

Canada Elections Act

before it is said to me "Let us have the 47-day provision." I want to deal with the total picture.

I could not possibly vote for this bill at this point in time, even though I find myself generally in agreement with the 47-day provision. I want to hear what the people from the large rural ridings have to say. I am sure the first question they will ask is "What else is involved in this legislation?" They will go on to ask: "How does this 47 days relate to the voters' list?" I ask myself, how does this 47-day provision relate to my time as a member to get through a 500-mile long riding? Does this 47 days relate to informing the voters or making up the voters' list? How does this 47 days relate to every other section in the Canada Elections Act and amendments thereto?

I believe the government has done us a disservice by bringing this bill before us today. I hope that it will not be placed on the Order Paper again until the fall and until we see the rest of the package on the electoral reform in this country. We know it is needed. We want it, as do the other parties, but we want it all at the same time. We want it to be coherent and we want it to fit together properly.

• (1520)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott Fennell (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I am glad I had the opportunity to clear up the process with you before speaking on this bill, both earlier and during the few minutes in the House.

To me, this bill parallels the fill in the Ontario weekly newspapers, and that is what it is. It is fill. It does not really attack the problem of the Elections Act. We are talking about 47 days versus 59 days. The consequence of this 47 days will be the erosion of the democratic process in this country. Basically it gives the incumbent an advantage. Since the government has a majority, it would give the government an advantage. I have to state right here and now that I cannot support 47 days. I will give Your Honour more reasons as I go on.

The bill is totally incomplete. It does not cover anything. In my riding, I have a microcosm of Canada. I have urban development, I have an industrial area, and I have a large rural area which makes up the largest part of my riding. My first election campaign took me 365 days. Now I am being asked to cut my next election down from 64 days, which we happened to have the last time, to 47 days. I do not think there is any way that I could go back and be re-elected under these conditions. I will have had to work at it the four years I will have been here—something like 1,500 days.

There is just a little side point, one little item, which is missing from this bill. We talk about 321 members who will have 47 days the next time.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): That is right!

Mr. Fennell: Those hon. members will no longer be known as backbenchers. They will be known as the 47-day upper

benchers sitting in the gallery because there will be nowhere else to put them, or else we will all crowd in together when we come in for a vote. I hope we are given 47 days to vote.

Another point which I feel was left out of the bill is that volunteers in a campaign who are supposed to raise money have no longer been given a challenge. They have a great opportunity to go and raise all the money they want. But now, the government wants control of the election, so it gives back the money, and I disagree with that. I think perhaps the new candidates should be helped out, but the incumbents should raise their own money. They have about 1,500 days in which to raise money while they are in office. If they have done a good job, they will receive all kinds of money to run their campaign. If they are not re-elected, that is their own fault.

There should be some method of improving the electoral lists because one of the major problems of our campaign offices is dealing with people who did not get on the list. I have an unusual situation, particularly in part of my rural riding where people are not allowed to register when they come to vote. Half of those people in my rural riding can register when they come to vote and the other half cannot, and they must be enumerated. There is no geographic difference. These people live on farms where the enumerator does not get around. These people are out in the fields and the wife is out to work. It just does not work.

Perhaps 47 days might be practicable if people were allowed to register at the polls. During this debate some members have suggested that a permanent list would solve the problem of 47 days. I shudder at the thought of a permanent list, and I will tell you why. It is because we would create a whole new bureaucracy right across Canada, in 281 constituencies. I cannot accept that. I believe that 59 days is a minimum we can deal with.

One little point which is missing in this bill is the matter of a deposit. In 1867 it cost \$200 to put one's name on the line to get elected. On a relative dollar basis, with the inflation we are experiencing, that deposit should be \$20,000, but maybe I will cut it down and say that we should be required to put in \$2,000. It is just a little extra point that is missing in this bill.

Another little point is with regard to the hours. It was tough for the people in Vancouver to find out that the Liberals had won the election while they were still voting. There should be some adaptation made there. I really feel strongly about that. There are several private members' bills but—

Mr. Fisher: Vote Liberal!

Mr. Fennell: —it is just a point. We have to look at this total package. It is simply not enough. This bill is not doing anything for the country. We are not representing our constituents if all we tell them in this bill is that there will be 12 days fewer than the last time around. I think that is totally unfair. Basically, it is fine. If I had a district to represent such as downtown Toronto, where there is all these highrises, it would be simple. All one does is to go up and down elevators. One goes up the elevators and then one walks all the way down. I