

Canada Elections Act

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, taking advantage of that section on November 23, 1965 I wrote to Mr. Nelson Castonguay a letter, the relevant paragraphs of which are as follows:

Vancouver Quadra is the seat of the University of British Columbia. An estimated 2,000 U.B.C. students lost their votes in this election under the provision of Paragraph 16(9) of the Canada Elections Act because they were not duly registered and in attendance at university when the election writ was issued on September 8, although most were here when the enumerators called during the week of September 20 to register the voters.

Unless this section of the act is amended students at U.B.C. and other educational institutions will continue to be in danger of losing their franchise whenever a September election is called.

In accordance with section 58(2), suggestions made in writing to the Chief Electoral Officer must be included in his report to the Speaker of the House of Commons at the conclusion of the election. Therefore the suggestion I made to him, that an amendment be made in the area of section 16(7) dealing with ministers and teachers, is before the Chief Electoral Officer and—

Miss LaMarsh: There is not one.

Mr. Deachman: The Secretary of State (Miss LaMarsh) has just advised me that there is no Chief Electoral Officer at the moment, but I think this matter will be settled shortly, and I am sure the new electoral officer will have the files before him, with a recommendation from the former Chief Electoral Officer in regard to this matter. In any event, the matter has been put before him, and he is under law compelled to review this question when the matter comes before him.

This is another way in which, in addition to the bill I have presented to the house, an amendment may be brought about to our election laws in order to permit Canadian students 21 years of age and over resident at Canadian universities to exercise their vote. We are in an era when the number of students is increasing very rapidly. These students must never again be disfranchised at an election should they become resident at a university between the issuance of the writ and polling day.

I know that other hon. members in the chamber today who are interested in this problem will want to say something on this matter, but I hope they too will urge that steps be taken, either by the passage of this bill or through amendment of the elections act introduced by the government, to make sure

[Mr. Deachman.]

that Canadian students are not again disfranchised in this manner.

Mr. F. J. Bigg (Aihabasca): Mr. Speaker, this bill touches on what is, I suppose, the most important right of every Canadian citizen, namely the right to cast his ballot. I certainly support 100 per cent the principle of making sure that every citizen of Canada be given the opportunity to vote. I would also not disfranchise British subjects resident in Canada, particularly if they intend to live here, from exercising their right to vote. However, it seems a strange anomaly that students at university can be deprived of their franchise when resident British subjects at the same university and with the same residential qualifications are able to vote. I think the whole subject of voting in Canada should be reviewed. Students are not the only ones disfranchised through no fault of their own. The Canada Elections Act should be revised in several very important particulars.

For example, I am not at all happy with the treatment given our armed forces. Sometimes when they are transferred from one depot to another at the time of an election either they or their families are put to some considerable trouble and are disfranchised because they do not meet residence qualifications or are unable to qualify to vote at the point where they wish to vote.

Also secrecy of ballots cast needs to be preserved. If we are to change the rules we must ensure that the votes by members of the armed forces cast are indeed secret. I can assure the house, as could any other hon. member who does a little bit of homework, that under the present system whereby our soldiers vote it is easy to ascertain how members of the armed forces have voted.

I should like to see the Canada Elections Act amended, but I am not particularly happy with the present bill before the house. The whole matter of the franchise should come before the appropriate committee who could thrash the matter out. It cannot be done piecemeal. There are many ramifications to the electoral system of Canada which need straightening out, and I think this should all be done at once.

As a way out of this problem I think there is something to be said for adopting the English system of having university representation in parliament. This would get around another problem which arises, which is at what age university students are enfranchised. As has been quite rightly pointed out by the