

Citizenship

dropped to two or three years. He even felt that most people would support franting citizenship after one year of residence. He made some further comments which the minister ought to examine, as they deal with an aspect of this problem which we may encounter in future.

Professor Wilson, Head of the Faculty of Social Work, York University, expressed the concern that citizenship training facilities in Secretary of State offices are "very small" and that officials in most Canadian cities were "poorly trained." If you consider statements such as made by Professor Head, and by others who are actively working with immigrants and new Canadians, you sense that there is more to this issue than was presented to the committee.

Although we congratulate the minister for relieving hardship, the provision for reducing to three years from five residency qualifications for citizenship is not an unmixed blessing, as, undoubtedly, some people will encounter difficulty. Certainly spouses, who could acquire citizenship after one year in some cases and who now must wait three years, are adversely affected and, in that regard, the provision of the bill works in reverse. Even more important is the suggestion that it will now be necessary for spouses to meet language requirements. This aspect may create considerable hardship.

While there are many people who will come here in the prime of life as young people to participate in their own future and in the long-term future of this country, we annually receive thousands of people who come here as the parents of new Canadian citizens. What is to be the situation in their case? If the parents of Canadian citizens come here in their fifties and sixties, are they to be denied citizenship if they are not able to develop language facility in one or the other of our official languages?

● (2020)

I ask hon. members to think of the people they know from their experience, and in their community, who have been excellent citizens in their country and yet may not have mastered the ability to speak or communicate in one or the other of our official languages. This seems to be a foolhardy insensitive extension of what in many instances has been a sensible language policy. I urge the minister to give some consideration to the special kind of hardship that may be created by building this kind of inflexibility into this new act.

Finally, there has been some discussion about whether citizenship is a privilege, responsibility, or right. I believe it is all three. Citizenship creates a greater sense of being a part of this country, of being anxious to play a constructive role in it and, indeed, of being willing to sacrifice to make this country a better place in which to live.

Perhaps most of us in this House are fortunate because we were born here. Those who have chosen, sometimes at great personal cost to themselves, to leave their country, culture, language, and religion to establish a new home here have done so with the hope of bettering their situation. They have come with the idea to maximize their contribution to this country. Canada would not be the country it is today without their assistance, their contribution, and their place with us. In this instance we should be attempting in every way possible to make citizenship for them more of a reality, with more of a hope in that reality.

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock): Mr. Speaker, this bill, which generally speaking is an omnibus bill, reminds me of some of the old home remedies we had to take when we were kids. The hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Andres) will remember some of these.

A remedy for the common cold was turpentine. Because no one liked to take a dose of turpentine, they put it on a spoonful of sugar. That was supposed to make it good. You held your nose, swallowed it, and it was supposed to cure you. Certain elements of this bill remind me of that kind of home remedy.

There are some good parts in this bill which we accept, and in fact welcome. At the same time some are rather hard to swallow. Some of the redeeming inclusions in this bill are obvious. For example, in clause 10(2) there is finally some recognition given to the equality of women in the area of citizenship. Legislation that recognizes their equality is long overdue.

There is another aspect of the bill which makes the machinery for acquiring citizenship a little more accessible. The court system will be a little more available. That is a commendable feature of the bill. At the same time the court system should not be depreciated. The trappings and majesty of the court system should not be a kind of travelling affair. You must not take away from the wholesome austerity that exists in the court system. On the one hand the bill provides, and ought to provide for those amenities. At the same time it ought to make the process of citizenship a meaningful experience.

There are some major flaws which deserve attention. They raise questions in our minds. If these features are as important as the government feels, why were they so long coming forward? Was there great public pressure? Were people writing to the government asking when it was finally going to reduce the waiting period to become a citizen? Has the Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner) been deluged with mail from immigrants who have come here in the past five years complaining that this is too long to wait? I hardly think that is the case. I doubt there are any members of this House who have been deluged with this kind of mail.

Many people, even some overseas, were aware that this bill was in the offing. On an overseas parliamentary trip some months ago one hon. member found that people were aware that this bill was coming forward. They were asking when C-20 was coming to the floor of the House. I had to look to see what C-20 was, but those who were thinking of coming to Canada were aware that it was in the offing. Therefore the first question I must ask is why the government has now decided to bring this bill forward.

Second, what is the purpose of wanting to reduce the waiting period from five to three years? If the government has some cogent, logical arguments that will explain the reason for this reduction, we ought to hear them. To this point, the government has not presented any such arguments.

This seems to be the day when everything is instant. We have instant unemployment insurance. I am thankful that the government has brought legislation forward to take away some of the instant quality of unemployment insurance. We have instant welfare, and almost instant LIP