

*Canada Elections Act*

the Liberal party, and most certainly for the Conservative party.

Each political party, and this includes all parties, will have to earn the votes of the young people of Canada the hard way. They will each be judged on the actual merits of their platforms and policies, as well as their behaviour in parliament.

No nonsense will be tolerated from any of our youth. The result is that, in my opinion, the passage of this bill of mine by this house, or its referral to a committee for study and then its subsequent passage, will have a salutary effect on the political affairs of this country, to the edification of the public, of parliament and our great institutions.

• (5:10 p.m.)

For the information of the house I should like to point out that the following provinces have lowered the voting age: Alberta to the age of 19; British Columbia, 19; Newfoundland, 19; Saskatchewan, 18; Quebec, 18. The provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are also planning similar legislation. The voting age in the Saskatchewan municipalities is 18. In Canada today, therefore, five provinces, representing more than half of the population of this country, have lowered the voting age.

In the last ten years the House of Commons has once defeated and twice talked out private members' bills which would give the franchise to Canadians over 18. In 1963, the Commons committee on privileges and elections gave unanimous approval to amendments to the elections act which would lower the age to 18.

Recent opinion polls have shown a considerable increase of people in favour of lowering the age. The September 1966 Gallup poll reported an increase in 1958 from 33 per cent to 48 per cent in favour of lowering the age.

It is widely felt that the services the youth of this age group contribute to society entitle them to assume the responsibility of the ballot. In times of peace these young people, to a considerable extent, attain responsible places in society. In times of war their service in our armed forces has been absolutely essential. They have faced the utmost privations and hardships and have rendered even the supreme sacrifice on behalf of our country. These young people pay income tax; they are responsible in criminal law for their acts. If they are able to do these things, then they are responsible enough to have their own ballots. Young people over the age of 18 play a large role in the economic field. Therefore, they

[Mr. Brown.]

should have a vote in respect of the economic policies of this country.

The extension of the ballot to the youth of this country would be in keeping with the best principles of responsible government. A fundamental principle of our form of government is government by consent of the governed. Because the ballot in such a country essentially is a democratic right, it should be as widely available as it can properly be exercised. A large electorate promotes the realization of effective government; it better registers the popular will and provides a safeguard against disaffected elements which might otherwise work outside the law.

I am really rather proud to be the sponsor of this bill. I believe in our youth and its mighty potential. In taking the position I am taking I am being neither visionary nor idealistic; I am in no way detracting from the importance of any single age group among those who already are qualified to vote, nor am I detracting from their attitudes or opinions. I myself have appealed for the votes of the wage earners, the heads of families in my constituency who have my respect in an undiminished way, and I would have no hesitation in appealing for their votes again if I so wished. I need not add that the great body of our more senior citizens have my love and respect. They all helped to build this country and we owe them our affectionate regard. We salute them in all their future endeavours. Under this bill, however, to this great body of voters will be added the youth of our nation. These people, it is true, are young in years and experience, but they are fresh in outlook and are not tied down to traditional attitudes or points of view.

A balanced, highly rational and serious contribution by youth in the affairs of this country is, Mr. Speaker, something which is much needed in Canada. Here, when we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of confederation, I say, with all the force I can muster, let us add to the great electorate of this country the youth of Canada who are awaiting to take their part in public affairs and to lend their weight and youthful strength to the operation of government in Canada.

The bill which I sponsor today simply reduces the age requirement for all voters to 18 and over from the present requirement. The other sections, which have been examined by the law officers of the crown, substitute the words "18 years of age" for the words "21 years of age" where they appear in the act.