

than five as is now the case. If I may say so, I think the government has not made a case for the change. I have an open mind. I am willing to be convinced, but I do not think the government has made a case at all. It has just said "Five is an arbitrary figure; let us make it three"—as if the change were of no consequence because the figures are arbitrary. But lots of things are arbitrary. For example, the five years set for the life of a parliament is arbitrary. If we reduce things on the ground that they are arbitrary, maybe we should reduce the life of a parliament from five years to three. It would have the advantage that it would jibe with the argument used in this case, I suppose.

There are a number of things which could be said about this proposal. First of all, I would suppose that any immigrant would want to have enough time in which to make sure that the decision he took to come to Canada was one he wanted to stick with for the rest of his life, and that at no time would he wish to change his mind and exercise again the citizenship he would be forfeiting if he became a Canadian.

Then there are practical things. You know, there is a pet formula which the government and its predecessors seem to use. They take a very subjective view. No matter what is involved they start out by saying it is reform, it is an advance, and it is non-discriminatory. Mr. Speaker, they have used those three terms so often that the value of those words in the language has depreciated. In Canada, "reform" has been debased to mean only the Liberal notion of how things should be done, whether it makes sense or not.

Another word which has been vastly downgraded is the word discrimination. It has been made into a bad word. That has happened because it has been used so often in the sense of discriminating between people so that one of them is treated unfairly—discrimination in matters of taxation, for example. But surely there is nothing wrong about discriminating. I would hate to see the government nationalize the wine industry, for example. If would not wish to discriminate so it would call all wines champagne.

Mr. Epp: And insist on 80 per cent Canadian content?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacLean: I make no apology for being able to discriminate between what is suitable and what is unsuitable in a given situation. It is not necessarily virtuous to say that the power of discrimination is being removed from someone. I believe I know what the minister means, but I should like to see the committee approach the bill with an open mind. I believe the committee should arrange for representatives of all points of view to appear before it. Perhaps our first citizens should be there. I am glad the hon. member for Kamloops-Cariboo (Mr. Marchand) has spoken. Except for him I suppose we are all of us immigrants to Canada, or else our parents or grandparents were.

Mr. Stanfield: And his were, once.

Mr. MacLean: Well, in prehistoric times, his ancestors, too migrated here. Every point of view has a right to be heard. I believe we should hear from people who have recently become Canadian citizens. They can contribute a

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great deal to evaluating the wisdom or lack of wisdom of some of the things we are doing. We should hear briefs from other levels of government which are required to provide various services and amenities, education, among other things, for people who come to this country.

We ought to be able to assess the obligations we place on other levels of government in an objective way. In this connection I understand that in most areas local governments, in order to protect themselves, require children registering in their schools to demonstrate that their parents are in the country legally as landed immigrants or otherwise. We all know that in some of our large cities thousands of people are here illegally. Many of them have children and those children are being denied education because if they went to school the fact that their parents were not here legally would be exposed. So their parents keep them at home. Considerable numbers of children are growing up in our cities who are being denied education because their parents are not landed immigrants and perhaps will never acquire citizenship. These are some of the matters the committee should examine carefully. Mr. Speaker, I have already spoken longer than I had intended, so I will leave it at that.

Hon. Stanley Haidasz (Parkdale): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on Bill C-20 I believe I can say without reservation that this long-awaited and long-overdue legislation is most welcome, especially among potential citizens of Canada although it touches every Canadian.

Today being United Nations Human Rights Day commemorating the universal declaration of human rights in the United Nations, I think it is significant we should be discussing new citizenship legislation because it does grant new rights to potential citizens which they were not able to exercise before.

The legislation before us provides for fundamental changes in the granting, retaining, resuming, and renunciation of citizenship. These changes, as well as many others in the bill, are unequivocal and fair. That is why the definition of Canadian citizenship as a qualified right represents an important and progressive step in the history of naturalization and citizenship laws in Canada. The federal government led the way in 1947 with its own citizenship legislation, the first such law to be passed by any Commonwealth country, granting a citizenship separate from that of British subject.

The proposed Citizenship Act of 1975 is a logical, equitable, and up-to-date piece of legislation. The new provisions eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex by according equal treatment to men and women.

● (1700)

The new citizenship act is also more equitable to children. For example, the age of application for citizenship has been reduced from 21 years to 18, the age of majority and the age of voting in this country. Furthermore, the new provisions give rights to children born abroad equal to those of children born in Canada. The proposed legislation also eliminates the present registration requirements, thus making the right to citizenship indefeasible in the first generation born abroad. The bill also passes on the right to