

Citizenship Act

Riis), Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy), Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria) and Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador (Mr. Rompkey) for their guidance and co-operation.

This goes to show that if a private Member does have good legislation, with the co-operation such as I have received, it can go forward in the short time it has taken this Bill to be passed.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to have the honour to speak again on Bill C-254 at this third and final reading stage. I will make my comments very brief because the Bill must be dealt with before six o'clock if it is to be adopted this day. That, of course, is my wish.

I would like to congratulate the Member who proposed this Bill as I did at second reading stage. I would like to reiterate his comment that co-operation on a good idea can result in worth-while and productive legislation.

The Bill with which we are dealing may be considered by some to be very minor in that it does not affect as large a number of Canadians as does some other legislation. Nevertheless, it is an important Bill in that some Canadians who assist the Government so well by representing us overseas are receiving treatment which is less than fair under the present legislation. This Bill would correct some of these inequities by allowing the spouse of a Canadian citizen to accumulate the time necessary to become a Canadian citizen while out of the country for the purpose of representing our country with his or her spouse.

The Member raised the case of the wife of Ambassador Ken Taylor who was not able to receive well deserved recognition because she was the spouse of a diplomat who had not remained in Canada long enough to allow her to qualify to become a Canadian citizen under the existing rules.

The average time spent abroad by Canadian diplomats is almost four years. Sixty-eight per cent of spouses of Canadian citizens working in diplomatic and other foreign service postings have accumulated three or more years when time spent abroad is added to time spent in Canada. Nevertheless, under the current legislation, unless the time spent in Canada is consecutive, these people do not qualify.

The Bill as proposed does not qualify everyone who is the spouse of a Canadian citizen who has been working outside the country for three years or longer. It merely enables them to apply. The rest of the tests would remain in place.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, for myself, as Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and as the representative of a number of citizens in the National Capital region whose work could be negatively affected by the existing Citizenship Act, I am pleased to support this Bill to amend the Citizenship Act as it will benefit a great number of Canadians, and especially a

great number of people who will be able to become Canadians once this Bill is passed.

Having said this, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take up more time because I would like other Members to be able to speak as I certainly hope that this House will agree unanimously to give passage to this Bill today.

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-254 is a triumph of common sense over bureaucracy and fusty thinking which I am afraid has prevailed for some time and has really been discriminatory against spouses of Canadian employees working abroad, particularly in CIDA and Canada's foreign service. Many of these spouses have ably and strongly represented Canada abroad, as diplomatic spouses must, despite the fact they could not, themselves, gain Canadian citizenship because they were not in the country long enough at any one time to meet the qualifications.

I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Etobicoke North (Mr. Pennock) for his persistence, as well as congratulate the Foreign Service Community Association for their excellent work in lobbying, assisting, and supporting the Hon. Member.

Last night I was thinking that this was actually a time of good news in the world. The Soviet Union is changing its tune and contributing to the United Nations, China has accomplished a revolution as the veterans give way to new leadership, and Jerry Falwell is going back to religion, leaving politics behind. Perhaps we should have a newspaper like this, containing all the headlines of which we have dreamed but have not occurred. I think, in a small way, one of the back pages should reflect that we saw common sense with respect to foreign service spouses and other spouses of Canadian employees abroad.

The amendment which was agreed to in the legislative committee is useful. I believe it demonstrates that perhaps it made sense for some sober second thought on this particular measure. The amendment simply ensures that if a person is married to a non Canadian, who happens to be employed by the Government of Canada, and is posted or working abroad, they would not inadvertently be allowed in the door to gain Canadian citizenship possibly without ever having set foot in Canada.

Much of Canada's foreign service marries non Canadians. I, too, am married to a non Canadian, who has since become a Canadian citizen. The reason is that I spent six years in England, at about the time when people become interested in settling down. I met my wife with whom I have been for some 25 years now.

Obviously, the reason that half the foreign service are married to foreign born spouses is because foreign service officers spend half their time abroad at about the time they are