

Canada Elections Act

days less to become known, to make my record known to the electorate in an attempt to unseat me. Anyone who wants to take my seat will be disadvantaged."

If I were totally motivated by the desire to hang on to power, I would have no trouble with this bill. However, in the long term, on account of short-term gain, to retain power will erode the commitment of the Canadian people to the democratic process. It is another step in the direction which is inherent in the Constitution. It is a fundamental belief in oligarchies, that the strong shall rule the weak. It runs counter to the very first paragraph of Beauchesne, which is the book which each of us receives upon election to this House, about the purpose of this House and Parliament.

I can see the unfairness of this 47-day period even more clearly in the case of a byelection. If you are an astute observer of the rhythm of this House as it unfolds and transpires toward a general election, you can begin to make a reasonable guess as to whether or not we are heading toward an election. That guess is likely to be reasonably correct unless, all of a sudden, an unfavourable Gallup poll comes in, and then it changes dramatically and quickly.

The provisions of this bill would affect byelections. Do all political parties have the same opportunity to see a byelection coming? Do they have equal opportunity to contest that byelection? We need only look at the past decade of behaviour by this government in relation to byelections. You can see how cleverly they wield the power to name the date.

Mr. Collenette: It is the law.

Mr. Hawkes: Who made the law?

Mr. Collenette: Everyone in this House.

Mr. Hawkes: The transitory majority wants to change the fundamental law of this country, the Constitution. That same transitory majority wants to amend the fundamental democratic protection we have which is inherent in the elections act. To be on that side of the House and say that it is this House and all of the regions and a reasonable portion of the people in those regions who support the Constitution, or this kind of electoral reform, is to be dishonest. It is dishonest to make that kind of statement. This is a transitory majority, primarily from two provinces, that is determining the Constitution of Canada. That same majority is seeking to weaken—

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member would permit a question.

Mr. Hawkes: I would be happy to accept a question.

Mr. Fisher: I am curious about how the hon. member can reconcile an apparent contradiction in his comments. I am asking this honestly out of my own curiosity. One of the great differences between a parliamentary system, which I think the hon. member has actively supported and endorsed in the past and probably still does, and a presidential system is that a presidential system has a fixed election date and a parliamen-

tary system has a floating date. Can the hon. member tell me how we can protect Parliament and still have a fixed date?

Mr. Hawkes: Kindergarten teachers could think up such complex questions. Had the hon. member been listening, near the beginning of my remarks I said that the government could simply name the date one year in advance instead of 47 days in advance. Why not tell us one year in advance when it is going to be? It would not be a violation of the parliamentary principle. There is one other part of the parliamentary system which is not the same as a presidential system, and that is that the government can be defeated by a majority of the members of this House who have the guts to do so.

● (1550)

An hon. Member: That's what happened a year ago.

Mr. Hawkes: No, what happened a year ago was an extension of the parliamentary secretary's basic commitment to retaining and hold power regardless of whether it was good for Canadians. That is what happened a year ago.

You could have another provision in the electoral law, that when the government is defeated, we can have our 60-day period. It could occur under that circumstance. But in the absence of a government defeat, give us all equal notice, six-months' notice or a year's notice, and that will not violate parliamentary democracy. That certainly is not the presidential system.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit another question? Does the hon. member feel that the Canadian people would like us to have campaigns that last a whole year?

Mr. Hawkes: I think I can speak on behalf of the voters of my riding who have noticed that some campaigns seem to go on for two or three years. The Liberals run a campaign as a government from the day they are elected till the next election. That is the point I have made. Those of us who would like to spare the voters of this country long election campaigns might be better served with certain knowledge of the date of an election further in advance. In the absence of that knowledge, I suggest that the New Democratic Party as well as this party begins to move into an election stance a considerable length of time ahead of an election. Many, many ridings in this country and many political parties had campaign headquarters rented and phones installed for the 1979 election in May and April 1978, yet that election took place only in May of 1979. The government controlled this, a great deal of money was wasted and Canadians were subjected to a very long election campaign.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Now they are opening ministerial offices all over the country.

Mr. Hawkes: That is true. The campaign offices today are called ministerial offices and the taxpayers pay for them. That is the difference. Once an election period starts, it is the donors