

Canada Elections Act

PUBLIC BILLS

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

AMENDMENT RESPECTING AGE OF VOTERS

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville) moved that Bill C-21, to amend the Canada Elections Act (age of voters), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

He said: Mr. Speaker, at this time I take pride in introducing Bill C-21, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act with regard to the age of voters. The bill, if passed, would reduce the eligible voting age in the whole Dominion of Canada from 21 to 18.

• (5:00 p.m.)

At the outset I want to make an assertion which is essential to my cause in presenting this bill today. It is that voting at the age of 18 is, in my opinion, a right which should have been granted to young people many years ago. Participation in the political process should not be a part-time job; it should involve young people at all times, and this means providing them with that basic right, the right to vote. All too often politicians use young people only to lick stamps or place stickers on car bumpers during election campaigns and political conventions. Lowering the voting age to 18 is long past due.

In order to get people involved we have to work to extend the political base as much as possible. Years ago, only people who held property were allowed to vote. This limitation was relaxed to the benefit of all Canadians. Women received the franchise and this, too, resulted in benefits to the Canadian people.

I should like to summarize briefly the history of the lowering of the voting age to 18. The C.C.F. government in Saskatchewan, soon after its election in 1944 under the leadership of the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas), lowered the voting age to 18 in that province, enabling young people to vote at that age in the 1948 election. The age limit was subsequently reduced in Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, and in Newfoundland where the voting age is 19. We also find voting ages of less than 21 years in the United States in the states of Georgia and Kentucky as well as in the new states of Alaska and Hawaii. Nearly 40 countries have adopted a voting age of 18, countries in all

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

corners of the world on both sides of the iron curtain, countries with differing political ideologies. It seems ironic to me that Canada should still have a voting age of 21. We are still debating the mediaeval concept that persons are not mature until they attain the age of 21. This concept grew out of an age when a person was not thought physically able to wear armour until he became 21.

I appeal to members to vote on this bill, not to talk it out. All of us know that similar bills have been presented many times by members of all political parties. All political parties at one time or another have been in favour of reducing the voting age to 18. I believe that as far back as 1962 the committee on privileges and elections unanimously recommended that this should be done in Canada. But the proposal never seems to come to a vote, or when it does it is defeated, or the issue is tied up in committee after committee.

The former prime minister of Canada, the right hon. Lester Pearson, speaking to the house on November 18, 1963, came out in favour of reducing the voting age. But nothing was done about it. As reported in *Hansard* at page 4858 Mr. Pearson said:

This party has been committed to the reduction of the voting age to 18 years of age for some years, and we are anxious to see that it is done as quickly as possible.

I suggest the time has come when we should stop talking about this matter, both here and outside the house, and pass a bill giving effect to this proposal.

Young people have been expecting to get the vote at the age of 18 for a long time. I picked up an article the other day in the *Globe and Mail* of November 16, 1963, which raised this hope among many people, and I should like to quote a paragraph or two from it:

It is virtually certain that all Canadians who have passed their 18th birthday will be able to vote in the next federal election. The Commons election committee was unanimous, this week, in approving the reduction of the voting age (at present it is 21); and all parties have indicated they will support the change when it comes to the floor of Parliament.

The arguments in favour of the change scarcely need repetition. People can now vote at 18 (provincially, but not, of course, federally) in Saskatchewan and in Quebec; they can vote at 19 in Alberta and British Columbia.

All over Canada they can work at 18, marry at 18, drive a car at 18, go to jail at 18. They can fight in wars at 18—and in fact, as servicemen,