

*Citizenship*

Although I suppose we all take this position too often I believe it is almost arrogant for those of us who are alive today to consider that we are more intelligent, more perceptive, that we learn more quickly than our predecessors, and that therefore now we can learn in three years what it took people five years to learn previously.

I suggest that is a very weak foundation upon which to base a change. It is a change that is very fundamental. We do not automatically hand someone Canadian citizenship papers at the border. The five-year period evolved through much history. There was much experience which caused us to establish the five-year period. It seems to me that we should have very good evidence before we tamper with that history and tradition and bring about a change in something this serious which represents an obstacle to Canadian citizenship. We require much better evidence than has been provided by the minister during his speech at second reading. I have very serious reservations about this. I would find it exceedingly difficult to support the bill on that basis.

I do not intend to go into any great detail in respect of the other features of the bill. One of the pleasant duties I have performed—and I am sure this is the case with other members—is attend citizenship court in my city from time to time. I have found the experience enjoyable, rewarding, and stimulating.

The emotion that is evident on those occasions is certainly infectious. Every time I have attended one of these courts I have come away feeling a little more proud to be a Canadian. I have felt a real sense of warmth toward those persons who participated in the ceremony and who became Canadian citizens on that day. Therefore as a result of those experiences I enjoyed, as a member of parliament I am very reluctant to suggest concurrence in the amendments to these procedures that would tend to take away the dignity from the Canadian citizenship ceremony and procedures. These procedures and traditions are not carved in stone forever. No one suggests that. However, they are traditions. We are the custodians of our history and it seems to me that before we start changing in any great manner these procedures and traditions which have been established, we should have very good cause.

Quite frankly, from listening to the minister and reading the remarks of those who have spoken on second reading in support of this bill, I find I am still unable to reach the conclusion that sufficient evidence has been provided to justify these changes.

**Mr. W. C. Scott (Victoria-Haliburton):** Mr. Speaker, as one member of the committee that toured our country trying to assess the mood of the people with respect to what our citizenship and immigration policy should be I am pleased to add my comments to this debate. The members of the committee found that it was not as easy to make that assessment as some people might have thought when we set out. It is already obvious we will not find it any easier to obtain a consensus on the recommendations set forth in this bill.

It is well known to almost everyone that our committee was hard-pressed at times to conduct our investigations in an orderly and sane manner. We were often subjected to harassment and abuse by special interest groups and by

[Mr. Andre.]

extremists of every possible persuasion. I would hate to think that even a single recommendation we are now being asked to consider was made as a result of this extreme pressure, or to satisfy the demands of a small but vocal minority faction in our country.

I must begin my remarks by saying I cannot accept some of these proposals for changing or upgrading our immigration laws. In some cases I find the recommendations are inconsistent. In others I feel we are placing too low a value on that precious thing we call Canadian citizenship. It has never really been difficult for people who meet the minimum requirements for landed immigrant status in Canada to qualify for and acquire Canadian citizenship. In fact when I set out with the committee to sample public opinion on this subject I did not consider we had a mandate to make it easier for people to come to Canada or acquire Canadian citizenship.

I understand that 750,000 people applied to come to Canada in 1974. What would we do with all these people if we had an open-door policy? In respect of immigration and citizenship, just making it easy is not the same as making it fair. If we are to consider only the aspect of fair and equitable immigration policy, we must first consider what would be fair to the people already in Canada. We are not, after all, thinking or speaking of the Canada of 200 years ago, or even 100 years ago. We are speaking of a Canada that is already threatened by overcrowding, a country that has a high level of unemployment, a country that is already beset with tensions and animosities based on race, colour, creed, language, and a country which has all the problems that exist in countries from which people would like to emigrate.

I cannot agree with the proposal that would lower the requirement for residence in order to acquire Canadian citizenship. Five years is not too long for any person to wait to qualify for citizenship. It is not too long a time for any person to be asked to live in our society and to learn why we are the way we are, and why we place such a high value on our citizenship status.

● (1730)

Switzerland, one of the most democratic countries, requires at least 12 years residence for citizenship. After all, when a landed immigrant is accumulating the required five years of residency, he is free to work and to live as though he were in fact a Canadian citizen, enjoying the same benefits and the same protections under our laws. I do not see any reason to reduce this requirement for residency. It has already been pointed out that while the requirement for five years residency is arbitrary, so is the proposed three year period arbitrary. Why should there not be an arbitrary period of residency just as there are arbitrary requirements with respect to the character of a prospective immigrant?

There are some proposed changes to the act which I can support, but most of these could and should have been made without the effort and expense of sending the Immigration Committee throughout the country.

For instance, the proposal to confer citizenship on a child who was born outside Canada where one or the other of the parents is a Canadian citizen simply recognizes a discrepancy in the immigration laws which should have