

*Canada Elections Act*

duped into reaching conclusions, and that this can be an obstacle in the way of obtaining information on which the public can rely in coming to a conclusion or a decision during an election campaign.

The results have been used in the past, in certain instances, in a way that has come close to stampeding voters during election campaigns to come to wrong conclusions. I am afraid that this may happen if the present system is allowed to continue. If this bill is referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections I believe we may be able to devise rules and regulations in respect of information presented to the public during election campaigns, so that the public will appreciate that there is a backup to the information provided as the result of an authentic poll.

Let me give an example of what can happen. On one evening toward the end of the last election campaign, I think in the last week or 10 days, I was listening to an evening newscast by the CBC. Certain views were given, based on a poll conducted by the CBC. Certain statements were made about certain things which might happen on the basis of information obtained by the corporation. That was well and good. During a later newscast that evening by the same corporation, based on the results of the same poll, a totally different statement was made as to what might happen.

As something more than a disinterested political observer, I reached the conclusion that the CBC did not know what it was talking about, or that the poll was so difficult and complicated to read even its own officers could not make a firm decision about the prediction. This is the sort of thing that has happened over and over again.

Some people might ask what difference it makes because people do not pay attention to polls in any event. I believe that people do pay attention to polls.

● (1600)

I think the Labour Party in Britain in 1970 discovered, to its unfortunate shock, that the poll on which it relied showed a result that was nothing like what the electorate produced in the way of votes. In effect what the poll did in respect of that political election campaign, because it indicated that the Labour Party in Britain would win by a very substantial margin, was to draw voters away from that party to the Conservative Party.

What concerns me, whether it should happen in favour of or against my party, is that people start making decisions, not on the gut issues that are being discussed but on figures presented as being authentic to show that this or something else will happen. People do make decisions in that way. Therefore I say the very least we as members of parliament can do, if we are to allow polls to continue in this country and be used by the media during an election campaign, is place the public and ourselves in a position of knowing that when the results of polls appear, the polls have been governed by some guidelines which we can accept.

We must be sure that there is no manipulation by the media in an effort to direct the electorate in any given direction. I do not say that the electorate necessarily would follow the direction in which the media might tend to lead it, but I do say that up until now it has been very difficult for me to believe there is any credibility at all in

the results of any of the polls that have been produced and used during an election campaign because, almost without exception, when the information is brought forward there is a doubt factor which can run as high as 25 per cent.

In the particular poll to which I referred involving the CBC, the doubt factor ran as high as 33 per cent. When one realizes, when election day comes around, that 5 per cent of the electorate, should it swing one way or the other, can either elect or defeat a government, one realizes it is difficult to have much faith in polls which have such a doubt factor involved in them. Yet the media does not mind this very substantial doubt factor because, if the results are not the same as were indicated, they can then say that the doubt factor substantially went one way or the other, which altered the result the media had predicted.

I do not know about the radio and television stations, but many of the newspapers in this nation become very upset by any suggestion that they should be prevented from using polls. They say this would be curtailment of freedom of speech. I say in answer to that that any time the press does not provide accurate information to the public, based on sound facts, that information should not appear in the newspapers. I say there is no curtailment of freedom involved if the newspapers are prevented from using information which, in the first instance, is not authentic. All too often newspapers have neither the staff, the time nor the capability to produce accurate information in respect of what they endeavour to place before the public about an event that is taking place.

More often than ever before in the history of election predictions, polls have been shown to be inaccurate. At the same time while this is the case I believe a great many people in this nation still rely on them in an endeavour to make up their minds on how they will vote. Whether we like it or not, my experience in respect of the various election campaigns in which I have been involved is that many voters make their determination on whether or not they think they are voting for the candidate who will be a member of the party which forms the government.

All too often the polls give an inaccurate assessment of what in actual fact happens on election day. Unless some guidelines are produced, I feel polls should be abolished so far as their use publicly in the media is concerned.

At the same time, so that members of parliament cannot be charged with limiting freedom of the press in any way, I would accept as an alternative guidelines established by Parliament that would tell the media that if they are to produce the results of polls during an election campaign, and place these results before the public as accurate and authentic information on which the public should be able to rely, then the media will have to follow a set of rules and regulations to the effect that it must be shown how many people were encompassed by a poll, that the poll was national in its investigative function, or provincial if the poll being placed before the public purports to give a reading on the trends in a given province.

In addition the regulations should provide that every area in the nation must be involved. Far too often, especially in respect of Gallup polls produced in this country, there is no mention of the attitudes of the people who live in the four eastern provinces.