

Canada Elections Act

points since I know other hon. members wish to speak on this matter. First, I should like to see the principle embodied in the idea behind the absentee ballot extended to those who are crippled, who live in nursing homes or find it difficult to go to the polls.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. McCleave: I realize that the hon. member's notice of motion deals with those who are physically absent from their constituencies on election day. I think it might cover those who can only attend at a polling booth after making tremendous sacrifices and going through great hardships. I will cite a case I am personally familiar with.

Provincial election laws have provided for those people in nursing homes who are elderly and not mobile or in other ways incapacitated to cast their ballots, and in that way provincial laws are ahead of federal laws. That often leads to confusion, since many voters do not think election workers are telling the truth when they say that the provisions of certain provincial electoral acts are not included in the federal election legislation.

Sometimes when a person has driven up to a polling booth and has not been able to alight from the car that person has been approached by an agent of one of our parties and been permitted to vote without leaving the car. While that sort of action may contravene the letter of our electoral legislation it does not contravene its spirit.

I said I would cite a case I was familiar with personally, and I do so now. During my second election campaign I remember one particular voter who was seriously ill and who came to the poll, no doubt to frustrate my attempt to be elected. No one will say that the lady in question was forced to come since I imagine she had been a lifelong adherent of another party and no doubt wanted to nip my political career in the bud. At any rate, she went to the poll and voted in tremendous agony. Shortly thereafter, within hours of voting, the woman had passed away. She could have been given at least a little more life if a ballot had been brought to her sickbed. So I hope that in this parliament we can come to grips with this problem. I think that every parliament during its four-year term should make changes in the Canada Elections Act. I hope this change will be one of them.

● (5:20 p.m.)

I understand that the hon. member who proposes this motion lived for some time in my area. Therefore he should be familiar with the armed forces problem. Perhaps that problem is not so acute for the Halifax constituencies because there are large numbers of servicemen concerned, but I think the hon. member is right in his general criticism that service voting is too often identifiable. Somebody on a base in Germany may be the only one going to vote in a particular riding in Canada and it does not take much imagination to see which way he voted. Therefore I certainly support those provisions in the hon. member's motion.

I would hope the Department of National Defence would be less sheltering in its attitude to the people in the armed forces. There seems to be some idea that they are to be protected at all costs from political ideas. I think this ghetto approach to the serviceman, not only to make his vote a rather special and different sort of thing but also to make it very difficult for politicians of any kind to bring ideas and discussion to him, is less than commendable in a democratic age.

The last meeting of the national defence and external affairs committee last year will provide useful information with regard to the problem of employees of the Department of National Defence, the Department of External Affairs and the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce who serve abroad. The problem there is simply to get Canadian ideas and newspapers to these people. Some newspapers do get to them but not all. To give them more participation in general elections some heed should be paid to the evidence given before that meeting.

Those are the few points I wish to add in my most fulsome support for the notice of motion proposed by the hon. member for Coast Chilcotin. I simply conclude by saying it should be referred to a committee, together with any other similar subject matter, and I would hope the committee would be generous enough not only to consider the hon. member's motion but to give it a somewhat broader aspect by dealing with those who for physical, medical or health reasons, or for sheer age, find it somewhat difficult to get to the polls on election day.

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey): Mr. Speaker, aside from being entirely in support of the proposal put forward in the motion of the