

people, coming from a member of the Conservative party, a party which has been an energetic champion of the cause of freedom of information. It is interesting that this comes when that party is out of office, and it is apparently now in the best interests of the country. However, members of that party have not been known for their consistency.

I note that the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester (Mr. Coates), who is quite a guiding light in his party, and one who is trying to assist his leader in many ways, has sponsored Bill C-262 which would prohibit the publication of the results of opinion polls for the entire election period. That may be a little sterner stuff, but I think the real problem of what we are talking about here is that such a bill really does not treat the Canadian people with much respect. I think it more or less implies that they are like lemmings, that they are like sheep, or like buffalo out on the prairies stampeding in one direction, and that direction is whichever way the polls seem to be blowing.

These fears for the ignorance and gullibility of the electorate for only two weeks do not make much sense to me. I am reminded of the phrase by Franklin D. Roosevelt that fear is nothing but fear for themselves, and he should have known. In 1936 there was a very famous poll conducted during the U.S. presidential election, which showed that Alf Landon would thump Franklin Roosevelt. What in fact happened was that Roosevelt thumped Landon, but the *Literary Digest* only consulted people who subscribed to the magazine, and in the middle of the depression the only people who could afford magazine subscriptions were all Republicans. Not too long after that the *Literary Digest* went out of business.

One can only hope that this House will give this bill the treatment it so richly deserves which was meted out to similar bills sponsored by the hon. gentlemen from Cumberland-Colchester North and Burnaby-Richmond-Delta in the first session of the Thirtieth Parliament. Both bills, C-213 and C-404 respectively, would have prohibited the publication of the results of opinion polls during an election, as is proposed by the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester in this session.

I might note that a very distinguished member of this House, no less a distinguished member than yourself, Mr. Speaker, said, and I will quote from the Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for Tuesday, April 13, 1976, as follows:

MR. FRANCIS: Well, if you were to try to do it on a national basis, you would have the kind of thing where the Detroit paper would do a poll on Canada and publish it in Detroit. The United Kingdom tried to do this and they had it from Radio Luxembourg, beamed at the United Kingdom, back and forth. I just do not think it is enforceable. And, while I do not like opinion polls, and while I understand why someone presented the bill, and I wish I could think of a good, legitimate, valid reason why I could achieve the same result, I have to say, deep in my heart, I think it is wrong.

● (1620)

That is the end of the quote from yourself, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Knowles:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it is in order to bring the occupant of the chair into the debate.

### *Canada Elections Act*

**Mr. Smith:** The point is well taken. I was just reading from the minutes of a committee. The point that was raised in that committee is a good point. What would happen if a Detroit radio station decided to make public the results of a poll done in Canada? With the techniques we now have, with these discs you could have an Atlanta television station broadcast the results of a poll. People all across Canada could have their discs aimed at some satellite and get the results. Are we going to try to stop this? It raises rather horrendous scenes.

You can picture people in eastern Europe huddled beside their radio with the lights out, or turned down very low, listening to the "Voice of America", waiting for the police to break down the door. I can think of many movies of the second world war where the Gestapo would storm in and find somebody with the earphones on. Is that the sort of thing we are going to do?

Once we start muzzling the press and denying the press the right to publish information, where do you stop?

I understand the motivation behind the bill presented by the hon. member, but it is a very slippery slope. Once you start that sort of process, I do not think there is any guarantee that it will not creep away and creep away and eat into very fundamental and precious rights. We have always had a free press in this country.

What would happen if somebody took a poll and we had a version of a Hyde Park corner in this country? Sometimes if you go to Toronto City Hall on a Sunday afternoon you see somebody on a soap box. You see the same at Allen Gardens and a few places in Toronto where there are corner orators. Are you going to extend the bill to preclude somebody from taking a poll himself and standing up on a soap box to announce it?

Where do you draw the line? The final week ban on publication of poll results involves a clear and obvious abridgement of freedom of expression. It would restrict individuals, the press, magazines, radio and television, for a crucial seven-day period. In the language of journalistic ethics it would flagrantly and without any question abridge the public's right to know. If a late change in public sentiment were under way, this rule would require that knowledge of the change be withheld from the general population. The bill's sweeping demand, it should be noted, would withhold all polls, those accurately reflecting the trend as well as those that might in one way or another be seriously misleading.

Look at the results of the last election. Does anyone think that the results were seriously affected by the polls? Certainly the polls were broadcast far and wide. The voters in western Canada were not influenced very much by them if they believed the polls which indicated that the Liberal party would do well in eastern Canada. It did not cause a stampede toward the Liberals on the prairies.

**Mr. Knowles:** It caused a stampede the other way.

**Mr. Smith:** Perhaps if anything it did cause some weakening of our support. Look at the polls. They were not all saying the