

Canada Elections Act

Roman citizen equal in status to the residents of that eternal city. Unfortunately, that has not developed, but there are still parts of the Commonwealth which grant this reciprocal right to Canadians.

The other day I read that the Prime Minister has become an enthusiast for the Commonwealth. I think that is a fine thing. I am not one of those who criticize people because they change their mind. It indicates that, in this regard, he has a mature point of view.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Macquarrie: Can we not, even in committee, have a little cessation of interruptions?

The concept of the Commonwealth is surely meaningful. It is certainly a unique political organization. We do have rights that, for instance, are extended to our diplomats. There is a subtle difference between an ambassador and a high commissioner. Could this not be recognized in the realm of the franchise? Perhaps instead of rushing against this, we might, within the Commonwealth lead in internationalizing the concept of citizenship. This might be a fine thing. I am never happy when I see people trying to turn Canada inwards in any of these matters. So, I would be content with the way this provision appears in the bill. I think the government made a little alteration and not an improvement. I would not want anyone who believes that this distinction should remain to think that it is to perpetuate discrimination. It is rather a development in sustaining a reciprocal recognition which transcends nationalism and, to that extent, surely is not totally bad.

● (4:30 p.m.)

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Chairman, the disposition of the government was to accept the amendment to the act proposed by the committee. I acknowledge that there is a difference in formulation, but I am not sure how substantial the difference is. I think it is much the same as was recommended by the committee. From a personal standpoint, I am inclined to accept the committee's recommendation because it is not desirable to take the franchise away from anyone who previously had it and who has remained in Canada. On the other hand, I recognize that there has been a discrimination in favour of immigrants to Canada from the British Isles—indeed from the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere, which historically happens to have been part of the British Commonwealth. This is a recognition

by the committee that discrimination in Canada in favour of those immigrants is not to continue but, rather, that the class to be entitled to exercise the franchise, not being Canadian citizens, is to be frozen, in effect, as of June 26, 1967. The class may be reduced from time to time by an individual losing continuous residence in Canada.

Under the circumstances, I would recognize that there is a wide difference of opinion among hon. members on this particular subject. As the representative of the government, at this point my disposition would be not to vote personally on this question but to leave it to the decision of the committee as a whole whether this particular subsection should be amended or whether it should be accepted in full.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, we didn't have a full opportunity last evening to deal with this because the hour was getting late and there was a disposition to explore other matters.

I am not generally disposed to support the amendment before us as proposed by the member from Matane. I do not believe in the principle of confining and restricting the franchise or of removing it from people who previously had it, albeit they may have received it by way of a bilateral agreement with another country or may think themselves in a position of privilege vis-à-vis other people in Canada who are not British subjects. Nevertheless, the principal point that I wish to make, and on which I found our opinion, is that we should not confine the area within which the franchise should be applicable but rather we should be concerned about expanding it. It is from that point of view that I cannot support the proposed amendment.

I suggest that we might be better advised to say that any adult over 18 years of age having been ordinarily resident in Canada for the past year, whether or not that person is a Canadian citizen, should be entitled to vote. A year's continuous residence is the provision we use with respect to British subjects, so we could expand it to apply to people from other countries. People who have been ordinarily resident in Canada for the period of a year would be contributing to Canada, would be governed by our laws and would be paying taxes for the upkeep of services and facilities within the nation. By virtue of the provisions of the Citizenship Act, which I hope will be amended, these people would have to wait for five years before applying to become Canadian.