

Canada Elections Act

thought desirable, in the interest of uniformity across the country before lowering the voting age to wait until the federal government decided to take action.

This is a logical position to take. The difficulty is that if the federal government is inclined to procrastinate unduly, the action which the province felt to be desirable would have to be delayed interminably. The majority sentiment in the Manitoba legislature, according to a vote which was held on this question of the voting age a few months ago, was that there should indeed be a reduction in the minimum voting age from 21 to 18. But the members still felt that the federal government should be prevailed upon to act first.

It is to be hoped, then, that before the passing of another year, certainly before the next election, this change will be made. We have an opportunity to act here and now in the form of the bill presented by the hon. member for Brantford (Mr. Brown). The remaining provinces will without doubt follow suit and we would then have in this country a uniform election law with regard to minimum voting age, the effect of which would be to give an opportunity for involvement for the young people today who in so many instances feel frustrated because they are unable to take part in any meaningful way in the nation-building process or in the political processes of our society.

I know that some elements in our society will be of the opinion, as they have been for a long time past, that to extend the franchise downward to the age of 18 would be to run the risk of political parties catering to the supposedly less stable elements—that the temptation would grow to buy or curry favour with less stable groups. While there are no doubt certain aspects of the behaviour of youth which may cause some adults to feel concerned, I and many others are getting the decided impression that by far the greater number of the young people of today are showing an impressive degree of maturity and good judgment. I believe they are giving evidence of a degree of seriousness and of a sense of commitment to ideals; they are showing they would like to become involved in helping to solve many of the human problems which exist in this country and in the world today. Since they have this desire for involvement and this sense of commitment, we should not withhold any longer the chance to have a say in the choosing of the government of our country, which is just as much their country.

I would be very disappointed if with deliberate intent, or some murky or cloudy purpose, this bill does not receive endorsement.

● (5:40 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the hon. member for Brantford (Mr. Brown) for having introduced this bill in the house. As the previous speaker mentioned, several members have given thought to this matter.

I feel that most young people are serious enough to judge political matters. I say, most of them, because I do not mean that 50 per cent of our young people have attained maturity. I took pleasure in conducting a small survey in my riding on this subject, and I think that hardly 50 per cent of the young people are really interested in politics or for that matter, are actually informed on political matters.

In fact, the replies I received were rather vague. Now, a percentage of 50 per cent is reasonable enough. At any rate, we notice the same situation with older people. Several elderly persons know absolutely nothing about politics, especially those who live in large cities. I have worked in rural municipalities and especially in larger centres and one notices that the greater majority of the people, even in cities, who are middle-aged, or are considered as such, know nothing about politics, do not even know who their member is. I can assure you that they know very little. I feel that we have here a group of young people who are reasonably conversant with public affairs and certainly deserve the attention of governments.

To my mind, the federal government would be acting fairly in enfranchising 18-year old youth. In fact, are they not taxed from age 18? When one is paying and forced to pay, one is entitled to get something in return.

Furthermore, the provinces show the lead in this matter. In fact, several provinces have already reduced the voting age. Why? For political reasons no doubt, because I think there might be a little bit of politics in this. In the province of Quebec, if the government did it for political reasons, it certainly was not lucky because it was defeated. But quite apart from the political point of view, it would be undoubtedly fair to 18-year old youth to give them the right to vote. I would even say that it is a matter of justice to enfranchise everyone who is taxed and to refuse the right to vote to those who are not taxable. And I mean taxable—