

## CHANGES IN THE CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

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doing business abroad and, perhaps most particularly and most relevant to our immediate experience, members of the federal public service serving abroad including the Department of External Affairs, Industry, Trade and Commerce and Immigration. The conclusion of the committee on this point, which has been concurred in by the Government, is that for administrative reasons it should be possible to extend the franchise to members of the federal public service living abroad, but for the same reasons it would be difficult to extend it to the other categories I have mentioned.

As you know...we have a very tight system of control for electors living in Canada requiring, primarily, a personal visitation to determine whether a person is resident in the poll. It is felt that the same system of close control should be necessary to avoid a situation where, by accident or design, someone might appear on a voting list in more than one place. The basic problem with persons living abroad is that of keeping track of them. Through its records the Federal Government is able to keep track of its own employees - who is living where at a particular time, and particularly at election time - but it is very difficult to keep track of other categories I have mentioned.

I know this is a controversial question and I take it that it was ultimately decided in committee, as it was by the Government, on the basis of administrative difficulty rather than on the basis of principle. The decision of the committee, I take it, was that on the whole there could not be found an effective procedure for assuring that those other than members of the Armed Forces and Canadian public service employees living abroad would be able to vote without the risk of loss of effective control by the electoral system, and therefore no procedure has been developed to deal with these particular categories.

While I am referring to the special voting rules it might be appropriate to point out one change which was made by the committee and which has been concurred in by the Government. It arises out of the requests by Canadian Forces electors that the system be changed so that the late reporting of Canadian Forces votes, and in the case of the new rules of all the special voters, be overcome and that their votes be counted along with all others on election night. The feeling was that the late reporting of the service vote approximately a week after election night inclined to focus public attention on the party preference of this particular group of electors. This was changed so that the votes of those voting under the special voting rules can be counted with the results on election night. The date for nomination of candidates has been advanced from the fourteenth to the twenty-first day preceding voting day, so the Forces

electors and other special electors may vote from 14 to 9 days before the election....

In addition to the foregoing matter, the Government has incorporated a great many of the suggestions made by the committee, including the following among the major ones: First, to establish a system of proxy voting whereby fishermen, mariners, prospectors, students and permanently disabled persons may be able to vote at an election through a proxy appointed from among electors in the polling division. It is anticipated that this will add between 5,000 and 6,000 voters to the list or at least give the opportunity to 5,000 or 6,000 people, who otherwise would not have been able to do so to cast a ballot, to exercise their franchise.

### REDUCTION OF VOTING AGE.

The second major change in the size of the electoral group as such is the reduction of the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years. It has been estimated by the Chief Electoral Officer that this will add approximately one million electors to the electoral rolls. Thirdly, the bill adopts the recommendation of the committee that the right to vote be confined to Canadian citizens and to those British subjects who were qualified at the last general election campaign and who have remained ordinarily resident in Canada on a continuous basis....

### REVISED BALLOTS

It has also been determined that a new form of ballot would be introduced - I gather that this is something the committee considered at length - which is intended to overcome some of the confusing aspects of the former ballot form which, at times, resulted in spoiled ballots. Also, in dealing with the question of spoiled ballots, which were a not insignificant factor in campaigns in the past, I may say that the stricter rules in the existing Elections Act will be relaxed with respect to the marking of ballots so that any mark on the ballot space may be accepted such as, for example, a check mark, a mark with a ball-point pen or a mark in any other way. They will be found acceptable and the ballot will not be spoiled so long as the mark is not so distinctive as to identify the elector....

### ELIGIBILITY OF CANDIDATES

Another matter which I gather was considered in the committee and rejected was the suggestion that not only should the minimum age of a voter be set at 18 years but that the age of eligibility for being a candidate should be at the same level. The Government has concluded that if 18-year old citizens are to have the right of casting a vote at an election, they should equally have the right to stand for election after the usual nomination procedures have been followed. On that basis, the qualifications of a candidate have been stated as anyone qualified as an elector, which of course includes those who are 18 years old or more....