

Hansard. Ontario Legislature. 21st October 1985

Mr. Reville: I rise to speak in favour of the bill. I had thought that when the bill came forward the only concern we would hear from the members of this House would be a concern similar to that expressed by the member for St. George (Ms. Fish). I too got an anxious phone call from the clerk of the city of Toronto expressing concern about the administrative problem that might arise from the lateness of the bill, but I have a lot of faith in the ability of the municipal officials and I am sure they can cope with the problem.

I was surprised and amazed to hear some of the comments of other members of the House. The member for Carleton-Grenville (Mr. Sterling) does indeed raise a bizarre anomaly, but I fail to see how it is relevant to the nature of this bill, which is after all in great part to deal with those who have a disability under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I am sure the member for Carleton-Grenville will not be surprised to know that those of us who have found ourselves in the situation of requiring 10 qualified electors to nominate us sometimes get 20 on the list to make sure this particular eventuality does not occur and leave us without a candidacy when the nominations close.

9 p.m.

I was much more concerned listening to the comments of the member for Wellington-Dufferin-Peel (Mr. J. M. Johnson) and the member for York Centre (Mr. Cousens). I am sure they are concerned that all electors should exercise their franchise in a totally rational way, but I fail to see the kind of test that might be administered to an elector to ensure that he did exercise his franchise in a way that would be considered by a consensus of people to be rational.

I am mindful of a story that every member of my caucus will have heard and perhaps will have been required to memorize. It was a story often told by a former leader of the party who now is ambassador to the United Nations. It describes an unfortunate situation that probably has never happened to a member of either of the other two parties, but clearly has happened to members of my party on occasion. One hopes it will never happen again.

I invite all who are professional politicians to think about occasions when they have done inside scrutineering and counted ballots. The story relates to an area of the country where people had not yet seen the wisdom of supporting my party. None of the officials was a member of my party, except for one, who was Mr. Lewis.

They were counting the ballots and it went predictably as it had done for generations in the riding: Tory, Tory, Tory, Liberal, Liberal, Tory, Tory, Tory, Liberal, Liberal, New Democratic Party. A hush fell over the room and the ballot was passed from deputy returning officer to poll clerk to scrutineer. They inspected the ballot and determined it was valid, notwithstanding it was a vote for the NDP.

They went back and counted some more: Tory, Tory, Tory, Liberal, Liberal, Liberal, Tory, Tory, Tory, and on and on, when yet another offensive ballot was found -- another NDP vote. It was also passed around the room to people with shocked and aggrieved looks on their faces who were wondering what to do. The deputy returning officer was a person of considerable leadership and he announced that clearly some person had voted twice.

The reason I tell this story, as self-deprecating as it may be, is to try to deal with the concern the member for Wellington-Dufferin-Peel elucidated in his remarks, which was, "In a close election, would it not be terrible if the deciding vote were cast by a patient in a psychiatric unit or a mental hospital?"

One wonders how one would be able to tell. One wonders what kind of franchise it is if it does not count in a close election. Having seen many ballots over the years when people in psychiatric facilities were not allowed to vote, I have seen some very strange ballots with comments written thereon and sometimes ballots on which an elector clearly voted for the wrong person.

People in psychiatric facilities ostensibly have a mental disability. That is not to say that all people in psychiatric facilities have those disabilities, although it is alleged that they do. I myself was unfortunate enough to spend a long time as a guest of a previous government in the Ontario hospital in Kingston. My fellow patients took a lively interest in the elections, although they were not allowed to vote. Clearly, they had the same range of political opinion that one might find among any group of people.

It seems to me intolerable that we would deny any citizen the right to vote by virtue of a disability. We clearly have been working on trying to make polling stations accessible to the physically disabled and we do not find that the lack of a leg should somehow prevent somebody from voting.

I am particularly concerned, knowing that the member for York Centre (Mr. Cousens) is a psychologist. For him to say that a patient in a mental hospital might not be able to form an opinion about whom to vote for and what the issues of the day are is a shocking commentary on how people who are not laymen view mental disabilities.

I strongly urge people who may hold the view of those two members to think very carefully and try to do some investigating. My view is that the last provincial election was not rendered somehow invalid because people from mental hospitals exercised their franchise.