

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** By unanimous consent, is it agreed that we refer Bill C-237 to the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts, and amend the second reading motion accordingly?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** Accordingly, Mr. Benjamin, seconded by Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre) moves that Bill C-237, to amend the Canadian Citizenship Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts.

**Mr. Benjamin:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the length of time hon. members on all sides have taken to accommodate me.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** We did our best.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I thank colleagues on all sides for their co-operation. My initial comment is this: I am not sure what I am supposed to do, but I will figure it out as I go along. I have been here somewhat more than 8½ years and have placed various private members' bills on the order paper, but this is the first time one of my bills has been called.

**An hon. Member:** It must be the Christmas spirit.

**Mr. Benjamin:** It is not only the Christmas spirit; it is also evidence of socialist planning and perseverance.

**Mr. Epp:** You just blew the bill.

**Mr. Benjamin:** This bill has been on the order paper for the last four or five years and relates to another bill which has been on the order paper since 1969 or 1970 calling for the removal of the prohibition against epileptics in the Immigration Act. I have entered into correspondence with many citizens who are concerned about this matter and am supported not only by people in my constituency but by people in all parts of the country as well as members of this House of all parties. This bill is consequential to another bill presently before the House, namely, the bill to amend the Immigration Act. The amended Immigration Act will delete the prohibition against epileptics being entitled to landed immigrant status and, ultimately, the right to become Canadian citizens.

My bill would amend the Citizenship Act pursuant to certain sections of the Immigration Act. I am afraid I am not a lawyer and I will not become involved with legal terminology. I have entered into discussions with my good friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Mr. Guilbault), with the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale), and with legal counsel. The more I talked to legal counsel, the more confused I became. I understand that the bill, if the House is good enough to pass it on second reading, will require at least two minor amendments in committee, so that when the new citizenship act is proclaimed on or shortly after February 15, my bill will be relevant to that new citizenship act. As I say, it will have to be amended in committee in two ways. Instead of referring to the Canadian Citizenship Act, it will refer to the citizenship act. Also, the relevant section of the

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new act will need to be amended so that my bill is not redundant or is not completely wiped out by the proclamation of the new citizenship act. That is what I understand, according to the legal advice I have been offered.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Would you now explain what you said?

**Mr. Benjamin:** Mr. Speaker, I can explain it, but I promised my good friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State that I would not talk too long, perhaps not much more than three or four minutes, because he, too, wants to speak on this bill. Let me remind the House of the history of this bill. It represents the culmination of the efforts of members of all parties, efforts going back a long way in time. I remind the House that the provisions of our immigration and citizenship laws have been somewhat inhumane.

● (1710)

I have a file of correspondence that has accumulated over the past several years. For example, the wife of a pastor of a Lutheran church in Winnipeg whose husband and children could be, and are, Canadian citizens, could not be a Canadian citizen because she suffers from epilepsy. They emigrated from the United States some nine years ago. If you were sitting opposite her at a table and she had an epileptic seizure, you would not notice it; it does not last ten seconds.

Another case involves a university professor who has been here since 1967. In addition to writing books, he occupies the chair on the faculty of an important university in this country. He has been denied Canadian citizenship because he is an epileptic. His wife and children can be, and are, Canadian citizens. They have made a marvellous contribution to this country. I have received correspondence from a person in Ontario. I will not name the place. He filed application for landed immigrant status at the Canadian consulate in Detroit. His application was refused because he is afflicted with epilepsy. I might point out that his last epileptic seizure was some years before making application. It goes on and on. Medical people have told us that this is not a mental illness: it is a physical incapacity; the medication for it even prevents seizures.

My bill states that when the amendments to the Citizenship Act are passed—and I presume they will be with a government majority, if they still have one in February, and if they do not it might be passed with our support—those who have been here on ministers' permits because they are part of a prohibited class, namely, epilepsy, will be credited with their time here.

I notice that the new Immigration Act puts an end to disallowing imbeciles, idiots and morons coming into the country. If the Liberals and Tories need that much more help, we will let them come in. I am only teasing my hon. friends.

After having talked to lawyers, I understand that if my bill is passed those who have been here for many years will be credited with that time. In two of the cases I mentioned, the people have been here for eight or nine years. They would be