

Canada Elections Act

As we look around us we observe the many financial and social responsibilities a young person has. Many young people between the ages of 18 and 21, even younger, are married and have families of their own. Many of them are working and paying income tax. Many have responsibilities at home as well as responsibilities to the community at large. Since a driving licence can be had at the age of 16 most of them drive a car. They can hunt and carry a gun. Many churches in the country have already recognized that people are responsible for their actions before they reach the age of 21.

We should also give young people the opportunity to become involved in society at an earlier age. A better balance should be struck in Canada between the young and the elderly in the matter of voting. In this regard there is quite a disparity. As *Maclean's* magazine pointed out in an article last June:

Nearly half the Canadian people are indeed under 25—some 9.8 million out of 20 million, according to the 1966 census—but only 1.4 million of these are old enough to vote. Among 11.2 million voters they are 12.5 per cent, or exactly one in eight. And though they are the largest of the five-year age groups into which the census figures are broken down, outnumbering the next youngest voters by about 220,000, they are still less than one-fifth as numerous as that vast army of the middle-aged and the elderly, the 7.4 million electors who are 35 and older—

If young people were given the vote I submit there would be a better balance in the representation of the Canadian people.

Lowering the voting age is but a toe in the doorway, as it were, toward opening up society for the participation of youth. Our young people are impatient. They are demanding a number of radical socio-economic changes. They want to eradicate many disparities. We need to create a society that offers far more avenues to explore. Lowering the voting age would be but a start toward the accomplishment of these things. Many of our present institutions are very cold and de-personalized.

Our young people want democracy but democracy in its truest sense. They want democracy not only in the parliament of Canada and in the government but also in the private sector of our economy. They want universities to be democratized. Our Indian people want more say in making decisions, and many of our workers in factories want a greater participation. The public wants more control over corporations that affect a large part of their daily lives.

[Mr. Nystrom.]

Let me conclude by saying this: If we do not go even as far as to extend the voting age, we are only asking for trouble. We will be ignoring basic facts. It would be but a small step toward opening up society and increasing the opportunities for people to participate. This is why many people are losing faith in our present democratic system. Even many moderate students are asking why they have to demonstrate or hold a sit-in before people will listen to them. We do not want this sort of thing, and like to accomplish things quickly and in a democratic manner. Unless we do so we will encourage more and more activity outside political channels as we know them today. Therefore I ask the house to give this matter serious consideration and to pass this bill today.

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay): Mr. Speaker, over the past several years private members from all parties now represented in the House of Commons have presented bills to provide that the age of voters under the Canada Elections Act be 18 years instead of 21 as at present. During the life of the 27th parliament nine public bills were introduced by private members to amend this section of the act. These bills were either talked out or referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. In November, 1963, the standing committee actually approved an amendment to the Canada Elections Act to lower the voting age to 18. Although since 1960 prominent members from both government and opposition have agreed with the argument that the voting age should be lowered, as yet no government action has been taken to bring about this change. This state of affairs seems to suggest and to lead one to suspect that although lip service is paid to arguments in favour of lowering the voting age, in fact the most convincing considerations must be those that are against doing so. This is what one is led to assume from what has happened in the house in this regard since 1960.

A strong feeling undoubtedly persists among many that young people are particularly susceptible to radical or extremist elements. Since they are likely to be influenced by unscrupulous factions, so the argument goes, they should not be trusted with the franchise. Such an attitude really calls for proof positive that young people will handle the franchise intelligently, even before they have the opportunity to vote.