

*Canada Elections Act*

because a number of matters could have been raised and discussed at that time, matters which really need correction involving our Canada Elections Act, matters which are anachronistic now. I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for having brought the Bill forward to the House, for having vented the need for changes to the Canada Elections Act.

I would certainly support what the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier is proposing today. I was interested to note that he and others feel that perhaps the whole issue should go much further. It reminds of the time some years ago, long before I became a Member here, when I appeared before the parliamentary Committee on Privileges and Elections to put forth a proposal that we introduce absentee voting in this country and that we have a continuous electoral role system in this country such as there is in Australia. There is no problem in Australia managing to have absentee voting and extending the franchise to everyone who is a citizen. I do not think that Canadians are any less competent than Australians to carry that out. I feel that had we been able to send the subject matter to committee, as the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi suggested, we would have been able to discuss that broader issue.

**Miss Jewett:** That's right.

**Miss MacDonald:** However, I want to suggest to the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier, who has brought this very valuable piece of legislation before us, with regard to Schedule II of the Canada Elections Act, that extending the vote to persons whom he has designated would be one improvement we could make. There is another under Schedule II which he has mentioned, and I am sure that he and other Members of the House have heard this matter raised, as the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) has raised it both as Minister and again as an Hon. Member of the Opposition. I would refer particularly to the dependants, the spouses of Armed Forces personnel and public servants serving abroad who indeed have the vote.

It is clear to everyone here that the Canada Elections Act allows members of the Armed Forces and members of the diplomatic service to declare their place of residence in Canada in January or February of each year. They can designate the constituencies in which their votes will be cast. What I find repugnant and anachronistic is that the spouses who, by and large, happen to be women, must accept such designation of residence for themselves. Those women are not allowed to declare where they will vote in Canada. A spouse must accept the designation of the constituency declared by her husband even though she may never have lived in the riding when in Canada or met any of the candidates for the election, and may not have any connection whatsoever with the particular constituency designated for the vote.

I have raised this matter with the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne). In fact, I raised it with him in questions on May 10 of last year, and suggested that this was something which could very easily be changed. In fact, when I

raised it with him I suggested that the Election Act could be changed so that in January and February of each year the spouse, at the same time as the member of the Armed Forces is permitted to designate his constituency, could designate the constituency where she had formerly resided and where she had had in the past some connection from the point of view of residence. That is really a very anachronistic situation.

• (1750)

I raised that with the Minister of National Defence. In his reply he undertook to follow it up and said that he would bring it to the attention of the Chief Electoral Officer, but nothing has been done. Months have passed, and nothing has been done. There is an anger and frustration among the wives of the Armed Forces personnel serving abroad who, under the Canada Elections Act, are considered merely an extension of their husbands. They do not exist in their own right.

I would hope that when this Bill goes to committee, as I pray that it will, that will be another aspect of Schedule II, that is, the independent nature of spouses of Armed Forces and diplomatic personnel living abroad, that that subject matter can also be addressed, and that the very much out-of-date section of the Canada Elections Act will be corrected.

**Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore):** Mr. Speaker, I want at the outset, as did some of my predecessors who have been speaking today, to congratulate the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for bringing forth a very timely Bill. It happens to be a matter that he has been working on, as I understand it, for some ten years, and it must make him feel very good at least to see it come before Parliament once again.

The difficulty, however, is that many people in effect are disenfranchised because the Bill does not go far enough. It is noted, however, in the explanatory note, that in 1977 the Canada Elections Act was amended to grant the right to vote to Canadian citizens teaching outside Canada in Canadian Armed Forces schools or employed as administrative support staff in such schools. However, this Bill only extends that privilege to Canadian citizens working for the Canadian Armed Forces outside of Canada. At the present time we merely have teachers being accepted. The civilians working for the Canadian Forces are not accepted at this time, but would be in this Bill.

I agree with my colleague from the NDP that the Bill does not go far enough. It should include all personnel, all Canadians at all missions, embassies, high commission offices, trade offices, immigration offices and so forth, wherever they might be in whatever country. It should include Canadians working on projects and contracts in various countries. For instance, we have a big contract coming up to build a Canadian embassy in Saudi Arabia, and we will have a number of Canadians there. They should have the right to vote in any elections that take place while they are working on that project. At the present time they would not be able to.