

*Private Members' Business*

parties. At the last election we had 14 or 15 registered political parties and our tendency is to divide and distinguish ourselves regionally.

This is not a trend we should encourage in a national Parliament. Yet we have as our official opposition the regional party the Bloc Québécois whose sole purpose in being here is to take its one province out of this Canadian family.

I believe we should also have the humility as parliamentarians to recognize that many of us as individuals got to this place not as a result of any sweeping mandate from the voters but, given the multi-party nature of Canadian politics, through the grace of plurality.

During the Liberal sweep of Canada I got 42 per cent of the votes cast in Cumberland—Colchester and my next closest opponent took 36 per cent. In the Reform heartland a member from Calgary had a 44 per cent plurality. The list goes on across the country.

There are many of us in the same situation. We are not only a regionally diverse nation, our electorate is also very diverse. We mislead ourselves and do them and this country a disservice when we see our constituents as distinct little tribes.

There is no such thing as a homogenized Nova Scotian, nor is one in Quebec where one size fits all. I take great pride and satisfaction in knowing that there is unity, there is oneness in the diversity that identifies Canadians.

We should recognize our duty as parliamentarians to provide a focal point for Canada here in this House. We can best do that by ensuring those who enjoy this House's privileges do so as members of registered parties who reflect the entire Canadian spectrum and not narrow regional interests.

• (1825)

This bill in no way impedes the right of any member of any party to sit in this House now or in the future. What it does ensure, however, is that if they want to sit in this House as a member of a registered party enjoying the benefits that flow from registration their party must nominate candidates in at least seven provinces representing an aggregate of 50 per cent of the population.

That is not an onerous requirement for any party that aspires to run this country. As an Atlantic Canadian, I have a vested interest in regional special interests. However, I feel that this country and Atlantic Canada benefit from a strong national government.

We are best served by a strong national Parliament and this bill is intended to live up to the diversity and the multiculturalism of Canada. It is intended to represent the national character of Canada.

**Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke):** Mr. Speaker, the intended purpose of this bill is to stop single interest parties from being established.

The manner in which it is written could also stop multiple interest regional parties from forming. There is a realistic purpose in establishing a restriction on financial assistance in the form of a rebate or a portion of the election expenses.

However, this restriction now exists by way of a requirement to field at least 50 candidates in order to qualify for that election expense rebate. On one hand, it is understandable to want to prevent the emergence of political parties that advance the interests of a single province. This bill, however, is not a very democratic way to achieve that goal.

Many people have suggested that democracy really only exists for about one minute every four years when one enters the polling booth. That is not good enough. This country clearly does have different regions and from time to time problems in those regions give birth to new political movements.

Sometimes those regional parties disappear early in their existence, such as the Progressive Party. At other times, a party such as the Reform Party of Canada which saw its start in a region grows to become a contender to form the next Government of Canada.

I would point out to members that this can also work in reverse as we saw in the last election when the Conservative Party went from being the government to a non-party status in a single election.

Forcing political bodies to run in areas where they have no interest is more likely to create regional alienation than it is to present it. A far better solution would be to create a more responsive political system that would tend to address these regional problems before they could spawn a new local interest party.

Consider the problem created by a single issue like fiscal responsibility. The have provinces are having their financial resources stripped from them to finance irresponsible government spending while the have not provinces are getting less from the concept of wealth sharing because of that same lack of federal financial responsibility.

In this case, provinces on either side of the equation could spawn a regional party when the real solution should be found in a new sense of financial responsibility on the part of the government.

An issue could be much smaller, like the firearms legislation. Ill conceived legislation such as that currently proposed by the justice minister could conceivably result in the emergence of a group from a particular area wishing to ensure that we focus on control of criminals instead of persecution of law-abiding citizens.