

Polling Station Hours

Under my proposed Clause 4, voters absent from the riding on polling day or advance polling days are eligible for a proxy certificate. Other countries have provisions to accomplish that. In the United States, citizens can attend at U.S. embassies abroad and cast their ballots on voting day. Canadians who are absent because of holidays, business trips or who are unable to get to the poll because they are ill or are students would easily obtain a proxy. That is what my proposal in Clause 4 would provide.

● (1710)

There is a fifth and final point proposed in my bill. Under the current Canada Elections Act we have a list of special electors; the Canadian forces electors, the public service electors and veteran electors. There is a fourth class, if I could call it that, which I would term special external electors, those Canadians who have gone abroad for temporary periods of work. I do not refer to those on vacation or at schools, but rather to those people who have gone abroad, perhaps engineers working on Canadian pulp mills abroad, pipeline consultants, Canadians working overseas for CIDA or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or even some Canadians who go overseas for periods of less than five years to work for Petro-Canada, Bell Canada or other companies. This would mean they could be away from Canada during an election period and would otherwise be disenfranchised. Canada has shown its flexibility in that we now have three special categories of electors on the list; as I mentioned, the forces, the public service and veterans. I am now proposing a special electors' list which would cover that kind of worker who is absent from Canada for a long but still temporary period of time.

I would not expect the House to accept this bill without some support. I have had some lengthy correspondence with the Chief Electoral Officer in this regard. He has given me some commentary on the proposals. I cannot say he is either fully for them or fully against them, but he does indicate he has reviewed the drafts and has set out his comments in a letter I would make available to the committee which refers to this bill. At this time I think I should allow other hon. members of the House to comment on this proposal, but I would be glad to bring those comments to the attention of the committee should this bill get to that stage.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the first and perhaps the main proposal contained in this bill reminds me of an experience I had on Monday afternoon, October 14, 1935. That was the first election in which I was a candidate. I do not see many hon. members suggesting that they remember that date, but I was a candidate in that election. I had voted for the first time in the election of 1930 but it was 1935 before I ran as a CCF candidate in what was then the constituency of Winnipeg South Centre. With all of the enthusiasm and hopefulness of a 27-year-old candidate I was sure I was going to win.

About five o'clock in the afternoon of election day the newspapers appeared on the streets of Winnipeg saying "Lib-

erals sweep Nova Scotia". We still had two or three hours of voting in Winnipeg and, of course, there were several more hours farther west. Whether that had any effect on the voting one will never know, but at least that was the first year in which we had this concern. The radio was also reporting the same sort of thing. It was as a result of that experience in 1935 that the government shortly after brought in a bill which Parliament passed, between the 1935 and 1940 elections, prohibiting radio stations from broadcasting election results until the polls were closed in the area in which the radio station was located.

Things have changed a great deal since then. This seemed a very simple matter to solve at that time. Now with networks and easier access to long distance telephones, with the United States radio and television stations giving out the information, the ban against pre-publication of the results does not have very much effect.

Accordingly, I believe the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke) is to be commended for bringing in a bill proposing we do something about this. I hope I am not publishing results before they are announced, but I believe the government is going to indicate its willingness and readiness to have the subject matter of this bill referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. If that proposal is made we shall certainly give it our support. In other words, we think the proposal of the hon. member should be looked at to see whether his idea or something like it might be feasible.

The first reaction some of my colleagues had to this proposal was that it would be shortening by too much the number of hours available for voting. That could be overcome by adding a couple of hours, still preserving the principle that the polls should open and close at the same instant right across this vast country.

Another way in which the matter might perhaps be dealt with would be to require that ballot boxes not be opened in the eastern part of Canada until the polls in the west had actually closed. That idea is also subject to criticism in some respects. I have heard of others and we have received letters suggesting still other ideas. My friend recited the experience of the 1980 election when even in Manitoba the first television results from the east let us know that the game was over so far as the outcome of the election was concerned. The fact is that it would be desirable to find some way by which the possible influence of knowing the early results could be counteracted.

This idea, along with others, could well be the subject of study by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I believe it is almost a tradition in this place that within a year or two of an election we reconsider the Canada Elections Act. The Chief Electoral Officer and the government bring forward suggestions and private members make proposals. I believe we should look at what has been put before us now in that light.

Something got me off the track when I started to say that the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra was particularly concerned about the 1980 election when it seemed to be all over by the time we got to the Red River Valley. I can remember other elections, cliff hangers, in respect of which we