

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 28, 1991

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. John Bosley (Don Valley West) moved that Bill C-286, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (addition to the official list of electors), be read the second time and referred to Legislative Committee G.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in my mail on Friday and over the weekend here in Ottawa and in Toronto, the flood of municipal literature began.

One of the crucial pieces of information that every sensible municipal candidate includes in his or her literature—as those who have been through this know—is the notation that if somehow you have not made it to the enumeration lists, that is not the end of the world. You can go to the polling station on election day and you may swear that you are a proper and bona fide elector and you may vote. That is an expression of something we, at least at that level, hold dear in democratic systems. Under no circumstances should you be deprived of the essence of democracy, which is your right to cast your vote for who shall lead your community or your province or your country.

Ironically, the level at which we do not do that is this one. Political scientists tell us that our elections will always be about people and images. The last election became, in a gratifying way, an election about a major, major policy issue. No member is going to forget the experience of debating the free trade agreement in the last election.

I cannot forget the anger that was expressed by those who came to see me as a candidate who had been missed on the enumeration lists. These people felt this was a crucial vote for them, whatever side they were on, and certainly could not believe that because they had been away or had been missed by the enumerators, they could not go, swear the oath on election day and vote. They felt—whatever side they were on—that it was probably the most critical election they were going to be involved in for some time.

I suggest that since the next election will presumably involve some form of approval or disapproval of parties that are running either on constitutional or trade package agreements, it is going to be just as crucial in the minds of all Canadians, whatever side of the issues they are on.

I do not intend to take the full 20 minutes that is available today to a mover of a private members' motion. I simply wanted to put that view on the record. There is now a royal commission or a political commission examining all of our electoral procedures. I know this bill has already been received by their staffs and lawyers and they are looking at this proposal.

Perhaps the proposal that is codified in this document, Bill C-286, may not be the one that is finally deemed to be the best. What this bill says, however, is that if an elector has been missed by an enumerator he or she may go to the polling station on election day provided he or she goes with one other person in order to establish identity. That person must be willing to swear an oath that this person is indeed a resident of that electoral district. The person who is then trying to vote produces some sort of personal identification satisfactory to the returning officer, is then registered to vote and votes.

If there is a better way to do it I will be more than happy to see it. I only want to try to improve the situation in some little way on behalf of those who felt so frustrated the last time when they were left off the list. It seems long overdue to me. I have no doubt that the commission is going to make lots of recommendations about various ways to make the system more open, fair and democratic for all Canadians. They may suggest