

*Canada Elections Act*

● (1710)

We have institutionalized a structure or a set-up which will be virtually impossible. I say "virtually impossible", but they may come down from the heavens to get agreement. That is the problem with the Meech Lake Accord. I do not think, under the auspices of the Meech Lake Accord that the objectives which the Hon. Member is espousing and which I am espousing in terms of an elected Senate will be achieved. In fact, I think it will be a step backward and that it will be even more difficult.

**Mr. Kindy:** Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Cape Breton—East Richmond (Mr. Dingwall) for his excellent analysis of the situation as far as the Triple E Senate is concerned. However, what does he think about a system wherein we must approve the Meech Lake agreement which has been cast in stone, and Parliament cannot even debate it, or, if it debates it, it cannot amend it because it has been said that it must remain the way it is?

What does he think about this process? Does he think that powers are being taken away from us because it has been said that it cannot be amended, that it must be as it is?

**Mr. Dingwall:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member should have no doubt whatsoever that the institution which we now know as Parliament and the role we play as Members of Parliament will be lessened and lessened substantially. That role will be usurped by the Conference of First Ministers which will be convened yearly with regard to constitutional and other matters. They will be the ones, and we will not have the effective voice we ought to have as national parliamentarians.

The brief answer to the Hon. Member's question is that I do not believe it is very appropriate or in Canada's best interest for 11 men to come together to consummate a deal in the darkness of night and without a very lengthy, exhaustive, and detailed process to examine every issue affecting the Meech Lake Accord.

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** It being 5.14 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS--PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

### CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

#### MEASURE TO AMEND

**Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt)** moved that Bill C-237, an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (leave of

absence), be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, the purpose of my Bill is to amend the Canada Elections Act in respect of leaves of absence. One must understand that the Act now applies to all employers who fall under the jurisdiction of Part III of the Canada Labour Code. The Act allows an employer to permit an employee to have a leave of absence to seek a nomination to represent a political Party or to be a candidate in a federal election. That is where it begins, and that is where it ends.

It does not deal with what happens if a candidate is successful and serves two years or four years in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Angus:** Or nine months.

**Mr. Rodriguez:** It could be nine months, as in the case of 1979. The law is silent. When an employee presents himself, the employer can therefore say that he is sorry but that there is no longer a job in the corporation or operation.

What I simply want to do in my Bill is to amend the Canada Elections Act for all employers who come under the jurisdiction of Part III of the Canada Labour Code to make it law that if an employee is successful in a federal election he has the right to a leave of absence. Therefore, when he is no longer in public office, he has a right to come back to his employment.

Why have I considered this issue so important as to present a Private Member's Bill on the matter? In my 12 years in the House of Commons I have observed—and I think it is important—that the House of Commons is an expression of what it is that makes our system different from other systems. The fact is that in this House sits those who have been chosen by the citizens of Canada to represent them. This is the very essence and heart of the democratic process. If this is the essence of the democratic process and the expression of the democratic will of the people of Canada, Parliament must be representative of the people who make up its citizenry. It must be representative of the diverse nature and characteristic of the nation, ethnically, gender-wise, regionally, and occupationally.

I am sad to say that Parliament has historically been open to an elite. Those composing the House of Commons in the past have usually been white, Anglo-Saxon protestant men of relatively high incomes. Research will confirm that. Statistics indicate that most Members of Parliament come from the professions, particularly the legal profession.

**Mr. Angus:** Really, lawyers?

**Mr. Rodriguez:** Yes, absolutely. According to two Canadian political scientists, Michael Whittington and Richard Van Loon, 20 per cent of the Members of Parliament elected in 1984 came from the legal profession.

**Mr. Gauthier:** How many?