

*Canada Elections Act*

to join in the debate on Bill C-262. The purpose of this legislation is identical to that of two other bills that were considered previously, namely, Bill C-208, introduced by the Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) and considered on June 20, 1980, and Bill-555, introduced by the Member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens) and considered on May 4 of this year. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Bill now before the House was considered before on November 26, 1981. Even allowing for the fact that some Hon. Members in the Opposition may have a poor memory, I still fail to understand why we should have to discuss the subject again. In any case, for the information of the Hon. Member for Cumberland-Colchester (Mr. Coates) I would like to repeat some comments made on other occasions with respect to similar measures. The amendment he is proposing to the Canada Elections Act is aimed at prohibiting the publication in any manner of the results or alleged results of a poll of the public opinions of the electors. I feel that is entirely unacceptable. It is an insult to the intelligence of Canadian voters and it infringes their right to be informed of the things that concern them.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very distasteful that a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, a Party that has always been a tireless champion of freedom of information, is now proposing to gag the press and deny information to the public. Curiously, this proposal is being made at a time when the Hon. Member's Party is not in power but has a popularity rating of 52 per cent, according to the Gallup Poll. Apparently, it is now in the interests of the country. It is true that the Members of this Party are not known to be particularly consistent.

● (1520)

The Member for Cumberland-Colchester, one of the pillars of his Party, is trying to help his leadership candidate, Mr. Clark, as much as he can, and he is sponsoring Bill C-262, which prohibits the publication of results of public opinion polls throughout the election period. This is perhaps a little drastic, but the real problem is that this Bill does not treat Canadians with much respect. It infers that we are so many sheep that will immediately go off in the direction to which the public opinion polls seem to be pointing.

These fears about the ignorance and the credulousness of Canadian voters during a period of four weeks do not seem to have much of a basis in fact. I am reminded of the famous words of Franklin D. Roosevelt: The only thing we have to fear is fear itself, and he knew what he was talking about. In 1936, a now famous opinion poll was taken during the campaign for the presidency, which showed that Alf Landon would beat Franklin D. Roosevelt by a tremendous margin. Well, Mr. Speaker, what really happened is that Roosevelt beat Landon, by a landslide, but the *Literary Digest* had only consulted its subscribers. In the midst of the Depression, the only people who could afford to subscribe to the *Literary Digest* were Republicans. Not long afterwards, the *Literary Digest* went

bankrupt. In any case, we must look at this problem realistically. Even if the House could agree in principle on the purpose of this Bill, it would have to acknowledge that it would be impossible to prevent the broadcasting or publication of public opinion polls. Adopting this legislation would be like tilting at windmills.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote what was said in April 1976 before the Committee on Privileges and Elections by the Hon. Member for Ottawa-West (Mr. Francis). The Hon. Member had this to say on the subject of opinion polls: If we tried to do so on a national scale, I am sure that it would be a Detroit newspaper that would carry out the poll in Canada and publish it in Detroit.

In the United Kingdom, they tried to enforce this kind of legislation, but there, people could get the results of the polls by listening to Radio Luxembourg. I do not think it is enforceable.

Mr. Speaker, personally, I am not very keen on opinion polls. I realize that we cannot adopt this legislation, but nevertheless, I think we should try to find the right way to achieve the same objective, and I do not think this is the right way.

The point raised in the proceedings of the Committee is a valid one. What would happen if a Detroit radio station decided to broadcast the results of a poll made in Canada? Considering the use of cable and other technology such as dish antennas with which we can receive satellite signals, a television station in Atlanta could broadcast poll results. Are we going to try to prevent it from doing so? That could lead to some very nasty incidents.

Mr. Speaker, I have this picture in my mind of people in Eastern Europe, listening to the radio in almost total darkness. They listen to the Voice of America, in fear of a police raid any minute. I remember many movies about the Second World War in which the Gestapo caught some member of the underground communicating by radio. Shall we do the same? This does not seem very realistic. If we are to gag the press and deny it the right to publish information, where do we draw the line, or rather, where do we begin?

I can understand why the Hon. Member introduced this Bill, but he is on very dangerous ground. In my opinion, such action is the first step towards the infringement of fundamental and valuable rights.

Mr. Speaker, the press in Canada has always been free to make criticisms and comments. We have survived in spite of this throughout the years. What would happen if someone conducted an opinion poll and wanted to do in Canada the same as in Hyde Park? Will the scope of this Bill be extended to prevent anyone from taking an opinion poll and climbing on an improvised platform to announce the results? Where do we stop if we prevent publication of poll results in the last week before an election? This is clearly encroaching on the freedom