

Canada Elections Act

I will not attempt to bring the minister up to date on the debate that has taken place in the last hour or so, particularly the debate that took place the last time we were in committee on the bill, but it would be helpful if Canadians were able to understand the general direction of the thinking of the government in terms of future citizenship requirements, whether or not the present rules and regulations are going to be amended, or whether indeed any thought is being given to this question at all.

With regard to the amendment before the committee, I must say I am opposed to it, and I repeat the thoughts I started to express before lunch. If hon. members had taken the opportunity of reading the present Act, they might be able to comment on it a little more dispassionately. In this way, we might achieve a little more unity. I am sure that the very points that are giving rise to heat and to argument this afternoon were very much in the minds of the committee members when this legislation was before the committee.

The suggestion made by the hon. member for Ontario with respect to this particular provision has some merit, and the hon. member might wish to amend subclause (3) by substituting the words "All those persons" for the words "Every British subject".

The amendment before the committee seeks to achieve what perhaps most of us desire: it is the method of achieving that desire about which we seem to find some disagreement. Most hon. members are aware of the necessity to tidy up the approach taken by the standing committee to this particular problem, and the aspect of retroactivity leaves something to be desired as far as the phraseology is concerned.

The suggestion made by one of my friends to the left of me the other day has some merit, and if the members of the committee took cognizance of it we might be able quickly to dispose of the amendment now before the committee and to move on to a series of amendments that would allow the committee to put into legislative form many of the points that have been made in the debate this morning.

I contend that immigrants, particularly British subjects, should not simply be told once they have arrived in this country that we are sorry but the information they were given as to their right to vote is now incorrect, that we have decided to do something else. As members of the committee know, under the bill now before us a certain group

of individuals would be disenfranchised. Perhaps an amendment that would change the date of qualification from June 25, 1968 in subclause (3)(a) would correct the situation.

A number of suggestions have been made in respect of a time limit in this regard, and I have made my feelings known on this question. I should like to hear the views of the Minister without Portfolio. I urge the members of this committee not to support any amendment that would cause misunderstanding or hardship. It is quite evident, Mr. Chairman, that your committee was conscious of the necessity of putting this particular provision into some kind of order, particularly as far as those people who have chosen to come to Canada to live are concerned.

● (3:20 p.m.)

As I indicated, I must oppose the amendment we are considering now. I hope my remarks were not out of order and that hon. members will look at one amendment which I am certain is formally before us and another one which, if it is not formally before us, was certainly given to us for our consideration over the weekend. It does have the effect of preserving the right of those people who may come between now and the date of the next election to vote at subsequent elections. As a result of the advice we have given them, I suspect in many instances we have held out this right to them as an inducement to come and settle in Canada.

Mr. Stanbury: Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East for his interest in the Canadian Citizenship Act. I have mentioned that the Canadian Citizenship Act is under review. In recent weeks, I have been visiting every province in Canada consulting with leaders of citizens' organizations and others who are interested in citizenship law. I am not yet ready to make proposals to my colleagues as to what changes there should be in the law, but I hope to be able to do so shortly. I hope that my colleagues will agree there should be a bill on this subject before too long. The Act is outmoded, and I think it requires a great deal of improvement.

As hon. members may know, I have been interested in the subject now under discussion for some years. It has always been my contention that there should be equality of treatment in the Elections Act, as in all our laws, and that there should be no discrimination between people residing in Canada on the basis of their national origin. I think that is

[Mr. Forrestall.]