

age of 21. This inconsistency has been set right in the new bill.

● (1640)

Le me deal now, Mr. Speaker, with two points about British subjects—points about which some confusion may exist. Under the present act, a British subject wishing to become a Canadian citizen has a much simpler road to follow than does an ordinary alien. He is not questioned on his knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. He is not tested on his knowledge of the English or French language. No interview is conducted to determine his character. He does not appear before a judge to take the oath of allegiance unless he himself requests it. Normally, he simply takes the oath before an examiner at the time of application.

Since one of the main reasons for drafting a new citizenship bill is to give this country citizenship legislation that is firmly based on principles of fairness, the preferential treatment of one group of potential citizens over another is no longer acceptable. For this reason, the privileged status formerly granted to British subjects has not been maintained in the new bill. British subjects will now be treated like other applicants.

Another point with regard to British subjects is the removal from the new bill of the phrase which appears in the present act "a Canadian citizen is a British subject". There are those who think that the removal of this phrase will mean that Canadians travelling abroad will no longer have the protection of British legations. This is not the case, Mr. Speaker. Canadian citizens now receive the protection of the British legation where no Canadian mission exists because the Canadian government has made arrangements with the United Kingdom for such services to be provided to Canadian citizens. Such services in no way depend on the fact that Canadian citizens are termed British subjects under the present Citizenship Act.

The phrase "a Canadian citizen is a British subject" was, in reality, a transitional one. Before 1947, every resident of a country that was part of the British Empire, or latterly, of the British Commonwealth, was designated a British subject. The Citizenship Act of 1947 was the first law passed in any Commonwealth country to create a citizenship separate from that of British subject. The old phrase "British subject" was kept on, as I said, transitionally. Since then, distinct citizenship has been adopted by most Commonwealth countries, including the United Kingdom itself.

What we are proposing now is to add a phrase to our citizenship law which recognize today's realities. In the new bill we have recognized the status of "citizen of the Commonwealth". In so doing, we acknowledge the ties of friendship that exist between Canada and all members of the British Commonwealth, not all of whom can any longer be properly designated by the term British subject. Furthermore, in recognizing this status the bill provides that the special status accorded to British subjects in any other Canadian legislation shall henceforth be applicable to all persons who are citizens of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Speaker, let us now look briefly at several measures which make Bill C-20 a more liberal piece of legislation than the current Citizenship Act. One such provision will

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make it possible for Canadian citizens who have been residing abroad and have lost their citizenship in one way or another over time to resume Canadian citizenship with one year's residence after they have become landed in Canada. It did not seem fair that a person who had qualified as a Canadian citizen and had resided here for many years, and had for some reason lived abroad for a while, would have to go through a long process all over again on his return to Canada. Consequently, we have made a change. Such a person may normally resume his citizenship if he again becomes landed and resides here for one year.

A second measure which liberalizes the approach to citizenship is the removal of the requirement that an unsuccessful applicant must wait two years before a new application can be considered. A provision of the present act, that waiting period may well have had an intimidating effect on potential citizens and in certain cases it may even have created hardship. If a person is genuinely mistaken when he applies at a time when he presumes he has achieved qualification, let us say in knowledge or language proficiency, there is no justification for withholding a subsequent application for a minimum period of two years. Therefore, in the proposed legislation the restriction has been removed.

Another of these liberal provisions—

Mr. Stanfield: I don't like the word. It is not a very good presentation.

Mr. Faulkner: Liberal with a small "l". Another of these liberal provisions is the reduction in the waiting period from five years to three. Rather surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, this is a change which has caused some discussion. We have received some letters claiming that people cannot acquire a genuine understanding of this country in anything less than five years. We have received others claiming that all immigrants are automatically going to become citizens after three years. Of course, neither of these contentions is true. On the contrary, some immigrants may want to wait 25 or even 30 years before acquiring citizenship. But for the many immigrants who do want to apply for citizenship as soon as their residency requirement has been fulfilled, five years seems an inordinately long time to wait.

Looking at the minimum waiting period, we felt that it was arbitrary and unfair to penalize those who feel themselves ready to apply before a five-year term is up. After all, we live in a society where highly sophisticated systems of telecommunications not only put us instantaneously in touch with events across the country but link us to events in the far corners of the earth and even beyond. The fact that such a wealth of information is so readily available to every potential citizen is a cogent argument for the reduction of the waiting period.

Another change which is proposed in the bill is the removal of the requirement that an applicant be "of good character".

Mr. Stanfield: Is that a liberal provision?

Mr. Faulkner: Mr. Speaker, I am most anxious that this change should not lead to any misunderstanding. A great