

Citizenship

Many people in Canada, as they viewed our immigration laws, made one point time after time. I do not have time to go into the statistics, but the point they stressed was that the reaction to immigration today—many briefs pointed this out—was largely spawned or largely due to the fact that people felt in many areas the government had lost, so to speak, the handle or control of immigration flows. For that purpose I should like to read from page 53:42 of the same report:

Many submissions received by the committee suggested that if Canada's record of successful multicultural adaptation is to be maintained, more attention must be given to the development of programs related to cross-cultural and inter-racial understanding... Should an assessment show a need for significantly expanded national, community and school programs to promote intercultural harmony, the committee believes—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): Order, please. The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) has the floor. If other hon. members have anything to say, I wish they would wait.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp: I will repeat:

Should an assessment show a need for significantly expanded national, community and school programs to promote intercultural harmony, the committee believes the federal government should explore with the provinces ways of encouraging and implementing such programs.

● (1520)

I believe we will only have to teach immigrant Canadians that this is a bilingual, bicultural country, but also that it is a multicultural country. These should not be empty words, either. The program should not be constantly threatened by cutbacks or, as is presently the case, by extinction. All we have to do in this regard is look at the testimony of the Canadian consultative committee which has said that the Minister of Labour who is responsible for multiculturalism has virtually abandoned his portfolio. Rather, we should look upon multiculturalism, and the contributions these Canadians can make, as a positive force.

I look forward to the committee hearings when the minister and his officials can outline the advantages of reducing the period of residency qualification from five years to three. If this is the time that is necessary for immigrants to adapt socially, economically and culturally, I should like to see it demonstrated and know what programs the minister has in mind to encourage the use of immigrant talents and abilities. One part of the bill which I cannot support in any way is clause 5 on page 4. I should like to read it into the record:

5. (1) The minister shall grant citizenship to any person who, not being a citizen makes application therefor and

Then follow the paragraph:

(b) (i) for every day during which he was resident in Canada before his lawful admission to Canada for permanent residence he shall be deemed to have accumulated one-half of a day of residence—

The way I understand that provision is this: it means that an alien—let us not even say “illegal immigrant”, because I do not believe you can use the two words in the same context—who is here illegally for six years, under the terms of that clause can be given citizenship on the ground

[Mr. Epp.]

that he has fulfilled three years of the residency requirement. For every two days in Canada, one day is counted toward his residency qualification, so I read it the minister is saying that parliament will now make legal what to date has been illegal. This is preposterous, Mr. Speaker. I wish the minister could give us an assurance that this clause will be deleted from the bill. It certainly would improve it. I say that because I do not want to make legal something which is illegal.

All around the country immigration officers at private talks stressed time and time again that they needed manpower and sophisticated investigative devices to cope with the large, international movement of illegals. They stressed that the type of illegal they come in contact with often has international connections, sometimes criminal, particularly with drug trafficking on an international scale. They asked for the tools to do a good job either at the primary inspection line or the secondary inspection line.

The immigration program in the last few years has suffered because in the minds of Canadians the alien who enters Canada illegally has been equated with those who came legally and wanted to make a contribution to the country. As the clause stands, it gives the appearance that the minister is in favour of legalizing something that is presently illegal, and it forces members of the House to condone something that is wrong. It also erodes the confidence that we should have in our immigration officers and RCMP special officers who are concerned with these movements every day. For the life of me I cannot find any purpose in this clause.

In his speech, the Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner) did not say why he felt clause 5 was necessary. We hear all kinds of estimates of the number of illegals in the United States and Canada, but I am sure no one knows exactly what the figures are. Canada is attractive and people want to make a home here, so it is natural that a number come this way. But surely the minister does not wish to see a clause in the bill which will erode the work presently being done by his officials. If he knows of some good reason why this clause should be included, I should like to hear it, but I think the bill would be enhanced if it were amended.

Another clause that I should like to deal with concerns the hearing before a judge of the citizenship court. The judge has no right to defer the application. Sometimes the judge may feel that the applicant is not ready for citizenship and that a review in six months' time would be in order. If the bill is passed as it stands, however, the judge must hear the case and within 60 days he must make a decision. If the application is denied, the applicant is informed of his right of appeal, and once that process is carried out that is the end of it. I feel that if a judge considers that a delay of six months or a year will help the person adjust to Canadian life, a delay should be granted.

Bill C-20 makes many positive contributions, but we must ask ourselves, first, if the change from five years to three years will ensure that people have truly become Canadians, are proud of Canadian life and will make a contribution to Canada. We must also ask if a person who has been in Canada illegally should be allowed to use 50 per cent of that time to go toward the residency qualification. I look forward to the committee hearings, Mr. Speak-