

Canada Elections Act

for Abitibi (Mr. Laprise) and to add that I do not approve the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard).

In the first place, it seems to me that paragraph (e), subclause (4) of clause 14 is extremely broad. The paragraph reads as follows:

(e) every person undergoing punishment as an inmate in any penal institution for the commission of any offence;

There are two extremely vague terms which lead me to believe that we would not be fair if they were accepted.

● (9:40 p.m.)

The phrase "every person" includes hardened criminals who have been given a life sentence as well as individuals sentenced to a three month jail term for dangerous driving, for example, or because they could not obtain bail or for any other reason. Such an expression is unacceptable in a bill dealing with the basic democratic right: the right to vote.

In my opinion, there is another expression which is unacceptable, and I quote:

—for the commission of any offence—

There is an enormous difference between the person who is sentenced for a theft of \$2, \$10,000 and \$100,000. I hope my colleagues realize that. The man who is guilty of rape, homicide, armed robbery or a \$10,000 theft is in a much more serious situation than the man who stole less than \$20.

Everybody cannot be put on the same footing nor can we say "every person" because one has been judged an outlaw and is branded.

As the hon. member for Abitibi (Mr. Laprise), I am not willing to grant the right to vote to all criminals in all Canadian jails. The right to vote is not all; one should be able to use that right according to two principles.

First, one must realize what he is doing and, second, try to improve a given situation.

The convict, if he has committed ten offences, certainly rejects society, its leaders, its laws and its framework. Therefore, he is not prepared to take advantage of his franchise; even if he could use it, he could not do so conscientiously, honestly and properly.

On the other hand, anyone convicted following a minor offence such as dangerous driving, a \$200 theft or inability to put up bail—justice in Canada being bound to money: if one is rich and a member of a particular political party, one is safe—cannot be considered as a dangerous criminal.

That is why I feel that paragraph (e) is unacceptable. However, one must not go to the other extreme and extend its approval to all inmates.

It would surely be wise for us, as members of Parliament, to reserve our judgment on paragraph (e), as well as on the amendment, in order to allow not only hon. members, but also legal counsels for the House, to find a third solution which would render justice not only to inmates able to exercise their right to vote, but also to the greatest number of people able to exercise it.

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, it is always useful to have our colleagues give us the benefit of their knowledge. I was surprised by the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) to the effect that paragraph (e) which reads as follows should be deleted:

(e) every person undergoing punishment as an inmate in any penal institution for the commission of any offence;—

The object of this amendment is to give inmates the right to vote. In my view, the amendment is in many ways illogical. First of all, its author has forgotten that paragraph (f) states that the right to vote shall be refused to, and I quote:

—every person who is restrained of his liberty of movement—

If the liberty of movement of a prisoner is restrained, the situation should be corrected. However, if we pushed this reasoning to the extreme, then under this paragraph, the disabled would also lose their franchise.

Something else amazes me too. I apologize for my scrappy remarks. Of course, they are in line with those I heard and on which I am trying to comment.

Some members of the N.D.P. sometimes suggest that we should not grant the franchise to senators. The bill stipulates that the franchise will not be granted—well, it might have been the Conservatives, but it is all the same, it comes from the opposition—to judges. Furthermore, the bill provides that the franchise is not to be granted to new Canadians who have not resided in Canada for five years because they are not Canadian citizens. All those things are understandable.

I feel that a senator has much more experience and deserves far more consideration than a criminal, and that the judge who is denied the franchise will vote much more sensibly and objectively than a criminal. It is