

Canada Elections Act

foundation, has estimated that in the 1960 presidential election in the United States there were 8 million people who were classified as mobile adults unable to meet state, county or precinct residence requirements and so were unable to vote. He has said that a system of absentee balloting could take care of that problem.

He has also estimated that there were 5 million people in the United States who were kept away from the polls by reason of being in hospitals, nursing homes and the like, while an absentee system would have provided them with the opportunity to vote. He further estimated that there were some 2,600,000 adults travelling for business, health, vacation or other reasons who were unable to obtain absentee ballots.

We have a similar problem in Canada and we must concern ourselves with it. There is the inalienable right of a person of proper age, who meets all the qualifications, to cast a ballot in a federal election, and of secondary concern to that are the expenditures and costs of providing an absentee balloting system. We should always keep in mind in enacting legislation that we should provide those citizens with every possible opportunity to cast their ballots on election day, regardless of where they may be. They should not have hurdles, barriers, prohibitions and restrictions put in their way. The elections act, as it is now worded, does not provide a system of absentee balloting and therefore it presents hurdles, prohibitions and barriers to approximately 200,000 people in Canada. This should not be a part of our democratic structure, and I repeat that I hope the motion before us will be given speedy passage and that later on we can proceed to enact legislation with provision in it for absentee balloting.

Mr. Frank McGee (York-Scarborough): I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak on this motion and I should like to congratulate the hon. member who moved it so early in the session when our memories are fresh with recollections of our recent experience.

I would agree with the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson), that there is an unanimous or near unanimous view, held not only by members of political parties but also by members of the public, that a shorter election campaign is desirable. I would also agree with the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Stefanson) and the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) in their justifiable and proper concern with the problem of fishermen and other special categories of people who have a particular problem in registering their votes. However I think they may be mistaken in

[Mr. Howard.]

thinking that this resolution provides the full solution to it, and I suggest that perhaps a permanent voters list is not the best way to go about solving the various components of the problem as they were outlined today. I have an alternate proposal to make and it is aimed directly at achieving the result which the motion seeks:

—so as to permit shortening the period of time between the issue of the writ of elections and the date the said writs are made returnable.

When the question of this permanent voters list was before the committee on privileges and elections, of which I was a member, so far as my recollection goes the decision not to proceed with a permanent voters list was a unanimous decision. I may be subject to correction on that, but before proceeding any further there is one other observation I should like to make concerning the special problems of special groups in the electorate. It has to do with the service vote. The service vote problem, which was given such wide attention in recent times, would not be solved by a permanent voters list.

In answer to another point raised by the hon. member for Red Deer when he was discussing the cost and when he suggested that other voters lists could be drawn from the same source, while that might appear to be the case at first glance, there would still be required a certain amount of processing because, as the hon. gentleman knows, there are different qualifications for different types of elections, federal, provincial and municipal qualifications, and there would be much activity related to finding the particular qualified people within a community with the right to vote in a particular election. While I can see his point in justifying the expense involved I do not believe such a list would provide a complete voters list for every electoral environment in the country.

The statement of the chief electoral officer to the committee, about which reference was made by the hon. member for Selkirk, was to the effect that the initial cost of establishing this voters list would be between \$6 million and \$7 million, and he suggested that it should be revised at least twice a year. I cannot recall whether it was during the committee proceedings, or as a result of private conversation afterwards, but I gained the very definite impression that in his judgment a revision four times a year would be the desirable arrangement.

I would be inclined to agree with him and other authorities from other jurisdictions who have expressed opinions on this, because of the problem which exists in the constituency of York-Scarborough where there was an increase of some 40,000 voters between 1958