

*Canada Elections Act*

in Canada represented about 5.3 per cent of our population. This in turn represents about one million people or more living in Canada today who were born in the United Kingdom. About half of those would be on the electoral rolls. So we are looking at something in the neighbourhood of half a million people who were qualified as electors in 1968 by virtue of being British subjects. Who will have to take out Canadian citizenship in order to qualify after a five-year period? It will not be, as someone suggested, the older persons who came to Canada before December 31, 1941, because those people are automatically Canadian citizens under the Citizenship Act. Moreover, my amendment does not require that they go through any procedure with the citizenship court in order to demonstrate the fact of their citizenship. They are Canadian citizens, and they no more need produce a citizenship certificate than someone born in Canada is required to produce his birth certificate, unless he happens to be challenged at the polls on his qualification to vote. So proof of citizenship is not an immediate or first requirement in registering as an elector, although from our familiarity with the act we know that it may be if the matter is disputed.

At this stage I wonder if I may clear up a point that has troubled some hon. members. It has been expressed in several ways today but still does not appear to be quite clear. First of all, those who acquired citizenship by virtue of the Citizenship Act of 1947 are not required to take out citizenship today. They are required to give proof of their citizenship. They are required to get the little card to which the hon. member for Vancouver East referred. It is the equivalent of a birth certificate. When a Canadian citizen is asked to produce proof of citizenship, he produces his birth certificate for which he paid two dollars to the registration office in the province of his birth. A person not born in Canada can produce proof of his Canadian citizenship by sending \$2 to the citizenship court and obtaining a citizenship certificate. It does not cost \$10, as someone suggested this afternoon. It is not an amount that would be a burden even for an elderly citizen.

The bill is specific in saying that this is not an application for a grant of citizenship. Item 3 of the regulations says that where a Canadian citizen desires a certificate of citizenship, he shall file an application on the prescribed form with the registrar, which is a very simple procedure; it is quite different from going to the citizenship court, being examined

and making application for a grant of citizenship. So some things that have been said here this afternoon about citizenship and the rights of citizens, and about British subjects, have not really been in context with the act that is before us.

• (5:10 p.m.)

The amendment that I have is quite a simple one, Mr. Chairman, and meets the middle ground that all members want to meet in respect of this question. It minimizes the burden on these people making the transition and wishing to have their citizenship in good time for future elections, at the same time giving them an opportunity to vote under their old status as British subjects should an election be called within the next few years.

**Mr. Coates:** Mr. Chairman, in moving this amendment the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra has indicated what I find to be the most objectionable aspect of it, that is, that people who thought themselves citizens of Canada will now have to prove their citizenship. Some members seem to think there is nothing wrong with this. They believe it is quite all right that someone who has lived in this country since 1947 and believes himself to be a Canadian citizen will find, if this amendment goes through, that he is not unless he can meet the bureaucratic demands of this government to prove it. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra says this is not any different from an application for a birth certificate. I suggest that if he had talked to people who had the problem, he would not make that comparison.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Coates:** There is a great deal of difference between getting a birth certificate and being told you have to prove you are a Canadian. I am sure that the hon. member for Vancouver East and the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek, with hundreds of thousands of Canadians who will find themselves in the same position, object very strongly to it. Having considered themselves to be Canadian citizens all their lives, suddenly they find that they must produce evidence of their citizenship. Apparently it makes no difference what service they gave to their country during that time.

**Mr. Stewart (Cochrane):** How do officials know that unless it is proved?

**Mr. Coates:** That is the trouble with this bureaucratic system; the officials have to be