

Canadian Citizenship Act

CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING COURTS,
APPLICATIONS, CERTIFICATES,
ETC.

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration) moved the second reading of Bill No. 256, to amend the Canadian Citizenship Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I think I should make a few very brief observations about this bill on the second reading. It in no way purports to change anything fundamental in the Canadian Citizenship Act because the government does not feel that anything fundamental needs to be changed in that act. In fact, we feel that the act as it was conceived in 1946 and placed on the statute books by a previous parliament has worked extraordinarily well. But from time to time it has been necessary to make what I would describe as housekeeping amendments, amendments that are required because of certain special circumstances that arise.

The bill contains two types of such amendments. There are three sections dealing with matters of substance, but I intend to ask one of my colleagues to have one section stricken out because I have changed my mind about the advisability of proceeding with it as a result of the deliberations in another place.

Mr. Fulton: Would you tell us which one?

Mr. Pickersgill: That is section 2. The first of the other two sections has to do with a very limited number of Indians and Eskimos who many years ago moved from Alaska into the adjacent parts of the Arctic coast of Canada and have been residing there ever since but who, because there were no immigration officers, were never landed and therefore have never properly become Canadian citizens. This sad state of affairs came to the notice of the department recently and we came to the conclusion that everyone in the house would feel that something ought to be done about it.

The other section has to do primarily with Canadians who, living outside the country and being in the service of the country, either in the armed forces, in the federal public service or in the service of the provinces, contract marriages and have children, one or both, and whose status we feel should be recognized somewhat differently from the way in which it is recognized at the present time.

There are five other sections of the bill which are procedural and have to do with the providing of somewhat more convenient

facilities for the acquiring in Canada, and in one case abroad, of Canadian citizenship. We have found as a result of the experience of the last two or three years, since there have been a considerable number of immigrants who have been in the country long enough to have acquired domicile to qualify for that citizenship, that many people living in remote parts of the country have found it very difficult to make three separate visits to the courts that are appointed under the present act, and the purpose of these procedural changes is primarily to deal with that situation. There are some further details in the bill that I can explain very much better, if they need any explanation, in committee, sir.

Mr. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, the bill now before us was discussed quite fully in the other place earlier this session, the report of their proceedings being contained in the Senate *Hansard* for Wednesday, April 18. After the bill received second reading in that house it was referred to their standing committee on immigration and colonization and, as the minister has pointed out, it was as a result of the deliberations both in their house and in their committee that the minister was led to recommend the deletion of section 2 of the bill.

As he himself has said, the bill is more by way of a tidying up process than by way of introducing any change in principle, so that we feel there is really nothing that requires to be said on second reading as to the merits of the bill itself. There are one or two comments we wish to make in committee and a consideration we shall be advancing as to a suggested change and the reason therefore in one of the sections, but we will deal with that when we are in committee.

The only general observation I should like to make now is that we are glad to note that progress is being made in providing a satisfactory and speedy method. When I say "speedy" I mean a satisfactory and efficient method of dealing with applications for citizenship, one which produces the result without undue delay but not one which de-emphasizes the solemnity of the occasion. The most outstanding examples, of course, are the recently constituted special courts in Toronto and Montreal. Having said that, however, I would make the general observation that, as one never achieves perfection, we believe there is still room for more to be done in connection with emphasizing the solemnity of the occasion, the desirability of obtaining Canadian citizenship and the advantages and duties which follow from that process. I recognize that