

polls open simultaneously across the country and close simultaneously. This would mean that in Newfoundland, for example, the polls would open at 12.30 noon and close at 8.30 p.m.; and in British Columbia they would open at 8 o'clock in the morning and close at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

The argument has been made that reducing the voting hours from 11 to eight would necessitate the creation of additional polling districts, or at least polling stations, in order to relieve congestion at the polls, and that in some areas—British Columbia, for example—it would be necessary for Parliament to legislate more time for employees to leave work in order to vote. A committee of this place or the other place could hear those arguments about what I call the Austin bill, Bill S-11, as well as the alternatives.

● (2140)

I note that the government has Bill C-58, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, now before the other place. I am disappointed that the government did not see fit either to incorporate Senator Austin's bill or to address in some other way the problem Senator Austin's bill tries to address, because I repeat, and I insist, that I believe it is a serious problem in terms of national unity, as Senator Austin has pointed out. But, more than that, it is also a serious problem in terms of the dignity, solemnity and, generally, the atmosphere we want surrounding election day in this country. I refer again to the problem of broadcasting results to western Canada long before the polls have closed there.

If the government has some objections to Bill S-11 or to this idea, we should know what those objections are. There is some cause to believe that for various reasons, perhaps for some of the reasons I have noted, the Chief Electoral Officer is cool to the idea, but, I repeat, if the government has objections, then let government spokesmen say what those objections are. If the government has a better idea, then let those spokesmen come forward with that better idea. Indeed, if any honourable senator has a better idea, let him or her give it to us in the course of this debate.

My point is that the problem the bill addresses is serious and it is appropriate for us to take legislative action on it. As I have said, without committing myself to every detail of this bill, I hope that the government and all honourable senators will approach the bill in that spirit.

Hon. W. M. Benidickson: Honourable senators, I should like to put a question to the Honourable Senator Murray. When Senator Austin introduced this bill and spoke to it on second reading, did he indicate which committee of the Senate might have this bill referred to it? Has Senator Murray himself some idea of which committee of the Senate should study the bill after it has had full debate at the second reading stage in this chamber?

Senator Murray: To the best of my recollection, Senator Austin has not suggested that the bill be sent to a committee. Nor do I have a committee in mind. I am aware that at least one other honourable senator, and perhaps two, might wish to enter this debate. Perhaps at a later stage, and after some

[Senator Murray.]

consultation between leaders, we could agree on whether to send this bill to committee and, if so, to what committee. I did not make the suggestion myself because I somehow wondered whether it would be preferable to let a matter which, after all, has to do with elections be discussed in a committee of the other place. However, I leave that for further consideration.

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, I propose to adjourn the debate unless someone else wishes to.

Hon. John M. Macdonald: I should like to adjourn the debate.

Senator Frith: Very well. I will not adjourn the debate, but I should like to ask Senator Murray a question. If I understand the essence of his intervention on this bill, it is that he agrees that the problem addressed by the bill is serious and should be dealt with by electoral reform, and I agree with him.

He also invited any other senators who intervene in the debate to come up with a better idea, if they have one. Senator Murray is certainly one of our resident experts in the Senate on electoral reform. I do not say that with any sarcasm at all, but quite sincerely. Does Senator Murray himself have a "better" idea, as he has suggested others might have, or is he studying the matter, or is the matter something he wishes to discuss in committee? Other than the points he has made, can he give us any other direction he thinks we should be taking, other than the direction taken by Bill S-11? Does he feel that it is a matter of tinkering with these hours, or does he accept the concept of the hours, and does he have an idea as to how they might be improved?

Senator Murray: I do not see how we can deal with the problem without some kind of what has been called "universal election day clock." I would vote for this bill right away, if I could be convinced that the hardship and the inconvenience that will be caused, particularly in the Atlantic provinces and in British Columbia, will not be too great. In that respect I am encouraged by the fact that the bill was sponsored by a senator from British Columbia. However, I would want to hear from voters, representatives of political parties and the Chief Electoral Officer on that subject.

On motion of Senator Macdonald, debate adjourned.

EXCISE TAX

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE
COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER OF BILL C-57—DEBATE
CONCLUDED

The Senate resumed from Tuesday, May 26, 1981, the adjourned debate on the inquiry of Senator Barrow calling the attention of the Senate to the Preliminary Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce on the subject matter of Bill C-57, intitled: "An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Excise Act and to provide for a revenue tax in respect of petroleum and gas", tabled in the Senate on May 19, 1981.

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I propose that this inquiry be treated as