

*Supply*

did the hon. minister say what this legislation is about. He chastised the NDP thoroughly; he chastised us thoroughly; and in his own way, whether he realizes it or not, he chastised his own party with those comments. And now he does not even have the fortitude to remain here to be taken apart.

Let me talk about this bill for a minute or two. I believe that election reform is a topic so important and so vital that it should not be part of partisan politics, yet that is what I have been hearing.

**Mr. Axworthy:** I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member for North Vancouver-Burnaby (Mr. Cook) has suggested that I do not have the fortitude to stay. I would be most pleased to stay but, as I said at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, I am also required to appear before a committee, and I would hope the hon. member would at least respect that responsibility in his remarks.

**Mr. Cook:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. minister wishes to go to a committee, he might find the remarks more easy to take if he reads them in *Hansard* tomorrow. I would excuse him on that basis and apologize to him for perhaps using intemperate language in watching him marching out of the House the minute I stood up. We have seen that with other ministers of the Crown. I find it offensive to the members of the House of Commons that it happens so often. In this case, you have a committee, so away you go!

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Cook:** As I was saying, the question here is with regard to a bill on electoral reform. Electoral reform is not a partisan political issue. I believe all members of the House believe they are here because of the wisdom and the intelligence of the voters in their individual ridings. Certainly I do.

What is the question? How do we make it fair? It is the Canadian people, their right to vote, their ability to vote and their convenience to vote, that we are talking about. The question is also, how do we make it at the least cost to the nation and at the least cost to the business of the nation.

I must be partisan for one minute. I believe that this motion of the NPD was wrong. We will have a good deal of time to discuss this bill when it comes up for second reading. I would rather see them deal with some of the true issues, such as, economics, unemployment and what is taking place now. That is what they should have been discussing today, not these minor—minor, I say—changes to the electoral act. That is the problem. These are minor changes to the electoral act, when we need all of the recommendations that can be made in connection with changes. What have they done? They gave us one little change. Now they are giving us another little change. Why can we not have it all at the same time, so that it can all be discussed properly?

The problem with this bill to me, as a member from British Columbia, is the hours. It suggests closing the polls at 5.30 in the afternoon, 6.30 mountain time; 7.30 in the east; and 8.30 in the maritimes and Newfoundland. That is fine. It hardly

makes any change whatsoever in central Canada, but it is a severe impediment in British Columbia.

I have basically a suburban riding. Most of the people in my riding do not get home before 5.30 in the afternoon. They talk about the four hours off or three hours off under this bill, that you are entitled to. That is absolute nonsense, because of the cost. I have a telegram here. The Employers' Council of British Columbia has already made a quick study of this bill. They represent something like 140 major companies in British Columbia. They represent 600,000 workers. They determined that if this bill is passed, it is likely to cost the economy of B.C.—and this is only this group, this 600,000 worker group, 140 companies—\$30 million every time there is an election. It is wrong. It should not cost \$30 million. That is what it will cost in British Columbia. What will it cost in Ontario? Absolutely nothing. Is this fair?

The minister spoke about everyone being treated the same, everyone being treated in an equal way. Well, they are not being treated equally in B.C. under this particular bill. Sure we are annoyed, sure there is that small sign of alienation when we get the results from the east long before our own polls close.

That is not the real cause of the alienation. There are other causes as well. There are ways this could be made equal, but the government has not even taken a look at it. I am referring to this suggestion, and I only put this out as a suggestion because I have not read about its being discussed, if it has been discussed. Let us have a two-day election, from noon until eight p.m. in each region of the country and then, the second day, the polls can be closed at four o'clock in the afternoon in British Columbia. Let us make it two days.

● (2050)

The briefing papers to the cabinet say it is impossible to protect ballot boxes. That is absolute nonsense. Let me make another suggestion. Why not have our elections on Sundays when no one is working or when a very few people in essential services are working? Why not a Sunday election day so that everyone can vote?

**An hon. Member:** We go to church.

**Mr. Cook:** All right, let us do it another way. Why should a national election day in Canada not be considered a national holiday? We could use one of the national holidays we already have. Goodness knows, we have enough of them. If we are having a national election day, that day would become a national holiday. Perhaps that would emphasize that people should be wanting to vote and getting out to do so.

To close the polls at 5.30 in the afternoon on the west coast would be an impediment to voters. That would make it that much more difficult for them to get to the polls, and it would be unfair. It would not solve the problem they want addressed. The only thing it would do would be to cause all polls across the country to close at the same time, and that is dead wrong for British Columbia.

**Mr. Taylor:** Also for Alberta.