

have that to consider when thinking about entering themselves as a candidate for election.

I think my proposed amendment is reasonable, appropriate and timely. The Government would show a great deal of leadership if it were to allow this Bill to go to committee and eventually pass. It is the type of leadership which would nudge provincial Governments to legislate in their own jurisdictions. It would certainly go a long way toward contributing to the development and building of a truly democratic society.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane-Superior): Mr. Speaker, I commend the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) for bringing to the attention of the House an amendment which is required to the Canada Elections Act. I think that Part III of the Act recognizes the principle established by the Hon. Member but that it stops too soon. If Hon. Members had listened carefully to the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt, they would have heard that he was making a valid argument and one which ought to command the attention of the House.

He established the rationale for his amendment deeply in the principles of democracy itself. That is to say that all sectors of the community, or all sectors of the nation, those from all walks of life, ought to be legitimately and properly represented in the House of Commons. To my knowledge, there is not a ruling class in Canada. There is not a group of people from which it is appropriate to draw Members of Parliament to the exclusion of other groups of people. The wider the representation of the community of Canada in the House of Commons, the better the Government we will have. However, that is not now the case. There are a large number of people in our society who are reluctant to come forward as candidates for the political Party of their choice in order to seek election. It is not that they fear the democratic process of being elected. They fear what the future may hold for them if they take this very dramatic and drastic step.

I do not think I need to remind Hon. Members that to seek to become a Member of Parliament is, in fact, a high risk endeavour. It is a high risk enterprise and a gamble. In a sense, what one is gambling is one's life—one's very self. It is quite different to put yourself before your fellow citizens to seek election to come to the House of Commons as a Member of Parliament than to go to Las Vegas, Atlantic City, or Nassau. In a sense, it is to gamble with your entire being, your economic long-term well-being, your own psychology and your own sense of self-worth. In terms of self-worth it goes up if elected but can be decimated if one is defeated. As the Hon. Member suggests, those who seek office are dealing with long-term security. They have to deal with their security in terms of their own place in society. The legislation which we have in place states that a leave of absence can be granted for those who come under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code to be nominated as a candidate to seek election. However, there is no requirement in law to hold that place open while that Member is here in the House of Commons.

Therein lies the problem. We know what can happen if at the end of a term one retires for one reason or another. It could be because of health or the fact that one has not felt any

Canada Elections Act

degree of self-fulfilment or self-actualization in terms of being a Member of Parliament. There may have been frustration or disappointment involved, or one could have been defeated. Then, where is that person who sought to be elected? We know where that person stands. That person becomes an outcast. He or she can well feel despised and rejected. As the Hon. Member has pointed out, it is far more serious for some than for others. I do not think it is easy for anyone, Mr. Speaker. We should never gloss over that. We can always say that one can return to the practice of law. I have spoken with many former Parliamentarians who were lawyers and it is not that easy. You just do not pick up that quickly. It is difficult.

● (1730)

Some school boards can be very generous. They can grant a leave of absence, sometimes beyond one term, sometimes going into a second but there is no consistent policy. The law in Ontario, I might remind Hon. Members, says that if one is a qualified teacher in the province and you serve in the House of Commons or in the Legislature of Ontario, the years you serve in the Legislative Assembly, federally or provincially, may count as years of teaching experience when you go back to the class-room. All you are obliged to do is to make up your superannuation payments. They can count as years of experience toward the required years for your eventual requirement. That is a very generous principle. I think it has allowed quite a number of people from the class-room to consider going into the House of Commons for a period in their life. It has attracted teachers as much as this place in the past used to attract lawyers to a very extensive degree.

Let me come back to the basic principle of having as many people from as many walks of life as possible in the House of Commons. I believe because we have restricted it narrowly to those who feel they have an opportunity because of the privileged position they have in society, because it is less threatening, they run for public office and are elected. I think as a result of that, because the range has been too narrow, we have created a gap. I consider it a serious gap between the real community that we purport to represent and the precincts of Parliament itself.

Would it be possible—I do not want to be assertive here—that that is why the process of parliamentary reform has been so retarded, so slow to get moving? Is that why? It may be, I do not know. I do know that if we opened up the opportunity to serve in the House of Commons to other sectors of society, to other walks of life, and those people were able to hold their place during that term, or even seek a second term and then return, those sectors in society would benefit greatly when people came back. They would have experienced Parliamentarians, and I can see that almost all sectors of society would benefit from having the person come back by holding his or her place by way of a leave of absence.

If this practice were followed and if this amendment were accepted and the practice became an example for other sectors of society, imagine how the business community would benefit from having someone return to the community having been a