

should lose the right to vote and when that should not occur.

I have heard members say that the Clifford Olsons of this world should not have the right to vote. That is a justifiable argument, but how is it going to be phrased in law in such a way that the courts will not throw it out in the future? That is a concern. They may also have to take a look at who is actually in prison at the present time.

• (1730)

One of the ironies we all know exists in our system is that the very fact you are convicted of an offence does not mean you are going to be treated equally by the courts. Some will go to jail. Some will go to jail for short terms and some will go to jail for long terms. Others, as I mentioned earlier, will get off with a fine. Often this relates more to the legal and financial powers of someone who is convicted rather than to the individual aspects and merits of the case.

We know that in our country there are many, many more native Canadians who end up in a penitentiary than others who commit similar offences. It is not one of the bright lights of our judicial system but it is a fact in this nation.

If the mover of this motion had taken the approach of listing certain offences, perhaps those offences which carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment or those offences which carry a maximum period of five or 10 years imprisonment, everyone who is convicted of those crimes would lose the right to vote. That would be a fairer system because if you are convicted of a crime, you lose the right to vote and it is not on the basis of what the judge determines should be your punishment. Therefore, if you commit murder you lose the right to vote. It is not whether you are put in jail for one or two years. That is the whole point.

If the member had taken that approach, I think he would have found that his bill would have been charter-proof. That is one approach. It is not the only approach, but it is one that has been considered by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform which, as I said earlier, has representation from the three political parties in the House of Commons. We recognize what has happened with the court cases. With respect, I do not believe that this member's bill will get around future court challenges.

Adjournment Debate

I understand the concerns many Canadians have and I am sure the member has with the fact that there are people who have committed horrendous crimes and still have the right to vote. However, I do not believe that the bill before us resolves it in a way that is fair to all Canadians and at the same time recognizes what has happened in the courts of this land.

[*Translation*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Since no more members wish to speak, the time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

Would there be unanimous consent to call it six o'clock?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would be prepared to wait for a few minutes to make sure that members are here and we can proceed.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Madam Speaker, last spring I expressed concern in Question Period about the difficulties small businesses are experiencing in obtaining financing.

It is estimated that in this country, eight out of every 10 new positions are created by small business. Certainly, Canadians need jobs. Unfortunately, due to this recession, many small businesses lack the confidence to invest any further and also consumers lack the confidence to spend. Both consumers and businesses have lost confidence that this government will bring in an economic plan to get us out of the recession and put Canadians back to work.