

The Interim Elections Act.

Not "Rep by Pop"

by W.J. Alliston

There were primarily two glaring needs which led to the New Brunswick Elections Act of 1967. One was the voters' evident confusion over the proper use of the ballot in the provincial general election of 1963. This was particularly apparent in the urban riding of Saint John City where a large number of ballots were disqualified, and a recount found two Liberals and two Conservatives victorious instead of the previously announced four Liberals. The other need was for a more realistic distribution of seats consistent with a population steadily concentrating itself in urban areas. Also, in 1963, the federal government began studies on a complete redistribution of boundaries in federal constituencies which would enhance the power of the under-represented urban electorate.

Chief Justice Michaud was employed to prepare a report containing recommendations for a new Elections Act. The Report was tabled in 1966. Among Justice Michaud's recommendations to be incorporated into the Act were changes in the administration of elections including the appointment of a Chief Electoral Officer as an executive civil servant in a supervisory position with his own necessary staff. Another change of particular interest to the university community is that New Brunswick students of voting age are attending college or university outside their home district or in the electoral district in which they are extending their education. This means that students attending U.N.B., Saint Thomas, or Teachers' College from outside the city will have the choice of voting in Fredericton or their home riding. A new statute will also guarantee the right of every voting citizen to three consecutive hours of free time for voting purposes during the prescribed voting hours.

The two primary changes effected by the new Act are the new ballot and the addition of six new seats in the provincial Legislative Assembly. By the previous Elections Act, each party provided a stock of ballots containing only the names of their particular nominees. The Conservatives had a ballot, and the Liberals had a ballot, and the returning officer was required to provide an adequate quantity of blank ballots. The voter, in the privacy of his voting compartment, would

choose the ballot he wished to use. If he simply wished to vote the straight party ticket, then he merely had to fold his ballot in an envelope and pass it to the returning officer. However, he was allowed to scratch as many names off as he wished and add as many in his own hand as he wished provided the total was not greater than the number of possible elected candidates.

The invitation to confusion and spoiled balloting in this method is obvious when one considers the large number of people who, in a federal election, are not capable of marking an "X" beside the candidate of their choice. The new provincial ballot is the ultimate in clarity and simplicity. There will be one ballot only for each electoral riding instead of the former two. The candidates are grouped by party, and the heading for each group is the party affiliation. The names of the government candidates come first, followed by those of the party which forms the official opposition, and concluding with candidates of any other recognized party or independants. Each candidate's name is written in bold, black type, followed by his address and occupation. There should be no legitimate excuse for error or confusion since the voter simply marks an "X" by the candidate of his choice.

The new ballot passed the legislature with barely a word of opposition, but the redistribution provoked vigorous protests charging the government with attempting to "steal" the next election through balancing redistribution in their own favour. Saint John Conservatives were concerned that the new City of Saint John is only to receive seven M.L.A.'s while it has a population of roughly 90,000.

Justice Michaud's recommendation of one member to every 10,000 people was accepted as the basis for redistribution; therefore, the Saint John members felt that New Brunswick's largest metropolitan area should receive at least eight and possibly nine members.

Mr. Ames (York) accused the government of "gross discrimination" against the City of Fredericton. Only two members will represent the new riding of Fredericton which includes Marysville, Barker's Point and