

*Canada Elections Act*

is even more important that the President of the Privy Council should include the inmates of our penal institutions. In the past, so many people have considered such inmates as a breed apart from other Canadians. By incarcerating a man, not only do we strip him of his personal freedom but we strip him of his civil rights as well. If we are to make these men dignified, responsible and integrate them into society, the least we can do is allow them to vote so that they can take their rightful place in society.

• (4:20 p.m.)

Last week I had the privilege of travelling across parts of Canada and visiting penal institutions. The indelible impression left on my mind is that there is a need to create a proper relationship and understanding between the inmates of our penal institutions and the general public. It is necessary to make those inmates feel they are part of the community. I think that giving them the right to vote would be a step in the right direction.

My third point relates to reducing the voting age from 21 to 18 years. My party has been on record for some time as approving of this principle. I expect the government hopes to gain some advantage from the one million new voters. The leaders of the different political parties will face a challenging time in bringing to the new voters of this nation their political platforms. This will be one of the great challenges of the next general election. Today, our young people are much better educated than in the past about political matters, and the question that arises in my mind is this. Have those young people accepted their responsibilities and are they sufficiently socially mature to vote? In other words, have they graduated from childhood to adult status? At present, a person acquires adult status automatically when he reaches the age of 21. He is then allowed to vote, to enter into contracts, to hold real property, to undertake jury duty, to marry without parental consent, to drink beer and to establish a separate domicile. These are his rights.

By lowering the voting age to 18 years, will we also lower the age at which our young people can assume these other rights? Will an 18-year old be allowed to serve on a jury, to enter into contracts and so on? In other words, will these rights be given to 18-year olds automatically in future? I entertain serious doubts about this matter. It seems to me that they should earn their adult status. Perhaps I could draw an analogy between young

[Mr. Gilbert.]

people and those who wish to become Canadian citizens. A person becomes a Canadian citizen only after he has learned one of our two main languages. He must have some knowledge of the history and geography of our country and possess evidence of good behaviour. In other words, he must have no criminal record, must appear in Citizenship Court and, after submitting evidence of his fitness to be a citizen, he takes the oath of allegiance and becomes a Canadian. Why should we not require something similar of our 18-year olds? They should prove that they are worthy of adult status, that they are of good behaviour, that they are willing to accept responsibility and are socially mature.

What criteria would govern the granting of adult status? These young people I submit, ought to contribute their time and talents to the public service. Thousands of choices are open to them. Of course, we must provide jobs and opportunities for them; but this should not be difficult because there are 700,000 young students who want summer employment. Instead of being a burden on the government, we could provide these young people with the opportunity to be useful. For instance, if a young man is an artist, he could contribute his time and talent by decorating public and private institutions. If he is an athlete, he could teach youngsters to play hockey, baseball and skiing in the winter. If he is the cultured type, he ought to play in a youth orchestra or participate in some drama group. Other young people could serve by conducting tours, by helping to clean up our pollution problem, by helping crippled children or elderly adults, by baby sitting for young married couples and so on. They could perform services like these and, after a time, they would earn their adult status.

Of course, they would have to show evidence of a record of public service and good behaviour. Perhaps they could appear before a court similar to the citizenship court and bring forward two or three witnesses who would testify to the truth of statements concerning their public service. At that time they could be given their social security card, which would be an indication that they had graduated from childhood and assumed adult status and responsibilities. Then, such young people ought to have the right to vote. A young man could then perform jury service, enter into contracts, hold real property, marry without parental consent and so on. This is my own view, Mr. Speaker, and is not