

Canada Elections Act

good friend, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for bringing forth the Bill today. I think it is a Bill of extreme importance. I am sorry that the Hon. Member for Dauphin (Mr. Lewycky) could not address himself to the contents of the Bill rather than making a series of rash judgments about other Members of Parliament. However, it is the kind of thing we have come to expect from Members of the Opposition, particularly in the last ten days or so when rash judgment seemed to be about the only act of which they were capable.

Miss Jewett: Why didn't you listen?

Mr. Kilgour: How long are you going to speak?

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): As long as I must in order to express my thoughts, and if some of the—

Some Hon. Members: Sit down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. I wish Hon. Members would address their remarks to the Chair, please.

Miss Jewett: We want the Hon. Member to sit down.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to address my remarks to you and to remind you that the rash judgments are still occurring. The importance of the Bill cannot be exaggerated, because the right to vote is the most fundamental of rights, next to the right to life, in my opinion.

Miss Jewett: To coin a phrase.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): I would certainly hope that the Government would accept the Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): The Hon. Member, in speaking to the Bill, said he had written to a number of Ministers and to the Chief Electoral Officer, and he quoted from some of those letters. I must say that whoever composed the letter from the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne) was certainly making some long grasps, it seems to me, because the reasons given were not very valid. In fact, they were hardly rational. It seems to me that it should be easy to establish the mechanisms by which Canadians overseas may be able to vote.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): I see only one major flaw in the Bill, it being that it is too narrow in scope. The mover of the Bill himself has recognized that fact. However, why should we not include the dependants of people who might be working overseas?

Mr. Lewycky: And the spouses.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Why should it apply only to dependants of those in the Canadian Armed Forces? Why should it not also apply to those who, while they may not be public servants, may be employed by the Department of External Affairs or by CIDA? What about volunteer workers in fields such as medicine, education or social work? Because they are serving humanity outside of Canada, why should they be denied their votes? Why could they not go to the nearest Canadian embassy or high commission and swear a standard affidavit stating that they had not voted in Canada and therefore are eligible to vote in any federal general election? What about missionaries, for instance, as the Hon. Member for Dauphin mentioned? It seems to me that rather than putting roadblocks in the way of people's right to vote, we should be doing everything possible to make it easy for them to vote.

Miss Jewett: Refer it to committee.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Therefore, because the Bill is, in my opinion, too narrow in scope, I should like to move:

That Bill C-669 be withdrawn and the subject matter thereof be referred forthwith to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. That motion requires a seconder.

Mr. Lewycky: I will second it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Mr. Dionne has moved a motion, seconded by Mr. Lewycky. Such a motion would require unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

An Hon. Member: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): There is not unanimous consent.

Miss Jewett: David Smith said, "No".

Mr. Smith: They said it was me.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to see that the motion as put forth by the Hon. Member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne)—

Miss Jewett: Nice try.

Miss MacDonald:—did not receive the consent of the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Smith).

Miss Jewett: He is just a nobody.

Miss MacDonald: It is a shame that a matter of this significance could not have been referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for study, for detail and for passage