

*Naturalization Acts*

Mr. BAXTER: I think the question I asked is partly answered by referring to sub-section 3 of section 1 of the act of 1914, which provides that—

Nothing in this section shall, except as otherwise expressly provided, affect the status of any person born before the commencement of this act.

But if we see fit to adopt clause 5 of section 1 of this bill, which provides for the registration of birth within one year at a British consulate in the case of a person born on or after the 1st January 1915, members will see that it will affect the status of a person born before the commencement of this legislation. The fixing of time is always an arbitrary matter. In England no doubt their Naturalization Act of 1922 is adapted to the times that were fixed in some previous acts which were being consolidated. I would suggest that the date should read the 1st January 1924, computing the seven-year period from that time so that no person born before this bill becomes law would be prejudiced. The only difference it would make between us and the Mother Country would be the adoption of a later date here; and where we have so many people living in the neighbouring republic whose status would be affected, I think we should be rather careful to keep the door open for British citizenship wherever it is possible to do so.

I would make one other suggestion to my hon. friend, the Secretary of State (Mr. Copp). I think it very unwise to have such a complicated measure as the Naturalization Act partly in one volume and partly in another, consisting of references and cross-references. I am fairly well accustomed to comparing statutes, but in the few moments at my disposal I cannot say that I have got hold of everything bearing on the point I have just dealt with. What does this mean? We scarcely ever have to deal with the question of British citizenship except in two cases: one, to advise whether a particular person is qualified to be the owner of a British ship—and that is extremely important—the other, to decide whether a particular person is entitled to the franchise in this Dominion. We know when we get into the heat of an election all sorts of people will put forth all sorts of opinions with regard to the Naturalization Act. Each side wants to get every possible voter, and I am afraid some horribly unsound law is uttered around election times, but I could readily acquit any reasonable practitioner from trying to serve a party purpose in the opinion he might express on the ground that he would be lost in the morass of provisions that have been repealed or partly amended. Would it not be much more

[Mr. Copp.]

simple to consolidate these acts? The law is not likely to be changed again for a good many years I trust. There are provisions here in regard to the status of alien enemies which I do not want to discuss to-night as I have not found their bearings yet. For all I know the provisions may be quite satisfactory. We could have what is proposed to be the whole naturalization law of Canada consolidated, and so greatly simplify reference to this law, which at best is difficult enough when embodied in one well-drawn statute. At present these statutes are in a very awkward condition for the ordinary practitioner to deal with them.

Mr. COPP: I quite agree with my hon. friend that the acts should be consolidated, and I made a suggestion to my Under Secretary the other day to this end. He told me he had the matter in mind and as soon as this bill was accepted by parliament he would make a codification of the whole law and have it published in pamphlet form for distribution to those who cared to apply for copies.

Mr. BAXTER: I appreciate the intention, but I do not like it. I want to be able to go to the statute myself; I do not want someone else's compilation; and that is the general experience of the profession. A very excellent deputy may pass the work over to a very competent official, but the result will not be an act of this parliament, and conceivably errors may creep in. It is just as easy for the official to prepare a consolidated bill for passage now; then we will have every phase of the question before us. I do not raise this point in a spirit of captious criticism, but I want to get this very important legislation put in the very best form possible, and I would strongly urge my hon. friend to take a little more time and adopt my suggestion.

Mr. COPP: I have no objection if the committee feel it important that the consolidation should be done now, but it seems to me—although I do not wish to press my views upon the committee—that as there are only three or four amendments they might be accepted now and the act could be properly consolidated afterwards. The consolidation of the statutes could not very well be done during the present session.

Mr. GUTHRIE: There is no doubt a great deal of force in what the minister says about the consolidation of all the Dominion statutes. This consolidation is long overdue. The work was commenced a year and a half or two years ago, but from information I