

Canada Elections Act

years before being eligible to vote, or whether we say that people who come to Canada are eligible after only one year; I am content with either proposition. I contend that all people in Canada should be treated equally, be they of British, French or any other origin.

In recent years the pattern of immigration to Canada has changed. Large numbers are coming to cities like Montreal, Toronto and other cities in Ontario from countries like Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. In the recent past substantial numbers have come to Canada from the Asian countries. I ask whether there is any member of this House who would say to these people: "You are second or third-class citizens. Certain people who come to this country can vote in elections after a stay of one year, whereas you have to wait five years or more"? I hope no one in this House would suggest that. If that is the case, no one should propose that some people should have to wait five years for the vote whereas other people need wait only one year.

I close by saying I am prepared to vote for any motion made by any member of the House that treats all people equally when it comes to voting at election time. I do not care whether these people are white, yellow, red, black or brown, whether they are British, French, Scandinavian, Greek or Dutch. Equally, I am prepared to vote against any proposal giving special status and rights to a particular group.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Chairman, I should just like to make one comment on the remarks made by our colleague from Saint-Denis and to ask one specific question on the amendment before the committee. I speak not as a member of one of the two founding races; I belong to neither, though my name might give the impression that I do. I was not even born in Canada. Nevertheless, I am proud to call myself and to be a Canadian.

• (12:10 p.m.)

However, the point I want to answer in a very reasonable way, in relation to the suggestion that we are being unfair as far as the past is concerned, is that by this amendment a group of Canadians are being told that according to the law as it stands now and has been in the past, they are not Canadian citizens. I do not agree with the statement of the hon. member for Saint-Denis that the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek can take out citizenship if he wants to, because he should not have to.

[Mr. Orlikow.]

Therefore I think this amendment is wrong because I believe everyone who has been in the country under the regulations and the laws that have existed in the past should have these full rights that are due him. There ought to be some better way of making sure that all Canadians up to this point should be what the law has said they have been and what they thought they were. I think that is a reasonable answer.

This amendment is inadequate from this standpoint because I think everyone at this time who has been here and is technically and legally a Canadian citizen in the sense that he belongs to Canada should continue to have those rights which he has exercised in the past. He should not have to take action such as many Canadians are now having to do. This amendment is inadequate because it does not really fill the need. I am not talking about the broader principle of the bill. On that basis I agree with the hon. member who has just spoken, that all Canadians are equal and we must regard them as such. This is another point relating to the new legislation as far as the future is concerned but which does not really relate to the discussion on this particular amendment.

Mr. Macquarrie: Mr. Chairman, this is the first time we have been in the committee in the morning and perhaps that is the reason the debate is a bit more stimulating and aggressive than it has been on previous afternoons. I do not want to repeat what I said last week. I do think that this is the one amendment of the five which would actually be hurtful to our whole cause. I think it should be opposed because it does that which I think is not good, it diminishes the electorate and would have the effect of lowering the number of people who would participate in the franchise.

I am very much impressed by the fact that the new nations of the Caribbean Commonwealth as they set up their new countries were generous and considerate enough to reciprocate to Canadians there the rights people from the British West Indies resident in Canada obtain under the British subject provision. I do not want to be a party to deleting from the electoral rolls of Canada the very fine people from the Caribbean Commonwealth who are making their homes with us at the present time.

I am not in favour of anything which narrows the franchise. Our role should be to broaden it. As I said the other day, I hope we