

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to be a little concerned about the slowness of the studies on government programs. I cannot believe that, in the present circumstances, there is a lack of personnel to work actively on these studies. I admit the minister has his problems but I cannot accept that on behalf of unemployed workers, of those whose benefit period is finished and who are now on welfare, as well as those who get absolutely nothing and keep hoping that these shipyards will soon be re-opened with contracts from the Department of National Defence. Could the minister tell the House whether he will bring pressure on the public servants of his department to complete these studies and finally ask for bids to put into practice what is supposed to be done before those workers are in real poverty? We must recognize one thing, that workers on the south shore and in the Lévis area are not all millionnaires, they are people who want to work. Could the minister tell the House whether he is really going to do something about these studies with a view to carrying out this project?

● (1432)

[English]

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, I am well aware of this. My friend, the member for Levis, has stated this in equally emphatic terms, and very consistently, over the past several months. I am certain pressure has been brought to bear to the extent that is feasible. You cannot put ships in for refit without the specifications being very tight. As all hon. members know from past experience, we are trying to improve that process. They will have to go to tender. We are hopeful that that can be done in the shortest possible period of time. I forget the exact date that we are aiming for, but in the case of ships of the Department of National Defence, one of our replenishment ships and some of our refitted destroyers, it would be late summer, early fall, before work could begin.

The government is also trying to find other ships that need to go in for refitting and special upgrading. That matter is being looked after by one of my colleagues who is not present today. The interests of the workers at Lauzon are very much in the heart and mind of this government.

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CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**RIGHT TO VOTE OF BRITISH SUBJECTS—EFFECT OF AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION**

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council. It concerns the Canada Elections Act. As thousands of Canadians are now finding out for the first time—British subjects, English, Scottish, Irish—that because they have not taken out Canadian citizenship as provided for under amendments brought in by this govern-

ment, they will be losing their right to vote. Many of them served in the armed forces.

Will the minister do something in order to bring about action in this regard, either to provide the widest possible circulation of the fact that the citizenship courts will be available immediately for those who wish to apply for Canadian citizenship so they may be registered as voters either during enumeration or on appeal? If there is insufficient time for this, would the minister give consideration to bringing in an amendment to the elections act to provide that the section in question, because information is not available to Canadians as a whole, is amended for the purpose of ensuring in this election that these people who voted in past elections, will have the right to cast their votes?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I will obviously pay careful attention to the representations made by the right hon. gentleman. I am not sure whether I have all the details in mind, but I believe that at the time the changes were made to the electoral system, it was to put every citizen in the country who had the same historical attachment to Canada on precisely the same footing. Therefore, it would be, on first consideration, difficult at this stage to propose amendments that might have the appearance of conferring upon one particular class of citizens a possibility that was not available to others who were in Canada at the same time. That is my recollection. However, I will look into the matter and see whether there is any basis for the second proposal which the hon. gentleman put forward.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is this. I can understand the argument advanced by the minister, and I appreciate its nature, but surely that does not cover the situation. The citizenship courts should now be given the opportunity and, indeed, enjoined to enable these people who, not knowing the law, find themselves in the thousands today in the position where they will be denied their right to vote. If the citizenship courts were now advised to allow applications, many of these people could secure their right to vote which should not be denied them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I did not fully clarify my intention in my first reply. I intend to draw this proposal to the attention of the Secretary of State with a view to accelerating the process of citizenship attainment, if that is at all possible under the circumstances.

ALLEGED UNFAIRNESS OF AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is on the question asked by the right hon. gentleman. The minister said that the purpose of the legislation was to bring everybody into the same position. I point out to the minister, as a preface to my question, that we are now dealing with people who have voted consistently, many of whom fought for this country and are now old age pensioners.