

Federal Elections

process purely for political reasons. I will sit down soon since this is not a bill which requires great and extensive explanation. The citizens of Canada know its value. They believe in predictability and want it. I expect that there will probably be a speaker from the New Democratic Party, which is normal. There should be one speaker from the Liberal Party. But if the Liberals choose to put up speaker after speaker until five o'clock, then the people of Canada will be denied the opportunity to have some predictability about when elections occur. That is symptomatic of what they are demonstrating here. They would like to cling to the power they have and embrace it to themselves and call an election for political reasons, not necessarily seeing it as serving the people of Canada but, rather, serving the political party in power. I believe that this bill, while simple in its form, has a great deal to merit its adoption.

I hope that hon. members will make a couple of short speeches and let this bill pass before five o'clock. As I have said, those who choose to speak until five o'clock are effectively denying Canadians the right to know when the next election is coming up, at least this is so in my own riding where I have conducted a simple poll. If Canadians know when the next election is to occur, they can work toward it. This allows them to believe that the government does not hold all the power with respect to when an election is called and to use that power at its whim.

Mr. Paul E. McRae (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to make a few comments about the bill which is before us today. I must say that it is an engaging piece of legislation and one with which I have some sympathy. Perhaps what outweighs any possible advantages I see in the bill is that in my opinion it is not fitting that a short private member's bill should be the avenue for changing our parliamentary system. This bill would perhaps cause the most radical change to our system if it were adopted. I am not saying it is a bad thing, but it is something which must be given a great deal more thought. Thus, in speaking on this bill I am not in any way saying we should not be looking at it in a serious way, but I do not think this is the proper vehicle to bring about this change.

The parliamentary system, as we know it in Canada, Great Britain and many other countries, is based on the notion that the executive, that is, the cabinet, has these powers but it is nonetheless at the mercy of Parliament. If Parliament decides at some particular point in time to vote against a government on a major issue, as took place on December 13, 1979, then the government is defeated and an election must ensue.

I can see some great advantage to having a fixed term. Certainly if you are sitting on this side of the House, as members opposite did a year or two ago, there is a great advantage to having a fixed term. It was of great advantage to my party a few weeks ago, when we were dealing with a major money bill, and we had only five or six more votes than the opposition. There are many times when members on this side of the House must be here. Anyone in government will know you have to be here more often than do members of the

opposition since you do not know how many of them will come out to vote. There is a great deal of insecurity caused by this situation.

I would like to look at the American system for a moment. I think more of us are familiar with that system, perhaps, than with any other system, with the exception of our own. I would like to look at a system which operates under fixed terms, a two-year term for congressmen, a four-year term for the president and the executive, and usually a six-year term for the Senate. These terms are set out in the constitution and there is no possibility of change with regard to them. I think we should look at this system to see the advantages and disadvantages associated with it and then adopt the best provisions for our system.

For a good portion of my life I have been very interested in the American system of government. I spent a great deal of time studying the American system of government in university, and I have visited Washington many times. I am always amazed at how the Americans make the system work at all. It is a system in which the executive body is separate from the legislative body. In our system, they are one and the same. In the American system, there are so many checks and balances. For a long time it has been a mystery to me how bills ever get through the American system. One of the major reasons for this is the intense politicization which goes on in the United States. People are constantly lobbying their representatives. Politics is a deadly serious game. One of the reasons for this is that bills are initiated in the Congress or the Senate where there is no tight party discipline. If a bill is defeated, the government does not fall.

Let us look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of this type of system. I think one of the real advantages to the American system is the fact that it is much less adversarial than our system. In that system, you cannot sit down and make a deal with another member. In ours, you can sit down and reach agreement with your opposite number, which means that we are not constantly exchanging violent and rabid debate. We are not constantly fighting. As time goes on, and certainly with the advent of television in the chamber, and the upgrading of the question period, I feel that the adversarial part of our system is not working well. Some strains are developing because we are constantly fighting with each other. Perhaps the fight might not be as real, but the public perceives us as being constantly in a quarrel. That is not true to the same extent in the United States. There is no question that the fact that one may vote on one side or the other side of the issue and that party discipline is not nearly as strong is one of those things which removes the adversarial part of it, and I think that is an extremely important fact.

● (1620)

I have talked to congressmen and I have talked to people who work in the congressional office. I have talked to lobbyists in the United States. There is constant, ongoing lobbying and constant politics. Someone from another party may absolutely and entirely disagree with one's views; two people may dis-