

*Canada Elections Act*

same thing. The CTV poll, the CBC poll, Carleton university poll, and the Toronto *Star* polls were not giving the same amounts, but they were all indicating the same direction, and the direction was that the Liberals were going to win. In fact they did win.

What would happen, for example, if we were to ban polls just during the last two weeks? The Ken Taylor "Iran incident" caused the Tories to think that this might be their salvation, that it might turn things around. Anyone working in the campaign in Toronto during that election who talked to a Conservative worker knows that this gave them a real shot in the arm, a real flow of adrenalin. They could hardly wait for the next poll to come out. They felt that somehow a twist or a change in their fortunes would be indicated as a result of that Iranian incident.

Would we deny them the hype or the adrenalin or the good morale that would result from an incident that might happen toward the end? Are we to say that during the first part of the election when something great happens, the polls will reflect it and you can let the effect of that be indicated on the electorate and allow them like lemmings to go in that direction, but that cannot happen in the last two weeks? If that were the case they probably would have asked Ken Taylor to get out of there two or three weeks earlier so that there would be time for the polls to reflect the upsurge in their fortunes. This is the ridiculous sort of thing this legislation could trigger.

One point that was raised by the hon. member for Athabasca was the way in which knowledge of how the mood of the country was going would affect the decision of a voter. Somebody who may feel strongly about a majority government might like to know if one of the two major parties had a better chance to form a majority government than the other. Somebody might prefer one of the two major parties, but actually liked minority governments. If he thought the NDP had a chance of holding the balance of power, he would vote for them, but only if they were going to hold the balance of power. I do not see anything wrong with that. That is valid information. Why should we deny the electorate that information?

The electorate, if anything, in terms of knowledge of politics, elections and the issues, are increasingly becoming more sophisticated. I do not think we need to stop up their ears so they cannot hear information they always had a right to have because somehow their minds are going to be tainted and they will go off and do something they would not otherwise do.

If somebody was very concerned about having majority government and wanted to know which party had the best chance of forming one, he could do his own poll. However, the results would only be relevant in his own riding, and his riding might be going in the direct opposite direction of the rest of the country. When we have such a spread-out country, almost 5,000 miles long, it is valid for a person in one part of the country to want to know how people in the other parts of the country feel. That is valid.

Our party will take its chances on the impact that such information will have on the electorate. I do not think the

possibility that somebody's vote, and I do not think it is very many people, may in fact be determined on how the mood of the rest of the country is going, and cause everyone to react in the same way. The results, particularly in the area of the country west of Winnipeg, in the last election will indicate that. If there was a buffalo stampede out there, it was not in our direction. It was in the opposite direction, notwithstanding the fact that the polls and the direction of the polls were well known.

Another interesting question that arises is the difference between the work of a political commentator, of a syndicated columnist, of a magazine writer, and the work of a pollster. Let's assume a rough equivalence in terms of talent and sensitivity on the part of the two. Are we going to say that a political commentator with a column in newspapers across the country, who can say he has been talking to a lot of people and it is pretty clear what the mood of this country is, and the Liberals are going to win this election or the Conservatives are going to win this election, cannot do that? People respect his judgment. They say that if Lynch, Fisher, Fotherington, Regenstreif say that, and he goes up on the mountain and gets it in tablets of stone, it must be true. If that is the information they are looking for, they certainly will believe Mr. Lynch or Mr. Fisher. Are we going to say to them they cannot be writing columns like that in the last two weeks of an election campaign? The bill does not purport to do that. But what is the difference?

● (1630)

If people are so easily influenced by what authoritative people may say about the mood of the country, rather than read polls by Martin Goldfarb or Peter Reigenstrief they will just read columns by Charles Lynch and Doug Fisher. And we all know how authoritative they are. They may differ from time to time, but so do the opinions of the pollsters. They are not always identical. That is another problem you get into if you follow this route.

I would like to refer to a statement by Mr. Lynch in a column he wrote on March 18 of this year. It was entitled "Effects of Polls Overshadow Roles." One sentence in that column really says it all:

Polls convey accurate information. Hence, those of us who are committed to freedom of information must support publication of the polls.

Such is clearly not the position of the sponsor of the bill before us, a member of the Conservative party, the party which is well known for its championship of freedom of information. We certainly find them in a paradoxical situation here with all the polls which have come out, particularly in the last election. I am sure there were many more polls taken in that election than in any previous election in Canadian history.

The New Democratic Party, the third party in the House, has more members than it ever had before, and I am sure it was never more clear to the Canadian public that the NDP had no chance whatsoever of becoming the government. However, the polls did not, unfortunately, stop the people of this country from returning that party with more members than it