

*Canada Elections Act*

I would like to refer to the Charter of Rights as it concerns this Bill. It is a Charter that our Parliament agonized over for a long time, the better part of a year. This is one of the first opportunities that the Government has had to demonstrate the importance of the Charter of Rights, particularly with respect to Part I, Section 3 which concerns the democratic rights that every citizen of Canada has. Our new Constitution says that every citizen has the right to vote in an election of Members of the House of Commons or Legislative Assembly and is qualified for membership therein. It is a pity that this right has not been extended to our citizens who are, in this case, serving with the Canadian Armed Forces, even though they may be employed in civilian categories.

Another part of our Charter concerns the whole question of mobility rights that ought to be recognized. Part I, Section 6 says that every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada. If we recognize the right to vote and the right to be mobile both inside and outside of Canada, it is certainly very puzzling why the Government would want to talk out a Bill of this nature when we should be ensuring that all Canadians have that opportunity, wherever they are or from whatever background. The Charter states that they do have that right.

Aside from the fact that the Constitution indicates that we should support a Bill such as this, we also have to keep in mind the democratic principles under which we operate. On other occasions I have cited the famous quotation of Henry Emerson Fosdick who said that democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people. The people whom we want to include under this particular Bill may be considered by others as ordinary people overseas, but in some respects I think they are extraordinary. They are extending the service of Canadians not only here but overseas. They are making sacrifices in many ways by living in countries where they do not have the same kind of amenities that we have in Canada. It is a pity that they are not recognized.

I am pleased that this Bill seeks to extend this right to vote to all. I believe it concerns the basic question of citizenship. It has been said that the most important office is that of a private citizen. Why should certain private citizens be deprived of their opportunity and right to vote? I believe that citizenship is a demonstration of service to the country. One of the best ways to demonstrate citizenship is to allow people the right to vote. I would emphasize the importance of this fact.

Fortunately, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier has recognized the importance of voting. Perhaps the other Government Members have not recognized the importance of that right. It has been said that voting is the least arduous of a citizen's duties. He or she has the prior and harder duty of making up his or her mind. Therefore, when people vote, that is an outward manifestation of an inward act which they must perform. I do not understand why the Government wants to talk this Bill out and thereby deprive people serving overseas of the ability to make up their minds. I suspect the Government is fearful that when they do make up their mind their ballots will not be cast in the same way they have been in the past.

I do have some reservations about this Bill. I feel that it does not really go far enough. It seems to be limited purely to

civilians who are working with the Armed Forces. I suggest that there must be an extension of this to anyone who is working in another country. Many of these people have sacrificed much to go abroad. They are still vitally interested in what is happening in Canada, but they are being deprived of a vote. I think, for example, of those working for CUSO. As well, there are those in non-government organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee. They could also be missionaries who are in other countries.

Our Charter of Rights talks about the fact that we should not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion, race or age. There should be a basic equality among people. This Bill should take into account all those Canadian citizens who have the right to vote under the Charter that we fought for.

The problem of administrative difficulties should not be of any concern. The previous speaker talked about the fact that we already receive lists of those in the Armed Forces overseas who are entitled to vote. We get their names regularly so that we can send them our "householders" and other information. What is stopping the Government from enfranchising all those overseas who can vote?

This Bill certainly merits the attention of the House. At least the contents of the Bill should be referred to the committee, and therefore I am somewhat disappointed that the Government will talk it out. The fact that the Government talks Bills out in some ways makes a farce out of Parliament. The fact is that this is a good idea, it will be raised in the next session, either in a Speech from the Throne or through proposals from the bureaucracy. I would like to expand on that point. The philosophy of this Bill will be brought forward by the bureaucracy as one of its own ideas. It will receive approval in the next session of Parliament. Here we have something which has been brought forward by Members of Parliament, people who have been elected to present their views. But no, that idea will not be accepted because it came from a Member of Parliament, even though it happened to be a Member from the Government side. However, when it comes from the bureaucracy, it will be accepted the next time around. I know that this is exactly what will happen in this particular case, and the Government is making a farce out of Parliament at this stage. I see the Parliamentary Secretary shaking his head, but this is unfortunately the way we are seeing things operating in the House.

● (1740)

I would therefore urge Hon. Members opposite to think this through, not to talk this Bill out, and at least to refer the subject matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections which may study it and bring us some recommendations to restore to Members of Parliament the power that they really deserve to have.

**Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague and