

of New Brunswick. If you are going to constrain this time, the candidate in Carleton-Charlotte cannot physically cover the same degree of ground that he is able to cover with a longer time period.

Would the government, then, give some consideration, in very difficult advertising circumstances, to the constraint of time plus a little bit of leeway so that one can make contact other than by the media when it is impossible to make it physically, as I have been accustomed to doing? If you cut 15 days off the Carleton-Charlotte candidate, whoever he may be, that means just that many more communities which he is not going to see.

It is a funny thing, but in constituencies in the city it appears that you do have to keep a profile and you do that in the press. In the rural constituencies both the local and national press only recognize the giants when they speak in this House. If they are in the city of Saint John, Halifax or Toronto, they get publicity. The rural candidate is not going to get any freebees in the world of the media, printed or electronic. Therefore he is at a disadvantage if he wishes to get his name known. If you are going to cut this time, these are additional considerations which I think have to be extended to them.

I think I have kept at least one part of your requirements for the consideration of this bill and the mutual understanding on it. I have not been, nor do I intend to be, political, but I do ask whoever chairs this committee or participates in it to review some of the remarks I have made as a country boy in this nation who has some idea of the difficulties of conducting a political campaign under the constraints of this act and who will suffer under the additional constraints. This I think is what the people want and I am willing to abide by it; but if I am to do that, I hope the House, in its consideration of this bill, will give some additional consideration to the necessities of rural campaigning and this time constraint.

How are you going to get around Peace River, Alberta, or Prince George-Peace River, British Columbia, or some of the northern parts of Quebec, in this period of time? Can you make any opportunity for candidates to travel through their constituencies faster? You can do it faster by plane than I can by car, and that is the only thing I can afford under this structure. So should there be an additional expenditure allowance in rural constituencies for plane travel under the time constraints we are going to impose? What is the answer? Before this bill is finalized, let us give that subject attention.

Mr. Chuck Cook (North Vancouver-Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I must be political with a few opening remarks, and this is pertinent to this particular bill.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cook: I consider this bill to be far too little and far too soon. I do not believe the bill should be before this House at all. It is a waste of Parliament's time to be considering it at this time.

Canada Elections Act

It was said in The Speech from the Throne:

You will be asked to appoint the committee of Parliament to examine the electoral system in order to ensure that the highest degree of representativeness and responsibility is achieved and that the confidence of Canadians in parliamentary institutions is strengthened.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), speaking in Winnipeg just the other night, said:

We've announced that a parliamentary committee will be established to study and make recommendations on how to make the Senate and House of Commons more effective instruments for the expression of regional interests and priorities as well as the expression of the national will.

Now, for heaven's sake, when you have a government that is planning to rip the electoral act totally apart, change the rules of the game as evidenced by the statements of the Prime Minister, to bring this piddly little bill into the House at this time and ask us to do a little bit with it—

An hon. Member: It is your bill.

Mr. Cook: Yes, but we were not planning on having the rest of it.

An hon. Member: We did not advocate proportional representation; that was you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.

An hon. Member: Why don't you listen?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.

Mr. Cook: What I am suggesting is that attempting a snip, when really what the government is planning to do is to destroy the whole animal, is ridiculous and we should not even be discussing this matter. However, it is before us and there are a number of comments that must be made relevant to this particular piece of minor legislation.

● (1500)

Now I can become slightly non-partisan and point out that the length of elections in Canada now runs 59 to 60 days. Every province in the country has made changes. In Newfoundland, it is 21 days for an election; Prince Edward Island, 26 days; New Brunswick, 36 days; Quebec, 32 days; Ontario, 37 days; Manitoba, 35 days; Saskatchewan, 28 days; Alberta, 29 days; British Columbia, 38 days.

If we really look at the 1980 election, we find that the writ went out on December 13. The election campaign, particularly in city ridings, did not get under way until early in January when the children went back to school. I do not think many members were out knocking on doors and saying, "Merry Christmas, please vote for me". If they did, perhaps they are not here.

The length of time of an election is only one small issue in terms of the entire question of electoral reform. This bill should not be before us at this time; it should have been held back. In approximately three months, in September, the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the changes he wants in election law will be available.