

longer be properly designated by the term British subject. Furthermore, in recognizing this status the bill provides that the special status accorded to British subject in any other Canadian legislation shall henceforth be applicable to all persons who are citizens of the Commonwealth.

Canadians returning home

Mr. Speaker, let us now look briefly at several measures which make Bill C-20 a more liberal piece of legislation than the current Citizenship Act. One such provision will make it possible for Canadian citizens who have been residing abroad and have lost their citizenship in one way or another over time to resume Canadian citizenship with one year's residence after they have become landed in Canada. It did not seem fair that a person who had qualified as a Canadian citizen and had resided here for many years, and had for some reason lived abroad for a while, would have to go through a long process all over again on his return to Canada. Consequently, we have made a change. Such a person may normally resume his citizenship if he again becomes landed and resides here for one year.

A second measure which liberalizes the approach to citizenship is the removal of the requirement that an unsuccessful applicant must wait two years before a new application can be considered. A provision of the present act, that waiting period may well have had an intimidating effect on potential citizens and in certain cases it may even have created hardship. If a person is genuinely mistaken when he applies at a time when he presumes he has achieved qualification, let us say in knowledge or language proficiency, there is no justification for withholding a subsequent application for a minimum period of two years. Therefore, in the proposed legislation the restriction has been removed.

Citizenship waiting period

Another of these liberal provisions is the reduction in the waiting period from five years to three. Rather surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, this is a change which has caused some discussion. We have received some letters claiming that people cannot acquire a genuine understanding of this country in anything less than five years. We have received

others claiming that all immigrants are automatically going to become citizens after three years. Of course, neither of these contentions is true. On the contrary, some immigrants may want to wait 25 or even 30 years before acquiring citizenship. But for the many immigrants who do want to apply for citizenship as soon as their residency requirement has been fulfilled, five years seems an inordinately long time to wait.

Looking at the minimum waiting period, we felt that it was arbitrary and unfair to penalize those who feel themselves ready to apply before a five-year term is up. After all, we live in a society where highly sophisticated systems of telecommunications not only put us instantaneously in touch with events across the country but link us to events in the far corners of the earth and even beyond. The fact that such a wealth of information is so readily available to every potential citizen is a cogent argument for the reduction of the waiting period.

Good character requirement scrapped
Another change which is proposed in the bill is the removal of the requirement that an applicant be "of good character".

...I would now like to outline our reasoning. I said a little earlier that the fundamental change in the bill is that citizenship is made a right upon compliance with certain specific statutory requirements. If the seemingly simple notion of good character were to be retained, therefore, it would have to be somehow rendered into a measurable requirement. But that exercise is not quite as simple as determining a person's age or requiring a look at a birth certificate or immigration landing date, or even verifying the applicant's knowledge of Canada or of one of its official languages. Even these latter two can be tested uniformly. Language and knowledge tests abound in schools and universities and can be used as models. But character is not so easy; it is more nebulous; more likely to be left to arbitrary appreciation.

We have examined the idea of leaving the task, as at present, to our citizenship judges and letting them determine whether an applicant is of "good character". The problem there is that the phrase itself is open to so vast a range of interpretation as to make it

no more than a subjective evaluation on the part of the citizenship judge, and thus to render its application as a standard requirement open to serious controversy. I am sure that if I ask each honourable member individually and privately how he or she would define the term "good character", I will get as many answers as there are individuals in the House. While citizenship judges may have interpreted the phrase with responsibility and good sense, nevertheless the fact remains that the application of the requirement has necessarily been an arbitrary thing, especially with regard to any distinction between public and private behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, leaving aside our technical problems for the moment, I ask the House to consider why we should try to test character in such a manner. After all, what is citizenship? It is the act of participating in a political system. Participation in Canada's economic and social systems are granted by residency, by simply being here legally. Very roughly stated, Canadian citizenship enables one to do several things: to vote; to run for public office; to carry a Canadian passport; to exercise certain activities where citizenship is a statutory prerequisite. It also allows one to enjoy an almost indefinable sense of belonging to, contributing to and participating in Canada. The conferring of citizenship is an enabling gesture on the part of the Government to lift all barriers which stand in the way of the full political participation of an individual.

Citizenship is not a reward for good behaviour. It is not a prize to be awarded only to the more meritorious. The native born do all the things I listed a moment ago without any test of character. I have reached the conclusion that the broad character requirement in the present act is indefinable, unrealistic and unfair. As practised in the past and in any known design, it punishes, sometimes wrongfully, human behaviour not punishable by law. For these reasons, in Bill C-20 we have turned to the law. Instead of the nebulous phrase "good character", we have set down specific criteria which can be invoked without fear of abuse.

Under the new bill, certain sections of the Criminal Code and the Narcotics Control Act will provide these neces-