

*Canada Elections Act*

that will extend the right of people travelling or living temporarily abroad to have an opportunity to demonstrate that they are still Canadian citizens.

Earlier today I made reference to some of the volunteer workers I met just last week in countries of Central America. They had been there perhaps one year, five years or 25 years and were still Canadian citizens. They prize their citizenship. They bring honour to Canada. I have to wonder why we should not extend the provisions of this amendment to include those people who are working abroad for the objectives of the Canadian people and Canada in another part of the world. I am thinking of the clergy, social workers, aid workers, all of whom stay out of this country for a long time. Do they cease to be Canadians? I was privileged to meet so many of them, young, old, middle-aged, male and female, of different religions and political ideologies, but all with two things in common: Their dedication to the good of the human race, and their love for their native land. I hope that at some point in committee study and further examination of this legislation, it will be possible to provide for them.

● (1750)

When I read the explanatory note with regard to Clause 3 of this Bill which indicates that this provision would allow travellers and students temporarily resident outside Canada to vote in general elections, I thought that there ought to be some provision for the teacher as well as the student. There are many people who are temporarily outside this country as teachers. There are junior faculty members at colleges and universities in other countries who intend to come back here when there is an opportunity for a long-term teaching position. Must they lose the right to vote?

I hope there will be an opportunity for us to consider the many Canadians who go out of this country for different periods of time in order to practise their professions, take employment, serve in service organizations or whatever, who have a great love for their country and a great sense of belonging which they can manifest most effectively by casting their vote.

I want to take that a step further, namely, to provide for the Canadian traveller. I like very much the way in which this legislation refers to those travelling abroad because more and more Canadians today have the opportunity to do just that. I think of people who take early retirement, who have perhaps put away a little money during their working years with the hope of taking a long-postponed trip. They may find that their trip takes place just at the time when an election has been called.

I once checked into the dating of elections and found that elections have been held in this country in every one of the 12 months. There is no reason to assume that an election will not be held in any particular season. Must people who are fulfilling a perfectly legitimate and admirable desire of taking a long trip lose their vote?

I can recall being in a position where I would have lost my vote but for the provision of an advance poll. However, a person who is away on an extended trip of the kind I described when the advance polls are held has no opportunity to vote. I am pleased, therefore, to join the Hon. Member who introduced this legislation in pleading that there be some recognition of this need.

In conclusion, this Bill points out the great opportunity of Members of this House. There are so many human needs which, to use the colloquialism, fall between the cracks. There are needs which no government Department or Minister has thought of, needs which have not found their way into the policy statement or election platform of any Party. However, they are important needs. It is then up to the private Member to recognize them and seek redress of them in legislation which he or she can introduce. Such a Bill as that has been brought before us today. I know that in principle it receives the general approbation of this House. I trust that at some time it will find its way into the statutes of the country.

**Mr. Morrissey Johnson (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception):** Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to join in debate on Bill C-268, an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act. This Bill makes a number of interesting suggestions on how we might improve the framework and procedures for voting in federal elections. It is, indeed, a timely subject.

The Government has taken a close look at the Elections Act, taking into account various recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer in his annual reports, recommendations made in the past by Members of this House, particularly those on the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, and recommendations based on the experience of the last general election. The Government has also suggested changes to bring the Act into line with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

There is an overlap between some of the proposals made by the Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis) and amendments which the Government is proposing to make to the Canada Elections Act through Bill C-79. One example of this is contained in Clause 3 of Bill C-268 which we are presently debating. As Members know, the present Canada Elections Act provides the means for people in the Armed Forces and the public service and their dependants who live abroad to vote under special voting rules.

The Member who sponsored this Bill now suggests in Clause 3 of the Bill that this category of voters be broadened to include Canadians who are travelling abroad or living temporarily outside Canada at the time of a federal election. He goes on to suggest that these Canadians should use the same voting mechanism as that which is now in place for the Armed Forces, public servants, and their dependants who live abroad. I can say that I support this proposal in principle, although not in detail. In principle it is consistent with reforms proposed by the Government in Bill C-79.