

Hon. W. S. FIELDING (Shelburne and Queen's): Mr. Speaker, I desire to move:

That the Bill be not now read a third time, but be recommitted to a Committee of the Whole House, with instructions to amend it by adding the following words as subsection 1 of section 40 "In the case of by-elections, if two or more vacancies exist at the same time the Governor in Council shall fix one and the same day for nomination in all the electoral districts for which members are to be elected. Provided, however, that this shall not apply in any case in which the vacancy, whether caused by death, resignation or otherwise, has existed for less than one month".

The principle of simultaneous polling has been regarded as an important one in the public affairs of Canada for very many years. There was a time, long ago, when exceptions had to be made for a few isolated districts. These have gradually disappeared, and I think now we recognize that in the case of a general election there should be one day chosen for all the elections to be held. I know that in the earlier history of the provinces which now compose the Dominion the name of a very distinguished statesman in Nova Scotia was most honourably associated with what is called "the simultaneous polling day". I refer to the late distinguished leader of the Conservative party in that province, the Hon. Mr. Johnston. The desirability of simultaneous polling, then, has been recognized in our general elections, but by some omission it has not been recognized in our by-elections. If it is a sound principle that at a general election all the elections shall be held on the same day, surely it is an equally sound principle to say that if there are half a dozen by-elections the writs shall be issued for the same day. All the argument that applies in the one case applies with the same force in the other case.

Now, it has happened at times that a number of vacancies have existed and the government—and when I say "government" I do not mean the present Government but all governments—have taken advantage of the opportunity to select the particular seat in which it suited their convenience to bring on the election, and having carried that seat, as they believed they might, they used it as an instrument to affect the results in the other seats, and so undue influence was exercised by the government of the day. Again I say that when I speak of "the government of the day", I am not referring to the present Government alone, but to all governments.

It seems to me that it is reasonable, if there are a number of vacancies existing at the same time, that the writs shall be issued for the same day. When I was presenting

that view at an earlier stage of the session an hon. member asked me the question: What would you do in the case of a vacancy which had very recently occurred? I thought that a fair question, and what I have proposed in this resolution is that if the vacancy has occurred within thirty days the rule shall not apply, but wherever vacancies have existed for thirty days or more then all shall be filled at the same time; the writs shall be issued for one and the same day. Now, if you want an illustration of this—and it is only because it is an illustration that I refer to it—take what has happened in the case of East Elgin. Here we have had a vacancy for several months, but no writ has been issued, simply and solely because it has suited the convenience of the Government to pick and choose the places in which there shall be contests. The district of St. James in Montreal and the district of East Elgin were made vacant by death at about the same time. In the case of St. James division an opportunity was afforded to the people to return their member, and we have an able and eloquent member in this House representing that division. But the people of East Elgin have been denied an opportunity of having any representative in this House. There was a time when there used to be some talk of French domination. Here is a case of French domination; the French district of St. James has its member here but the English district of East Elgin has been denied the right of representation in Parliament. Sir, the argument is so simple and so complete that I do not need to dwell upon it. The motion I make is to the effect that if a vacancy has but lately occurred, say within a month, it shall be excepted from the rule, but wherever vacancies have existed for more than a month the Governor in Council shall be obliged to issue the writs at the same time, so that the condition which now prevails whereby one constituency in this Dominion is denied its representation for a whole session shall no longer be permitted to exist.

Hon. HUGH GUTHRIE (Acting Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I do not know that personally I take any great objection, on the whole, to the proposal which my hon. friend (Mr. Fielding) has just made in the amendment which he has moved, but I think it is rather late in the career of this Bill and late in the session to bring such a matter forward. I have some faint recollection that during the committee stage of the Bill my hon. friend made a sugges-