

Canada Elections Act

the very large constituencies, such as Yukon, the Prince George-Peace River and the Peace River constituencies in Alberta, and others which are nearly equally as large. I do not know whether you would ever have time to cover those constituencies in any time frame. If there are hardships which would be imposed by a restriction of time, they would be the ones which would really feel it at its worst.

It does seem to me that if other jurisdictions, such as, let us say, the United Kingdom, can conduct an election in 28 days, surely Canada could stand a reduction to something like 45, plus or minus a day or two, as this bill is now proposing.

There are, however, some frailties in the act as it presently exists. I do not wish to be construed in this instance as speaking with any political malevolence at all, but I would like to see a better elections act, particularly as it relates to a rural constituency. It is in that frame of mind that I want to make a few suggestions.

For instance, the restrictions upon advertising for a convention in a rural constituency impose restraints and constraints which I do not think should be there. I think one should be permitted, as a political party or as an aspiring candidate prior to his official entry into the race, to advertise as one sees fit. I say that because I do not know how you are going to scatter the name through a community 200, 300, 500 miles in length if you do not have the opportunity to advertise.

If you are an incumbent member and you are the only candidate at a convention, I can see that it does give you some advantage. As has been pointed out by the hon. member for Mississauga North, there are advantages and disadvantages. But if you are opposing an existing member, one of the advantages I think a new face in a campaign requires is the opportunity to advertise in pursuit of the nomination, and to advertise the meeting at which he hopes he may be the successful candidate. To include this in the cost of an election, or even to preclude the possibility of publicizing his name and ambitions, I think is a most unfair restriction.

If it were—and this, I suppose, is political—the intention of the government to pursue these constraints and make sure they were exercised with equal hardship on all candidates, that would be fine; but in my experience in the last two elections in this nation that has not been the case. It appears that liberties have been extended to candidates, perhaps I should say of all parties, and there has been no inclination by the Chief Electoral Officer or the returning officer to really see that this facet of the requirement of the elections act is enforced. I think we should either eliminate constraints upon advertising for a convention, or there should be a notice to all parties, to all returning officers and to all known or prospective candidates that, if they breach the law, they shall not be eligible to participate in the election.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to indicate to the Chair how that pertains to reducing the number of days for an election. This bill is very, very narrow in scope. It aims at reducing the days during

an election campaign, and I think the remarks of the hon. member are not directed to this.

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, if it be the desire of the Chair and the House to restrict debate to the literal phraseology of this bill, then this is really an exercise in futility. I had the understanding, as I think the hon. member for Mississauga North had, that in fact we were going to be allowed to discuss the election process and the requirement for change in that election process. I do not have any criticism of the hon. member for Mississauga North, but I do not believe I am wandering any further afield than did he; and I am certainly speaking on the elections act which is about to be amended. I hate to take issue with you, Mr. Speaker, but I do submit that the elections act is part of the subject matter of this bill. We do have a specific amendment, and with that I agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): May I interrupt again. I listened very, very attentively to the remarks of the hon. member for Mississauga North (Mr. Fisher), which were always related to the constraint and time limit during an election. Perhaps there was an understanding between the parties, and the Chair is very disposed to go along; so if there was I would like to accept the word of the hon. gentleman. If there is such a disposition I am quite willing to entertain any debate at all if that is the understanding, because I am here at the service of the House.

Mr. Collenette: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to see that there is consistency on the part of the Chair after the decision taken yesterday on Bill C-57, which was to call on the rule of relevance immediately when one saw that particular comments were not relevant to a bill. This is something that many of us have advocated for quite some time. It was started yesterday on Bill C-57 and I would support the Chair.

What is before us right now is a specific amendment to the Canada Elections Act. There will be ample opportunity to discuss the Canada Elections Act and potential amendments at the committee. Mr. Hamel will be bringing forward his recommendations within the next few months. Perhaps in the fall we will have that opportunity. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think you are entirely correct in requiring members to speak specifically about the question at hand, which is the limitation of the electoral period from the present period to 47 days.

● (1440)

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I just want you to know that it was unnecessary for the parliamentary secretary or anyone else to say he supports the Chair. I assume it would be unparliamentary for him to do otherwise than to support the Chair.

Mr. Collenette: McCain was not supporting the Chair.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, if I may say so, as I was listening to the hon. member, I felt he was dealing with the impact of time, which is the essence of this bill, on the electoral process. I say with respect that I felt that was the thrust of his remarks. I naturally join, if it is necessary at all,