

Canada Elections Act

to have voluntary patients in a mental hospital vote. It was surprising the number who did avail themselves of the opportunity to get on the voters list by having a certificate from the chief medical superintendent. I held a political meeting there. It was an exercise in therapy for them and a novel experience for me. It was a very intelligent meeting. Persons who are voluntary patients in mental hospitals are not persons who are lacking in mental appreciation. As a matter of fact I would say that the standard there is much higher than it is in many nursing homes where we deal with persons of very advanced years who are suffering from senility and other infirmities.

On the face of it my view is that we should not accept the proposal of the hon. member. There are too many difficulties involved. Remember this: An amendment to the Canada Elections Act applies in every part of the country. If the same standards or conditions apply in all parts of the country, fine; but we know it is a fact of life that the same standards do not apply in all communities. The same thing applies with regard to hospital voting. In the provincial elections in my province, and in the civic elections, there is voting in the hospitals. If there is a polling station within a hospital, an alert political organization can vote a great number of those people who are ambulatory patients. This depends upon whether they will go into the hospital and find out which patient can get to the polling station. There are ways and means to have them transferred; it is quite simple. In the elections in the province of Alberta we experienced no difficulty in having the patients in all categories in the general hospitals vote. That is all right, depending upon the number of constituencies. The problem is whether you can sort these votes out.

Provided you are satisfied that this will not be used as a means to suborn an election, I am sure it can be done; in other words, if you are satisfied that it will not be used as a means to materially affect the election result by the use of false ballots or by the substitution of ballot boxes. All these opportunities can arise. Every time you open up and handle a ballot box, unfortunately you create an opportunity for certain persons who are unscrupulous enough to try something to affect the honest result of an election. That is another consideration.

I would prefer to see the subject matter of this bill referred to the next committee of

[Mr. Lambert.]

this house which may sit to deal with the problems of the Canada Elections Act. There will be an opportunity when we have the report about election expenses and so on. I think this is a related subject. Certainly I would agree that we should not have to amend the Canada Elections Act piecemeal. There are points which I, and undoubtedly others, will raise to show that there are anomalies contained in the act. These should be dealt with at the same time.

Mr. Deachman: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member not agree that in a country where increasing numbers of people are travelling and moving about the country because we are becoming that kind of a country, through mobility and so on, and where people are going to universities, that we have to accommodate the voting public. The way to do that is not by putting aside the Canada Elections Act because we find it difficult to accommodate the student and the man who moves from job to job, or the person who travels, because this is the kind of Canada we are going to have to live in.

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Speaker, I will reply to that. There are limitations. I will stand corrected, but I believe that in the province of Saskatchewan where they did have a mail ballot they have had problems because the result could not be declared for three weeks. Surely one of the desired qualities of an election is to get an early result. We know that when the government of Premier Lloyd was eventually voted out of office, the matter hung in abeyance for three weeks while they were collecting and counting the mail ballots.

There are two sides to every question. In this case I do not know that the advantages necessarily are all on the one side.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I should just like to ask the hon. member whether he does not agree that it is also a fact of life that these so-called floating votes made by university students would be nailed down in the constituencies where the universities are located if the writs are issued between October and April?

Mr. Lambert: Yes, but the student has an option. Under the proposed amendment he can vote either at the university or at his home poll. As a matter of fact, he has greater flexibility than the average voter who is pinned down to his own poll.