

has ever had. So there is no statistical evidence to show that the people are fooled by polls.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the party which champions freedom of information should suddenly want to muzzle the press and deny the Canadian people the information they have always had. They want to put us all into the situation of people behind the Iron Curtain; we should huddle beside our radios late at night, turn on the news from Detroit, turn off the lights so the RCMP will not break down the doors, and get the news of the latest polls to find out what is happening in Canada. As sure as I stand here today, that is what would happen if this bill were to pass. For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am sure the measure will not pass.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the measure and I congratulate the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) for bringing the bill forward and for the very responsible position he has taken in the contents of the bill, as well for his very well-reasoned speech.

I must say I was disappointed with the previous speaker who attempted to suggest, within the context of the motion, that it is a denial of freedom of speech. It is not a case of muzzling the press at all. As a matter of fact there are many journalists who have reservations about the way in which polls are conducted in this country and the degree of accuracy they reflect. The difference between reporting polls and talking about a person who wants to express an opinion on the outcome of an election is that polls are perceived to have some scientific or technical connotation to them, something done in a professional and scientific manner in which an adequate and accurate expression of opinion has evolved through the process of a survey. But we know, Mr. Speaker, that many of these surveys are quite inaccurate.

I certainly support the measure and I hope hon. members will see fit to send this proposal to committee for consideration. The member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith) forgot to mention that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), when the Speech from the Throne was introduced, said we would be looking at ways and means of improving the electoral process. Surely this is one area of reform which should be considered by a committee of this House, because there are different views held. As a matter of fact there are members on the other side of the House who share the views of my hon. friend from Athabasca. In *The Citizen* of June 20, 1980, there is an article entitled "MP Against Polls During Elections". It says:

A Liberal member of Parliament has called for a ban on the publication of public opinion polls during election campaigns.

Gilbert Parent, MP for the Ontario riding of Welland told the annual meeting of Central Canada's radio and television journalists Thursday that polls shouldn't be published in the month before voting day. He said during a panel discussion polls adversely influence voters and can be manipulated.

The man across the way who has just spoken with all the wisdom and expertise of the collective view of that group over there has certainly not polled his members, because there are many members on that side with whom I have discussed this question personally who have reservations about polls.

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It is really unfair for a member, in spite of his strong position on any particular issue, to suggest that the collective wisdom of this House is not a better balance than the collective wisdom of a few of his cohorts for whom he speaks. Nevertheless I share the view of my hon. friend from Athabasca and of the hon. member for Welland (Mr. Parent) that polls can interfere with the orderly democratic process.

One of the reasons we have polls—and this was alluded to by the member for Athabasca—is that there are some people who are over-anxious and who want to know beforehand what the outcome of an election will be. The journalists and pollsters take great pleasure in attempting to predict the outcome of an election beforehand, and I think that in the process they can distort voting patterns of individuals and of groups of individuals.

What is more disconcerting is that we are increasingly being bombarded by various types of polls, conducted with varying degrees of expertise; indeed, some lack any scientific method in the approach taken. As a result there is, I think, an increasing tendency for greater inaccuracy. This can cause confusion in the minds of the electorate, and I certainly find this to be unhealthy. As hon. members know, politics these days is a pretty complex game without making it more confusing by carrying out surveys of opinion which may or may not reflect what is actually factual.

The point I want to make is that when there is doubt as to the accuracy of a professional group of pollsters there is certainly even more room for doubt with regard to surveys and polls conducted by those who are not classified as professionals—I would classify them as amateurs. For example, we only have to look at the last election. A Gallup poll published just prior to the election indicated 48 per cent would vote Liberal, 28 per cent would vote Conservative, 23 per cent would vote NDP, and 2 per cent would vote otherwise. Well, that indicated there would be a 20-point spread between the Conservatives and the Liberals on the basis of the poll findings. The final result showed there was only a ten-point spread. That is a tremendous and gaping inaccuracy, Mr. Speaker. The final result was 43.9 per cent Liberal, 33 per cent Conservative, 19.8 per cent NDP, and 1.6 per cent Social Credit. I submit that this is a tremendous inaccuracy, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the reading of a survey such as this which is done in a very professional way, I am told.

● (1640)

There is no question, as has been pointed out by my colleague, the hon. member for Athabasca, that there is room for doctoring and manipulation, and I suggest that that constitutes a very unhealthy intrusion into the democratic process. My friend across the way quoted Charles Lynch. He quoted a section which would bolster his argument, but I believe as well—and this is the other point I want to make—that there can be a built-in bias in any poll that is taken. Mr. Lynch makes reference to that fact—and I quote from the *Montreal Gazette* of March 18, 1980—when he states: