

Canada Elections Act

have been away for some time on parliamentary business. I have had the privilege of hearing part of the discussion this afternoon. I feel so strongly about what I have heard that I wish to express my personal opinion on the matter now under discussion. I have no hesitation in saying that I completely agree with the point of view so admirably put forward by the hon. member for Coast Chilcotin. The hon. member made reference to Canadian citizenship. This really hit me hard, because I have always felt that I am a Canadian citizen. Yet this Spring when my passport ran out—I have a green passport, a special passport, as issued to all Members of Parliament—I discovered that because of a strange system of bureaucracy and regulation requiring that certain things had to be done, it could not be renewed without delay.

I have been a resident of the city of Vancouver for 60 years.

Mr. Deachman: You are a Canadian.

Mr. Winch: You think so?

Mr. Deachman: Yes, you are.

Mr. Winch: I have been a resident of Vancouver for 60 years; I was a member of the British Columbia Legislature for 20 years, during which time I was leader of the opposition for 12 years. I served in the armed forces for three years and I have been a member of the House of Commons for 17 years. I have had a green special passport for 17 years. And when I applied for a renewal of my passport this spring, I was told I had to prove I was a Canadian citizen.

Mr. Deachman: So did I. So did everybody in this chamber.

Mr. Winch: Let me finish. Then, I had to wait for a month to get this card with my photograph on it before I could get a passport. Believe it or not, it hit me pretty hard that I had to prove, after all these years, with the record and career I have mentioned, that I was a Canadian citizen before my passport could be renewed.

Apply these circumstances to the change now proposed, the amendment put forward to the Elections Act. For 103 years, a British subject resident in Canada for one year was recognized as a Canadian citizen with all the rights of Canadian citizenship, including the right to vote, without having to produce a card with a picture on it to prove Canadian citizenship. Not thousands, not hundreds of thou-

sands, but, I would say, millions of people in Canada not only believe themselves to be Canadian citizens but have been recognized as Canadian citizens with the right to vote, the right to become members of provincial legislatures and of Parliament. It would be a most retrograde step to say to these people, pioneers of Canada, that just because they are British subjects they no longer have any rights in Canada as far as voting is concerned unless they prove they are Canadian citizens by carrying a citizenship card. I sincerely hope that stupidity will not go so far as to lead us to tell these people that unless they hold an official card they cannot vote in the next election or in the elections which will follow.

[*Translation*]

Mr. De Bané: On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman. I am the one who moved the motion to amend the bill. I believe every hon. member is discussing the amendment in good faith.

I will not tolerate that an amendment submitted by me should be termed stupid by an hon. member, whatever his worth and his record.

I respect the hon. member and I venture to believe that he also wants the debate to remain on a level worthy of all hon. members.

[*English*]

Mr. Winch: I wish the hon. member had thought of that when he introduced his motion, one which affects people who have been Canadian citizens upon all occasions and in respect of whom I think there should be no suggestion that they should lose their rights, or their understanding of being Canadian citizens by reason of a change in the Elections Act. I am sorry if I hurt the hon. member's feelings by saying I thought the amendment was stupid. If he does not like that word, I will put it this way: I regret that the suggestion we are considering should have been made by any Member of the House of Commons because it shows disrespect to millions of people in this country who have always felt they were Canadian citizens without requiring any card. I sincerely hope that in their wisdom, acumen and understanding the members of this House will take no action to alter the Elections Act so as to prevent these people from exercising their rights and privileges as Canadian citizens unless they carry a particular authentication. If, in the years ahead, it might be thought desirable to bring about a change in present policy, I hope it