

*Supply*

geared to Ontario and Quebec, and the issue was energy prices. When the election returns were beamed out to British Columbia on American cable, there was anger felt by both Conservative Party supporters and NDP supporters, who knew full well that that cynical campaign resulted in a federal government not supported in western Canada, with the exception of two constituencies. There is anger in the people of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They are not anti-Canada. They did not mind that election results came in a little latter in western Canada than they did in the rest of Canada, but the results frustrated their desires and optimism even before their polls were closed.

What we are talking about is the history of the bill to which I refer. This matter was dealt with in the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. A bill was introduced by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke), who suggested that polls be closed at a uniform time. He suggested polls open in British Columbia at 8 a.m. and close at 4 p.m., which would even be worse than what the government is proposing in its bill. The government must have been listening to Senator Jack Austin, who brought in a private member's bill in the Senate which would have accomplished the same thing. It would have closed polls in British Columbia at six o'clock in the evening. It seems to me that the discussion and consultation the government carried out was not with the people of western Canada. It was not with the people of Newfoundland or the Atlantic provinces. That bill is something which came out of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. This was the result of a discussion by a small group of people on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections who thought it might be a reasonable course of action, but there was no debate or discussion in western Canada to alleviate some of the concerns of the voters there.

● (2100)

In committee, as reported at page 5 of the proceedings, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra had this to say:

In fact, talking to many poll workers, I find that the crowd tends to come between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., in other words, during the last three or four hours of the day.

People are accustomed to voting after work, or when working parents can spell each other, or when workers come out of the woods or in from fishing.

The attitude of the Minister of Employment and Immigration surprises me, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that the government is so committed to this change that it will not consider having the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections conduct further surveys on the question in western Canada. Certainly the Conservative members who speak for people in western Canada, and particularly in British Columbia, and of course members of the New Democratic Party, have indicated that there was some phony reasoning on the government's part regarding this program.

The Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council (Mr. Smith) was on that committee, and on June 9,

1981, as reported at page 8 of the proceedings, he had this to say:

I wonder if the theoretical benefit is worth the real pain or inconvenience I suspect some people may find if—I am sure if you closed polls in B.C. at 4 p.m., the percentage of people who voted would drop. I have no way of knowing that for sure, but I suspect it really would. I will be interested in hearing the views of the western members. Quite frankly, it would not bother me, but I am just not sure there is evidence to show that the benefits would outweigh the pain or inconvenience.

This was in reference to a private member's bill introduced by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra. On the same day and at the same meeting, as reported at page 11 of the proceedings, the hon. member for York East (Mr. Collette) said:

The election clock I suppose is more of a political question, and Mr. Smith brought up a couple of points that are interesting. I suppose speaking personally as a Liberal if uniformity is going to increase the Liberal vote in the west, then I am in favour of it, because that was the corollary of the argument which Mr. Smith put forward.

It is unfortunate that we cannot view this matter through the eyes of the people of British Columbia. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra did introduce a private member's bill, as he is entitled to, which dealt with this matter but despite that I do not think the Conservative Party is wedded to the proposition.

When the Minister of Employment and Immigration spoke about consultation I had to wonder who he was referring to. I am sure that in the next few days he and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) will receive a number of letters from small business people who are concerned about the provisions of the bill and about the expense they may have to incur in freeing their employees between 1.30 and 5.30 p.m. Does the government intend to close down the schools in British Columbia, the Yukon and parts of Alberta at 1.30 p.m. or 2.30 p.m. so that the teachers may have their four hours free to vote? Does the same apply to manufacturing plants and government offices and industries?

The minister should ask the Prime Minister to show him some of the telegrams he received today. They came from the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council; Jack Munro, the President of the IWA, representing thousands of forestry workers in British Columbia and the United Steelworkers of America in Vancouver, who are all opposed to Bill C-113. These are the people the parliamentary committee should consult before making decisions about parliamentary reform. These things should not be left to members of Parliament, who often have a jaundiced view of reality from Parliament Hill.

I would urge the parliamentary secretary to look upon this debate as a positive thing instead of dismissing it, a course of action which the Minister of Employment and Immigration seems to favour.

There are alternatives, Mr. Speaker. The problems faced in British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Yukon must be addressed. People there are concerned about knowing the result of the election before they go to vote.