

Canada Elections Act

Mr. Speaker, I hope that one day we will have an honest, intelligent and fair election system which will produce the governments we want and not forced upon us like those we have had since 1867.

[English]

Mr. D. W. Groos (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join that chorus of voices in support of this private members' notice of motion. I note that we have only ten minutes before this measure will come to a vote, so I intend to be brief. It is hoped that it will be referred to the committee on privileges and elections.

No single notice of motion could possibly cover all the defects which exist in the Canada Elections Act, but this notice of motion would certainly correct a very important error. In paragraph (c) of this notice of motion the hon. member very rightly proposes that members of the public service of Canada who live abroad, and their dependants should be able to cast absentee ballots. I am entirely in favour of this suggestion, but he continues to say "in the manner prescribed for the armed services." Perhaps I did not do my homework before entering the house, and I only entered a few moments ago, but I think it will be found that dependants of armed servicemen abroad are not now in a position to vote during a general election. I hope this matter will be corrected when a correction is being made in respect of dependants of members of the public service of Canada.

What I am really doing is putting in a plug for the dependants of armed servicemen serving abroad in order that they may be permitted to cast absentee ballots. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerald Richard Cobbe (Portage): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak on this most important motion dealing with the Canada Elections Act. I support it wholeheartedly but suggest that possibly it does not go far enough. In proposing a motion like this, and it is the longest one on the order paper, I am sure the hon. member found difficulty in drafting it in shorter form.

Some comments by hon. members regarding the vote of our armed forces abroad have surprised me. I was surprised to hear any suggestion that there is a considerable amount of fraud connected with the armed forces balloting.

[Mr. Fortin.]

• (5:50 p.m.)

I certainly hope the armed forces personnel will have the opportunity to refute this allegation because I do not believe it is fair for these people to have to accept such statements without having such an opportunity. I would say that the suggestion 33 per cent of the people were not motivated to vote probably accounts for these changes being recommended. I do not believe these people were not motivated to vote. The truth is rather that they were not given the opportunity to vote. As was indicated before, it was impossible for them to get to the polls on election day.

I believe that this suggestion not only affects Canadians who travel abroad, such as those who travel on government business, but also other persons who should be given the opportunity to vote on absentee ballots. I am referring to people who have been moved from their districts after the electoral lists have been posted. What opportunity do these people have to vote? In most cases they would have to travel half way across the country to get back to their proper poll. I believe some consideration should be given to these people and their ballots should be separated from those of the armed forces.

There are also people whose place of work is many miles away from home. Our advanced poll system does not take care of these people. If we look up the statistics we will find that one out of every five families in Canada moves every year. So, it is obvious that in our vast country the privilege of voting is taken away from a great number of people.

To get back to the subject of the armed forces vote, I think there are other measures that could be implemented to assist the armed forces personnel in voting. I do not agree with the statement that it is not possible to inform our armed services personnel abroad about what is going on in our country. A list of constituents who are in the armed forces abroad is available to all candidates, and it is quite easy to communicate with these people. I suggest that members of our armed forces abroad have a much greater interest in what is going on in our country than many people who live in Canada, and they are in very close touch with what is going on here. I am sure that the newspapers that are sent to them are more widely read than they are by people living in the constituency who choose not to vote. However, I am not in total agreement with the provisions made for the