

Dominion Elections Act

have been brought to the attention of the committee. There is just one that I would like to emphasize and perhaps I will go a little bit further than the hon. member for Peel (Mr. Graydon) went. I refer to the grievance that people feel when they are denied the right to vote because they have to be away from their home constituency on election day.

The hon. member for Peel made a useful suggestion when he proposed that the provision for voting at the advance poll should be widened somewhat. He suggested that the categories of people entitled to vote should be enlarged. I see no reason why there should be any limitation at all on the classes or categories of people entitled to vote at the advance poll. I know, for example, that in provincial elections in my own province of Manitoba it is possible for anyone who has to be away from his home constituency on election day to vote at the advance poll, simply by declaring that he has to be away.

Another possible solution of the problem might be found by taking a leaf from the book of British Columbia with respect to their practice in provincial elections. I understand that in that province there is quite an extensive arrangement for absentee voting. In other words, no matter where you are in the province of British Columbia on election day, you can cast your vote. If you are in your own constituency, you vote at your own poll. If you are out of your own constituency, you are permitted to vote wherever you are and to cast a ballot for the candidate of your choice back in your own constituency.

Mr. Green: Provided that you are on the list.

Mr. Knowles: Certainly. The hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) makes the necessary interjection that you have to be on the list. I am not dealing with that feature. I believe suggestions have already been made today as to the desirability of taking the list in the most effective way. My point is that there are these two cases that I am citing, the unlimited use of the advance poll in the province of Manitoba and the use of absentee voting in the province of British Columbia, which have to a large extent solved the problem of voters who have to be away from home on election day.

Mr. Green: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Knowles: Certainly.

Mr. Green: Would the hon. member suggest that a person who might be on the list in British Columbia could vote in Halifax?

[Mr. Knowles.]

Mr. Knowles: As a matter of fact, I was going to come to that point, and to say that it might create some difficulty if the provision were as wide as that. I am not trying to spell out all the details. I will leave that to the committee in consultation with the chief electoral officer and those who are experts in this field. A possibility might be that a person could vote anywhere within the province to which he belongs. But I think if that limitation were made it would then be desirable to couple with it the suggestion I have already made about the advance poll. In other words, I feel that anyone who has to be away should be permitted to vote, and the advance poll seems to be the best solution to the problem. In addition, I would suggest that the time for the advance poll should be made just as many days in advance of the actual polling date as is administratively possible. After all, in a democratic election our aim is to get out to the polls as many as possible of the people who are entitled to vote. Once we have made sure that there is nothing out of the way going on, that no people are on the list who are not entitled to be on it, every effort should then be made not to restrict or to limit people from voting but rather to facilitate their voting. I strongly urge the committee to consider one or the other or both of these suggestions. As I say, I have cited the practice in those two provinces. A possible solution would be a combination of the two of them.

I know that this matter has been considered when the elections act has been under review on former occasions, and that proposals such as I am making have been rejected. But in the meantime we have had another election. Thinking of my own experience on June 27 of last year, the grievance or the complaint that was drawn to my attention most often was that of persons who were denied the right to vote because they had to be away from their own constituency on election day. I would strongly urge the committee this time to try to meet that problem.

There is just one other thought concerning which I would like to say a word or two; and this is more in the nature of a plea to the government than to the committee. The matter was mentioned this afternoon by other speakers. It is that of the desirability of the next and future redistributions being made not by a parliamentary committee but by some qualified independent commission. The last time the matter of redistribution came before this house I had the privilege