

*Citizenship*

as a citizen of Argentina. His mother was Canadian, they were living in Canada and desired to make their home here, but she could not have her child registered as a Canadian, so the child is essentially stateless.

To complicate the matter further, this couple is now living in Mexico under a two-year program operated through a social agency. This couple is in the peculiar situation of not being certain about the welfare of their son in that he is not a Canadian citizen, although his mother is and his father intends to become a Canadian citizen once he satisfies residency requirements. They are quite concerned in the event that something should happen to them. What would happen to this child? It is their desire that the mother's family should raise the child. The latter are Canadian citizens living in Canada. What happens to a child who is in Mexico with his parents, one of whom is a citizen of Argentina and the other a Canadian? How can that child be taken care of, and what sort of protection would he have from Canadian facilities and services to which he would be entitled if his father had been the Canadian as opposed to his mother?

These circumstances caused me to introduce a private member's bill three years ago to cover the situation, hence I certainly support this part of the bill. There is a difference between my private member's bill and Bill C-20 in respect of this matter of the right to citizenship of a child with a Canadian mother, and that is the matter of retroactivity. The bill I proposed would have given children of Canadian mothers the right to Canadian citizenship, and I am talking about those children who have been born and now exist. Bill C-20 would only give that right to children of Canadian mothers born after enactment.

The minister made some remarks about this bill in that he had some concern that the retroactivity feature if included could lead to some anomaly or difficulty. He gave as an example of his concern a child now 18 or 19 years of age living in his father's home country. As a result of a change in the Canadian law that child might suddenly be declared a Canadian citizen, thereby creating some problem for him.

It is my suggestion that this hypothetical situation could very easily be cleared up. I would suggest, therefore, that the real example I have just given of a child of a Canadian mother, who is now in one sense in jeopardy as a result of not being able to obtain Canadian citizenship, is worthy of more consideration. If you balance the real example against the hypothetical example of the minister, the balance should come down on the side of retroactivity.

The children of Canadian mothers who are now alive should be afforded this advantage as opposed to those who may be conceived and born after this act. These children cannot become Canadian citizens until age 18. With this retroactivity they would become Canadian citizens right now. It would take only a minor amendment to this bill to accomplish this, and it could be accomplished without the risk of the hypothetical example given by the minister. If the minister is paying attention, or will read these remarks later, he will see that this can be done easily by providing that this is done on the application of the Canadian mother. That would quite clearly prevent the hypothetical situation alluded to by the minister.

In terms of this small but important part of Canadian law, one more inequity toward that half of the population which is female is being removed, and that is to be applauded. I dare say that no one on this side of the House would speak against this provision. The only question that is raised is why it has taken so long. One member of the media who became aware of my private member's bill introduced three years ago made the observation that it seemed so self-evident it should have been passed very quickly.

In respect of these features of the law which are clearly discriminatory, and in respect of which public opinion is so clearly defined, there is no reason for such a long delay. There is no reason for the government to wait until it puts all these things together in one omnibus bill. If the government is as concerned as it claims to be from time to time about the lack of productivity on the part of parliament, it should look at this type of situation as one of the root causes. A simple bill like Bill C-275, to remove this discriminatory feature of citizenship, could have passed in about half an hour of the House's time some years ago.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, this bill has good and bad parts. I have spoken about the good parts and I should now like to mention the bad parts very briefly. It is regrettable that the government should resort to these tactics continuously, and I refer to the tendency of the government to put together an omnibus bill covering all possible amendments within a certain area. That sort of procedure is without doubt a major contributor to the slowness and inefficiency with which legislation is dealt with in this Chamber. Instead of blaming the opposition for delaying the passage of legislative measures by foot dragging, the government should look at the manner in which it packages its legislation covering various areas under one legislative blanket for passage through this House.

Perhaps the most serious reservation I have about this bill is the one referred to by my colleagues, and that is the question of reducing the waiting period for Canadian citizenship from five to three years. Canadian citizenship is an honour, and something all of us here feel should be held in the highest esteem. Thus when there is tampering with the mechanisms, the structures, the regulations, and the obstacles that precede the granting of Canadian citizenship, those of us who value it naturally have our antennae stretched out; we are very concerned and interested to learn the rationale and reasoning behind these changes.

● (1720)

Although I did read the remarks of the minister at the second reading stage concerning the reasons for the reduction from five years to three years I did not find any very convincing argument for the change. The thesis the minister proposed is that we live in a modern age with modern communications, and that therefore what took people five years to learn five years ago they can now learn in three years. I suggest that is a very questionable thesis. The evidence in support of that is lacking. The human animal has not changed that much.

I grant that communications and technology have changed and that the world has shrunk in a communications sense, but people have not changed that much.