

*Canada Elections Act*

I therefore propose, in view of the complexity of the practical reasons for the extreme streamlining of Clause 14 (4) (e) it be allowed to stand pending a much more thorough study.

**Mr. Laprise:** Mr. Chairman, I want to give my views on the amendment proposed by the member for Skeena (Mr. Howard). I would like also to indicate my admiration for his generosity toward those who deliberately have chosen to live on the fringe of society.

However, I cannot approve his attitude since all through his remarks I wondered whether we had not chosen the wrong place. The hon. member has given us such a list of all the advantages granted criminals over the last few years that we may wonder whether it is not more advantageous to live on the fringe of society.

We know how criminals are treated compared to law-abiding citizens. In Canada, thousands of families are living on social welfare. Thousands of workers must live on incomes obviously inadequate and deny themselves things essential to life which prisoners find in penal institutions.

It has been reported not so long ago that the construction of the penal institution at Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, in the province of Quebec, had cost \$32,000 per inmate. However, thousands of Canadian families have to live in slum dwellings which do not even belong to them and in distressing conditions, while \$32,000 is available to accommodate individuals who did not want to comply with Canadian laws.

In my opinion, if we grant these people the right to choose members of Parliament, we are giving in to them a little too much.

Moreover, a comparison was established between members of the armed forces and prisoners. This is stupid. No comparison should be drawn between those who defend their country and those who destroy it. If we give prisoners the franchise, we must give it to saboteurs and traitors also.

On these grounds, I cannot support the amendment moved by the hon. member for Skeena. The hon. member for Matane (Mr. De Bané) who spoke before me is wondering what would happen in the case of a man sentenced to 48 hours in jail at the very time of an election. I would answer him that when somebody is sentenced to 48 hours in jail, the offence is not likely to be a crime but rather some petty larceny or some minor offence.

[Mr. De Bané.]

Moreover, I am sure that in such a case, a Canadian judge would have enough understanding to defer the sentence.

I do not think the present Elections Act aims at granting the right to vote to those who have deliberately chosen to be outcasts. If we make it easier for those people than for those who are law abiding citizens, I am afraid we shall have to change sides.

Such are the reasons why I cannot support the amendment of the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard).

**Mr. Goyer:** Mr. Chairman, the merits of the amendment moved by the member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) are not easy to ascertain and, consequently, must not be taken lightly.

I believe our society now accepts the concept whereby citizens who break the law of the land are not condemned to prison to suffer any other penalty than that of being deprived of their freedom. And so, citizens who are imprisoned do not suffer any corporal punishments which are spurned by our laws. Citizens who now break the law and are imprisoned are not, generally speaking, deprived of access to information. In fact, they have access to literature and information.

Therefore, such citizens as are imprisoned are merely deprived of their freedom of movement. And even there, practise has it that more and more the prisoners are given the right to leave the institution for short spells at regular intervals. The citizen is therefore to be rehabilitated instead of being completely removed from the normal environment, so that he might readjust himself to society after serving his term.

• (9:20 p.m.)

I therefore ask myself two things with regard to the amendment proposed by the member for Skeena: First of all, whether the prisoners are well-informed; and secondly, whether they can have the will to improve society. Indeed, that is how, generally speaking, I understand franchise. Now, because in practice prisoners are given instead of denied access to information through radio programs, television, newspapers, they are in a position to follow the evolution of society like all other citizens, to see how the affairs of the state are managed, and so to pass judgment. Does the fact that he is excluded from normal life constitute a valid reason for denying him the right to vote?