

Canada Elections Act

many more Canadians are virtually disfranchised because of the present regulations. We have industrial workers in this country in that category. In British Columbia we have thousands of loggers, thousands of fishermen and many others who, in many federal elections, because of having been absent from their homes, either on the fishing grounds, or logging camps, or elsewhere, have in fact lost their votes. Many of these people are forced to leave their homes before the advance poll is taken, which, as we know, is taken but a few days before the actual poll.

It is almost impossible for any such fishermen, loggers or others in that category to cast a vote for or against a candidate in their home ridings. We think this is wrong. While we support and would like to vote for the bill introduced by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Deachman), we want to take this chance to urge the elections committee of this house to take a look at the present elections act with a view to securing, as far as is possible, a vote for the absentee voter in federal elections, and to take care of the situation that exists in British Columbia.

Without more ado, I take my seat in the house, with the assurance that if this measure will come to a vote, we shall support it.

Mr. Hugh Faulkner (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly about this bill, which in principle I support. I had in Peterborough the same experience the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra had in his riding. I remember trying to arrange for students who normally were resident in Peterborough, but who were attending Queen's, or the University of Toronto, or Carleton, or were in the Windsor area, to come back to Peterborough to vote. It was difficult to explain to students who were caught up in a political science class, and who were told by their professors of the importance of the right to vote and of its importance to democratic society, why, on the first occasion they could exercise this franchise, because of some technicality in the law, they were denied the opportunity to do so. For this reason I support the bill presented by my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

This bill deals with a specific problem in an act which is plagued with anomalies. The hon. member who has just taken his seat cited examples I had not heard mentioned before, probably because the industries affected are not major industries in my area.

[Mr. Mather.]

It has been pointed out before, and should be no surprise to members of this house, that this act is plagued by all sorts of anomalies. I think therefore it is imperative for the totality of the act to be referred to the committee on privileges and elections for discussion.

This bill provides a solution to a particular problem, but other problems are posed by this solution. For instance, this bill does not deal with the question of voting age, and whether it should not be lowered to 18. I have supported the view that the voting age ought to be 18.

Another problem posed by this particular bill deals with the concentration of floating voters that will arise in certain areas. The University of Toronto in itself, if the students were able to co-ordinate their activities, would probably be in a position to determine who their member of parliament was going to be. Realizing that the same applies to McGill, as a graduate of that university I think that would be deplorable. There is the technical problem of a concentration of floating voters in a particular area and their possible influence on an election.

● (5:30 p.m.)

There is one anomaly about which I feel very strongly. I refer to the deplorable situation of persons in hospitals and nursing homes who are not able to get out and vote and who thus lose their franchise. I remember very well during the last two elections visiting hospital patients and how depressed they were that they did not have the opportunity to vote. It is for this reason I suggest that though the principle of the bill is sound, the whole general area needs to be revamped. In my view the bill should be referred to the committee on privileges and elections where the problem could be dealt with in toto and not on a piecemeal basis.

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say on behalf of this party that we are in favour of the amendment proposed by Bill C-100. It is correcting a problem that manifested itself last autumn because of the date on which the election was held. Serious injustices resulted because of the date and so we are in favour of taking this small step forward to correct the problem.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I have some sympathy for the motive of the sponsor of the bill because I realize that in the last election a