

Canada Elections Act

might hold on long enough to this reciprocal aspect of the British subject in one country and another so we might be able to explore the possibility of extending it throughout the Commonwealth. It is in six or eight countries now, and I think this might be worth while.

I was impressed by Mr. Stewart MacLeod's Canadian Press article about the Prime Minister's new concern with the Commonwealth. This might be an avenue whereby we could foster a healthier sense of internationalism within the Commonwealth. I do not like this suggestion that people are espousing about second-class citizenship and third-class citizenship. They are saying that one group of people is better than another. I think this is unworthy.

The problem of the British subject provision is not that anyone thinks he is better and therefore entitled to something but rather that by law they were given a certain status. As I mentioned the other day, it is only recently that there was such an animal as a Canadian citizen. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was not a Canadian citizen, he was a British subject. Robert Borden was not a Canadian citizen but surely no one would be foolish enough to say that Robert Borden was not a Canadian. In fact, he was the architect of our independence. So it was 70 years before we set up a vehicle whereby people became Canadian citizens. One would find, I think if he looked over the roll of British subjects, that a lot of them do not bear the names such as Thompson, Forrestall, Macquarrie or MacRae. They get the franchise because at one time there were only British subjects.

I do not think there is any reason a country must freeze forever rights which were granted in the past. I would not hold to that opinion. Therefore I believe what the bill purports or suggests is in fact a better solution. What the hon. member for Matane would have us do in fact would be to retroactively divest people of rights which were given them by this country, rights which they had the right to believe would be extended to them. I do not like the idea of reaching back and taking from people a right which they have assumed was given them in good faith.

I am sure that the bill and the committee deal with this in a much less drastic and hurtful way than does the amendment of the hon. member for Matane. It would be regrettable if we should say today that this right is gone and there is no chance of these people recovering that right which they once had.

I heard a very fine speech the other day by the hon. member for Kamloops when he spoke about his people. He spoke about the length of time it took before they were extended the franchise. We know that in Canada today there is great soul-searching about the rights of his people. While I do not pretend to be an expert on all the ramifications, it seems to me that one of the elements which constantly comes through is the fact that many of the Indian people believe that a word given them has not been honoured. I would not want to be a party to dishonouring a word which had been given to any group of people in this country.

So I would say, let us find a reasonable way of dealing with this situation. Let us not abruptly disenfranchise people in this rather cruel and heartless way, because you do not really trot out your Canadianism with this particular device. Surely none of us is sticking out his chest and proving his Canadianism by taking from a group of those among us rights which were properly given them.

I must apologize to the hon. member for Trois-Rivières because apparently I created a source of amusement for him the other day through a misunderstanding. He said he was amused when I told the House about the wisdom of our forefathers. Actually the English expression "in their wisdom" is a figure of speech which quite often indicates that the person using that figure of speech does not think so much of the wisdom of these people.

The hon. member also went on to say that many young people today do not really believe that the older people are that wise. I tell him that young people in every age and of every generation have expressed the same point of view. I would not for one moment suggest that our ancestors in this place were any wiser than we are and, God help us, they were not any more foolish than we are. We are living in an age when we can get to the moon but cannot get to the heart of many of our cities. We can manufacture the finest instruments but we cannot seem to depollute our atmosphere. I am not sure that all wisdom resides either in the past or in the present. I am not invoking the wisdom of people in the past; I am invoking a fact of life. Our election laws were geared in this way and we are now dealing with what one might call the ethical and moral fallout of decisions which were made previously. I think we must deal justly with the people involved.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question of my hon. friend? I should like to