

*Plebiscite Act*

given a great deal of time, study, and—at least—lip-service to the cause of democracy, and I appeal to him now to reconsider this provision of the bill, and to give those who by circumstances are poor the right to exercise their citizenship in this matter as fully as any other people in our dominion. I strongly support the amendment of the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Fair).

Mr. J. H. BLACKMORE (Lethbridge): I rise to support this amendment. It was written long ago, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land". Many of the people who are in these institutions are fathers and mothers; they are to be deprived of the vote; they are thereby being dishonoured.

Considerable care, I take it, has been used in drafting this bill to eliminate as voters those people who might have a particularly strong selfish interest in voting against the plebiscite. The people who are in our institutions have had very great experience in this country; they have been through many campaigns; they know more than most of us know of what is to be learned from experience. To deprive such people of the vote on a matter of this kind seems to me clearly wrong. Many who are in these institutions are pioneers of this country. It makes my blood boil to think of our neglecting men and women who have gone out into the wilds and hewn out of those wilds the communities and provinces which constitute this dominion. Because of the fact that we are likely to be disfranchising many of the pioneers of this country, I would oppose the bill as it stands, and support the amendment.

Finally, let me point out that these people are least likely to be actuated by selfish motives. It is improbable that they have sons eligible for military service, although they may have grandsons. They are in the best position, I believe, to pass impartially on the question.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I shall support the amendment.

Mr. McLARTY: It may be appropriate to say a few words and to clear up, perhaps, a little misunderstanding which appears to have arisen in connection with section 4 of the bill.

The amendment which has been suggested is an amendment to subsection 2 of section 4 of the bill. It has been suggested that people are being disqualified from voting merely by reason that they are in what, for lack of a better term, I call a poorhouse. That is not correct. The point is that in framing this bill we adopted section 14, subsection 2 of the elections act, which clause has continuously

[Mr. Coldwell.]

been in the elections act for some time prior to the passing of the 1938 act, and have adopted in the matter of disqualifications—and it was the wish to make disqualifications as few as possible—the provisions of the various provincial laws dealing with disqualification of voters. It was not anything put in this bill with the thought of disqualifying those voters to whom reference has been made; it was purely to adopt the general provincial plan of disqualifications that this provision was inserted in the bill.

In other words, the special committee, in dealing with the matter, felt that there might be some argument made on one side or another regarding various classes, and it was felt that as the general scheme of the bill was to adopt provincial disqualifications, the exceptions should be and are very small and inconsiderable.

In certain provinces provision is made that this class of persons can vote; they were not restricted in voting in such provinces at all; it is only in the provinces where the province itself has enacted the legislation that there is any suggestion that this right of franchise will not be extended.

This provision is identical with the provision in the elections act which received the assent of this house four years ago.

Mr. BLACKMORE: I wonder whether there are not in this bill three or four very marked exceptions to the rule that, generally, the provincial laws are being observed. For example, in section 4, subsection 2, paragraphs (a), (b)—particularly (b)—and (c) are marked exceptions which have been definitely designed in view of the war.

Mr. McLARTY: We are on the third reading of the bill, and I do not wish to consume the time of the house; but what the hon. member for Lethbridge (Mr. Blackmore) says is quite correct, that they are there by reason of the fact that we are at war. If hon. members will read paragraphs (a), (b) and (c), those in internment camps, those debarred by reason of having claimed postponement, those affected by what we may as well frankly refer to as Japanese, are there, but the exceptions are all by virtue of the fact that we are at war.

Mr. MacINNIS: I think the reasons given by the Secretary of State (Mr. McLarty) are very lame indeed. In the Dominion Elections Act we have never closely followed the election laws of the provinces. We followed them where it suited us to do so and departed from them where it did not. For years in the province of Quebec women were not allowed to vote in provincial elections, but ever since we have had universal franchise in Canada women in that province have been allowed