

Dominion Elections Act

see to it that the opportunities for advance-poll voting are broadened. I do not go so far as to say that because someone wants to be away on holidays or wants to open up a summer camp two or three days earlier, wants to open on a Friday instead of waiting until Monday, they should be considered. You cannot legislate for peculiar and particular circumstances specifically; that only happens when you have a June or July election as a rule in this country. But the principle that I object to most is the classification by occupation to the extent that it is restricted. I do hope, and I am sure all hon. members from urban constituencies in particular must hope, that the committee will give serious consideration, and will make further recommendations to broaden the opportunity for voting at the advance polls.

I know, of course, that no matter how broad you make it, or how much you explain the differences in other ways, there will always be people on the borderline and you will continue to have the problems; but you will reduce the problem, which at the moment is a grievance to a large number of worthy people.

The only other thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is this. In 1948 we looked very carefully into the principle of absentee voting. I would say this. I have not yet seen—I suspect no one else here has seen—a system of absentee voting which is above the suspicion which the hon. member for Nanaimo (Mr. Pearkes) mentioned a little while ago in respect to the envelope voting that was exercised by the troops in the last election. Somehow that doubt of the secrecy of the ballot, where the ballot is not cast in the locality where the elector is entitled to vote, arises. That doubt is there. Those of us who are a little older had some unfortunate experiences back in the period of world war I when large blocks of absentee ballots were put on the auction block. That does not express exactly what I mean but the result was entirely the same. We do not want a repetition of that. Therefore the committee should walk very warily in considering any extension of the principle of the absentee ballot.

Mr. L. T. Stick (Trinity-Conception): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a very few words in respect of the position of the advance poll in Newfoundland. I would like to bring to the attention of the house the fact that thousands of our fishermen leave home usually the latter part of May and early in June, and go hundreds of miles away for the summer fishing. In my riding there were about six thousand who lost their vote. I would bring

[Mr. Mutch.]

to the attention of the committee some method whereby advance polls should be made for these men.

In my riding there is a coastline of about 500 miles. There were two advance polls, one in Harbour Grace and the other in Clarenville, about 150 miles apart. I do not expect the fishermen to go 50 miles to cast their votes. I do think that some consideration should be given whereby advance polls would be set up earlier and in the different localities so that these men can cast their votes before they leave home and go away. It is a serious problem in Newfoundland in the summertime where thousands upon thousands of our men leave their homes and go to Labrador and elsewhere. If we have an election on June 27 at another time thousands of these men will be disfranchised.

I want to bring to the attention of the house and of this committee this problem so that all possible means may be devised in order that they may be able to cast their votes before leaving home.

Mr. W. G. Blair (Lanark): I have had some difficulty with regard to this matter of the advance poll in my own riding. There are four towns in the riding with quite a few railroad people. Of these four towns only one town has had an advance poll, where there is a large railroad centre. The only people who can vote at that advance poll are the people who are on the voters' list of that town. Railroad men from other parts of the constituency have not the opportunity to vote at that advance poll.

Arrangements should be made whereby railroad men and others who might be qualified for the advance poll could get a certificate from the returning officer of the constituency indicating they were entitled to the advance poll. These men I am sure would be ready to travel the necessary distance if there were only the one advance poll in the constituency. Where there is no advance poll in two of the towns these men, especially the railroad people, have no opportunity to vote. A dominion election is usually held on a Monday and if the advance poll were ready three days before the election they would have an opportunity of casting their votes.

Previously there was only the one advance poll in the constituency at Smiths Falls but in the next election there will be an advance poll in one of the other towns. But that still leaves two towns without advance polls. As I suggest, railroad men and others who are eligible to vote should be able to go to the returning officer and obtain a certificate permitting them to vote at any place. If there