

going into an election. All through 1977, 1978 and 1979 the citizens of Canada were on hold, basically believing that an election was coming right away.

Essentially, my bill would provide a situation in which four years from the last election we could expect another election. To say that an election will fall on every anniversary date four years hence would cause some logistic problems. For example, the most recent election was a February election; it would commit us for a long period of time to having elections every February. Clause 1 of my bill seeks to repeal section 50 of the act to allow the government four months, either before or after the anniversary date, in which to call an election. Virtually, it is an eight-month leeway or four months either side of the anniversary date. Then the citizens of Canada would know that an election would take place within a specified time-frame. It ought not to be the prerogative of any government to hold off its best legislation, then put it through and, as a surprise, spring an election on the public. Certainly during the years when Lester B. Pearson was the Prime Minister of Canada the country was polled to sample the public mood. When the mood was felt to be a bit sour from the perspective of the government, there was no election announcement; but when the polls showed that it looked right for a win, the government went to the people.

What is wrong with the system as it exists now? The presumption is that the purpose of Parliament is to serve the government in power, whereas the presumption ought to be that the purpose of Parliament is to serve the people of Canada. They should be able to put in place their government, and the tools which make this place function ought not to be solely in the hands of the government. The government should not have the power to dictate, on the basis of polls favourable to it, the calling of an election. In the case of the 1979 election, the government held off for three years before finally calling an election. It would have been only a few more months before the Governor General would have been required to call an election.

The right opportunity for a win is not reason enough for an election to be called. If this bill were passed, the citizens of Canada would know that on the anniversary date four years from the last election, either four months later or four months earlier, or at any time within that time-frame the next election would take place. It would mean that opposition parties, government parties and the citizens of Canada would know what is going on. If the government holds off its best legislation until that period, then they would know what is up. It would be much better than what appear to be deceptive methods used now, where there is ongoing polling and the calling of an election when the government finds the time to be right. The government utilizes its ability to gather information in order to retain power. Elections are called today for the extension of power. They are not called, as they ought to be, with the presumption in mind that the people are the ones who should decide when an election is called.

There has been an ongoing manipulation in the calling of elections. This has been unfair, and the public has been deeply

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dissatisfied. In 1979, the public expected a snap election. Rumours were flying for at least all of 1977 and all of 1978, which was the normal year for an election. It did not come about because the polls were not ready. Then we were approaching the date in 1979 when the government would have been forced to call it. Yet, the government went almost to the death knell waiting for something to break, but leaving the people hanging as if somehow the running of this institution is only to satisfy the savouring of power by the elected government. I could say that of any party; it ought not to be its power nor that presumption.

I had the experience of attending a university in the United States for six years of my life. While there are aspects of the American system to be commended, others to be criticized and some to be condemned, I sensed the fact that they know that every four years they would elect their president and government made it a much more satisfactory arrangement than the one in Canada where we can have a majority government which on some issue it thinks is popular with the people can call an election and go for another majority government. This process is not used very much in the Parliament of Canada, but it is in some of the provincial legislatures.

We could have a majority government with a two, three or four-year range in which it can actually tease the people by saying that it will be going early. I do not think a majority government should be going early. It was sent to govern. If it has the people, it should be governing; it should not be talking about an election. Also it should not be tormenting the minds of citizens with the notion that next month there will be an election, and then not calling it. The people then wait for the next month, and it does not come. This keeps going on. The people wonder whether there will be a winter election. Then we come into the spring and through the whole next year, and still no election. It tortures the minds of Canadians in terms of when the members of this institution will be replaced. It is simply unsatisfactory.

I realize that putting a fixed formula in place has its limits in that it defies the parliamentary system. My bill would take care of that situation by providing a leeway of 40 days on either side, because a minority government could fall and the election could be called in the midst of winter.

I am sure hon. members will remember that the February election was rather uncomfortable. As an Albertan, I went about knocking on doors in Saskatchewan, and I should like to tell hon. members who are not from that province that it is pretty cold there in February. The steel doors on some of the houses were even colder. Four months later the election could have been held in the spring, and its anniversary date would have been sometime later.

● (1610)

I know how private members' hour works. If the subject matter is talked out, that means those who have talked it out will have denied what the citizens of this country want with regard to having some predictability. They do not want the government, this government or any other, using the election