

Citizenship

As near as I can tell, and the minister will correct me if I am wrong, if a Canadian goes abroad and for any reason loses his citizenship, he then has to apply as any other world citizen would have to apply to come to Canada. The same will apply to those immigrants who come to Canada and obtain citizenship here. They are not going to be able to hold Canadian and American, Canadian and Portuguese, or Canadian and Dutch citizenship simultaneously. If by some inadvertence they have made a wrong choice in their three-year period, they may find themselves in serious difficulty if at any point in time they wish to return to the land of their birth or the land from which they came. Under those circumstances I do not think five years is too long.

There are some aspects of changes in citizenship legislation which are pertinent to Canada and which follow the pattern of other countries. Holland, for example, is in a unique position at the moment. Recent press reports have told about their problem with the arrival of people from what at one time was their empire. People held Dutch citizenship in the same way that people held citizenship in the British Commonwealth. Those who were citizens of the Dutch structure held Dutch citizenship and had free access to Holland.

It is a very forward and proper step that this country cannot be inundated by an influx of people from any part of the world any more readily than it can from any other part of the world under the present structure of citizenship and immigration. In that sense there has been something acquired in the consideration of these two items.

I very strongly urge the minister to give serious consideration to clause 5(1)(b)(i), both for the sake of Canada and for the sake of the immigrant. I think I speak with a concern for both. Changing the eligibility from five years to three should be reconsidered. That is not a step which gives the landed immigrant any particular advantage other than voting privileges. It reduces the necessary time which any citizen court or minister might require before extending to an applicant the very important and highly privileged rank of citizen.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the government House leader saw fit to bring on this bill for consideration by this parliament at this time. I can think of nothing more important on the list of legislation that we must consider before Christmas, having regard to what remains on the order paper and the progress that has been made thus far. It is an unusual example of his foresight with respect to the legislative priorities of the country that he has seen fit, so close to Christmas, to bring forward to this House this important piece of legislation.

I am very happy that the Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner) and the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) are in the chamber this evening because there is, within this general field about which we are talking, an interrelationship with their responsibility.

I suppose there was a time in the history of our country when upon coming to Canada, taking a working position, and being involved in the cultural life of this growing country, the matter of citizenship was not nearly as important as it is today. But we are debating this bill in a world

[Mr. McCain.]

which is changing, a world which is becoming less and less democratic, a world in which people are pressured by over-population and diminishing agricultural production, resulting in starvation in many areas.

● (2150)

The number of democratic regimes is being diminished day by day; Canada is one of the few nations left in the world which believes in the democratic process, which is healthy and strong, which can allow debate such as this to go on, with different points of view being interchanged. This is a very attractive situation for increasing numbers of people and I believe that, as a result, over the next 20 years or so this country will find itself bearing the brunt of pressures in terms of the movement of people from other parts of the world. That is what makes the bill before us so important; that is why parliament should consider the whole question of citizenship with a great deal of care.

We are extending, by the offer of citizenship, the right to participate in a strong, healthy, and vital society. That is why this statute is important and that is why I want to thank the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) for bringing this legislation forward.

There are provisions in this statute which concern me. Other speakers have mentioned that a period of time one might call unauthorized time, as far as the statute is concerned can be allowed in certain circumstances, at least to a limited extent, whether the final period be three years or five years. This is important if the required time is to be reduced to three years because it makes the full period all the more important. I am not arguing now whether the period should be three years or five years; I will come to that issue, perhaps a little later.

The statute as presented, notwithstanding the minister's explanation, does within the ambit of its wording allow for time spent illegally in this country. In my view this does a disservice to many people who, aware of the rules qualified to come to this country under a very generous immigration policy, served out the period of time required, and were successful in obtaining citizenship. I think we ought to take a hard look at this aspect of the bill, and perhaps amend it in committee.

The reason why I think this is important is that I have discussed the bill with a number of immigrant groups in my constituency. We often hear about immigrants in western Canada, in northern Canada, and in the larger centres of population. But in this city, Ottawa, which ostensibly moves on a bi-cultural and bilingual axis, there is a large and growing immigration population.

I have made a point of sitting down with several groups representing people of various ethnic origins, some of whose members are landed immigrants, and asking their views with respect to this clause. It is the vagueness of this clause which has disturbed many of the people who have spoken to me about it, and which has disturbed me as well as a number of other members of the House. The present debate is an important occasion in terms of considering this right to participate in one of the free democratic societies in the world.

There is one other aspect I should like to deal with, and it has to do with the citizenship courts. It has been my privilege in the course of practising law in the national