

Canada Elections Act

do have some apartment buildings in my constituency, and it is a lot of work. However, I could cover that in 47 days.

What this bill will do to my constituency is turn over 80 per cent of my rural constituents into second-class citizens, and they are the ones who are the guts of the country. They are the true entrepreneurs. They are the people who started this country. They are second, third, fourth and fifth generation farmers. Even 59 days is not long enough for us to see them all. How much less would we see them in 47 days?

One matter which has been touched on in this debate is proportional representation, a matter which has been missed in this 47-day bill. I would suggest that if we are going to talk about proportional representation, we should look at the whole of government service. Let us start electing our senators, perhaps for life, if so desired. However, they should be elected as proportional representatives. We have a great big area at the east end of this building. We could be doing a lot more productive things with this area than what I have seen in the two years I have been here.

I would have one suggestion on the 47 days proposal. If we knew for sure that there will be no election for at least four years, perhaps we could accept the 47 days, because incumbents and new candidates would have enough time in three or four years to build up an organization and to build up their image. Perhaps when the bill goes to committee an amendment could be made which would provide that for elections which are four years apart, an electoral campaign of only 47 days would be allowed, but for elections which come sooner, that is, snap elections, the length of time of the campaign would remain at 59 days. That way, there would be an opportunity for good candidates to be picked, and if there had to be last-minute choices, there would be better people to choose from. All parties have the same problem of finding candidates when there is a snap election. Your Honour knows that. That is probably how I was elected the first time; they did not have time to look around. However, they are happy with me now. Personally, I think I can do it in 47 days, but I feel sorry for the new guy who comes in and does not have the same opportunity that I had with 365 days.

I have another possible amendment which could also be discussed in committee. Why not do away with elections altogether and just let the Gallup poll take care of it? That seems to be how we do it anyway. Let us make it equal so that we in the opposition have the same opportunity as the government. If we see our poll results are really high, we could say, "Hey, we are going to have an election". We could go to the country and it could be done in hours with computers. Think of the word processors and the computer facilities! We could do it in 47 minutes. We would not have to wait the 47 days. Think of the financial savings! The only company who would make any money is Torstar. It happens to practically own the Gallup poll.

I feel badly about the disenfranchised electors, those unfortunate people who are not in the country, particularly during a winter campaign, but are in Florida, Arizona, Hawaii, and

California. Let us try to really help those people and set up polls—

An hon. Member: El Salvador.

Mr. Fennell:—where our Canadians are. We may as well go where they are. So let us set up polls in Florida, Arizona, Hawaii, and California. When I retire from this House, I would like to be in charge of that.

An hon. Member: El Salvador!

Mr. Fennell: Well, the hon. member is welcome to El Salvador. I would just as soon have Florida or Hawaii.

I think this bill is failing the country. It is failing the people. It is satisfying only one party. It is appeasing the appetite of one party. It is not helping us. We will have disadvantage for all time. Forty-seven days is not enough time for any new person to get elected. I believe we should vote against this bill and we should strongly urge the committee which will be examining this bill to review the entire election act. The committee should look at proportional representation and I suggest that Senate members be included on this committee. All of this should be done properly. Some members in the other place have more experience than we have had here. I maintain that we must review the entire picture, not just the 47 days versus the 59 days.

● (1530)

I represent a rural constituency. I feel very close to my constituents. Incidentally, they are all staunch Conservatives. I feel most strongly that I should have the opportunity in the next election of having those extra 12 days so I can visit all my constituents, sit around their stoves, have lunch and coffee with them. On that basis, I hope that some of the words I have expressed will be accepted. I hope that when this bill goes to committee it will be redrafted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. The hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Fennell) mentioned that he had had a private conversation with the Chair earlier today. He ought to be commended for the remarkable effort he has made. I just say it was an extraordinary effort and it was very much appreciated.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if in those few words you uttered, there was a message for me. I heard the argument in the House earlier today about the business of relatives.

I think the hon. member made an excellent point that the bill is targeted to accomplish a specific end. It is not just a 47-day election campaign, but it deals with time limits for all kinds of processes which must be examined. It is also critical for members of this House to bring to the attention of the House the climate or the milieu in which this reform will take place. You cannot exercise your responsibility on behalf of Canadians in dealing with a specific narrow piece of legislation without trying to examine, as best you can, its implications for the total system.