

down to a defence of a vested interest. It is a defence of what they think is their electoral advantage.

● (2030)

I think it is important to clear away the particular mythology contained in this resolution, and talk about the real issue of democratic electoral reform in this country and who has led the way. I would only remind the hon. members of the New Democratic Party, and perhaps even those members in the Conservative Party who might be interested from time to time in matters of democracy, that when it comes to electoral reform it was the Liberal Party which brought forward the single most important advance in the development of a democratic base across Canada with the development of the Election Expenses Act a few years ago. It provided for the deep and full participation of ordinary Canadians in the financing of their political parties. It provided Canadians with the ability to take financial control of the parties away from the big donors. In fact, the major beneficiary of that electoral reform has been the NDP. We have, in our generosity and munificence, enabled that party to establish a much broader range of fund-raising than ever before by providing tax write-offs and tax exemptions. Even its leader and party presidents have said, with some degree of self-satisfaction, that the most important basis for whatever electoral success they may enjoy has been due to the change which we brought forward. Yet they have the audacity to say that we are not interested in the question of democratic reform and principles. Talk about their lack of appreciation for what we have done for them!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: We have provided them with the financial basis enabling them to preserve some remnant of responsibility on the electoral scene, but all they are concerned about is what happens on the lower mainland in terms of getting their votes out.

I think it is important to discuss electoral reform. It is a question with which we should always be concerned. We should always revamp, redress and revise the guidelines and rules by which we conduct our democratic society. That is why our House leader has put forward a number of important changes for parliamentary reform and democracy. How much more useful it would have been had the members of the NDP, rather than taking up the time of the House with a frivolous motion like this, said, "Well, let us use the time to debate that parliamentary reform so that we can improve procedures of the House and get more legislation through." We find, once again, that they are not really interested or committed to this question of how to bring about change and make improvements to the way in which the system works. What they are really concerned about is the protection of their own self-interest. Yet they try to camouflage that in the broad rhetoric of the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), the eastern member, to camouflage it in the proposal of the member from Ontario to help western Canadians.

Supply

For a moment let us discuss the tone and direction of the remarks of the hon. member for Oshawa in terms of why he feels that some denial is being made to the democratic rights of western Canadians. Where we must begin is with Bill C-113, the so-called electoral reform, which came about—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy: I am deeply appreciative of the support and response of the NDP members. Perhaps they are now beginning to understand what we are trying to say. The origin of that bill, the genesis of what we are talking about, emanated from western Canada. That was not something which was concocted in Oshawa, this was not something which was developed in the caucus room of the Ontario party of whatever stripe; this was something westerners requested. This was the result of a large and increasing demand by western Canadians for a change in the way and basis of organizing elections so that they would not feel separated when the vote came in. They clearly demonstrated that need and made a call for that change. What is even more remarkable—because we are hearing such a large volume of noise from the members of the NDP caucus from British Columbia—is that it was the province of B.C. which was most vociferous, most anxious and most concerned that this change be made. It was the people of British Columbia who were most deeply concerned that we make changes in this particular area. So I guess we can only conclude that the NDP members of Parliament from B.C. are not really representing the people of western Canada. Once again, they are simply representing their own particular self-interest as a party, not as a democratic organization, and what they think is to their electoral advantage. It is not what is in the interests of the people of British Columbia or of western Canada.

It is important to recognize that in putting forward the reform in Bill C-113, what we are really saying is, first, that people should not have their hopes prejudged by election returns coming in earlier. It is simply a necessity, as this country stretches for thousands of miles from one end to the other. In the days of new electronic communication there is an obvious need to ensure that when people are still polling and making their choices on the west coast, we have not already made a selection on the east coast. Therefore, not only is this a way of trying to grade and rate the voting times, but also to ensure that the electronic media, particularly coming from the United States, would not be broadcasting the election results which, as we know from every political science study, have a very direct and compelling impact upon the choices people make.

The reforms proposed in Bill C-113 are designed to correct that eccentricity in the present electoral system and to ensure that people in western Canada are treated the same, in an equal way, in parity with those in the east, even though that is being denied at this moment by the NDP.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: What is more, this proposal has been broadly discussed and debated in the House. You should ask