

*Private Members' Business*

In fact, because of the secret nature of these polls, nothing prevents this government from using methods that are questionable from a scientific point of view and thus commissioning results that will influence the vote.

Nothing prevents the government from only disclosing polls that are favourable and eliminating those that might be less favourable to its negative vision. Polling companies play a role that has an impact not only on elections but also on policy development. Governments use public opinion polls to define their positions on various controversial issues and to determine their priorities. Federal ministers therefore take the initiative of commissioning polls to test public reaction to various options. In short, the government is no longer concerned about the content of its policies but focusses on their form based on public opinion polls. The famous Axworthy reform is an excellent example.

The amounts allocated by the federal government for public opinion polls are astronomical. During the period from April 1990 to November 1991, a mere 19 months, apparently over \$10 million in expenditures were approved by the Department of Supply and Services and committed by the federal government for public opinion polls. That amount does not include contracts awarded directly by departments.

For all these reasons it is essential for transparency to become the main objective of democratic governments when they make use of public opinion polls. Bill C-309 calls for effective measures to ensure government transparency when public opinion polls are used. The report submitted to the House of Commons must therefore indicate the nature of the public opinion poll, the questions asked and a summary of the responses given, the name of the person or firm commissioned to conduct the poll and, finally, its cost. This is a bill with the potential to change the face of Canadian style democracy.

• (1130)

Speaking of surveys, I would like to comment very briefly if I may on the results of the survey carried out by Léger and Léger for *Le Journal de Montréal* and the *Globe and Mail*, released last Saturday, the day before yesterday.

With two weeks to go until referendum day, the yes side shows a solid 49.2 per cent compared to 50.8 per cent for the no side. In only a few weeks we have taken over five of the federalists' percentage points, reducing the difference to a mere 1.6 per cent.

This considerable advance is in large part due to what the press is calling the "Bouchard factor", but it must be pointed out that this week we gained only two percentage points.

Before distribution of the undecided voters, 45 per cent of respondents stated that they would vote yes to the referendum question, while 42.4 per cent indicated that they would vote no.

Among those whose minds were definitely made up, I must point out that 52.2 per cent of francophone respondents stated that they will be voting yes, compared to only 34.3 per cent who will vote no.

There are a number of explanations for this upturn in support for the sovereigntist camp. We have the most popular, most credible, most loved leaders in Quebec on our side in Mr. Bouchard, Mr. Parizeau and Mr. Dumont. Lagging far behind them are the spokespersons for the no side, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Minister of Labour, Mr. Johnson, and the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

We will win this coming October 30 because we are promoting the project of a just society that is fair for all, a project of generosity and compassion for the most disadvantaged segments of our society: the unemployed, welfare recipients, immigrants, refugees, pensioners and so on. On the other hand, the blueprint for society of this government, of the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Reform, is to protect big capital, those who are already advantaged. The program of the ministers of finance and of human resources development, of Ontario's Mike Harris and Alberta's Ralph Klein is to protect the rich and neglect the poor.

In conclusion, I state that the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-309.

[English]

**Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak for a few minutes in support of the private member's bill of the hon. member for Red Deer who has done some excellent work on the issue.

In 1980-81 I had the privilege of working on the original access to information bill. I believed then and I still believe now the intention of the government at that time was to do the very thing the private member's bill suggests.

In the last 13 years to 14 years the whole access to information process has become locked in a system I call the bureaucratic MAD treatment, maximum administrative delay. As a government member I have had great difficulty on more than one occasion in getting the access to information system to work for me.

The objective of the hon. member for Red Deer is to refer the bill to committee. He has not asked the House to accept the bill line by line, comma for comma. If small amendments are required I believe they can be accommodated in committee.