

Canada Elections Act

daily press, and having acquired over 25 per cent of the votes the government should underwrite a certain amount of the cost of the election for the various candidates.

When this concept was initially introduced in a private member's bill six or seven years ago, I spoke against it. At that time I had just been re-elected. In the election campaign there were six candidates in my riding, some with party affiliations, some without party affiliations, some founding new parties and some running as independents. I felt this concept would be impossible to administer and to underwrite. After reading and understanding how the committee's report could be implemented, I feel there is much in it that should be considered by this House. I am disappointed that Bill C-215 does not encompass more of the desires and wishes of that committee.

We are fast approaching a period in this country when the private citizen is being deprived of the power and strength of his vote. This is because it is becoming assimilated with cliques and the power of money. There is a mercenary strength of ideas and a mercenary strength of personal gain within this concept. If this concept proliferates and is further expounded, democracy in its true sense will be destroyed. This is the greatest omission from Bill C-215.

● (9:00 p.m.)

The bill is more than 300 pages long and it might well have encompassed more of the principles enunciated by the royal commission. Many people are especially concerned about two or three of the principles set out in the bill. The one that most people latch upon is that the voting age should be reduced from 21 to 18. I was first elected at the age of 30 and I have long felt an affinity with youth, an affinity with change, an affinity for the notion that young people have a great many ideas which should be incorporated in legislation and readily grasped by the leaders of our society and by this chamber.

I shall not try to convince you, Mr. Speaker that I wholly endorse the setting of the voting age at 18. While I have no intention of opposing the reduction of the voting age, I would have preferred it to be 19 years. My reasons are simply explained. Young people can hardly learn the full meaning of responsibility unless they have taken upon themselves some manner of responsibility. It is true that the age at which young people graduate from high school or leave the home is usually in the neighbourhood of 18 years. But the period

[Mr. Horner.]

between the age of 18 and the age of 19 is usually a time of tremendous transition during which immense advances are made in knowledge, wisdom and a sense of responsibility.

I shall not attempt to explain why the age of 21 was fixed as the voting age, the age at which young people had a full sense of responsibility. I say quite simply that I would much prefer the age to be 19 rather than 18 years established in this measure. From my own personal experience I can say that I went through a tremendous transitional period between 18 and 19 years of age. I have now seen my offspring pass through the same period and noted the progress he made during that important year. I think he has acquired some knowledge and that he will continue to acquire knowledge, wisdom and responsibility as he progresses in life having left, partly or wholly, the environment of the home.

It may well be said that young people of 18 in most cases are still dependent upon their home environment and that this is bound to influence their judgment as to the way they should vote. If we really mean what we say in this legislation, we are asking these young people to judge the issues as individuals, not to vote on the advice of the mother, the father or others in the home. In my judgment an individual decision could best be expected after a young man or a young woman had left the parental home for even a temporary period.

Mr. Rose: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Horner: Certainly.

Mr. Rose: I was very interested in the hon. member's remarks and I should like to ask whether he intends to come out against the concept of lowering the voting age to 18. Further, I should like to ask whether he has in mind any specific knowledge based on scientific studies as to the age at which young people acquire the knowledge to make meaningful electoral choices.

Mr. Horner: The question is an interesting one. I thought I had elaborated at length. I even though I had repeated myself a couple of times. I see that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson), who is well used to my repetitious remarks on a number of subjects and who has apparently got the drift of what I meant to say to the House, is nodding his head in approval of what I have said.