

Canada Elections Act

discussion has shown that the members of this House are trying to find a better way, if that is possible, in which the various people who make up our population can stand in some kind of approximate equality before our laws, particularly with regard to the important matter of voting in our elections.

I suggest that the search for absolute justice, which may give the appearance of treating everyone alike, can bring about unjust results. The point has been well made by several speakers that the people of this country have a differing status and differing rights which result from our history and the development of our laws over the years. I have no hesitation in saying that if this particular amendment is passed it will not accomplish a great national purpose of achieving equality between the various sections of our population, but rather it will have a punitive and discriminatory effect against a very large and important part of our population.

The hon. member for Saint-Denis has stated several times in the course of this discussion that if he could be persuaded that the adoption of this proposal will have a divisive effect, he will not lend his support to it. He appears not to have been convinced by the responses made by members opposite. Perhaps he will be more disposed to look more carefully at my opinion which is that this will have a divisive effect, and for that reason is to be deplored.

Many points have been made in this debate. It would be an imposition on hon. members who have sat through this discussion to repeat these points at this stage. One thing should be said by way of emphasizing what the Minister without Portfolio in charge of the Canadian Citizenship Act said earlier this afternoon. While this discussion has been going on I have been looking at the Canadian Citizenship Act and the various provisions contained in it relating to immigrants from the United Kingdom who are British subjects now resident in Canada. It occurred to me from this cursory survey of the statute, as the minister suggested, that it stands very clearly in need of study, revision and clarification.

I make the practical point that if the amendment of the hon. member for Matane is adopted, there will be a very confused situation at the time of any enumeration. Many people who have lived in this country for a long time would be uncertain as to their position. That appears to be a practical reason why we should not make any radical change of the type that has been proposed.

[Mr. Blair.]

I wish to reiterate a point which has been made many times by other speakers in this debate. There has to be a measure of justice, tolerance and respect between all sections of our population. We will not achieve this justice, tolerance and respect if we attempt to pass a law which is directed against a very substantial group in the population. There is no question in my mind that if this amendment is passed, it will have the effect of taking away rights which have been exercised by a large number of people in Canada for a very long time.

It will have the effect of depriving this important group of people of their franchise. I have been thinking about these people during the course of this discussion. They have contributed much to our country. Many of them have fought in our wars and many of their children have fought in our wars. I know of several widows whose husbands and sons were killed. We must be very careful before we say to these people that for technical reasons you are not Canadians like the rest of us, and you must go through some special procedure in order to vote as you have done in previous elections.

This is an unjust type of suggestion. It will strike many people as unfair because it has an element of injustice and unfairness about it. It is clearly predictable that the adoption of this resolution will have a divisive effect. It will be a reflection on this Parliament. It will be harmful to the country. For these reasons I hope this particular amendment will be defeated.

Mr. Prud'homme: May I ask a question? Does the hon. member believe that the fact that we want to Canadianize our institutions is divisive?

Mr. Blair: we are continually engaged in an attempt to make living in this country more acceptable to every part of the population. I suppose the word "Canadianize" applies to that. I can only reply by repeating my argument that no good purpose will be accomplished if in the process of making a change which one group thinks is important it alienates, infuriates and has a punitive effect against another section of the population.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

• (4:20 p.m.)

Mr. Harold E. Winch (Vancouver East): Mr. Chairman, I regret that I have not been here for all of this debate. I