

*Canada Elections Act*

Advance polls are of no help or of very little help in this matter. They are open one day only and are usually poorly advertised. In any case we are in the age of the two-week and three-week vacation in many parts of Canada. The British Columbia coast logger or fisherman may well be absent from his home not just for a few days but for three weeks, a month or even two months at a time. Why should such people be deprived of their privilege of casting an absentee ballot?

My constituency is not the worst in Canada in this regard. I am sure my hon. friend, the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), where there is a very large proportion of fishermen, would consider his people are very greatly disadvantaged in this matter. Both the Yukon and the Northwest Territories are vast expanses of land far, far bigger than the constituency of Coast Chilcotin. I also imagine that Rocky Mountain constituency, which is a long and difficult to negotiate geographical area, must suffer very severely in this connection.

In any case we are not in the age of our ancestors 50 years ago in Canada, or in the hungry thirties when travel was difficult because we could not afford the gas. I imagine that most hon. members who did occasionally beg or borrow a car would remember how gas for it was purchased two bits' worth at a time. The federal election law that requires the voter to present himself at his home polling station is really and genuinely fitted only for the horse and buggy days when men did not move far from their homes in order to work, the days when vacations were unknown and when, except for trains, the only method of travel was the horse and buggy, which did not take one very far from home.

I think it is important to note that the absentee ballot has been used with success in several elections in the province of British Columbia. It is a fairly simple method. An applicant for an absentee ballot must fill in a form at whichever polling station he attends and swear to the information he provides, and the secret ballot is then delivered to his home electoral district. There is also a safe and satisfactory method of counting these ballots. There is also a system of double-checking to prevent electors from casting two ballots, one in their home district and one in a neighbouring district.

I suppose there have been abuses of this system, because there are abuses in any law, but I have lived in British Columbia since

1945 and have never heard of one single abuse of the absentee balloting system. Those that have occurred have therefore, I think been small in number and not significant to the final vote.

In urging a system of absentee balloting I am fortunate to have the support of a very distinguished Canadian, Mr. Castonguay, who has reported on methods of registration of voters and absentee voting. This report of the representation commission was made in 1968. In his report appears this recommendation:

If the Commonwealth of Australia system of continuous electoral rolls is adopted, I recommend:

(1) That the Australian method of absentee voting, which provides voting facilities for electors who are unable to attending at their own polling place by reason of absence, but able to attend at another polling place located in the state in which they are registered, be applied to federal elections in Canada.

Hon. members may wonder why the motion that I am presenting here does not simply recommend that the government adopt the Castonguay report; certainly that is the evidence and the recommendation of an expert. The reason is that Mr. Castonguay's recommendation is based on the provision that Canada adopt the system of continuous electoral rolls. I am not opposed to that. In fact, I would hope that the committee on privileges and elections will adopt the whole of the Castonguay report. But in his introduction Mr. Castonguay makes this point:

However, it is my belief that the adoption of such a system would prove to be very costly.

My fear is that the committee on privileges and elections may very well be alarmed by the cost involved. Mr. Castonguay does not say exactly how much it would be. However, in rejecting or postponing the adoption of a continuous election roll system for Canada, the committee would also again be rejecting or postponing the absentee ballot. My hope is that in such circumstances the baby will not be thrown out with the bath water and that at least an absentee balloting system similar to that in use in British Columbia, where it has worked very well, will be retained—in short, that there be a compromise. What is a compromise? It is a meeting of minds of reasonable men.

One or two hon. members have expressed an interest in fishing in my constituency. Fortunately I had an experience recently that I think points up splendidly the value of compromise in human affairs. I was fishing for salmon and I caught a 14-incher, which by