



BILL C-23 - *FAIR ELECTIONS ACT*

BRIEF SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS' STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

A Canadian Teachers' Federation Brief on
Bill C-23, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act
and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts.*

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Canadian Teachers' Federation
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants



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Introduction

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) has prepared this brief to raise the concerns of teachers regarding provisions of Bill C-23, the Fair Elections Act. While we agree the Canada Elections Act should be updated to address issues like unsolicited calling, we are concerned that this Bill goes far beyond the scope of what is needed. Perhaps more egregious than the Bill itself is the seemingly undemocratic way the Bill is being rushed through the house without proper consultation with the people of Canada including those whose rights are being affected. Electoral reform in Canada is a laudable goal – one that requires careful deliberation and non-partisanship.

Here are three main concerns of Canadian teachers:

1. Speed with which Bill C-23 is being pushed through the Parliament of Canada

Change of this magnitude takes time and consideration by all those involved and affected. This is especially true when legislation proposing changes to democratic processes is introduced. Democracy works best through debate, consultation, consensus-building, and respect for diverse voices. Teachers welcome the diverse voices of children, parents and families every day in the schools and communities throughout our country. They work hard to ensure that those diverse voices are respected and heard. Our federal government must do no less.

Recommendation:

The Canadian Teachers' Federation recommends that Bill C-23 be referred to a non-partisan committee consisting of equal representation from each political party with representation in the House and that the committee use a consensus building model for decision-making,

2. Bill C-23 hampers the education of students and other Canadians about responsible citizenship and the fundamentals of Canadian democracy.

Many of our 200,000 members across Canada have been involved in preparing their students to participate actively in their democracy through the Student Vote Program (SVP) organized by CIVIX and in the annual National Democracy Week in which CTF is a partner with Elections Canada.

In the 2008 and 2011 elections, Elections Canada provided 100% of the funding for the SVP. In the last federal election, 15,000 Canadian teachers engaged 563,498 students in the SVP in 3,750 schools. Since 2003, CIVIX has engaged 9,000 schools and 3 million students from across Canada in a parallel election process. According to an evaluation of the program conducted by Elections Canada, the ripple effects were considerable. Here are some of the highlights.

- *Teachers felt that their own confidence in teaching civic education had increased as a result of the program. Teacher satisfaction was very high, with 95% of participating teachers saying they would very likely participate in the program in the future.*
- *Over 60% of parents reported an increase in their own political interest and knowledge as a result of their child's participation in the program. Parents further stated that the program provided their family with more opportunities to learn about and discuss politics. Among parents who voted, 20% reported that their child's participation in the SVP positively affected their decision to vote.*
- *Experiential learning, a key feature of the SVP, was found to have a significant positive impact on students' **interest in politics**. For secondary school students, program participation also had a strong positive impact on students' **understanding of voting as a civic duty**.*

Source: Elections Canada Student Vote Program Evaluation

On other fronts, CTF also participates in the annual Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy both as a promoter and guest participant. Each year, 70 teachers from across Canada have taken part in this valuable program. Upon completion, teachers bring a wealth of knowledge back to the classroom. This level of engagement from the national to the classroom level speaks to teachers' staunch

commitment to encourage and support civic engagement among Canadian youth through public education.

Elections Canada's educational programming must be maintained as it provides resources for the teaching of democracy, citizenship and voting. If passed, Bill C-23 will put an end to this valuable outreach and public education.

Beyond classroom activities aimed at promoting active participation in democracy, teachers are concerned about the example this Bill may set for students as they study its impact. Limiting the permissible public communications, not providing requested investigative tools and moving the Elections Commissioner to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, which reports to the Justice Minister are all facets of this legislation that appear to undermine democracy. It is difficult to understand and even more difficult to "teach" how these measures which restricts access to information, help to promote a transparent and open process.

Recommendations

The Canadian Teachers Federation recommends that Bill C-23 be amended to ensure that Canadian elections are a transparent process and that Elections Canada's educational programming including full funding in support of civic education, the student vote program and other public education outreach initiatives be maintained.

3. Bill C-23 has the potential of disenfranchising voters by the removal of the voucher system.

As you know, many people in Canada, for legitimate reasons, do not possess the type of identification proposed in this Bill. Canadian teachers believe that voting is not only a fundamental right but a responsibility within a representative democracy. Any proposal to limit this right, for whatever reason, must be considered very

judiciously. According to Elections Canada, over 120,000 voters needed to be vouched for in the 2011 election, which represents 1% of the voting population. According to Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand, there is no evidence that the current vouching process permits ineligible voters to cast a ballot. Bill C-23 has the potential to disenfranchise tens of thousands of Canadian seniors, youth and aboriginal people. These Canadians must be able to exercise their right to vote, and should not be hindered from participating in the democratic process by their own government.

Recommendation

The Canadian Teachers' Federation recommends that Bill C-23 add the Voter Information Card (VID) to the current list of valid identification, and provide the authority and funding to Elections Canada to enable it to hire and fully train all election workers for elections well before each election, and to make the voter registration list and ID checking even more accurate.

Summary of recommendations

The Canadian Teachers' Federation recommends:

- *that Bill C-23 be referred to a non-partisan committee consisting of equal representation from each political party with representation in the House and that the committee use a consensus decision-making model.*
- *that Bill C-23 be amended to ensure that Canadian elections are a transparent process and that Elections Canada's educational programming including full funding in support of civic education, the student vote program and other public education outreach initiatives be maintained.*
- *that Bill C-23 add the Voter Information Card (VID) to the current list of valid ID and provide the authority and funding to Elections Canada to enable it to hire and fully train all election workers for elections well before each election, and to make the voter registration list and ID checking even more accurate.*

Conclusion

The right to vote is at the core of a democratic society. Any attempt to change legislation governing voting rights must be conducted fairly and with great care. In fact, since the right to vote was embedded in the Constitution, there have been numerous amendments to the elections process. All of these changes have served to facilitate voting and broaden electoral participation. Bill C-23 is the first that aims to restrict voting rights and unbalance elections finance. We believe that broad political consensus is essential when proposing changes to the democratic right of Canadians. In its current form, Bill C-23 builds in potential partisanship, creating and unbalanced elections process in Canada and will further alienate an electorate whose participation rates are already low. We therefore encourage the committee and the government to either amend the Bill as we, and others, have suggested or withdraw it in its entirety and then, initiate a fair process for reform.

About the Canadian Teachers' Federation

The Canadian Teachers' Federation is an alliance of 17 organizations (15 Members, one Affiliate Member and one Associate Member) representing nearly 200,000 teachers across the country. CTF's mission is to serve as a unified voice of teacher organizations in Canada on education and related social issues by promoting high quality public education, the status of the teaching profession and the freedom to learn.

