

Canada Elections Act

what I might call the auction type of legislation. That is to say, someone in the house makes an offer and, with no early hope of having to accept any responsibility, the hon. gentlemen can always outbid.

Mr. Knowles: You are bidding 21; we are bidding only 18.

Mr. Pickersgill: Twenty-one, or bust.

I cannot see, really, why the hon. member for Assiniboia chose the age of 18; why he did not for example choose the age of 17. In fact, most of the argument advanced in support of this measure by most of those who supported it was, if my memory serves me correctly, that we ask people to fight at the age of 18, when there is fighting to be done, and that therefore if they are old enough to fight they should be old enough to vote.

One hon. member—and I think it was my fellow Manitoban, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Jutras)—pointed out that enlistments are permitted into the army, not at the age of 18 but at 17½. So that probably there should be an amendment, if that is to be the main argument. I do not think the fact that 18 years is already the law in Saskatchewan is any very compelling reason for most of us in the house to adopt this as a national measure.

Mr. Argue: Ask the hon. member for Rosthern (Mr. Tucker).

Mr. Pickersgill: The hon. member for Rosthern (Mr. Tucker), who is in committee and not in his seat today, is perfectly capable of making up his own mind.

The measure we are debating is a private member's bill having to do with the election of members to the House of Commons, a measure in respect of which there is no necessity of having any government policy at all. It seems to me that in relation to the election laws we, as members elected to this chamber, and not as members of the government or of the opposition, settle what the law will be. And it would not embarrass me in the slightest to find that the hon. member for Rosthern or the hon. member for Portage-Neepawa (Mr. Weir), or the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Harris), or any other member in the house took a view of this question different from the one I take.

As hon. members can see, the view I take is not strongly held, except on the one central point, that if we are to change the age at all, then the change should be in more than merely the privilege of voting. It should be to give people full legal responsibilities in every respect, when they reach the age at which they will be permitted to vote.

I was also impressed by the general line of argument used by the hon. member for Provencher in what I considered a very thoughtful and somewhat original presentation to the house. It has been my experience, and I believe it has been the experience of a great many young men and young women between the ages of 18 and 21, that those young men and women have not really formed very fixed convictions about a large number of questions which occupy the public stage, and about which in conducting our public affairs we have to form views.

I happen to be one of those people who think it is a good thing to have political parties, to have people belonging to those parties and, except when there are very strong reasons to the contrary, to have people stick to their parties. It seems to me, sir, that if we gave the vote at the age of 18 there would be a tendency for a great many more to vote in a stereotyped fashion, before they had really had time to complete their education and to do the kind of thinking and reflecting that some, at any rate, of the citizens do in those years. If I may be personal about it, since the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has drawn attention to the matter, it would have been somewhat more embarrassing to me if I had voted at the age of 18 because, undoubtedly, I would have voted differently from the way in which I have now formed—perhaps a habit—of voting.

Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo): A temporary habit.

Mr. Knowles: You do not have to stay in the rut.

Mr. Pickersgill: I hope I shall progress further; and if I do I suspect it will be because I belong to a party which is a genuinely progressive vehicle, and not merely one that sticks the progressive tag on its name.

Mr. Knowles: A horse-drawn vehicle, do you mean?

Mr. Argue: Have you got a forward gear?

Mr. Pickersgill: Yes, and also a brake. It seems to me that sometimes a brake is a very useful part of any mechanism that moves. I think, sir, there is another reason why, in default of any very strong ground for supporting this bill, it would be preferable not to adopt it. It is that elections—and I am not talking about what is spent by parties; I am merely talking about what it costs the taxpayers directly—cost a lot of money. If you brought thousands of additional—I have no idea what the statistics are, and I am not too good on this particular kind of arithmetic—electors, perhaps from