

Private Members' Business

undeniable right to vote, the conditions under which that right may be exercised differ. Is this the kind of distinction which violates the charter guarantees of democratic and equality rights? If it does violate the charter, is it justifiable in a free and democratic society? These are questions raised by the hon. member's bill. I do not profess to have the answers, Mr. Speaker.

The same questions raised by the bill are now being considered by the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. On November 15, 1989 the government appointed five commissioners under the Inquiries Act to inquire into and to report on the appropriate principles and process which should govern the election of members of the House of Commons and of the financing of political parties in candidates' campaigns.

Over the past two years the commission has held hearings across the country and has received hundreds of submissions, some of which dealt with the differences in treatment between urban and rural voters. The commission was given a very broad mandate by the government and was asked to do a comprehensive review of electoral legislation. The commission is expected to make its report in November this year. I fully expect that the report will address this issue and will make appropriate recommendations for this House to consider. The implications of this bill have not yet been fully explored. It is not, in my view, a good idea to start making particular amendments to certain sections of the Elections Act when we anticipate a major study and recommendations for comprehensive amendments to be released within a month.

[Translation]

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, I think we should wait for the results of the technical study being prepared by the Royal Commission, in connection with this question of adding the names of urban voters on a polling day. We should give the commission a chance to fulfil its mandate and to make the recommendations it deems appropriate after an exhaustive study of the entire dossier.

Mr. Speaker, the findings of the Royal Commission will be released very shortly, and I suggest that subsequently we decide in Parliament what measures should be taken.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment briefly in support of this proposal and congratulate the hon. member for Don Valley West on this initiative.

Actually, it is quite straightforward, and not only that, it is entirely appropriate. The proposed amendment says, if we look at the explanatory note, that it would have the effect of allowing any person entitled to vote in a polling division to have his name added to the official list of electors even on a polling day. At the present time, you cannot have your name added to the list after the official deadline has expired.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member who spoke for the government just now pointed out, there is a Royal Commission, the Lortie Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. It is true that the commission is considering the matter and is expected to submit its report very shortly, but it is also true that we as members have had a number of experiences, as the hon. member said, in 1988, and even in 1984, 1980 and 1979, and I could even go back as far as 1972. Mr. Speaker, I say that in a democratic country it is totally unacceptable that some people cannot vote because of their lifestyle, and I am thinking of people who are constantly on the road, people who live in hostels and lodgings, loggers who work in the bush, Canadians who happen to be working outside the country when the lists are drawn up, and who may be working on contract as lawyers, engineers or teachers. These people cannot vote because they missed the period said aside for having their name added to the list of electors.

• (1130)

I have seen a number of situations like this, Mr. Speaker. I even took a similar initiative in 1974-75, because people working outside the country were generally at a disadvantage, due to the fact that they could not cast their votes in their place of residence, either in Ottawa or elsewhere in the country, people who for personal reasons—some of which I mentioned earlier, including professional reasons—happened to be outside the country. In Kuwait, for instance, we had groups of experts specializing in firefighting. If there had been an election during their absence, they would have been unable to vote in Canada, and they would not have been able to have their say about the kind of government they want in this country. I could give you some examples.