

*Canada Elections Act*

Many polling organizations seem to think that Canada begins at the New Brunswick-Quebec border and extends to the west. As one coming from Atlantic Canada I feel that our people should have a voice, and have a point of view which should be expressed. I also feel it is important to know what the people in all parts of Canada think, especially if something is being presented which is supposed to contain authentic information about how Canadians feel.

There are many other considerations, but I believe there should be a substantial contact with the people in the nation, that all parts of the nation must be involved, and that there should be a minimal doubt factor. All these things should be spelled out when the poll information is being presented to the public as authentic information concerning the type of trend that is developing during an election campaign.

● (1610)

If these things were done I would feel better about it when listening to the poll information, and so would the public. There would be an elimination of the danger that the media in one form or another could manipulate the public by using poll information that was not accurate, to tell people things that were going to happen when in fact they did not have the information to indicate that such events were occurring. I think that the people who are putting out that kind of information have to accept responsibility for it, and must face the fact that after the event occurs the information they presented should have been at least in close proximity to the result forecast. I believe it would be in the best interests of everyone if this were to happen.

[Translation]

**Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, I want to make a few remarks on this bill. As for all other bills put before the House during the hour set aside for consideration of private members' business, I fear the clock will again put an end to the debate. But I must nevertheless congratulate the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates) for having proposed this bill.

As far as the polls are concerned, Mr. Speaker, I understand we are grappling with a difficult and serious problem because it allows journalists not to play their informative part, but to mislead the population by publishing the results of these polls. I say "mislead", because I have 13 years of experience in politics, and every year or at every election, my constituents have been seriously misled. The vote proved the public opinion polls wrong. Even in the last election, they predicted my defeat by 3500 votes to my Liberal opponent. Yet, I made it with a majority of more than 4,000 votes, which makes a difference of almost 8,000 votes with the polls' predictions.

I feel that such action should not be allowed during a period as sensitive as election time. Some take an election campaign as a joke; to them, it is like a horse race. But when one is serious about politics, when one is a member of a political especially a third party, when the odds are one to one hundred, it is then that we realize the bad influence of opinion polls.

[Mr. Coates.]

I see that the government members are having fun and are laughing, but with millions of dollars, it is easy to laugh and to buy every possible opinion poll. I think the public is misled because many people rely on polls. Even if some believe that people pay no attention to these polls, I suggest it is not so. A large number of people rely on these polls which often influence their votes. Those people expect the results to be in accordance with the poll and they are all disappointed after the election to find that the opposite happened. I say this not only for the successful candidates but also for their opponents, in order to prevent terrible disappointments, to keep a candidate from believing that according to the poll, he should win, whereas the next day he is astounded by the results. I would even say that it is unhealthy for some defeated candidates, Mr. Speaker.

I think that everything would go well if the government wanted to act properly, if big parties wanted to be honest. I am referring to the big parties because it is still felt today that everything can be bought, and since the big parties have the money, since they can pay reporters, radio broadcasters and pollsters, they control the polls. Now, there are two kinds of polls. Some are pretty good in their areas, although they cannot give the picture of the whole country. On the other hand, other public opinion polls, and they are in great majority, are "cooked" by supporters who want to influence and attract the 15 or 20 p. 100 of the voters who might be influenced by these polls.

Mr. Speaker, I think that prohibiting all publication during the whole electoral period would guarantee protection to the public, especially when there are controversies with the media. During the last election, I have had a striking proof of that. I knew that those polls were false and I did not even pay attention to them. I did not even give one dollar to the media and, unlike in previous years, I did not resort to radio or television programs for support. I published nothing in the big newspapers, precisely because I had lost all confidence in them.

● (1620)

To my astonishment, I was elected with a majority of almost 2,000 more votes than in previous elections. But those people had been misled during the whole election campaign. They were brainwashed by 12 or 15 ministers, going about in cars, helicopters, planes, for three weeks in my riding, spreading propaganda. To my mind, that is dishonest influence. The people who are supposed to be free, are not allowed to do something serious, wise on their own. They are not even given time to think things over.

That is why I am happy to see this bill introduced; this evening, I hope, it will be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections where we can face each other, the government members and those of the opposition, and say what we think as well as what is going on. After the elections, the electoral comedy and the money game are over. I feel much more honest and dignified work could be done in committee to protect the freedom of the Canadian citizen.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to abuse the time of the House dealing with this matter, but after such a dirt-throwing campaign, there is much to say. However, with this bill, I wish to demonstrate to the Canadian people