

that it does not want to take away the vote or the right to vote of any Canadian. There are three vacant seats in Canada right now, but no byelections have been called. Effectively Canadians in those ridings are losing their right to representation in the House. If the government is serious about every Canadian being represented in this place and not denied his or her privilege to cast a ballot, it should call the byelections. I imagine the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), depending upon whether or not he wants to make a decision, could make that decision tonight, and we would be in a byelections period tomorrow in respect of those three byelections. I challenge hon. members on the government side to consider it. I challenge them to take the matter to their minister so that the byelections will be called. At least that would take care of the situation wherein every Canadian is not represented in the House at present.

The government, which is almost virtually wiped out in the west, seems to have finally heard voices from western Canada indicating a problem out there. Members of the government are now saying, "If there is a problem, how can we resolve it?" They are hearing that there is alienation in the west and they are wondering how to address it. I should like to tell the House that alienation in western Canada will not be resolved by Bill C-113 or by changing or staggering the voting hours. In the 1980 election western Canadians, especially British Columbians, felt that, although they had the right to vote, what difference did it make? That seemed to be the attitude which I heard expressed in British Columbia. I am sure other colleagues of mine will express the same thing. But as we went further west, we realized that it was just an irritant. It was not the cause of the alienation; it was just a further demonstration of western Canadian feelings that they did not have a rightful place in the decisionmaking process in central Canada, in the central government.

If we take a look at what the government is proposing, it is very interesting to see the reasons which were advanced in cabinet for staggering the voting hours. For example, in British Columbia the polls would close effectively at 5.30 p.m. It was spelled out in the cabinet document, which I understand was circulated to all members of the Liberal caucus but of course not to all members of the House—this place works in wonderful and mysterious ways; sometimes we receive copies—that the polls close at the same time across the country and that, by magic, alienation would be taken care of. This is not the way it works. With the polls closing at 5.30 p.m. in British Columbia, we must remember that electors have to be given four continuous hours in order to cast their ballots. In its own cabinet paper the government said:

The proposed new hours would place a heavier burden on employers in the west, because most of the polling hours would fall within the normal working day—

The government recognized that this would impact negatively, for instance, upon people in British Columbia. Additionally,

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because the election would be held on a Monday, the government wondered whether employers would be forced to give employees a half day off, perhaps Monday afternoon, to cast their ballots. The document continued:

Moreover, it could reduce voter turnout by encouraging employees to take a long weekend, since polling day is on a Monday.

This comes back to the motion of the New Democratic Party. Would it not effectively remove the right to vote? Then there is the discretion, in other words, the four hours need not be given on polling day, they would be given on an advance day.

**Mr. Blackburn:** Saturday.

● (2020)

**Mr. Epp:** That is the point. The four hours could be given by employers on a non-working day, or what is traditionally now a non-working day. As you go from east to west, this of course would make very little difference. They point that out as well.

I think the government's conclusion is perhaps most relevant. It reads:

Moreover, western voters would almost certainly be required to vote on a day off, and the Bill might therefore exacerbate rather than reduce the sense of alienation in the West.

**Mr. Blackburn:** That is why they brought it in.

**Mr. Epp:** If that is their conclusion and the reason for bringing in the bill, if they think they will solve the problems of alienation in the west, I suggest they get more advisers.

There is a problem as to how we address the electoral question. I already gave as one example the calling of the byelections. What I am more interested in is not this kind of tinkering but, rather, parliamentary reform which would make this House more relevant in its day to day operations so that it might be more relevant to Canadians. That is the issue which we should address. As well, we should be addressing the issue of how the regions can be better reflected at the federal level. There is also the question of the Senate addressing the regional issues and how the voice of those regions will be heard here.

I recognize that the Fathers of Confederation—our first Prime Minister, for instance—wanted a unitary state. It was clean and neat and he understood it. But he also understood the nature of Canada. He understood that we would not have a country without giving very close consideration to regional differences and the need to fit the regions into the larger puzzle of Canada. That is why we are a federal state.

I suggest to the government that if it thinks it will resolve the differences of alienation by tinkering with the hours, it is badly mistaken. The government's own paper shows that it has very serious reservations about that. What we need, then, is to call the byelections and seriously review parliamentary reform within the House. Let us look at the matter of regional representation at the central level. Finally, when we consider the question of how best to carry out electoral reform, let us take very seriously the proposal that has been put forward of delayed counting or the withholding of the announcement of