

Citizenship

minister of citizenship. Now he is trying to lecture us on all the wonderful things he is going to do.

It is my belief that the minister and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) together are putting parts of this bill before Canadian society as another step toward eroding some of the principles that are directly related to many of the people in this country. I say that for a number of reasons which I will bring out in due course.

Immigration and citizenship are tied closely together; you cannot divorce one from the other. The joint committee studying the green paper on immigration has already held hearings in Quebec. A number of witnesses at those hearings, when speaking on various parts of the green paper, stressed the regulations governing citizenship and suggested that immigration and citizenship were inextricably linked. We do not have to go back many years to find that citizenship and immigration were under one department. The best thing that could happen would be for this minister to lose his entire responsibility, with citizenship being brought back to a department along with immigration where it rightfully belongs.

The committee that is now studying immigration will be going to Sudbury tomorrow and British Columbia next week. This government has stated on many occasions it is interested in having a public debate on this paper. It says it wants the opinion of Canadians regarding immigration. We in the opposition accept this idea. We have all seen articles in the newspapers stating that the government has already enunciated certain policies very clearly and that the cabinet has made certain decisions. The minister has said to the committee that this is not the case. Knowing he is a gentleman, I accept his explanation.

● (1750)

Now we have a bill before us which affects a large part of the discussions that are to take place in a public debate. I simply cannot understand why at this stage the government would bring forward this legislation. As far back as February 13, as recorded at page 3187 of *Hansard*, I asked the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) whether they would hold off Bill C-20 until such time as the public debate on immigration was ended. There is a relatively short time period; by July 31 we are to bring in a report. That is approximately 2½ months from now.

What is the rush now? If the government is sincere in wanting an official debate, surely it could wait until July 31 when the committee, with members from all parties, comes in with a recommendation or report regarding citizenship requirements. Surely that is a legitimate request. Back on February 13 I asked that question of the President of the Privy Council and in his answer he said in part:

I think it would be very useful to have a discussion going on in the House at the same time as the debate is going on regarding immigration, because—and here I agree with the hon. member—they are closely related and I think it would help to offset any idea that our immigration policy is directed against any particular group.

I plead with the government that, after the initial debate in which we are now engaged in this House, they hold off on this bill and give it a six months' hoist until such time as it has the input of Canadians that has been asked for in the green paper. In the matter of the reduc-

[Mr. Epp.]

tion from five years to three years, the minister made much about the fact that five years is arbitrary. It is. But so is three years arbitrary.

Let us look at the qualifications of other countries, because it is my concept that citizenship is a privilege that a sovereign country gives to an individual who has come to that country, just as it is in respect of immigrants who come to this country such as my people and other people who are so-called ethnics—I do not like that term, but I shall use it—who feel that Canada gives them a new home and therefore they want to make a contribution. They do make a contribution and are loyal citizens of Canada, but now they are asking what is happening to this country.

There are certain principles involved. Let us look at the facts in respect of other countries. The residency qualification in the United States is five years. In Britain it is five years. In France it is five years. Belgium has two types of residency requirement. The first is that one can obtain citizenship in three years if one has lived in Belgium before age 14, as a minor; but then it is six years after age 14. What rights does one have? This only gives one working and living privileges; that is all.

Then there is another qualification, that if you want full citizenship rights in Belgium you must have lived there for ten years and must be over age 25. One can then vote in Belgium. This is arbitrary, Mr. Speaker. What about West Germany? Citizenship there is determined by the province in which one resides, but the shortest period of time in which one can obtain citizenship is five years. In other cases the period can be as long as ten years. What about Switzerland? The period there is 12 years and the last six must be consecutive. What about Sweden? The law in Sweden states that the period is seven years but that one can apply after three or four years' residency and then the individual case is judged on its merits.

In Australia, the period is three years. In New Zealand, citizenship is at the discretion of the minister of internal affairs. All cases are judged on their merits. For non-British subjects generally the period is five years, and there is a preference for British subjects. When you get to places like Yugoslavia, the U.S.S.R. and some other iron curtain countries, you can apply for citizenship after you arrive in the country but to get there and obtain a visa is not very easy.

We must remember that Canada is a country which has welcomed immigrants. Last year there were 218,000. There is one country in Europe which already has a one-year residency requirement, The Netherlands; but if one checks the situation and looks at the number of immigrants into that country you find that there is hardly any immigration there. So I wonder at this point whether the question is academic. When the minister appears before this House and says that five years is arbitrary, I say that three years is every bit as arbitrary.

An hon. Member: What is the answer?

Mr. Epp: The answer is that citizenship is worth something and is a privilege that is bestowed on us by a sovereign country. Almost all of us in this country were immigrants at one time and had to go through a five-year period, and if you talk to many of these people they will tell you that they think the five-year period is not a