

Canada Elections Act

is a likelihood that their interest would be stimulated and would continue. At least there is a greater likelihood than if they were faced with a period of years during which they would have to wait until they reached the age of 25 without having the stimulus of an election to interest them in a decision that is important so far as our national policies are concerned.

With regard to the argument advanced by the Secretary of State to the effect that along with this provision should go the right to assume full legal responsibility in every other aspect of life, I think I would agree with his point if he were to limit that to the right, for example, to stand for election and be elected as a member of parliament. But it seems to me on the basis of his own argument that the net result of allowing people of this age to vote would not be to cause any great change in the political spectrum of this country. His argument allows a good deal of ground for the discredited point that that right should not be given unless full legal responsibility in every other sense was allowed. I commend the points I have raised to the attention of the house before we are called upon to make a decision on this measure.

Mr. F. E. Lennard (Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, in rising for a moment to oppose this bill I do not propose to repeat the different arguments put forward on several occasions during which this bill has been before us. I wish merely to state that it is only several years ago that a poll was taken in the Westdale Collegiate in Hamilton and in other high schools in that area and the pupils themselves were opposed to the earlier voting age. I rise merely to put that on record because I know it to be a fact.

Mr. F. A. Enfield (York-Scarborough): Mr. Speaker, before the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue) speaks again there are just one or two remarks I would like to make on the general principle involved in this very interesting discussion which has arisen regarding the voting age. I am sure none of us here would wish to belittle or criticize or in any way discuss the lack of ability of our 18-year-olds, nor in any way mention their lack of wisdom or maturity. We all know that the young people in Canada probably have a broader outlook, certainly a greater opportunity for education, and probably a wider experience in the light of present-day living than they had a decade or two ago.

The argument has been raised that, having reached the age of 18, they have enough experience, wisdom and maturity to make

it possible for them to vote intelligently, and hence this bill has been introduced. I assume that that is the only basis on which this bill can be justified. Well, the age-old view has been, of course, that 21 is the age of, I think it is called, discretion. That view has a long history and has existed, I suppose, ever since we have had the system of common law introduced in England. Ever since that system was set up 21 has been considered the age when one becomes legally responsible for one's actions. It is the only age at which a person can enter into a binding contract, and that is a basic premise that has been in effect for, I suppose, well nigh on 1,000 years up to this time.

Presumably there is a very sound basis for that legal belief, and it is not something that you can discard lightly. That is not to say that making the voting age 18 is directly related to that legal right, duty or responsibility, but it certainly is an encroachment on that principle.

As I have already said, it would take a very careful estimate of the situation before one could bring oneself to vote for this particular measure. If my memory serves me right, when the hon. member for Assiniboia was introducing this bill he said he felt—and he can correct me if I am wrong—that our 18-year-olds are better educated today than they were at one time and they were now in a position to vote intelligently at that age. Apropos of that there is a great deal of confusion existing in educational circles regarding the education our youth are now receiving. In Ontario last year the Ontario Educational Association conducted a survey of the province of Ontario to determine just what happened to school children after they started school, what qualifications they received, from which courses they finally graduated, and what happened to them up to the time of leaving university.

They found out that out of every 100 children who commenced elementary school, only 13 ended up with any sort of graduation certificate from high school. In other words, in Ontario only 13 out of 100 graduated with a senior matriculation in high school, and since it is a very progressive and rich province I presume that figure might well be applicable to the other nine provinces. I have no way of knowing, of course, whether that is true, but you cannot merely assume because the opportunity for education is there that that opportunity is always taken. Certainly if you are using that as a criterion I would submit that that criterion is not a valid one because 13 is certainly nowhere near a majority of the youth who