

have seen ministers on this side do that time and time again as well. There is an attempt to accommodate. I make the argument that while there is a political structure that operates in an adversarial way, that merely takes into account the kind of political culture we have and the types of political parties we have.

The second point I make is there is also room in the system, as we have all seen, to ensure that the regional interests and local interests of members are taken into account and to ensure that the government is flexible enough to take into account those needs which members on all sides of the House see as important to their areas, constituencies and regions.

I argue that when one starts to tamper with a system in a constitutional sense, the arguments to do so have to be powerful and strong. The point the hon. member is getting at in his bill is not one to be solved by dealing with the constitutional structure of the land. Instead, it is one that has to be dealt with in terms of the context of what I would call the political culture of Canada in the way in which we as parties organize ourselves in the House of Commons and in the country and the way in which we find it necessary to avoid setting any kind of fixed schedule which interferes with the political programs and activities we have in mind. I have been an advocate of fixed sitting terms for the House of Commons.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): So have I.

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rain River): We have not succeeded in being able to do that because by and large most members have found that it is more convenient for them in terms of the political responsibility which they bear not to fix the sessions of the House of Commons. The same argument applies equally, and perhaps more forcefully, to the constitutional proposal that my friend from Crowfoot has advocated.

I confess to having another reason for being concerned with proceeding with this bill. When you have a system that is seen by the Canadian people and the electorate as being reasonably acceptable and fair—note I did not say absolute but seen as a workable system and fair—it strikes me that when we begin to tamper with it, without powerful reasons for so doing, we begin to chip away at the kind of confidence that we have built up laboriously in our system over a long period of time.

I raise the point because if you look at the activities of a democratic system of government across the whole world, this kind of system of responsibility to the electorate is very much in peril and very much in a minority in the world. It is a system that is not growing. It is not a system where other countries are moving in to take advantage of it. We see a great many adaptations but we do not see the kind of four square democratic process that we enjoy in the North American and western countries. It is not a system that is growing. It is a system which is inherently fragile, one that has to be looked at very carefully and dealt with carefully as well.

When we start moving in to change the rules of the ball game without a necessity, without a powerful argument, without abuses to be corrected, then I have to say that I am not one of those who can see taking this bill any further. The hon.

member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone) has performed a service. He has demonstrated the use of this rather unique private members' hour by bringing forward the proposal so that we can examine it. By so examining it, we can see whether the hon. member has made his case. The hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) made a number of points.

Mr. Kilgour: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would the hon. member permit a question if I do not interfere with his right to talk out the bill?

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Yes.

Mr. Kilgour: It is a soft question to the hon. member. If the hon. member does his arithmetic, he will discover that there have been ten elections since 1952. We have had ten elections in 29 years. Would he agree that works out to one election every 2.9 years? Does that affect his argument in any way?

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, the sequence that I took started from 1957. However, it does affect the argument I was making. My argument was that by analysing each election that has taken place, to look at whether there have been any abuses of the power of the prime minister or whether there has been anything we could see as a culpable bona fide abuse of the system, my conclusion is that if you go back to 1945 you will find there was probably no abuse of the system. In fact, the only one I can think of that would be of real interest would have been the election of 1917 during World War I when, in my judgment, Parliament acted improperly, although not illegally. In my judgment, the election was not done properly, but again it was not illegal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired.

● (1700)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

MOTION RESPECTING SUMMER RECESS

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Pinard:

That, when the House adjourns on the day this order is adopted, it shall stand adjourned until Wednesday, October 14, 1981, provided that at any time prior to that date, if it appears to the satisfaction of Madam Speaker, after consultation with the government, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time, Madam Speaker may give notice that she is so satisfied, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice, and shall transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time; and

That, in the event of Madam Speaker's being unable to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker, the Deputy Chairman of Committees or the Assistant Deputy Chairman of Committees shall act in her stead for all the purposes of this order.