

Out-of-town students can vote by proxy

OTTAWA (CUP) — Most university students won't be able to vote where they live while at school in the October 30 federal election, unless they lie to enumerators.

In a series of regulations quietly handed down in January, the Trudeau government amended the Elections Act in a manner likely to disperse and discourage student voters.

Full-time students attending any educational institution in Canada must now vote in the constituency from which they originated. To do this they must contact the returning officer in their home constituency to ensure their names are on the voter's lists.

If students cannot be in their home constituency for election day, they may designate a person from that constituency to cast a proxy vote. Both the student and his representative must fill out a form in triplicate.

Formerly students could either register to vote in the constituency where they resided while attending an educational institution or register in their home constituency under the old Elections Act. The voting age was 21 then, but it has since been lowered to 18.

Instructions sent out to local returning officers by the Chief Electoral, J.M. Hamel, are quite explicit. Students are divided into four categories: married, unmarried living at home, unmarried living away from home, and unmarried on their own. Single students living "away from home" may not legally vote in their campus riding; they must cast their ballot in their parents' seat.

Married students and students who live "on their own" are to be enumerated in the usual manner.

"In the case of students' residence, liaison should be

established by the returning officer with the appropriate officials responsible for such residences so that at the proper time, their help may be sought in determining which students, IF ANY, should be enumerated," (caps ours) the regulations say.

The residences referred to include university, college, private schools or nursing schools.

The government has not neglected those students who do not live in a residence.

"Enumerators should be instructed that whenever an occupant of a dwelling describes his occupation as 'student', they should ascertain which of the four basic situations applies to that person by determining the relationship of that person to the other occupants of the dwelling, if any, and the nature and duration of that person's occupancy," the regulations continue.

"Enumerators should also be instructed that when they are informed that a 'member of the family' is away from home because he is a student, the name of that person should be included in their preliminary list even if it appears that, because of distance etc., that person will be unable to vote personally on the advance polling days or on ordinary polling day."

There is little that escapes the regulations. Even the definition of a full-time student is quite encompassing. If the enumerator or returning officer thinks the main reason a young person is away from home is to attend a school, he or she must register in the home constituency of the parents. This definition may be applied even if a student is also working and attending school part-time.

An official from the Chief Electoral Officer's department told CUP it is possible for students living away from home

to vote in the constituency in which they presently reside. But they must virtually lie to do so.

The student must tell the enumerator that she or he lives "away from home" and is completely independent of any parental support. The student must explain her or his position to the satisfaction of the enumerator or returning officer.

If the student is challenged at a poll on voting day, he or she must take an oath that she or he resides in the constituency.

The Election Act provides penalties for those who make false declarations under oath. Their vote can also be disallowed.

Observers doubt federal officials would dare take any action if a large number of students were to violate the new voting law.

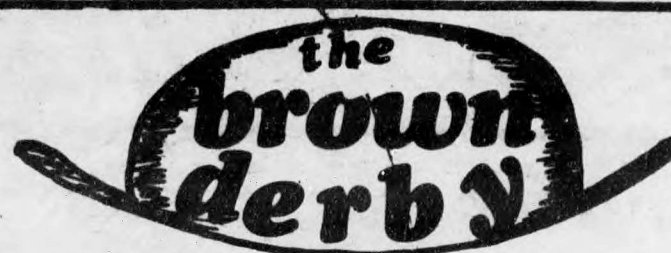
Some student representatives have indicated a co-ordinated mass violation of the new regulations may be organized, especially in constituencies where thousands of students reside.

Indications are many students will be discouraged from voting because of the bureaucratic troubles involved. Those who do will likely have their vote dispersed across the country, thereby having little effect on candidates running in constituencies with a large youth vote.

The government encountered no organized resistance from students in making the changes.

Canadian students have been without a national organization to represent them since the Canadian Union of Students folded in 1969. Attempts to

reform a national student organization are currently underway with a founding conference scheduled for early November, probably in Ottawa.



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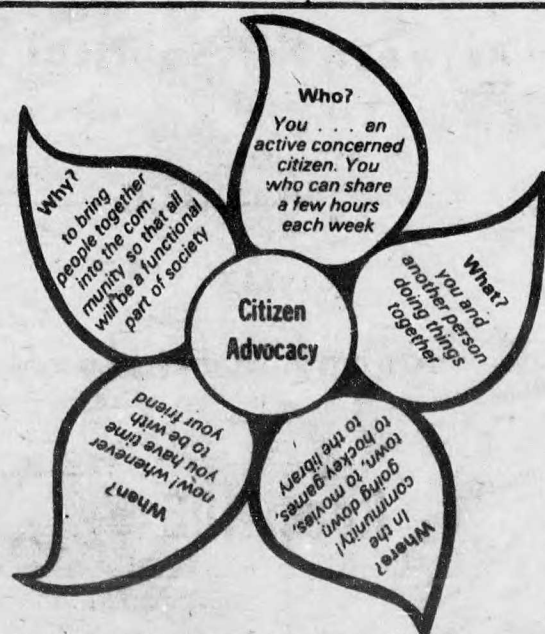
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