

Privileges and Elections

reason why that which was so casually disregarded the summer before became a hot issue this last summer? I have searched and researched, studied and inquired, but the only answer I got was from my study of the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion poll. Last Saturday's Montreal *Star* published a poll that had been conducted recently. The heading is "Disenchantment with Trudeau" and this question was asked: "Would you say that your opinion of the Prime Minister has gone up or gone down in the last six months?" Canadians seem to indicate that there is a downward movement, and the greatest decline is shown among the younger group.

Does it mean that because there is disillusionment among the youth with their one time hero, their "swinger of yesteryear", and with the Company of Young Canadians likely to go into the limbo of disregard and discard, compensation is offered in the form of this sudden interest in the extension of the vote to the 18 year olds? I cannot be sure. I do not attend the Liberal caucus and I do not know the inside story, but I think this question would bear reflecting upon.

Some of us have been very concerned with what has been happening to the committee structure of this Parliament, about which much talk was heard some months ago. We were told that this restructuring was going to make the House more efficient, more democratic, more relevant, more meaningful. But how much reality lies behind all these proclamations? The bugles have sounded, but how much advance has taken place? I fear very little.

We apparently have a government that believes that matter is inconsequential, provided the message is widely disseminated. Dissemination of messages is not sufficiently proficient at the moment they feel, though we hear it is going to become more highly organized at some time in the future. The illusion of activity is more valuable and easier of attainment than the reality of action. So, in this Parliament today we dwell on a mound of white papers buffeted by a hurricane of press releases.

Again, I say that this is one area from which the hands of the executive should be removed as much as possible. If there is one officer in the service of Canada who should be removed from the intrusion of the government, it is the Chief Electoral Officer, who is the servant of Parliament, not of the government. He is the man most involved in what will take place in this committee, at least as

far as this type of reference is concerned. He is the man whose work is most vitally affected by the committee's deliberations.

There are many things that one might say about the performance of the committee last year, and I do not intend to involve myself in this except to make one point. I was very much concerned that the committee traversed the country at great expense to see the electoral officers of the provinces. I am not an economist, but it would strike me a more rational procedure to invite the electoral officers to Ottawa. When members of the New Democratic Party and my party attempted to halt the pilgrimage, we almost won out, but lost by a nose. Surely, the electoral officers would have come. I do not take the view however that the committee must necessarily be Ottawa-bound, but it should not leave Ottawa and traverse the country at great expense to the Canadian taxpayer unless these deliberations are open to representations from the Canadian public. We want no sashaying around the country for closed sessions with one or two officials.

• (4:30 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Macquarrie: The electors, and not just those who operate the electoral machinery, should be heard. They are often the ones who have personal knowledge of the inadequacies because often they have been disfranchised as a result of flaws in the Act or may know of others who have been similarly denied. Possibly the public might be able to tell the bureaucrat something he did not already know.

We have, basically, a splendid election Act. Indeed, in many ways it is an exemplary one. We are fortunate, too, in the quality and competence of the men who have administered it. Jules Castonguay, Nelson Castonguay and J. M. Hamel have a deservedly high repute. I think anyone involved in any way would attest to the impartiality and efficiency with which the present Chief Electoral Officer and his predecessor discharged their important duties. Heaven knows, they are difficult duties.

As the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) mentioned, there are places where improvements can be made. We won't go into them here of course, but there is surely ground for improvement in the efforts we make to extend ever wider the opportunities for Canadians to cast their ballots.