survived very well without it before the election financing laws but once having received it they become dependent on it.

**FC: Just to go on that, you said that money does not win elections ideas do. Can you elaborate on that?**

**SG:** If we look historically, the Labour party won in England although they were very much under funded. The CCF won in Saskatchewan fighting money. Manitoba won with a CFF government fighting money which was a New Democratic Party government at that time, the same in BC and in Ontario. And if you look at the situation in the United States you will see Mister Obama is getting more money because he is winning. It’s winners who get money not money that creates winners.

**FC: Critics argue that public support for political parties allows third parties to flourish. How would you respond to that argument?**

**SG:** I know that we had flourishing third parties long before political financing, including Social Credit which formed a government in British Columbia and Alberta, including the CCF which formed the government of Saskatchewan and all kinds of third parties grew up during those years. Some of them succeeded, some of them didn’t succeed. But I

wouldn’t fund a party merely because it was a third choice, if it had any value people who believed in it would fund it.

**FC: You said individuals should be able to make anonymous donations to parties. Do you support any restrictions on individual donations?**

**SG:** I support the general law. Namely, that it is unlawful to bribe a politician otherwise I do not support laws with respect to financing because one, it is contrary to freedom of speech and secondly, because it is impossible to enforce them and it makes dishonest people out of honest people because they will find and seek out ways to get around stupid laws.

**FC: You said individuals should not be compelled to support things they disagree with. Would you extend that principle to trade unions as well? The idea here is that people shouldn’t be forced to pay for things they don’t agree with.**

**SG:** I don’t relate the two at all. When you are required to pay union dues to a union it’s for a service, namely collective bargaining, to bargain an agreement with the employer. You are not paying the union dues you are paying for a service for your benefit with regards to terms and conditions of employment and if you can convince enough employees that you don’t want the service you can undo it. But if the majority of employees say they want a collective bargaining agreement and that they want the union to bargain on their behalf then all of the employees should be required to pay for this service and nobody should be able to get out of it. I do not regard that as financing a belief. I regard that as financing the same way as we have to finance to build new roads. You can’t object to it because you don’t use the road.

**FC: In some instances some people look at it that sometimes unions support political parties.**

**SG:** I agree that no part of a members dues should be used to support political parties. And I believe that is right and I believe that a person took the case to the Supreme Court of Canada, I can’t remember who, and the Supreme Court decided against him and they were wrong. No part of his dues should have been used to finance political parties.

**FC: How can we ensure that money does not buy or win elections?**

**SG:** You can't ensure anything but history will tell you that it doesn't. When Tommy Douglas was campaigning, the absence of money was to him a virtue, something that would gain him votes not lose them.

**FC: You mentioned public support of parties leads to free speech restrictions. Can you elaborate on that?**

**SG:** The law says that a third party can't spend money in an election campaign. Need I go further?

**FC: Do you feel there's a way to remedy that situation?**

**SG:** All of the laws dealing with election financing should be repealed and then you will not have this problem.

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