

Canada Elections Act

Mr. Rodriguez: Twenty per cent, while 60 per cent came from other professions.

To put this in some perspective, one must keep in mind that, as a percentage of the whole population lawyers represent less than 1 per cent. Yet, as a result of the 1984 election, 24 per cent of the House of Commons comes from the legal profession.

Why is Parliament not more representative? I have asked myself that question, and I think the reason lawyers are over-represented in the House is that it is very easy for them to leave their practices and, after serving their term in politics, whether they are defeated or they leave voluntarily, it is relatively easy for them to move back into practice. Politicians from other forms of employment or other professions would not find it so easy. Working class people just cannot leave their jobs and expect to return and pick up where they left off. That sort of easy to and fro is not available to working class people.

● (1720)

Similarly those Members of Parliament who are very wealthy can step into lucrative patronage positions or corporate directorships once they have left this House or have been defeated. There are myriad examples of that around. Indeed, many who have served on the Government front benches after they have been defeated are welcomed into the corporate lawyer boardrooms of the nation because it is very important for law firms to have prominent ex-politician representation. There are many examples. The former Prime Minister for one. I hardly think he goes into a courtroom to practice law. I read of him leading a delegation of corporate representatives to China so that they could make entrées regarding trade with China.

A former Minister of Finance who came out today in support of free trade sat on the front benches of a former government and was welcomed into boardrooms. Those positions are not available to working-class people. Again, to quote Van Loon and Whittington: "Not the least amount of disincentives of political life in Canada is the difficulty many MPs find in returning to private life. Stories of MPs requiring two years to find employment are not uncommon. This problem suggests another reason for the heavy concentration of professionals not only in Canada but presumably in the U.S. and British legislatures as well".

In short, the lack of job and financial security in politics discourages average Canadians from getting involved. That has been my concern, Madam Speaker. I have sat in this House for 12 years and I have seen it. I have experienced the difficulty of being able to return to a job once one has served one's nation and it may be that your representatives, Madam Speaker, feel that they need someone else.

What can we do to help other average Canadians get involved in the political process? That is what my Bill speaks to. It goes in some small way to complete the Canada Elections Act. It completes the process. It is not just to get a leave of

absence to seek a nomination and to campaign for election to office. The process must be complete. But what happens after? That has been the disincentive for many excellent candidates who might have otherwise been elected to this House.

We have other Acts of Parliament which deal with our electoral process and which provide fairness. For example, we have an Election Expenses Act which tries to even out and to make politics in Canada fairer and less dependent upon one's pocketbook, making things more accessible and more democratic. It is an attempt to get away from the old practice of people attempting to buy a seat in the House of Commons. Before we had an Election Expenses Act I recall candidates for office to this House who spent \$95,000 and lost. There were candidates who spent \$150,000 to win office. This place was a hiding place for the wealthy. That is why we brought in the Election Expenses Act. It was an attempt to provide a level playing field so that it was not one's pocketbook that determined whether one got here or not.

We have also a Freedom of Information Act, an Act which ensures access to information. The Government has proposed legislation for a lobby registry Act. We have heard of and we are waiting for the conflict of interest legislation. All of these Acts tend to make our system more open, accessible and democratic.

My little Bill is one page long, but I appeal to Members in this House not to talk out this Bill because I think it is a small opening in the right direction. Not all the employers in Canada will be covered by this Bill, just those under Part III of the Canada Labour Code. It is a beginning and it is a leadership role which the federal Government would give if the Bill were approved. There are concerns by some who would say it would be open-ended, that a person could be here 15 years. I think if you look at the statistics, Madam Speaker,—and I know my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party knows that very few Members are here 15 years or beyond—then it is a question of negotiation between the employer and the employee. It may be that some arrangement would have to be made for retirement or placement in a position within the operation more commensurate with the skills and experiences as a Member of Parliament.

Surely the skills one learns in the House of Commons are skills that can be accommodated in any enterprise. Surely the reward for having served one's country—and I consider this to be a part of that, a commitment to serve our fellow citizens in the House of Commons—ought not to be a kick in the butt after six or three years. Many of us who are affiliated and identified with the particular ideology of a particular party would find it very difficult to be hired in the workforce. There is often a tendency that one is too closely identified with a particular political Party, that one is too hot to handle, that we cannot touch you.

I appeal to Members not to do the traditional thing which has been done around here with Private Members' Bills of talking them out. I do not mind that, but for God's sake if