

*Canada Elections Act*

I believe they would be very helpful and very instructive, assuming that this Bill will be going on to Committee. There are provisions for people who are in hospital. First I should mention that mobile polls in Manitoba are called moving polls. I invite Hon. Members to take a look at the Manitoba Elections Act because some of its provisions have been tested for a long period of time.

As I was saying, people in hospitals are able to vote either in their own stations or in mobile stations. If one happens to be confined to hospital outside his or her district—and of course this is very important for people in rural areas—there is provision for special blank forms which can be used. They can be placed into mobile polling stations as well. In addition there are special provisions for the blind and for those who are in various remand centres. These polling stations are available for those people who are charged with offences but are in detention centres awaiting trial. There is no minimum number of eligible voters necessary to receive this type of ballot service. Returning officers conduct surveys to determine the need. I am very glad to report to the House that to date this has worked very well.

Also there is provision in the Manitoba Elections Act for moving polls for sparse populations. Of course, northern areas pose certain problems. The Chief Electoral Officer has the power to declare any area remote and to have a mail-in ballot. In addition, there are regular polls in as many places as possible in northern areas. For example, in Churchill a ballot box is put on a train and voting is conducted on the train at various sidings. I do not know what will happen now that VIA Rail has cut out services in that area. I notice the Hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) is present in the Chamber. Knowing his work and concern for the handicapped, I am sure he will take this matter under consideration and ensure that people in northern areas have these opportunities. I know he is aware that there will be experiments in regard to providing a rail-bus service. Perhaps he could assist in ensuring that these things come into effect so that people in northern areas qualify.

There is another interesting provision which I would like to highlight for the benefit of the House. It deals with disabled persons who may come to polling stations but because of the physical facilities at the polls may not be able to vote there. There is a provision whereby the deputy returning officer can move the ballot box to the disabled person. Of course there is a restriction that the ballot box cannot be moved more than 50 metres from an entrance to the building where a polling station is. I think we might want to look at that provision federally because I know such concerns have been raised with the Chief Electoral Officer. I am pleased to indicate that some of these provisions are under consideration.

In Section 45(22) of the current Act there is provision, where a polling station has been set up in a sanatorium, a home for the aged, a chronic hospital or similar institution, whereby the deputy returning officer can move the ballot box from room to room to people confined in bed. Furthermore, it has been known for the ballot box to be brought outside the polling

station to people who are disabled. However, this is not strictly legal. The only provision in the current Act for such situations is that of proxy voting. With the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms individuals will want to vote and cast their ballots by themselves. The current provisions are clearly inadequate, and I mentioned the situation in Manitoba because we have additional provisions there which have been found to be very successful.

I would like to emphasize another point rather strongly. I refer specifically to the Obstacles Report. It is a nice, slick document but I think we should look at the substance of it as well. We ought to look beyond the gloss and glare and at its recommendations. It contains four recommendations which directly refer to voting rights and voting provisions for the disabled. Recommendation No. 5 is that we establish a postal vote system similar to Manitoba's. That is recommendation No. 5 of the Obstacles Report, which has received widespread circulation. It is important that we set up the appropriate machinery and programs recommended in the report to meet the needs of the disabled. It is a report that was worked on by many people.

• (1410)

Recommendation No. 6 is with regard to ceasing the policy of centralizing polling places. It specifically refers to Section 33(9) of the current Elections Act which gives discretionary power to centralize polls. The specific recommendation is that we deal with this and take into consideration the mobility problems of the disabled, the aged and the infirm.

Recommendation No. 7 talks of establishing orientation sessions for polling place personnel on the needs of disabled voters. This is something that should definitely be done. Returning officers of all constituencies and their staff should be provided with special training to ensure that the needs of the disabled are highlighted and provisions for the disabled are understood by all the staff.

Recommendation No. 8 of the Obstacles Report recommends that questions regarding accessibility for disabled voters be referred to a standing committee. Bill C-518 fits into the broader scope mentioned in the Obstacles Report. I wanted to emphasize that because I know the Government has highlighted the Obstacles Report. However, we have not seen much action on the specific recommendations. I hope we will very shortly.

In summary, there must be greater provision for the non-ambulatory federal electorate, the disabled. Providing a mobile polling station fits into that category. It is encouraging to see advances in various Provinces. I again refer to the Manitoba experience. I am also encouraged by the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that he is studying what is being done in the Provinces and is having a dialogue with them. He has also stated that he is looking at the Obstacles Report presented by the committee.

The New Democratic Party is very much in favour of extending the voting franchise. Therefore, we wholeheartedly