

*Canada Elections Act*

fore, I believe the means by which that happens should be open and available to all citizens.

It seems to me that the House of Commons is composed mostly of Members who were self-employed or professionals. In this House of Commons, there are very few working-class people sitting as Members of Parliament. I believe one of the reasons for this is that there are too many impediments for working-class people to become Members of Parliament. The greatest impediment involves financial and employment security beyond the time when the electors may turn them out or they may step down from office for one reason or another. It seems to me that the federal Government should make sure that a vehicle exists to remove that particular impediment.

Part III of the Canada Labour Code only deals with those who fall under the jurisdiction of the federal Government. Therefore, my remarks are directed toward those who are covered by the Canada Labour Code. If it is agreed that this Bill should go to committee and pass, I am hoping that it will become an example for the provincial Governments. That is the kind of leadership role I hope the federal Government will play.

Part III of the Canada Labour Code allows employees, on application, and on approval by the Public Service Commission, to become candidates in a federal election. However, if they are successful and are elected, there is no provision for leave for the time they are Members of Parliament. They must resign their jobs. That has been the experience at this level over which the Parliament of Canada has jurisdiction. I believe that is a consideration which colours the decision of many people who are covered by the Canada Labour Code.

I have checked into the experiences of employees at other levels across the country. For example, union leaders who work for banks are given leaves of absence without question while accumulating seniority but only to carry out duties as union leaders. That provision does not extend to becoming a Member of Parliament. If successful in an election, they must give up their jobs.

Teachers fall under provincial jurisdiction but in most cases, if the particular school board does not have policy with respect to leave of absence for becoming a Member of a provincial legislature or a federal Parliament, the teacher must resign. In the private sector, INCO gives leaves of absence for public officials who are elected provincially or federally. No seniority accumulates while the person is on leave. Falconbridge Nickel Mines provide leaves of absence as well.

According to the UAW-General Motors master agreement, any elected official shall be granted a leave of absence for the first term and additional leaves may be granted upon written application by the employee. However, there is no guarantee the employee will be granted such leave of absence. These provisions usually contain words like "may grant" or "should grant".

It seems to me that the limitations with respect to employment that are placed on an individual who is thinking of becoming a candidate prevent that individual from exercising

his fullest rights as a citizen. I consider the greatest service that I can give my country is to be here in the House of Commons.

• (1720)

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Rodriguez:** I see Members opposite think that is a big joke. Obviously, they do not consider what they do here a service to the people of Canada. Why are they laughing? They think this is a big joke. In fact, it is a service paid to the country. Outside of defending one's country in time of war, in peace time the greatest service one can give to society is to be here participating—

**Mr. McDermid:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Rodriguez:** The Hon. Member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid) says: "Oh, oh". If Hon. Members opposite come to this place with that view, it is no wonder they have no motivation to bring about creative measures in order to make things better for the country.

**Mr. McDermid:** I will deal with you in a minute.

**Mr. Rodriguez:** Yes, you will. You will talk this Bill out.

In a democratic society we encourage our citizens and teach our children that it is necessary to exercise their franchise. As a citizen it really bothers me that in considering municipal elections, for example, we see that less than 50 per cent of eligible voters actually go out to elect municipal councils. In some cases, 16 per cent of eligible voters go out to elect school boards. Surely it is important for us to think that that is not right. Surely it is not right for us to think that there are not qualified people to run as candidates. In terms of motivation, commitment and understanding, exercising one's franchise is one of the greatest responsibilities which a citizen has. Therefore, people cannot exercise their franchise if there are not people who are willing to put themselves up to be chosen. That, too, is a worthy exercise. When one does that one is saying: "I want to be a part of this. I have some ideas and I would like to have the opportunity to put them into effect because I think I can help build a better Canada". Because of the present limitations, the widest possible range of candidates who may be elected to the House of Commons is actually prevented from seeking office.

In a survey which I saw of Members of Parliament in respect of their backgrounds I noted that less than 2 per cent were formerly what is called blue collar workers. Parliament should reflect the widest possible range of the Canadian population. Not everyone has a profession. If someone should decide to run, and wins, and is defeated after one term, then he just cannot go back into his law firm, accounting practice, medicine, or whatever it might be, and pick up where he left off. People who are in the public sector just would not have a job to go back to. I am asking the Government to show some leadership in terms of the public sector. People with families