

Citizenship

The act as it now stands only permits the father to apply on behalf of a minor child so that the child may obtain citizenship. This has been changed so that either parent may make such an application. The same arrangement applies for adoptive parents. These are very progressive changes. There are other changes being made to the legislation that are important, but I think so far as women are concerned these highlight the concerns they have had.

The new provision to allow a person to apply for citizenship at 18 years of age instead of 25 years of age also is very progressive. This favourable change reflects the age of voting and the age of majority recognized in most laws of the land.

I should say, however, I am a little disappointed that the inequality in the voting age is not yet corrected in the Indian Act. Indian people still must wait until they are 21 years of age before they can legally vote in the band council elections conducted under the Indian Act. This is an injustice of which I hope the National Indian Brotherhood and other Indian organizations in the country will take heed, and endeavour to correct as soon as possible. I realize the ramifications involved, but I would say to my Indian brothers that this denial of rights to a large number of young potential Indian voters far outweighs any of the commitments that the organizations might have for the long-term plan of changes.

A bone of contention over the years regarding citizenship has been the term "British subject". This has been dealt with by a number of people here with much justification. I always felt uneasy about the term because in no way did I feel I was a British subject.

I can understand how people coming from many other lands must feel. To me the term "British subject" connotes that a person comes from Britain.

Some hon. Members: No!

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): I am stating my opinion. Do not shout no!

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I protest.

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): Then protest, but to me it also suggests that Canada is still a colony of Britain. As a person whose roots go pretty far back in this country I feel this is very unfair to people who come to Canada from other lands.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Surely you do not have such an inferiority complex.

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): How about the other way; I am sure no one should be treated as superior either. In the present law British subjects wishing to become Canadians must fulfill all the requirements necessary in respect of any other applicant, with two exceptions. First, the British subject does not have to be examined by a citizenship judge and, second, he does not have to attend a ceremony to take the oath of allegiance.

There will no longer be a privileged status for anyone. People wishing to become Canadian citizens will be treated the same regardless of where they come from.

[Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo).]

I was surprised to hear some of the opposition which came from the other side relating to the change in the act whereby a person could become a Canadian citizen in three years rather than five years. I must say I do not find any of the arguments put forward very convincing. The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) and others suggest that immigrants must have an adequate opportunity to adapt in economic as well as cultural and other ways before becoming citizens.

I was particularly surprised when my colleague, the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary, suggested that the only purpose of this change is political motivation by the government which is receiving a considerable amount of representation from newly arrived immigrants who have families in other parts of the world and want them here. I should say that I really cannot see in any way how this could reflect the political motivation of a party or affect the outcome of elections. The real motivation I see behind this change is purely a human one.

● (1610)

It must be a very difficult and emotional experience for people to decide to move from their homeland to another land. This is a very human experience, so I think that once mature people have made the mature decision that they want to become citizens of another country, why should we put them through the agony of having to wait five years? In many cases I feel that people must have made up their minds within three years, and three years is probably too long.

Mr. Epp: Why any time?

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): Why is there an objection about five years?

Mr. Epp: It is your argument.

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): This is a very progressive change, and I welcome it.

Some hon. members mentioned citizenship court judges. I have attended ceremonies where citizens have come before citizenship judges, and I want to commend the judges on the very dignified and professional manner in which they handle their courts.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): Some of my colleagues from both sides of the House have been citizenship court judges, and they do a tremendous job. They have played tremendous roles since this position was established. The reference in the bill to citizenship judges enhances their position, and so it should because theirs is a very important role.

In closing I should like to pay tribute to a number of private organizations in various parts of the country which help in the process of citizenship. In Kamloops it is the Soroptimist Club. These women make sure that those who receive their citizenship are made to feel very welcome. They do everything they can to help them adjust and to solve any problems, even after this waiting period of five years.