

Canada Elections Act

British feeling in that amendment, I would be the first to reject it. But I suggest this is a positive amendment, a new step toward the goal contemplated by the former Prime Minister of Canada and every new member of Parliament, whatever his ethnic origin.

We want Canada to be for Canadians, with no distinction whatsoever between those belonging to the two founding races and those who left their countries to come here and live with us.

We should not create second-class citizens or privileged social classes in Canada, but we should rather try, as far as possible, to make every citizen equal and make them understand that, to be able to vote at the next general election, they will have to be Canadian citizens and be at least 18 years of age.

● (11:20 a.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, I just came in and listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. gentleman who preceded me, whose eloquence and persuasiveness usually bring forth a favourable reaction from me. But this time I think he will allow me to disagree with the viewpoint he expressed. I think that Canadians as a whole will resist what has become apparent in the actions of this government, namely, in the face of difficult economic conditions the like of which we have not seen in this country—

Mr. Cafik: Since you were in office.

Mr. Diefenbaker: —the government brings before Parliament matters such as this that can only divide the Canadian people further as a whole.

The hon. member referred to second-class citizenship, against which I have always stood throughout the years and still stand. But it has become apparent week after week and month after month that this government is determined to remove any vestige of our British tradition in this country, indeed, to a degree that would have been shocking to French-Canadians such as Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Right Hon. Mr. Lapointe, whose speeches can be read not only with interest today but with value.

I say to the government, is it not about time that you put a stop to the accelerating rate by which our British tradition is being swept aside in this country? So far as those of the French race are concerned, I do not want to point out again but sometimes it has to be

repeated that in my own province in 1922, when it was unpopular to do so, believing that the French language had its place in the schools of Saskatchewan constitutionally because of its existence in the territorial days, I acted for two French-Canadian trustees on an appeal. They were prosecuted and convicted for permitting the use of the French language in a school to a degree that was not considered appropriate under the education act. I took the appeal. I was widely criticized for having done so, but I was successful on that appeal, and any hon. member that wants to look up the record of almost 50 years ago will find that in the case Boutin and Ethier I took that stand and have consistently followed it through the years.

When I was Prime Minister I realized that French Canada was not receiving its fair share of appointments to the senior ranks in the civil service or in external affairs. One of the first directions given was that there should be a realization that those of French origin were not receiving their fair share of top level appointments, and action was taken accordingly. Furthermore, to make Parliament bilingual, as it was under the BNA Act, we brought in the provision whereby simultaneous interpretation was adopted. These things had not taken place under Liberal administrations. We also made other changes in order to ensure that French-Canadians should not be in a secondary position with regard to citizenship.

I know the meaning of second-class Canadianism, and if you read my speeches through the years when I was in opposition you will find that I brought before Parliament over and over again the need for action to be taken to ensure that those were proud of having "Canada" on their shoulder straps in the days of war would not immediately become separated into various racial origins on their return. Back in August of 1944 I dealt with this matter at length during the course of a debate in the House, and the Right Hon. Mackenzie King who was Prime Minister said that when the war was over he would join the hon. member for Lake Centre, as I then was, and others of like mind to bring about these changes so that we would build a true Canadianism.

I say to the government: Remove this amendment now; do not continue a course that is becoming clearer day by day.

I do not want to speak at length—I have no notes before me—but I speak from the heart when I say that under this administration and