COMMONS DEBATES

Supply

The member of the Conservative Party who spoke ahead of me indicated that there was a possibility of delaying the count in eastern Canada, but I do not think that is a practical proposition. It would mean asking the scrutineers in New-foundland to sit around for four and a half hours before starting to count. That is not logical. Indeed, we might have some interesting results from Newfoundland—perhaps the NDP would elect six members there, depending on what the scrutineers were doing for that four and a half hours! Perhaps we should try it for a year to see how it works out. There is the possibility of counting the votes but not releasing the results. I think there could be some difficulty with that, however.

We should consider tightening the broadcast provisions in the Canada Elections Act and the broadcast regulations under the CRTC. There is also the possibility of imposing harsher penalties on cablevision companies that violate the Canada Elections Act or the Broadcasting Act. Perhaps there could be a delay in the message reaching British Columbia and the prairie provinces. We must not disenfranchise the voters of British Columbia.

This bill is a sop to British Columbia and to western Canada from a Liberal government that has no idea how to react to the real concerns of western Canada. These are concerns about the economy, about employment, about technology and all the things on which British Columbians and people in Saskatche-wan have been seeking direction from the government for some time.

For the Minister of Employment and Immigration to criticize this party for moving a motion of this nature shows he has lost contact with the constituency in western Canada. As my colleague, the hon. member for New Westminster-Coquit-lam (Miss Jewett) says—if he ever had it.

● (2110)

The issue we are dealing with tonight is an important one, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that if the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council has some comments to make it will be to tone down the Liberal side of this debate and to suggest there is some room to negotiate a change in Bill C-113 before it goes any further. I am sure if he were to talk to the opposition parties and consult some of the groups in British Columbia and the prairie provinces, he would make more friends out there—if that is what they are looking for—by doing that rather than trying to force this on us with the excuse that it is democratic and will make for uniform voting hours right across the country.

Mr. David Smith (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I will be quite brief because I am fully aware that a lot of time was taken up earlier today on a question of privilege and the NDP did not get the debate on their motion started until about 5.30 o'clock.

It is important to keep several things in mind when looking at the issue before us, just to keep it in perspective. First, this bill is not about to be rammed through. Whether or not we get

to second reading debate during this session remains to be seen; we do have a pretty heavy agenda. But in the event that it does go through second reading, it would of course go to committee where there will be ample opportunity for amend-ments to be moved, which amendments will be given serious consideration by this side of the House. Also, I think it is very important to look at the origins of this bill. If someone came into the House tonight for the first time they might somehow get the impression that this bill represents a heinous and dastardly plot cooked up in the minds of Liberal members. Of course, that is not correct. What happened is that the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke), a western Conservative, introduced a private member's bill which would do more or less exactly what the bill in question here tonight does. In addition, the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour), a western Conservative, also introduced a bill to the same effect. Therefore, to suggest that this is somehow a Liberal plot simply is at odds with the facts.

Any suggestion, Mr. Speaker, that because of this bill people in the west will be disenfranchised is also totally untrue. The number of hours that polls will be open would be the same throughout Canada. Why does this idea seem to have some appeal to some western members? Well, it may interest the hon. member for Nanaimo-Alberni (Mr. Miller) to know that when I was a boy going to Sir James Douglas school, Central Junior high and Victoria high school, all on Vancouver Island, a favourite item in the litany of western grievances was that what happened in the west as far as elections were concerned did not really count because it was all decided back in the east. I always felt that was a bit of a misconception. If you wanted to blame anyone, I suppose you could blame God because the sun moved from east to west. Had God arranged it so that the sun moved from west to east, perhaps we would have this complaint from the people in eastern Canada.

In any event, the reason for this bill was a desire on the part of this government to be responsive to a western concern. The idea was not spawned in our minds but in the minds of a couple of western Conservative members who presented private members' bills. We on this side of the House, in our continual effort to be reasonable and responsive—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Smith: —listened in order to try to do what we can to address the problem of western alienation. We said, well, perhaps they have a good idea here, let us show some respon-siveness and go along with it. The idea seems to have a fair bit of merit. That is really what it is all about. I think anyone who approaches this issue with an open mind would have to admit that the government is in that well-known position of being damned if it leaves things as they are and damned if it tries to rectify things as we propose to do with this bill.

I do not want to take any more time away from opposition members, but let us bear in mind that this is not a Liberal plot. It is, rather, a move on the part of the government in response