

[English]

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that almost every one of us has either spoken of polls in the way one of our party leaders expressed himself about them during the last election, or thought about them in that way. He said, "When the polls are in my favour, they are wonderful; when they are against me, I pay no attention to them."

I readily understand the concern of the hon. member who introduced this bill, a concern expressed in his hope that our elections might be run in such a way that our electors would really have free choice. I support that ideal to the hilt, but it seems to me that other things interfere with that free choice far more than the publication of polls.

The previous parliament enacted legislation respecting election expenses. I do not think it went far enough. I think money spent on high powered advertising frustrates the opportunity of people to think freely at election time. If we want to improve our elections by allowing citizens of our country freer opportunity to express their thinking, we should go further in equalizing amounts of money available to the various parties and, as well, take any steps we can to rid ourselves of misleading advertising, which is prominent in election campaigns just as it is prominent in the commercial world generally.

We can do something else to improve our elections. I know that what I feel is felt by members in all quarters of the House, and I regret very much that we have not moved in this direction. I am speaking, of course, of shortened election campaigns. They ought to be several weeks shorter.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Election campaigns lasting seven, eight or nine weeks are rough for all those who participate in them and they weary the souls and minds of our people, until they hardly know what to think. Near the end of that long period they are easily stampeded one way or the other. I think we would improve people's freedom of choice at election times if our election campaigns were shorter.

● (1640)

As for this specific bill, I would certainly have no objection if the subject matter of it were referred to the appropriate committee so that this matter could be discussed further. However, I see some very real difficulties in it.

During an election campaign, I pursue one of my favourite ways of campaigning by going to shop gates. If I stand at a shop gate early in the morning and ask enough of the workers going in how they are going to vote so it becomes clear to me that I have 75 per cent or maybe 90 per cent of the workers at that particular plant—

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My friend need not laugh. There are plants in Winnipeg where that is the case. However, if I send out a news sheet, poster or handbill, or in any other manner say that the workers at

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the CPR Weston shops, Dominion Bridge or Manitoba Bridge plants in Winnipeg North Centre are voting 75 or 80 or 90 per cent for me, according to this bill I would be committing an illegal act.

There are real difficulties when you try to control the dissemination of information or the collecting of information and publishing it in one way or another. Maybe I have taken the extreme case, but certainly any reading of these words makes it clear that the bill does not just confine itself to the established commercial poll-taking organizations. It applies to any person who purports to take some kind of poll and publishes the results of that poll in any manner whatsoever. I think the bill is good as a vehicle for getting the subject discussed. If the subject matter could be referred to a committee for such discussion, that would be useful.

I cast my eye across the way and I see that my friend, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) is here. He usually is on a Friday afternoon. He is part of this exclusive club that is here on Friday afternoons.

Mr. Francis: Thank you, Stanley.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He has a bill on the order paper which deals with a broader subject, of which this is a part. I refer to the hon. member's Bill C-333 having to do with subliminal advertising. I am concerned not only with subliminal advertising, but with the subliminal effects of a great deal of open advertising.

Most of us have ideas and ideals about what life should be like, the kind of persons we should be and how we should live. However, if I get the opportunity to sit in front of television, I come away with the impression that in order to be a full fledged member of society in this twentieth century, and it is getting pretty close to the twenty-first, you have to make sure your breath is pure. If you are female, you need to have the sweetest mouth in town. I find you have to make sure you have no body odours that are offensive and the impression given is that you have. These advertising people tell you what to do about all that. I find that you must drink beer and enjoy it.

Mr. Cullen: How many drink it who don't?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I don't drink it. I don't enjoy it. Indeed, I share the feeling of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) that it is offensive that this kind of advertising is put over television.

The hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates) is concerned about freedom of people to express themselves at election time. I say that the freedom of people in this country to decide the kind of persons they want to be is terribly thwarted. It is terribly frustrated by the kind of advertising for profit that goes on in the media of this country.

I could go on with a long list, but I do not want to speak too long on this. The ultimate is that you really are not a full fledged member of twentieth century society and are unable to get into the twenty-first century unless you have the right kind of tissue in your bathroom.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!