

Canada. It is not the exchange of letters that concerns me, Mr. Speaker, but the fact that the government has produced a bill that will make changes that I think are anti-democratic. I will be very explicit about that later.

I appeal to members on all sides of the House to think very seriously about the consequences of these changes. I hope this may be one of those rare occasions when the government will think very seriously about proceeding with second reading of a bill if the points that my party wants to make in the course of this debate are conceded to be valid. I hope that the government will withdraw the bill.

We object to the bill because in eastern Canada the proposed hours would be an inconvenience. I will not elaborate on that. The traditional hours of 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., with four consecutive hours being made free by employers for people to vote, meet the requirements of people in Atlantic Canada. The new schedule would cause some inconvenience to a number of fishermen and other groups, according to my information.

The real concern of this party, however, is the effect that such a change would have in western Canada. To put it very directly, the normal voting pattern of 60 to 80 per cent of the electorate will be shattered. According to the bill that the government has introduced, polls in British Columbia and the Yukon will close at 5.30 p.m. That is very serious. Fishermen, loggers, clerks in department stores in downtown Vancouver, in the Kootenays or in the Yukon or any working man or woman, will find it literally impossible to vote on election day.

The other change that is proposed is that the employer will have to provide four consecutive hours to vote, but not necessarily on election day. As long as four hours are provided before an advance poll day, that will be adequate according to this bill.

The cumulative impact of these two changes—cutting off the vote at 5.30 p.m. and removing the old requirement that employers have to leave four consecutive hours free on election day—could mean the disenfranchisement of thousands of Canadians in western Canada. We will not put up with that, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious matter and I want to ask all the members of the House to consider the consequences of it. There have been concerns in western Canada about the efficacy of our federal system to produce justice for people in western Canada as well as for people in central Canada and so on, but I will not go over those old and real grievances, Mr. Speaker.

In the last 48 hours I have received half a dozen telegrams from British Columbia—now that the news has been received there—expressing deep concern at the effect which the cutting off of thousands of workers from the polls will have. I hope that members of the House will not be party to a measure that will be an inconvenience in eastern Canada but will be a major liability to democracy in western Canada. If there have been problems of alienation and concern in the west before, they will increase in Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon after the impact of the proposed legislation is understood.

Business of the House

I began this debate rather late because of procedural matters which intervened today, Mr. Speaker. I will not take much more of the time of the House because it is almost six o'clock. Other members of this party will speak and I hope that members of other parties will address themselves to these very serious concerns and that the government will be persuaded by the arguments.

I want to conclude by saying that this party, and I hope all parties, believe that any electoral change must maximize, not minimize, the opportunity to use one's democratic right. We believe the gimmickry approach advocated by the Liberal government in this bill, rather than dealing with western grievances and rather than alleviating some of the tensions, will only aggravate them. In this context we believe that Bill C-113 suggests a cure that is much worse than the disease.

In the final analysis we think that Bill C-113 should be scrapped. It should be withdrawn and a totally new approach to the serious question of democratic rights ought to be taken.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

WEEKLY STATEMENT

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, at this time I should like to state what the business of the House will be for next week since this could not be dealt with earlier today.

As agreed among House leaders this morning, the first item of business tomorrow will be Bill S-25. It is not on the Order Paper but it will be reported from the Senate in time to be dealt with as the first item of business tomorrow. It is an act concerning the association of navy, army and air force veterans. It will be dealt with by agreement through all stages, with one speaker per party. That will be done tomorrow afternoon. It will be followed by Bill C-91, which deals with public works, and, if need be, second reading of Bill C-92, which deals with national harbours.

[*Translation*]

As far as the business of the House for next week is concerned, the schedule is as follows: Monday, the House will not be sitting, Tuesday will be an opposition day, Wednesday, the House will meet in Committee of the Whole in connection with Bill C-112 relating to certain taxes, and Thursday, we shall proceed with third reading of Bill C-112.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The Chair would normally recognize the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) who was rising to speak on the motion before the House. The Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) has concluded his remarks, and as it is now just past six o'clock, I think perhaps the most appropriate way is to indicate to the hon. member for Provencher that the Chair will recognize him as having the floor at eight o'clock, provided of course that he is here.