

Canada Elections Act

Before resuming my seat, Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer briefly to another change which is urgently needed in the present Canada Elections Act. I am concerned about the problem of the absentee voter. In my constituency of Thunder Bay many Great Lakes sailors lose their votes because they are away from their polling places on election day. During the advance poll they may find themselves at a location where they are not registered. In Canada we have persons who, because of sickness, infirmity or incapacity—they may be away travelling or absent for any number of reasons—are unable to attend their polling place.

May I point out that the Report of the representation commissioner in 1968 on methods of registration of electors and absentee voting recommended that in this country we should follow the Australian method of absentee voting. There one may cast one's ballot at a different polling place but it must be in the same province. The report also recommended that postal voting, the mailing of one's ballot to the place where one is a registered voter, should be introduced into Canada.

The need to lower the voting age and to provide for the absentee voter must be resolved before the next general election. I hope that these amendments will not be under debate still in the 29th and 30th parliaments.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, may I have your indulgence and the indulgence of hon. members on the government side of the house to speak for five or six minutes in support of the bill brought before this house by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom). It is significant that a measure similar to the present one has been before the house on nine occasions. Considering the interest the youth of this nation has displayed in this question, I think it ought to be decided very quickly.

We must ask ourselves, will we permit our youth to face responsibilities and help in the solution of problems which are causing inequities in this complex life we live? I have been fortunate in being involved with youth in my travels across the country. I am pleased to see the involvement of youth in the political arena. Surely it would be unrealistic for us to contend that we should not lower

[Mr. Penner.]

the voting age as this is not the proper time to do so.

In Hamilton aldermen 22 years old are elected. I am pleased to see that one of the youngest members ever to sit in this house is the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville. Surely the youth of certain elected representatives is significant of something. Perhaps the significance lies in the preoccupation of our youth with politics.

May I put it this way, Mr. Speaker. I was fortunate enough to have involved in my election campaign between 500 and 600 young people. As a result of their vitality, energy, know-how—I am speaking of political know-how—and advice I was elected to this house. I stand here very proud and very honoured that young people were involved in my campaign. At the same time I am concerned about any communication gap that may exist between the younger and older generations. Although we are prepared to say our young people are responsible enough to go to war, to come before the courts and to drive cars, at the same time when it comes to what may be termed the “nitty-gritty” of life we are reluctant to give them certain rights and responsibilities.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Participatory democracy is a phrase much used on the other side of the house. I am interested in it. I want to see more people involved. One of the most important groups in this great dominion of ours is the under 25 age group which makes up half the population. I do not think it takes a great deal of brains to understand what is happening at this particular juncture in time, when we think that half of the people in this country are under the age of 25 years. That is a significant statistic.

We must be prepared to accept the fact that there are many responsible people within this group. The restless minority is one thing. We hear about Sir George Williams College and about the University of B.C. Let us not become beclouded by the actions of the restless minority; their actions of violence; their actions of intimidation; their actions of blackmail. Let us look to the responsible ones who have the ideas, who have the energies, and who have the philosophies that can play a part in our political life.

The only proper forum for the energies, the restlessness and the excitement of youth