

Canada Elections Act

be that there will be an all-party agreement that, perhaps, with this change and that change to the Elections Act we could conduct a proper federal election. This would be an election that would be fair to all Canadians. It would ensure that they have their information and that the examination would be conducted in the same time as that established in many provinces. Perhaps 35 days would be equally acceptable, I do not know. I do know that this bill should not be before us now because of the vast changes which will come about in the election process in this country when this bill comes into effect.

● (1510)

When we talk about the potential of proportional representation, I connect it to the question of a 47-day election campaign. An election is called, and 47 days later the voting takes place. If there is any form of proportional representation which falls into this category, it really means there will be two elections. It takes probably a week or two to get on the list on the basis of proportional representation; and, depending on the system used, a separate voting may be required within the election to determine who will be on the proportional list. This may require that a party convention be called, or it may mean that some form of primary election will have to be held, as is the case in the United States. Under these circumstances, obviously, 47 days simply will not suffice, since at least two weeks of those 47 days will have been used up in order to determine who the proportional representation candidates are.

With that hanging over our heads, I wonder why we are even contemplating 47 days until we know what the rest of the package will be and whether 47 days will have anything to do with it at all. Yet this government brings in this measure to be debated on a lazy Friday afternoon. We are required to talk about it while the government does not understand that it should not be before us. Surely to goodness there is not that much poverty of mind and wisdom on the government benches that they cannot realize the implications of some of the legislation which should be before this House.

Mr. Taylor: Do you want to bet?

Mr. Cook: No, I will not take a bet on that; I might lose.

Before us is a bill which covers a vast subject. What has been printed is, if I may use the expression, a half-assed proposal dealing with the subject.

What else is there to say about this whole matter? Not that much. I think we have made the major points about what should not be included in this measure. In view of its terms, we would also like to see what would happen if it were to pass. If we ever get to the point of having an elected Senate, will this bill apply? Will the Senate have a 47-day election period as well?

Mr. Collenette: Come on, we're not talking about the Senate, we are talking about the House of Commons.

Mr. Cook: If the heckler over there is going to make comments, will he either make them quietly so that I cannot hear them at all or will he make them loud enough so that I

can hear him properly? There is nothing worse than knowing only that a heckler is saying something and yet not being sure of what it is he is saying. This is what has happened with the hon. member opposite. Mind you, if he is that embarrassed about what he has to say that he wants to tone it down to the point where he cannot be heard, that is just as well.

I compliment the hon. member for Mississauga North (Mr. Fisher) on a speech well made. I thought his comments were fair. I tend to agree with some of his ideas. I only hope that he will consider expanding his thoughts from the narrowness of what is contained in the bill with regard to the 47-day proposal.

There is a second proposal in the bill which has received very little discussion in this House. It is a rather important proposal since it involves a radical change. If accepted, it will mean that the voters' list will be handled in a totally different manner from the way it is at present. I suggest that in some ridings this may present quite a hardship. It will not be bad in a city riding where there is a returning officer and a returning office, and where one can view the mimeographed lists readily. I wonder what effect this measure will have in those 500-mile long ridings where the returning officer is at one end of the riding with the mimeographed list and the electorate is spread widely throughout the riding. How many hours or days will it take them to reach the returning office to view the list? I presume that the returning officer would send the list via special delivery through the Post Office to designated points throughout the riding where people can actually see it.

These problems are not addressed in the bill before us, nor have they been carefully considered. It is very unfortunate that this piece of legislation has been brought before the House at this time, especially since statements of all kinds have been made indicating that some major legislation will be forthcoming which will probably deal with proportional representation which, in turn, will change the entire ball game. We know that the Chief Electoral Officer will be suggesting in his report up to 100 minor housekeeping changes to the Elections Act.

Each one of these changes should be looked at in light of the 47-day potential and with the possibility in mind of a different method of printing the lists. I want to be able to consider these changes and discuss them. Once that is done, once all the changes have been put together properly, the government can bring their 47-day legislation to me. At that time, and under those circumstances, I think the legislation would receive a very fair hearing. But it cannot be dealt with in the abstract. It cannot be dealt with today. All the questions that are raised in my mind cannot be answered today, since I do not know what will be contained in the Chief Electoral Officer's report. I do not know what the Prime Minister will propose in the fall. Quite frankly, for a year now an ad hoc committee and the Chief Electoral Officer have been involved in discussions about many of the controversial measures involved in the Elections Act. They have been attempting to arrive at an agreement with all parties, in a way which would be fair to the Canadian people. I would like to see the conclusion of those discussions