

Private Members' Business

various ways to hold elections or to keep a permanent list.

It does seem to me that the best system in the world is bound to make at least one or two mistakes. If we seriously mean that people should get involved in politics and the process because it is their country, then we ought to write rules that allow a bona fide elector to vote even if it is at the last minute, at one minute to eight, before the polls close.

It ought to be self-evident that we must respond to the sense that people all through this country have a need to be empowered and take control of their systems. One place to start is to say that if we have not managed to develop a system that is perfect, there is a way for every Canadian to get his or her vote in before the end of election day.

We look around the world and see all the other countries that are finally getting a chance after years of oppression to have a democratic system. Remembrance Day is a time to remember what people fought for which is our right to vote for who will govern us. We then ought to make sure that everybody who is entitled to a vote really is entitled to get at the power of that vote, even if it is at the last minute of the last day.

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I would like to support very strongly this private member's idea. The hon. member has stated there should never be the situation where a duly qualified elector is barred from exercising his or her franchise because of some foul-up, mistake or difficulty in the process of enumeration. I can only say that I have spent many election days in provincial elections as the duty officer for my party in the returning office. In the province of Nova Scotia under our election act you may be sworn in on election day but you must do it at the returning office. Even that is a problem.

I recall very strongly in the 1988 provincial election, which was some six weeks before the federal, huge line-ups outside the returning office in my provincial riding. It was one of the best examples of non-partisan co-operation I have ever seen among the three parties as we tried to make this line go faster, get the people registered, and then send them back to their polls to vote.

That was a ridiculous waste of time. They have since changed that in the provincial act so that if you have to travel to the returning office to be sworn in you can at least then vote in the returning office.

On the federal level we have not had even that possibility. Our ridings are large. The hon. member and I both have urban ridings, although his is probably more populous than mine, and it is still a very similar problem. We have people who work shifts and are never home when enumerators come to call. I know that allegedly, and I am sure they tried to do this, cards and telephone numbers are left to get people before the revising officer or to have the revising agents come back, but time and again it does not work. People wake up on election day to discover that they are effectively disenfranchised.

Specifically I think it is a small thing. It would cause so little difficulty that there is no reason for it not to be done.

• (1120)

In the recent civic election in Halifax, several weeks before the election, I started to wonder if I was on the voters' list. I had seen nothing in the way of a card or anything like that in my door because like all of us in this House, I spend at least four days a week away from my own residence in Halifax.

When I went to vote on election day, it turned out I was indeed on the list. Of course in the civic election in Halifax you can be sworn in right at the poll. It is the same sort of thing. The same number of electors, the same people are enfranchised in that election as are in a federal election.

The swearing in at the individual poll did not create any kind of chaos or hold up matters to any degree that was even noticeable. It made people a lot happier about the electoral process. When people came in and were told they were not on the list at all: "Gosh, do I have to go here? Do I have to go there?" "No, just go to that table right there. You are set. You can be sworn in."

I think possibly—I do not know whether the hon. member had this in mind—it might be one small step in making the electorate slightly more sanguine toward politicians. I merely wish to say that I give this my strongest support and hope that this amendment will pass with the greatest possible speed. It is something that is to the benefit of all Canadians and it should be done.