

Partisanship has its disadvantages from time to time. There is such a thing as being too partisan, I suppose, but it seems to me that partisan politics and the act of being partisan are fundamental protections. Partisanship is built into this chamber. This chamber is designed for partisanship. If there were no partisanship, this chamber would not function. Our benches are divided by two sword lengths, precisely because of the partisan history and development of this kind of chamber.

A reaction to too much partisanship is somewhat suspect. Over the past few months the government has received no partisanship from this side of the House, merely honest, objective criticism of its legislation and of what it is doing. We do not believe in being partisan or taking partisan advantage in this chamber. We save that for the hustings, which is its proper place. There are people in this House who on occasion take partisan advantage, and surely some of that must be allowed.

As to referring this bill to a committee, which is a possibility with any private member's bill, I agree with the general principle of referring private members' bills to committees for discussion, but I come back to my first point. At all the committees, special task forces, federal-provincial conferences and first ministers' conferences the only prime minister in recent history who has been able to get unanimity from the provinces is our present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). The Prime Minister has been able, after much effort this summer, to get the provinces to agree on one thing, and it is a constitutional matter. Our Prime Minister has been able to get the provinces to agree that his approach to constitutional reform is wrong. The provinces are unanimous on that point.

That is a great achievement. It is not the achievement we need, but it is a great achievement. It is unique, and if we are to consider amending the British North America Act, which I think we need to do—and we may indeed need to do it in the area this bill addresses—I suggest that we turn our attention first to getting another kind of national unanimity, one which agrees with the Prime Minister. If we cannot get unanimity which agrees with this Prime Minister, perhaps we can get unanimity which would agree with a different prime minister.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to support the bill which the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) has put before us today to regulate parliament. As the hon. member says, it is the kind of bill which should go to committee. There should be some input from quite a number of sources, and surely we can come up with a better system than the one we have at the present time. I probably would disagree with some of the measures the hon. member has proposed, but I am sure that would be true no matter what bill was before us. Someone would see something wrong, and that is really why bills should be referred to committees.

I am particularly impressed by the hon. member's argument that the government should not have such cold feet that it cannot at least refer some bills to committees so that those committees can have input and recommendations might be tried out on the hustings, in the newspapers and in a number of

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fora besides committees. Surely in that way some solutions could be arrived at.

● (1722)

There has never been a better time to discuss this bill than right now. For the first time in a long while we are in a period of a delayed election. The election was planned first for last spring and all systems were go. The main thrust came last spring—although there had been small flurries before—when it was anticipated that an election would be called and everybody was prepared for it. It was interesting to hear the Prime Minister going round the country saying that he had spoken to many people and had found that they did not want an election. He said that elections cost money and that at this time we should not be spending money but rather getting on with the business of governing the country.

I say that if we are going to have a democratic process, if we are going to operate in the British tradition, it is normal to have an election periodically. The law under which we operate today is a very loose law which says roughly two things. It says, first, that we must have an election every five years at least, that an election must be called within a five-year period; and second, that there must be a sitting of parliament every year. That means that under that definition an election should be called in early July. But because we will have a session in January of 1979, an election need not be held in 1979. I suppose it could be delayed until September, 1979, or we could go even into the next year.

Mr. Breau: Until December of 1979.

Mr. Peters: There would be a session in 1979 and a session in 1980, so an election would still be called within the five-year period. That would make sense only in specific circumstances and if you decided to fit the rules to a given set of circumstances. However, it seems to me, as it does to the hon. member for Cochrane, that a much more sensible arrangement is to have an election called within a set period of time, I suggest a four-year period, and that the election be held on a set date. The day of the week might vary, or else the day of the week could be set in such and such a month. I think that there must be safeguards in any system, and therefore a method should be devised whereby an election could be called more often than in the set period of time. Also, there should be a possibility of lengthening the set period of time under certain circumstances such as a war or a revolution.

An hon. Member: Or bad polls.

Mr. Peters: No, not bad polls. I have a bill proposing the abolition of polls. I think that would be an awful way to run a country. We have been operating on the poll structure for too long. Mr. Gallup and our Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) have developed a great relationship. I do not think that should be the way to set the length of a parliament.

If we go back to the King-Bing issue—probably a bad example because the right decision was made but the public supported the wrong decision—there was an opportunity for