

*Elections Act*

vote of all the electors, especially in certain polls? In a labour division, as in my own constituency, where it is well known that practically all the voters would vote for me—I do not say that in any boasting way but simply because they belong to the Liberal party—what is there to prevent a man who has nothing to lose from going to the poll and, simply for the purpose of making trouble, forcing everybody to take the oath and to sign the affidavit, the women as well as the men, thereby clogging the polls and obstructing the work of the returning officers? There are certain hours during the polling day when more people come to register their votes than at some other period of the day, and there may be some voters who will be unable under the circumstances to register their votes.

There is also this fact, that there are some people—I know it is so in certain constituencies—who do not like to be forced to take an affidavit. They have some sort of scruple of conscience about it. They do not like to give their signature in order to be allowed to vote. My hon. friend from Quebec West the Solicitor General (Mr. Dupré) knows that in his own constituency there are workmen and women too who will not like this, and it may make trouble there, a great deal more than in my own constituency.

Why force this thing? It is not done anywhere else. I do not see why the honest people, those who have the right to vote, should be inconvenienced in this way because there are some culprits who would come and perorate voters. As I said last night, these culprits will not be prevented from carrying out their intention. They can easily say they do not know how to sign and they will mark a cross. As I said before it will inconvenience the honest voters, and for these two reasons I am strongly opposed to it. I know that this will not be a pleasant thing for a large number of bona fide voters, and I would like to know who is insisting on having this thing.

Mr. GUTHRIE: I think, Mr. Chairman, that the difficulties which my hon. friend sees in the adoption of this system are largely imaginary. Very few people are sworn at a poll.

Mr. LAPOINTE: But many might be.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Very few are sworn. My hon. friend says that if anyone desires to do so he might plug the poll by insisting on swearing everybody that comes along, but even if he did, the voters would all be able to register their votes between eight in the morning and six at night because no more than

[Mr. Lapointe.]

three hundred can vote at any poll. Experience shows that from ten to twenty sworn is the average. That is from Mr. Castonguay, who says that he would have to supply from ten to twenty forms. Well, I said, supply enough if it passes. I do not think anybody is going to be very much hurt if they are asked to sign their name to an oath. At the present time they can be sworn and they take a verbal oath, and the returning officer enters their name. It is a very slight thing to ask the person making an affidavit, "Please sign this." That is all you have to do. I think everybody will agree that this is going to stop a lot of this personation.

Mr. POWER: Not one.

Mr. GUTHRIE: I think everybody will agree that the house should stop it, and that we should do everything in our power to stop it. We should not strain at imaginary difficulties in order to accomplish some great purpose which I believe we shall accomplish if we pass this clause with this affidavit.

Mr. CHEVRIER: Mr. Chairman, with the principle, the stoppage of personation, I am fully in accord, but I think this is a most unpopular way to go about it. The Minister of Justice says he will need from twenty to twenty-five forms in each polling booth. If personation goes on only to the extent of some fifteen or twenty it is hardly worth while going to this trouble. Impersonation does exist and the minister says that he believes it could be prevented and that it would not take much time. I know that there will be learned people, men of experience who will feel hurt to a certain extent if challenged in that way. In certain constituencies there are aged people and illiterate people and if they are challenged it will take a certain length of time to explain to them that they have to make this affidavit. If it was the ordinary oath I would be in accord with it but this idea of explaining to an aged woman, to an old man or to an illiterate person will cause a delay in some cases of fifteen, twenty or twenty-five minutes.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Oh no.

Mr. CHEVRIER: My hon. friend is a lawyer and he knows that when an illiterate person comes into a lawyer's office to sign an affidavit a full explanation must be made. When we were discussing the affidavits that was one reason why this declaration was left out of the act. The enumerators going from house to house would have had to sit down and explain the thing fully to illiterate persons. Everyone realizes how long that would