

*Canada Elections Act*

number of university students were unable to vote without it costing them great time and expense, because their homes were some distance from the universities they attended. However, I feel the problem was over-magnified, and a great deal more emotion was expressed over it than it really warranted, especially when we consider the number of other people who, for one reason or other, are temporarily disfranchised. Further, in a university city or town there will always be a large proportion of the students over 21 already resident, and therefore not affected by the problem of transferring their temporary residences. Also, the problem only arises during a period of about five or six weeks in the year.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Deachman) did not speak about the university summer sessions which are an entirely different kettle of fish. These are usually of six weeks duration, and I would say almost 98 per cent of the students attending them are over 21. Therefore the incidence of application is much greater in their case.

Let us examine what happened on November 8 as a result of the writ being issued on September 8: Some faculties were already in residence. Also, a number of universities co-operated by organizing buses which carried students to their homes at no cost to themselves, and with an arrangement not to hold examinations on the days in question. Generally the problem was coped with by university authorities as best they could.

Of the proportion of students who were affected, now many would have voted in any event? I do not suppose there would be any greater proportion than the proportion of students who were already resident, who had the right to vote, and who cast ballots. In some constituencies this did not amount to more than 60 per cent or 65 per cent—something which is to be regretted, but this is one of the facts of life. I agree there should be no artificial barrier to any person who wishes to exercise his franchise, but I point out that there are other people who must be absent from their home constituencies by reason of work and who cannot vote at the advanced polls. We accept that as a fact of life.

We have not yet established the mail ballot. That may be the answer which the committee on the elections act may recommend, but in this instance we should be careful that we do not create a greater problem than the one which the bill seeks to correct.

The sponsor of the bill and the hon. member for Peterborough (Mr. Faulkner) pointed out that in some constituencies at a certain time of the year, particularly if the voting age were lowered to 18, a floating, temporary population of considerable size would be created, something which none of the constituency boundary commissions have taken into account, and these people would have an inordinate bearing on the outcome of elections.

● (5:40 p.m.)

If it is wrong for the armed services to vote en masse in a constituency in which they are stationed, then certainly the same principle applies to a non-permanent resident student. Certainly it would be a lot simpler, from an administrative point of view, if the armed services could vote from wherever they were stationed in Canada. I am not talking about those who are abroad. So there is that particular problem.

As to the other classes of people who may be disfranchised, what about the paraplegics? There are very few polling stations which will accommodate a person who is in a wheelchair. These polling stations are located in schools, in community homes, and what have you. In my own constituency in Edmonton we have a situation which is very good in so far as something like 20 per cent of the polls are concerned. A polling station is established in the new rehabilitation centre where there are ramps built which can accommodate wheelchairs and these facilities which are used in the Callow buses or Volkswagen buses which are provided by the transportation companies for the handling of paraplegic cases. Therefore, the advance poll is set up there, and these persons can vote at this centre, at the advance pool, when you have all the time in the world to handle these particular people who do require more time.

I would say that a much more humanitarian and effective way would be to amend the act to provide that any person who is a paraplegic or any person who by reason of age or infirmity is confined to a wheelchair may vote at any advance poll, and particularly at an advance poll which is capable of handling wheelchairs. This is only one category, and I cite it merely to show that university students are not the only ones who might be adversely affected. In the last election, through a request directed to the chief returning officer of Canada, and through my own returning officer, I was able to arrange