

*Canada Elections Act*

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said he has some major changes he wants to make. Why should we be bothered with this minor matter which ties in with every change that may be advocated in Parliament in terms of an election? Will 47 days be enough? I do not know because I do not know what are the other considerations. They are asking me to buy this pig in a poke and to decide that the election period should be shorter, without telling me what else they have planned or what other major items they will attempt to foist on Canadians. Until I am told those things, how can I possibly talk about 47 days or about electoral lists which will no longer be printed but will be mimeographed? These matters should not be before the House at the moment; it is a waste of time.

Why was a committee not set up for this matter and all other changes considered at the same time? Why was there not an omnibus bill? Why have they not brought it all in? Why have we not had a chance to look at everything?

There is a stack of bills which are waiting. Various matters are involved. Some of them are good; perhaps some of them are not so good. Every one of them has some relationship to the legislation before us. When they talk about 47 days, they should realize that they are changing every facet of the Canada Elections Act. This 47 days makes a difference to the Canada Elections Act, as does the question of the printed list.

For example, the hours the polls are open might be irrelevant, but moving after the list is out is relevant to the 47 days, as is voting by proxy. Holding the level of the membership of the House to a particular figure is relevant to 47 days; perhaps it will mean many more voters in individual ridings. Will the candidates have a chance to talk to everyone involved? There is some doubt about that.

There are ridings in British Columbia which are over 500 miles long. The government should talk to members representing those ridings to hear what they have to say about the 47 days. Will they be able to get around those ridings within 47 days? I realize that originally the length of an election was established based on the difficulties of travelling by horse drawn wagons on muddy roads. Even though it was done in that manner, the distance in those early days were much shorter. The difficulties in terms of travelling about ridings in the maritimes or Ontario in those days were not the same as they are today with the large size of ridings, particularly in western Canada. Those ridings are what we might call big ridings in the big sky country. Some ridings are hundreds of miles in size. Even with paved roads and instant communication by telephone, 47 days may not be enough. I want those members to have an opportunity to consider the 47 days.

I suggest that other things could be done to the bill which would make the 47 days reasonable and would allow the electorate to be well informed. We are not only here to please ourselves and to be fair to all candidates. We are supposed to be fair to Canadians and to let them consider what each party is advocating and what is the philosophy of each party, and to provide them with a reasonable time in which to make up their minds.

Perhaps 47 days is the answer, but I think the government will find out that hon. members from large rural ridings have other ideas relating to the 47 days which may make the 47 days acceptable to all. The publication of the results of the opinion polls relates to the 47 days; whether or not the results of such polls will be published. There are two acts to amend the Canada Elections Act in that regard. There are a number of ideas about which hon. members have felt strongly enough to propose bills dealing with individual changes. Surely they must all be considered. Surely the opinion and the report of the Chief Electoral Officer must be considered. The Speech from the Throne and the attitude of the Prime Minister and his government toward major changes must be considered. They relate to the 47 days as well.

We should not be discussing this matter today; the bill should not be here at this time. We should be talking about the bankruptcy bill or something which is important to the country, rather than wasting the time of the House as we are doing today with this bill. There are acts regarding deposits, partisan poll officers and the representation of parties at polls to be considered. This 47 days as opposed to 60 days will make a difference as to whether or not these things will be possible, whether or not injustices will be involved. There is the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and byelections preceding redistribution. This 47 days will have a lot to do with those bills, as well as with the mobile polling stations under the Canada Elections Act. If there are a couple of mobile polling stations in a 500-mile riding, I wonder how much the candidates can cover in 47 days. I am referring to many areas in western Canada or, for that matter, in the north.

What about the use of contributions, limiting them to federal uses? Well, I apologize for that one. It should not be included in here, because it has nothing to do with the act under discussion.

The period of 47 days is related to campaigning by non-residents and to permanent voters' lists. Those matters have a great deal to do with this particular piece of legislation. Many hon. members on all sides of the House have taken a look, or would like to contemplate, the potential of a permanent voters' list. This might make this legislation palatable to those with huge rural ridings. It can be done in many ways. The Australians have one system, but there are various ways in which it can be handled.

As I suggested, there were comments in the Speech from the Throne which proposed major changes. Also there was the speech in Winnipeg by the Prime Minister reiterating them as recently as last Monday. We know that the report of the Chief Electoral Officer is due in September. There is a raft of bills dealing with the Canada Elections Act, yet we have a little bill before us indicating limiting an electoral campaign to 47 days and stating that the list will no longer be printed. How can we deal with those matters in a vacuum without contemplating all other potential changes, ideas or concepts which might be very useful or interesting? Perhaps when we see the rest of the legislation it will be entirely possible that we may have a circumstance where 47 days will not be the ideal time. It may