

*Canada Elections Act*  
**NOTICES OF MOTIONS**  
**CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**

SUGGESTED AMENDMENT RESPECTING  
 DISFRANCHISEMENT, ARMED  
 SERVICES, PUBLIC SERVICE

**Mr. Paul St-Pierre (Coast Chilcotin)** moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of introducing a measure to amend the Canada Elections Act to prevent to a further degree the disenfranchisement of numerous citizens who are absent from their residence areas on polling days, and to prevent the Armed Services being singled out as the only professional group whose political choices are made public, by mingling Armed Service ballots with other absentee ballots, and, for those purposes:

(a) to entitle an elector to vote on polling day for the candidate of his choice who is nominated in his Electoral District, by casting his vote in a polling station or Electoral District other than his own, using an absentee ballot;

(b) to provide that Armed Services ballots shall henceforth be called absentee ballots and be counted simultaneously with other absentee ballots without, however, altering the present method of balloting by the Armed Services;

(c) to provide further that members of the Public Services of Canada and their dependents stationed abroad shall be enabled to cast absentee ballots in the manner prescribed for the Armed Services.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we have just dealt with an amendment to the Canada Evidence Act. The spokesman for the Creditiste party, the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin), pointed out that the Canada Evidence Act had failed to move with the times and had become badly out of date. Essentially, my motion urging changes to the electoral law of Canada says precisely the same thing—that this law has become badly out of date. It is no longer in tune with present day realities and as a result a shockingly large number of Canadians are losing their votes in every election.

I am a little disturbed to find that my motion is the longest on the order paper. I have learned to be afraid of too many words. I recall one case in British Columbia where a senior lawyer was asked by another lawyer whether he should attempt an appeal. The older lawyer inquired: "how long is the judgment?" The younger one replied: "17 folios." The older lawyer then commented: "I don't want to read it; go ahead with an appeal; no man alive can be right for 17 folios."

If my motion is long, however, it is not really complex, and I think I shall be able to show to the satisfaction of this house that it has proven of practical use already in Canadian elections. In the national election just completed, 25 per cent of the eligible

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard).]

voters of Canada did not cast ballots. We have no way of knowing how many of these would have cast their ballots if the advantage of the absentee ballot form had been available to them.

No doubt a great many of them did not vote because they were generally satisfied with the course of affairs in the country. No doubt, too, a good proportion of them did not vote because they have very little use for any of the political parties which came forward. I am not one of those who believe people should be forced to vote. I believe that to absent oneself from the poll is not a privilege but a right, just as it is a right to vote at the polls. I do not favour the Australian system which obliges people to vote on pain of a penalty. Nevertheless, I do not think there can be any doubt that a high proportion of the 25 per cent who did not cast their votes are people who were unable to do so because they were absent from their homes on election day. This is the purpose of an absentee ballot—to accommodate these people.

• (5:00 p.m.)

I might point out that in my own riding of Coast Chilcotin the number who did not vote was 33½ per cent, or one-third of the people.

**An hon. Member:** Dull election.

**Mr. St. Pierre:** Someone says it was a dull election. Possibly. It did not seem so to those of us who engaged in it. I would remind hon. members that mine is a large riding devoted mainly to primary production. There are many loggers and fishermen who must be absent from their homes on occasion as a matter of business. As a matter of fact I can give the house a particularly shocking example of the disenfranchisement to which I refer. One of the larger Indian reserves in Canada is situated in the riding of Coast Chilcotin—the Bella Bellas. On the day of the last election there were 410 Indian adults on the voting list and only 176 voted.

The reason for this absenteeism is that the community is entirely dependent for its income on fishing. Both on the day of the election and on the day of the advance poll since this year's major fish run was at Rivers Inlet 100 miles distant from Bella Coola, these Indian people had to be about their business. Because they were about their business they were denied their right to vote. As I say, this is a shocking situation, and I hope we do not go into another election without provision being made for an absentee ballot.