

Canada Elections Act

When one examines the present amendment, the following question comes to mind: How is it that in 1970 we find ourselves discussing the advisability of rejecting this amendment? I wonder why we are discussing this, since the question is of course beyond argument.

I wonder whether this is an illogical situation that some just want to perpetuate or unfortunate childishness on the part of many Canadians, because such provisions in the Elections Act are not justifiable on any grounds whatsoever.

And I mean it. For no reasons whatsoever. Indeed, if we were to inquire of 10 British subjects who are not Canadian citizens, who have been living in Canada for one or two years and have been through an election, we should no doubt find out that several of them did not avail themselves of that right to vote granted them by the act. I imagine that a proper British subject, arriving in Canada and finding that he has the right to vote after one year's residence, will refuse to exercise that right, for he cannot be aware of Canadian politics.

Besides, if he is already aware of Canadian customs, way of thinking and law, I suppose he will have seen fit to obtain a Canadian citizenship certificate. So I wonder why we are even discussing it.

This line of argument pursued theoretically could lead to the following conclusion. I say "theoretically" since in practice I cannot question anyone's intentions. Indeed, at some point, in some ridings on the island of Montreal, for instance, where English-speaking people make up 50 per cent of the population, scores of British subjects could be brought in and scattered in some strategic ridings to weigh down the scale of power. Theoretically speaking, this could be done if elections could be foreseen a year in advance.

It is unthinkable that such a thing can exist and we should all support an amendment aimed at amending the legislation by simply deleting subclause (3) of clause 14.

We claim to be adults and, consequently, we fail to see why Canadian citizenship should be given at a discount to anyone, be he British subject, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German or whatever. Discount sales are held in stores, but I do not see why the basic democratic right, the right to vote, should be given away to people who have just emigrated and who do not even have a certificate of Canadian citizenship.

To my mind, there is something sadly lacking there and, doubtless all my colleagues, especially those from Quebec, agree with the member for Matane in this regard and want that paragraph to be simply stricken out.

As for those who have already exercised their franchise as British subjects, and who are not Canadian citizens, they have of course had the advantage of a privilege. All they need do now is to make their participation to Canadian life formal by becoming full-fledged Canadian citizens. I do not see why a time limit should be set within which they can take out Canadian citizenship, and doubtless the authorities concerned will be pleased to grant it to them.

There is therefore no problem with regard to knowing how much longer that situation must be tolerated: it must no longer be tolerated. Indeed, it is intolerable, and because we have acted like children until now, by tolerating such exclusiveness in the law, is reason why it would be justifiable to maintain an absurd, idiotic and childish provision. We now have the opportunity to delete it; let us do so simply, and thus show that we are in an adult country, which is concerned about true democracy.

In closing my remarks, I wish to point out that subclause (3) is antidemocratic because the mere presence of a few hundreds of British subjects in a riding could tip the scales in an election one way or the other. Theoretically, that could happen. So, we see how liberty and democracy could be strained.

All of us hold democratic liberty dear; we now have the opportunity to prove it by deleting subclause (3) of clause 14 from this bill.

● (4:10 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Blair: Mr. Chairman, I wish to speak briefly in this debate. I wish to endorse the views expressed by some hon. members opposite, including the hon. member for Hillsborough and the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East. I also support the position taken a few moments ago by the hon. member for Coast Chilcotin and the position taken this morning by the hon. member for Ontario.

This is an important discussion. I make no criticism of the motives of the people who have moved this resolution which proposes striking out a proposed clause of the bill which denies those people who are British subjects and not Canadian citizens some of the rights which they now have. I think this