

greatest number of Canadians. With his proposal, therefore, our Hon. friend has given us food for thought.

Mr. Guy Ricard (Laval): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) is tabling today Bill C-268 to amend the Elections Act in order that we may have a greater number of registered voters on the voters lists during an election. First, I must commend him for his work because I believe there is a genuine problem there. Whenever there is an election and an enumeration is made, there is always a number of persons—that may be quite high in some cases—whose names do not appear on the voters list. This may be due to two things: first, people are not enumerated, either because they are not home when the enumerators call and their names cannot be entered. Second, during the revision process names are omitted from the list. And in order of course for a voter to have his or her name on the list, he or she must meet that requirement.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, the Canadian Government in Bill C-79, an Act to reform the Elections Act, indeed had that in mind and provided for a mechanism to revise voters lists so that a greater number of persons may have their names entered, and there is a mechanism as my colleague from Saint-Denis (Mr. Prudhomme) stated earlier, for unregistered people to have their names added to the lists. But there is another one also, for those whose names were written down but were omitted from the list itself.

On voting day, those people can apply to the electoral officer to have their names entered on the voters lists because they were omitted. They must of course submit evidence of having been enumerated. That is the main requirement. If they cannot submit such evidence, of course, they are not listed but if they can, they may then go back, with a permission or a chit from the electoral officer, to their own polling stations in order to register and exercise their most basic right.

Now, let us turn to the way the Bill now before us is submitted, Madam Speaker, and I will deal with Clause 1 only which provides that a person whose name does not appear on the voters list could do so, if this Bill is passed, provided he or she is vouched for by a voter whose name appears on the voters list, who is known there and who can testify to the identity of that person whose name is not on the voters list. I can see some danger in that. The danger might be minimal in rural constituencies, but in urban areas where there may be as many as 300 polls in the same riding a person resorting to that principle could make arrangements with other people in various polling stations and vote about ten times on the same day.

Madam Speaker, I can still remember—and I am sure you do as well—the way elections used to be held in the old days in the great Province of Quebec where they would use that same principle: a person was substituted for another of one's own choice and asked to vote. That happened time and time again. Thank God we had election legislation to do away with that kind of things. But if we follow clause 1 of Bill C-268 to the letter, I have the impression we will go back in time and once

again defeat the purpose. I do not think we can afford to do that in 1987.

I believe the basic problem as such is real and as the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) said earlier, we will have to try, at the second-reading and committee stages of Bill C-79, to foresee everything so that will never happen again. I know it is not easy. I know there are cases, as considered by the Hon. Member in his bill, where people cannot be contacted in apartment buildings, hotels, for instance. That is obvious. But could there be a mechanism flexible enough so that all those people could really be contacted and enumerated? That is what we will have to do.

The Hon. Member alluded earlier to the possibility of a winter election on free trade. I must tell him that in an election campaign on free trade people will be so eager to come and vote for it that there will be much fewer names missing on electoral lists.

• (1730)

[English]

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-268, an Act to amend the Elections Act presented by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis). Having recently experienced a by-election, I think the problems addressed in this Bill are more apropos for me than others. There are serious problems which I personally have experienced.

Just subsequent to the by-election, I received a number of phone calls and communications from constituents most concerned because, in their words, they were disenfranchised. I quote briefly from one of my constituent's letters which reads in part:

I was born in Canada and have lived here all my life. For the past six years I have been a resident of the Yukon Territory residing at the same address. I have voted in previous federal and territorial elections in Whitehorse. When residents of the territory were enumerated, apparently the whole apartment block I lived in was missed.

When this person phoned the returning officer it was too late to register and so she could not vote. A number of other people raised the same question.

It is extremely important to support this Bill. I cannot speak so much for the provinces, but in the Yukon territory the issues which my colleague addresses in his Bill are already contained in our Territorial Elections Act, for example, being able to be sworn in at the polls. In a territorial election one can be sworn in at the polls, as is being proposed in Bill C-268. In the past federal election this was not possible. This is confusing because the general public will not make these distinctions. People assume election procedures are similar.

Because one could be sworn in at rural areas but could not be sworn in at Whitehorse, there was a lot of anger, confusion and frustration during the recent by-election because people thought they could be sworn in at the polls. This Bill will go a long way to putting consistency into the regulations as to who