

Citizenship

When the minister closes debate on second reading I hope he will explain in detail the motivation behind this legislation and what induced him to substitute one arbitrary period of residency for another. Finally, what is the government's position with respect to clause 5? We need to know it, in order to study the bill adequately in committee and again in the House when it returns for third reading.

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, a man's citizenship was of utmost importance to him in the days of Greece and Rome. Those concepts of citizenship have guided many nations, including our own, and ought to guide us as we change the laws pertaining to citizenship.

Most in this House know of the great status attaching to Roman citizenship in the days of the Roman empire. A man's status as a citizen of Rome was an honour which made itself felt in every part of the then known world. Let us remember these lessons of history. Then, after the Roman empire, came the British Commonwealth of Nations. If you were a citizen of the Commonwealth you were a citizen of the United Kingdom, and had the right to move freely within the British Commonwealth. That was an important advantage and made available to the British citizen, or Commonwealth citizen, important services at home and abroad. Let us keep these examples in mind when considering laws to change citizenship status. Let us, at the same time, reflect on the value of our citizenship.

I hope the government will not be inflexible, will not insist on passing the bill, clause by clause, exactly as written. I hope amendments will be moved. Although certain parts of it are a step in the right direction, other parts of the omnibus bill are not as beneficial to Canadian citizens as they might be.

The hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) went to some length to explain aspects of the bill which he thought were good. Now I must raise certain questions. Actually my first question was raised by the previous speaker, who referred to clause (5)(1)(b)(i) which, purportedly, has to do with students. He did not find its language acceptable. How will that language apply, for example, to refugees, a large number of whom Canada has accepted? I do not quarrel with this. Such people have been allowed entry. But what about the many other people who are constantly being discovered in Canada, who have not come in legally in the proper fashion? Will this clause apply to them, as well as to students?

My reason for asking is simple. In order to become a landed immigrant, one must apply abroad. This means that those who did not apply abroad for entry are at present illegally in Canada, regardless of their present status as dishwashers, students, or anything else. Any provision allowing such people to apply for landed immigrant status within Canada negates this legislation, which says that the application must be made outside Canada. There is an inherent contradiction in our legislation in this area which we must consider carefully. Apparently one act of parliament virtually negates the effect of the other proposed legislation. I do not think that is intentional.

Mr. Benjamin: What has that to do with citizenship?

Mr. McCain: Almost without exception we are citizens of Canada either because we emigrated or because our

ancestors came here. Most of us are descendants of immigrants to this country, immigrants from one part of the world. There are few exceptions. Those who came to Canada made this a fine country. Therefore we have a responsibility to those who are in Canada, and to those who are or will be applying for citizenship.

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Citizenship is not a right of any individual other than by birth. It is not a right which has to be granted because an individual makes application to come to our shores. It is in fact a privilege. It is a privilege which has ministerial discretion to guide how and when he can grant this extension of privilege called citizenship.

The purpose of a term of eligibility is obvious. It is necessary for the country granting citizenship to have some time to appraise the individual who has come, and to determine whether in fact that person should be given his citizenship. This should be regardless of his linguistic capabilities and regardless of his knowledge of our geography, but certainly not regardless of whether he is prepared to assume the responsibilities of citizenship and whether he is in fact a builder who will add to our structure of Canada.

Five years is not too long to assess this. We can show many cases in this country where people who have come to our shores for what appeared to be the intention of being Canadians have in fact become the centre of some of the areas of discord in this country, to put it mildly, which have caused great concern to Canadian citizens at large.

It is of particular importance at this moment in time that the government should give very careful consideration to the five year term. Again I refer to some of the people who have come here under forced circumstances, whom we have accepted under forced circumstances, and who should prove to us that they want to be Canadian citizens and a part of this nation. They did not come here of their own volition. They came here because of expulsion or to escape prosecution, and because we opened our doors. That prosecution may have been from a government of any flavour in this world because we have not been discriminatory in the acceptance of refugees into our country.

I submit that this nation and the minister in charge of this department need some time to evaluate some of the people who have come to this country. It is quite all right for some to say that this is being discriminatory. However, not a single person has ever said to me that he should have obtained his citizenship in five years.

I come from a community which in the last 40 years has received probably 25 per cent of its population as a result of immigration. Not a single one of them has ever complained to me about the period of time required to acquire citizenship.

There is another facet that, on behalf of the immigrant applying for citizenship, should be carefully considered. The clause which says you cannot have dual citizenship in Canada eliminates the possibility of being a Canadian and American citizen, a Canadian and a British citizen, or a Canadian and a French citizen. That is a trend everywhere in the world.