

I do not wish to deny the obvious fact that the government has certain advantages in being able to choose the date of the election. There may be organizational benefits in terms of even the most limited advance warning given to the government party machine which could be significant in a kind of close election because they would have the advantage of having their troops organized.

The effect of the local party organization is to pull out the maximum number of potential supporters who might otherwise have abstained, not to make converts. The greater volatility of the electorate in recent years indicates that the campaign proper may be of more importance in converting voters than had previously been thought. If so, it is likely to make the capacity to determine issues upon which an electorate is fought more important than organizational factors.

● (1752)

Prime ministers have great difficulty in concentrating campaign attention on the issues they themselves wish to emphasize. Media coverage may in practice give the advantage to opposition parties. A point in fact occurred in the last election. When the campaign started, wage and price controls were brought out but this was not the major issue as the campaign went on. Then we saw that as it developed in the campaign it became a very major factor.

I do not want to talk this bill out, Mr. Speaker. I believe we should, in many instances, consider having a fixed election date of four years. I should like to give my support to my colleague, the hon. member for Cochrane.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should not like my colleague from Cochrane to think that I feel the House should not pass his bill or, as we say, that the House should kill his bill. But I understand that this is not the question tonight; we are here to deal with it and no one has suggested that it should be referred to the committee for well-known reasons.

Just the same, I should like to congratulate him on the fine remarks and the good points he has made. I should like to congratulate also the two previous speakers as well as the parliamentary secretary. It is quite unusual to hear a government member develop points which we have brought to the attention of the House on a number of occasions, because I remember that our former leader, Mr. Réal Caouette, had raised this matter both in the House and during past election campaigns. It is even better to find that government members share those views.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that it is time that Canada, a highly mature country, amended its constitution or, even better, included in its new constitution provisions calling for elections on fixed dates.

It would prevent the prime minister, whoever he is, from playing with the date of the election, from playing with the

people's nerves, and often the speculators in the stock exchange from advancing things and making undue profits. Furthermore, it would also prevent the mass media from speculating on all the activities of the prime minister, whether he walked across Wellington Street, or held a press conference or went to see the Governor General. In any event, an election has been announced every season for two years; it is like Ember days in the past when we knew in advance that it would occur four times a year.

I think it is time to rely on the maturity of the Canadian people and to stop playing with Gallup polls, whether they gallop or not, whether they trot or walk, with polls of all kinds which are sometimes without rhyme or reason but which make it possible to abuse the population. And there are people who rely on them.

I think this should be prohibited, and I am very serious about it. Provided an election is decided those polls should be left aside and the population should decide itself who will be reelected and who will form the next parliament. This is how it should work if we really want to have a strong and lasting democracy. I also think that we all agree that whatever government, provided it is honest, should never be defeated on a question or on a bill. It is the best way to leave all hon. members a very personal responsibility. Every member should be responsible for his vote and his position. If at a certain time parliament as a whole is not satisfied with the executive, then it will be possible to introduce a non-confidence motion, and if it is passed by the majority, an election will have to be held.

To my mind, the parliamentary secretary was quite right when he said that this would bring more responsibility and objectivity to our deliberations, while reducing the time spent on procedure. We would thus try to reach our goal as quickly as possible, and the Canadian people would be better served.

As an added bonus, the cost of administration of the House of Commons may also be reduced. At this point, the committee is trying to find means to improve services at lesser costs. I think that would be a good way of reducing administrative costs; there again, we would be serving the Canadian people better.

Mr. Speaker, for all those reasons, I feel that we are definitely right in bringing pressure to bear in order to achieve the objectives of Bill C-212. Now, if we can manage to agree, here, in the House, on this matter, we shall be happy to tell the public that we are responsible people, that we are giving our country a new constitution. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I should like this bill to be passed immediately.

[*English*]

Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton): Mr. Speaker, in the short time remaining, about one minute, I should like—

An hon. Member: Sit down.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!