

Privileges and Elections

of this House completely defenceless in the face of independent commissions that all too often demonstrated no rhyme or reason for the decisions that were made. The burden seemed to be on us to prove that the commissions were wrong.

I have on the Order Paper a public bill which I trust will be debated later this session dealing with the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. However, this is but one point in the Act that needs attention; there are others. It seems to me that the whole election machinery should be judged as a package, and this can only be done if the legislation is referred to committee. If it is impossible to do this now, then I trust the government will decide that this is the next item to be referred to the committee.

In the committee's examination of the Act I hope attention will be paid to one very difficult problem, and this concerns the broadcasting of election results on the Atlantic coast before the polls on the prairies and the Pacific coast have closed. As long as we had only radio and the CTV and CBC television systems to contend with, there was no worry because they were able to impose a news blackout. I think it is quite right that they should.

The system that prevails in the country to the south of us, is, I think, absolutely ludicrous. For example, people in California know hours before their polls close what the early trends are in the Atlantic states. In this day and age people tend to vote during the remaining three hours of election day, especially in urban centres. All they need to see how things are progressing elsewhere is to turn on the television set. This is particularly the case in summer elections. A great number of people who are trend followers are going to change their minds; that is a foregone conclusion.

One way to circumvent this dissemination of election information is to impose a similar ban on cable networks. We cannot, of course, control news services of the United States. If election results from the Atlantic provinces are broadcast by U.S. networks, are flashed to Montana or Washington and picked up by Canadian television viewers, then the whole exercise is for nought. But I do suggest that in Canada we should impose not only a news blackout by the two main broadcasting systems during polling hours, but also by cable television networks. Every effort should be made to block the news getting south to the United States networks so that they can flash it across the northern part of the United

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

States for easy reception by Canadian television viewers whose sets can capture the United States signals.

● (5:50 p.m.)

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this resolution will pass and that in due course the committee will come up with a number of changes, including those in connection with hospital voting and service voting, particularly those overseas. Consideration should also be given to individuals travelling overseas and members of the public service who, by reason of their duties, have been posted abroad. These people should also have the right to vote. I know it would not be easy to have such a system, but surely with a little bit of ingenuity something could be done to enable these people to record their vote without being identified as a particular group.

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, in a very few moments I wish to make some of the points that I believe should be of concern to the committee. There should be the widest possible franchise for the electorate.

The hon. member who preceded me mentioned the fact that our foreign service people should have an opportunity to have their say in domestic affairs, an opportunity they now do not have. Yet, it was borne in upon me, by reason of a trip just completed to India and Ceylon, that in high commission offices the military attaché has the preferred privilege of a vote in a federal election while third secretaries do not. It seems that any sensible committee of this House of Commons should be able to straighten that problem out in no time at all.

I wish to point out the poll system is not always suitable for those who are ill or not able to attend easily at a poll. There are paraplegics who find it difficult to attend most polls and impossible to attend others. There should be two approaches to this problem. First, I suggest a system similar to what we have in Nova Scotia, a transferable vote. I think the committee would do well to look at the Nova Scotia practice in that regard. It is much better than the federal practice. Second, a conveniently located special poll should be set up in each constituency for people who attend by car or ambulance. They should be able to cast their vote outside instead of being put through the torture of being carted up a narrow staircase and put into very narrow quarters to cast their vote.