

Canada Elections Act

The third principle that we have to look at is the question of consensus. What is the status of that? I think we have to have agreement from most parties in order to proceed with this bill. The public has to see that parties of all sides think that it is a good idea. So far since April we have heard from five speakers on this bill. I think they have been in agreement in principle. We have heard from representatives of one Ontario rural riding, one Toronto urban riding, an Ottawa suburban riding, a Winnipeg urban riding, and today a B.C. riding. Each member has indicated his general agreement with the idea that we can shorten our election campaigns.

We know that the bill was introduced by both a Liberal and a Conservative administration. There were, however, two important questions raised by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) when he spoke in mid-April. On April 14, at page 9282 of *Hansard*, the hon. member wonders whether urban ridings might find a short campaign a little easier than a suburban riding and even easier than a widely spread rural riding. A couple of pages later the hon. member raises a second important question, whether the method favours incumbents. I shall examine those two concerns because I think they are honest questions. I would like to give the hon. member my impressions as to how we should treat his two questions.

I remember working in the Manitoba provincial campaign in 1977, a campaign which took six weeks to conduct from start to finish. The Churchill riding is enormous; it is almost as big as the federal seat. It cost approximately \$2,000 for the candidate to fly around the riding just once. The riding stretched north of Flin Flon across to Churchill and it took in a lot of the geography north of Lake Winnipeg. It was filled with tiny hamlets with 100 to 200 people living next to a lake. The candidate would fly in on a float plane, visit them and then go on to the next spot. He built up an organization in each of those municipalities as he went through. I am happy to report that the mechanics of the campaign went very smoothly.

● (1420)

I watched his efforts closely. I was intrigued by the way he was going to operate. With the use of aircraft and sometimes with the use of canoes, he was able to visit personally every little hamlet at least once. He got to the bigger places twice. Through radio, television and local newspapers he was able to advertise his campaign, tell people what his platform was, what his background was and what the party generally was promoting across the province. In six weeks I did not see any way that he suffered as a result of its being a large constituency. Even though it was a provincial campaign, I believe his constituency was larger than most of those represented in this House, with the exception of those in schedule 3 of the act. As I mentioned, he got to the larger centres at least twice. He had the provincial leader in there twice.

Unfortunately, at the end of the campaign he only collected 12 per cent of the vote. That was not his fault. It was the fault of those of us sitting in Winnipeg. He convinced me in that experience that technology for travel and communication

made a modern local campaign highly effective. If you look at the result, the 12 per cent of the vote he received, it would appear that technology and travel make a provincial or national campaign highly effective. He got a pattern of the vote remarkably similar to the pattern obtained in most other ridings across Manitoba by the Liberal party in that election.

I do not want to make too much of one example, but I think it is illustrative. It is a practical example that helps us to see that travel by aircraft in remote places is often as effective as a car or walking in a crowded urban centre. He certainly got to all his constituents.

The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton asked about suburban places. I feel very confident replying to him and telling him about my own experience because I come from a suburban city west of Toronto. We have 93,000 voters and 400 polls. There are 55,000 households in my riding which is about the equivalent number of voters in smaller constituencies.

My riding is made up of people from all backgrounds and all kinds of living circumstances. They are in apartment buildings, subdivisions, instant villages and towns and historic little centres. Malton and Streetsville are there, towns which started up in the middle of the 1800s. Meadowvale, a town which started five or six years ago, is also there.

In 44 days, between January 5, 1980, when I was nominated, and February 18, when the election was held, we recruited 650 to 700 workers. We canvassed every poll in the middle of the winter. We put up over 4,000 lawn signs and conducted two mailings. I ran my own personal campaign. Some would say that was the weakest part of the effort. We went to 16 different local meetings that had been organized by schools, churches and ratepayers groups. If at the end of that effort someone did not know about my campaign, it was more accidental than purposeful. It was not a result of the time allowed, 44 days. My opponents did the same and they did it in the same time period.

In 1979, the campaigns in my constituency were conducted with the same intensity. It was spring, not winter, but the campaigns were no tougher. They were prolonged, but they were no better. My opponent in 1980 was an incumbent. He had been a challenger in 1979. He had been nominated in 1978 and had spent a year or a year and a half knocking on the 55,000 doors in our riding. Once the bell went, he did the same things as the Hon. Tony Abbott, my predecessor. He canvassed every poll, put up thousands of lawn signs and he defeated Mr. Abbott. He did it with a highly effective campaign that was dragged out from 1978 through 1979. His result was the same as mine. His took a year and a half, mine took 44 days.

I have had personal experience in a suburban area, and in northern Manitoba I witnessed with great interest a campaign. The key was the issues, personalities and the parties, not the length of time. I want to make that point quite strongly. We want to be able to say that time does not necessarily penalize people if they come from bigger areas, wilderness areas, spread out or heavily populated areas. A long campaign will not necessarily help the candidate.