

Canada Elections Act

I believe that the hon. member for Saint-Denis is a fair-minded man who means what he says. I say to him: think it over. I urge him to withdraw his support for this amendment and, in doing so, to recognize that the proposal does, indeed, contain a further threat to unity and, second, that in his view every Canadian should feel equal.

• (12 noon)

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Chairman, I again rise on a question of privilege. May I say in answer to my hon. friend that I have held my view for many years, which perhaps is one reason I am sitting here in Ottawa rather than Quebec City. My question of privilege is that I believe Italians, Germans and Ukrainians are also a special part of us in Canada.

May I also say that I refuse the generosity of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris, who suggested we include as a special category immigrants of French-speaking origin. I refuse this generosity because to me every Canadian, whatever his country of origin, is a special part of us in Canada. No longer is he a German, Scandinavian, Greek, Armenian, Arab, or whatever the case may be.

I repeat that I see nothing wrong with the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek taking out his citizenship, but am I downgrading him? Up until now he has been able to take his seat in this House. However, the decision is for him, not for us. My contention is that everyone in Canada is equal in the matter of citizenship. The only difference between Canada and most other countries in the world is that we have two official languages. Certainly there is no special privilege granted to English or French, or should not be.

If there are to be privileged groups in Canada, then perhaps they should be the Eskimos and Indians rather than the two founding races. I am getting tired of hearing this expression used by hon. members opposite. I have said hundreds of times when I have been in western Canada, and I repeat it again today, that I sometimes wish my name was Prudomski so that I could make people understand better. But because my name is Prud'homme it sounds as though a special case is being made for French-speaking people in Quebec. There is no such thought in my mind, and there never has been and I hope never will be. As far as I am concerned, everyone in Canada, regardless of racial origin, should be treated equally.

As honourable men, I say immigrants should take out Canadian citizenship if they want to vote in general elections. To be eligible to vote in Canada you must be 18 years of age or over and a Canadian citizen. This situation is an honourable one and is far from being divisive.

Mr. Coates: Mr. Chairman, may I answer this so-called question of privilege in this way. First of all, the hon. member for Saint-Denis said he did not think what he was proposing was divisive, but if it were shown that it was, or if he thought it was, he would not agree with the proposition. I have endeavoured to show him it is, but he has ignored my comments and made some other proposition. I said that the proposition now put forward is divisive, and I have no doubt about that. If there is any doubt in the hon. members' mind, then he too should recognize it and oppose that proposition.

The second point I want to make relates to a quotation from Abraham Lincoln, who once said that you cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. I think that is a pretty important consideration.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, I must admit I am puzzled by the turn taken by this debate. I suppose that since this country was founded there has been a special type of arrangement made for those who come from the British Commonwealth countries; that is to say, almost immediately on their arrival in Canada they are entitled to all the privileges, including the right to vote. I do not want to be critical about that; this is part of our history.

As I understood what the right hon. member for Prince Albert and others had to say, they wanted this situation to continue, though some did not want the right extended to people who come to Canada from French-speaking countries. I come from a constituency where people of all ethnic groups, with the possible exception of people of French origin, have settled in large numbers. I represent over 20,000 people of Ukrainian origin, 12,000 people of Polish origin and large numbers of Czechs, Russians and Jews.

As I have understood the reasoning of the right hon. member for Prince Albert over the last couple of years, he has been arguing that all people in Canada should be treated equally. I agree with this proposition and should like to see it applied to our election laws. I am not too concerned whether we say that those who come to Canada must wait five