

Canada Elections Act

[Translation]

Mr. De Bané: Mr. Chairman, as I was saying yesterday at the end of the sitting, my amendment is based on the following considerations: A federal Parliament such as ours must not be the champion of any nationality and indulge in any discrimination.

What is the present situation? We are granting privileges to a particular group, the British subjects, whatever their country of origin. As for immigrants from other countries, we demand of them that they become Canadian citizens if they want to vote.

Today, there are about a million and a half British subjects who did not ever deign to become Canadian citizens even though they have been living in Canada for many years. Besides, I wonder why they should become Canadian citizens since they enjoy the same rights as all Canadians. The preferential treatment they enjoy under this clause is found in other legislation, in other fields—even administrative—including the public service for instance where preference is given to Canadian citizens or British subjects.

In my opinion, the only way to check nationalism and intolerance by one group towards another is for the government not to favour one over another. The federal government must pass legislation which does not favour any ethnic group.

Obviously, the most important argument is this: We would not want to give preferential treatment to one group over another. However, there is another even more important: Parliament should not deprive certain persons of the rights they already have.

I would say to my hon. colleagues that no British subject would be denied the right to vote at the next federal election, if he is willing in the meantime, to take the necessary steps to become a Canadian citizen.

Indeed, under the bill now under consideration, any British subject enjoying the right to vote in 1968 would still have that privilege. Consequently, all those who were entitled to vote in 1968 and who at the next federal election would have been in Canada at least five years and wish to obtain their Canadian citizenship would have the right to vote.

I say frankly that this section seems to stem directly or indirectly from the conquest, and I hope we have all forgotten it. What we want, it is to build together a country where all the people will be equal, where one group is not given preference over another, where, in particular, French Canadians will not come up

[The Chairman.]

against a certain kind of provocation, though undoubtedly unconscious. In my opinion, Canada will not be able to survive unless it becomes the champion of equality between all ethnic groups.

Of course, it is but a detail without any significance to put one group before another. But I think that in a country like Canada where nationalist feelings are quite strong, it would be sheer folly not to heed all these small details in which, finally, some want to find a justification for their intolerance.

This is why I believe that Canadian citizens alone should have the franchise and that British subjects who have been living here for many years, and who are an asset to the country, should take the necessary steps in order to become citizens like the rest of us.

[English]

Mr. Macquarrie: Mr. Chairman, I am interested in the hon. gentleman's supporting statements on his proposed amendment. I cannot believe that if the bill as presented or as the committee has recommended—and there is a slight difference here—should be enacted into law, the survival of Canada would really be seriously endangered. I think that was a bit extreme. Nor can I believe it is a vicious exercise in discrimination, or a recollection of the conquest.

I am not so concerned about the fact that citizens of another nation, another jurisdiction, namely, the United Kingdom, should find it in a sense easier to obtain the franchise here than others. I think there is another aspect to it to which the hon. gentleman does not advert and that is the fact that this is one part of a reciprocal arrangement. There are Canadians in Britain who will be voting tomorrow, because the United Kingdom parliament has extended this right to them.

Mr. Pepin: Some might be elected.

Mr. Macquarrie: Indeed, as the minister mentions, some may be elected members of the United Kingdom parliament.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): For Labour.

Mr. Macquarrie: There was a concept at one time that we might be able to extend, through the Commonwealth, a great generality of citizenship, and in modern days that we could have an expression as in the days of Rome, *civis Romanus sum*, indicating that a man from the very remotest region could be a