

Canada Elections Act

opinion polls these days, but nevertheless we do not try to stop the publication of opinion poll results.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Call an election.

Mr. Burghardt: Why do they still persist? I think that this Bill and the two other Bills sponsored by Tory Members really show that the Progressive Conservative Party is not ready to treat the Canadian people with much respect. It shows that the Tories think that Canadian electors are like lemmings, like sheep or like buffalo on the Prairies, all running in one direction. That direction is whatever way the polls seem to be following. Maybe the Hon. Member believes that this is the reason his Party has 52 per cent of the latest Gallup poll.

Those who support the Bill pretend that the use of polls during an election campaign becomes an impediment in the exercise of free choice of the citizens to vote and exercise his or her franchise. How can this occur? How can it come about that a citizen is impeded in the exercise of his or her free choice in an election campaign?

Some Hon. Members will answer that the use of polls in the election campaign in the current environment becomes an undue influence, unduly influencing voters. It is quite possible that individuals in Canada would take a poll result as being a definite indication of the parties' standings on the day the poll was carried. However, let me refer to the words of the Right Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, words which he said on many occasions and which I am sure the Conservative Members will very clearly remember. He said that the only poll that counts is the poll taken on election day.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): It tells us something about the polls.

Mr. Burghardt: If those words are true, why do we then not take the appropriate step to ensure that the only poll which really counts is carried out in such a way that it does not become a source of undue influence on voters? The matter to which I refer is Bill C-113, a Bill which was introduced by the Government in order to have simultaneous voting all across the country. The Bill has been opposed by Members of the New Democratic Party. If its Members are so preoccupied by the alleged undue influence caused by opinion polls on voters, then why do they not support Bill C-113 and readily pass it through the House?

Mr. Skelly: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Burghardt: Steps should be taken to ban the publication—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order. The Hon. Member for Comox-Powell River rises on a point of order.

Mr. Skelly: We opposed the Bill in order to place on the record that we were discussing the Bill and to indicate that it was the omissions which caused us concern.

Mr. Burghardt: Mr. Speaker, nevertheless they still opposed Bill C-113, and that is the bottom line. Regardless of any omission of amendments to the Bill, the New Democratic

Party still opposed the Bill which would give us simultaneous election results right across the country. Therefore, if Hon. Members are really concerned about the undue influence of public opinion polls on voters, that is the Bill they should be considering so that all Canadians would receive election results at the same time.

I hope this legislation will not be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections today. The Standing Committee, to my mind at least, does not have to discuss a matter which most of us in the House should oppose in principle. I believe that the Canadian people have the right to know and are mature enough to make decisions based on leadership and programs rather than on percentages. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be the case for the Tories who have no leadership and no program to offer Canadians. Rather than attempting to infringe on the freedom of the news media, I think the Hon. Member for Cumberland-Colchester and his colleagues should put forward some ideas to deal with the real problems of the country. Unfortunately, Hon. Members opposite seem to prefer moving dilatory motions, such as yesterday's motion which destroyed the business of the House for one entire day, or ill-conceived Bills such as this one, rather than getting down to the real issues.

Mr. Taylor: Where were you a week last Monday?

Mr. Burghardt: A week last Monday I was here. I was on duty and I was here at 11 o'clock—

Mr. Taylor: Your men weren't. They wasted the day, not us.

Mr. Burghardt: —to answer the Hon. Member of the Conservative Party.

However, returning to Bill C-262, as I said earlier, Canadians will certainly make up their own minds as to which political Party or member in the federal, provincial or municipal realm they will support at election time, regardless of what public opinion polls say. If we are to start banning public opinion polls during election time, then we will have to start banning editorials of newspapers and the writings of well known Canadian columnists in newspapers and preventing broadcasters in radio and television from expressing opinions during an election campaign. Many times editorials have been written with regard to a particular candidate or party. That does not mean to say that the Canadian people will follow that line of thinking. The same holds true for public opinion polls, whether they are published during an election campaign or at any other time of the year. It does not necessarily mean that Canadians will follow those percentage figures.

As I said earlier, Canadians will make up their own minds. They are mature and honest enough to make a selection during any political election campaign. To muzzle the news media as suggested by this Bill and similar Bills which have been brought forward by the Tory Party would certainly be a denial of the freedom of the press. I understood that Opposition Members would adhere to that but they do not.