

Dominion Elections Act

the system so that the serviceman may feel that he has the same privilege as any other Canadian citizen of recording his vote secretly so that nobody, either directly or indirectly connected with him, may be able to ascertain how he has cast his vote. This is one of the main things the committee should inquire into when reviewing amendments to the elections act.

There is another point I should like to raise, and that is regarding fishermen. The fishermen are given the opportunity of recording their votes at advanced polls, but I understand that these polls were not established in all constituencies where there were a number of fishermen. The result was that a fisherman going to sea on his lawful business and expecting to be away on election day could not record his vote in his own constituency; he had to go to a neighbouring constituency.

I take this opportunity of bringing these two points to the attention of the committee in the hope that they will review them and see whether amendments cannot be introduced to relieve the uncertainty in the mind of the serviceman and to give the fisherman the opportunity of recording his vote in his own constituency when it is necessary for him to be at sea to carry on his fishing operations according to the season of the year.

Mr. Gordon Graydon (Peel): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make certain observations with reference to the conduct of elections in general, and I think perhaps this is an appropriate time to do so. First of all I think it is advisable that our general election machinery and procedure for taking the expressed will of the people should be subject to such a review from time to time as this motion envisages. I thought the subject was debated on a rather broad basis this afternoon, and I should like to mention one thing which was said by the hon. member for Macleod (Mr. Hansell). I only do so because his judgment and views are highly respected in the house, and I would not mention my disagreement with him if it were not for the high respect in which his views are held. I do not like his suggestion of Americanizing our way of holding elections.

I realize there may be advantages in the suggestion he has made of regular general elections, but I think such advantages are overruled, overbalanced and outweighed by the numerous advantages of the British system. It may be, as he says, that the dice are somewhat loaded in favour of a government, but after all we who have been in the opposition for a long time have perhaps become accustomed to certain things that are almost inherent in our system with respect to oppositions and governments. Even if the dice are

a little loaded in favour of a government nevertheless I think a government ought to be given a certain amount of elasticity and non-rigidity in choosing the time when a general election is to be held, but of course within the statutory limits that are presently provided. Whenever a government feels that it should consult the people it does so at its own risk because if the people think they have been consulted too soon or too late they always have the democratic right of dealing with the government on that point in addition to others.

I should not like to see this country come to the position where an election would have to be held on a definite date fixed for every four or five years and everybody aware of that date for years ahead. I should like to see the present system continued. I have great difficulty, Mr. Speaker, in competing with those who are talking over there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Graydon: I should not like to see the committee deal with this matter in the manner suggested by the hon. member for Macleod. I believe there are advantages in our present system of leaving it in the hands of a government to decide when to go to the country, within certain statutory limitations. I believe if we departed from that system we would lose something so far as our democratic British principles are concerned, and I think we would feel the loss greatly. Even if some of us have been in opposition for a long time we are still prepared to allow the government to exercise that function because it is a part of our British system, and that must always be preserved.

There is another point I should like to mention. Although there may be instances here and there in the public life of Canada, and in some cases they may have been rather glaring, I think most members of the house who have been here for any length of time will agree with me that, taking a broad view of the whole political picture in Canada, Canadians conduct their elections in a pretty clean manner, and I doubt if any other part of the world does so any more cleanly than we do. We all have our weaknesses, but in my time in any event, so far as elections are concerned, I have no knowledge of anything other than thoughtless irregularities, and none of them have finally affected the ultimate results so far as the will of the people was concerned.

That does not mean we should rest upon our oars. I think it is the duty and responsibility of members of parliament to try to maintain as great a degree of purity in our election affairs as possible. In these days when people with other ideologies are trying to upset our