

*Immigration Act*

—to have the newcomers who have come to live in this country, to make their homes here, become citizens and share fully and equally with us in all the privileges of citizenship.

I agree, of course, with the hon. member for Lambton-Kent that in the technical sense of the word there is no compulsion about the amendment he suggests. I suppose an argument could be made that there was not even any element of implied coercion; but, as the hon. member for Vegreville pointed out, in the explanatory note the word "mandatory" is used. There is no doubt that there is a penalty imposed for not doing something, and for not doing something that I think none of us would want to see done except as a purely voluntary act.

Therefore instead of doing anything that implies in any way any suggestion whatsoever of pressure upon newcomers to join our citizenship, what we ought to try to do is make our citizenship appear to the newcomers so attractive that the great majority of them will need nothing in the law to urge them, when the five year period is up, to make their applications. I do think there are one or two ways in which the objects of this bill can be achieved very much better by other forms of action both on the part of governments and on the part of ordinary citizens.

Perhaps you, sir, and the house will bear with me if I make one or two suggestions as to what some of these things are. I do not think there is anything basically wrong with the citizenship act. It is true that my hon. friend the leader in the other place has introduced a bill which will later come to this house, which proposes to make some minor amendments to the citizenship act. Without at this time anticipating a future debate I should like to emphasize the fact that they are minor amendments and have nothing to do with the fundamental principles on which the law is based. I do not think there is a need for any fundamental change in the law. I do believe there is perhaps some need for improvement in some of the practices.

As far as my department is concerned we try to make the technical side of acquiring citizenship as easy as possible. I refer to the technical side advisedly. I do not think we want to encourage newcomers to treat citizenship lightly, or to have them regard it as a process by which you can put a coin in a slot machine and have a document come out. I feel this is perhaps the most solemn, voluntary act, except marriage, that any individual can take; therefore it ought to be vested with a certain solemnity and it ought to be taken seriously and certainly freely.

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

However, owing to the geographical nature of this country there are many remote places where newcomers are living where it is very difficult for an individual without considerable cost and inconvenience to appear three times in the court, and that is what is normally now required in order to obtain citizenship. Certain amendments have been made to the regulations to make it somewhat easier to fulfil certain of these technical requirements.

I may say, sir, I would welcome any effort that any hon. member can make in his own district to make these requirements better known to newcomers, and to help them in obtaining their citizenship. I should also welcome from any hon. member on either side of the house any suggestions as to further technical improvements which could be made in the procedure of the department.

With the exception of Montreal, Toronto, and the immediately surrounding areas, and certain remote localities, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration has not set up courts of its own for the purpose of granting citizenship. I think it would be most undesirable to do so, if for no other reason than because it would be a quite unnecessary charge upon the taxpayer. In the normal case the county or district courts, which are of course under the administrative control of the provincial governments, perform this function.

I should like at this time, if it is not inappropriate, to express great appreciation for the devotion not only of the judges of the county courts and the other judges and magistrates in this country who perform this function but also for the devotion and kindness which is generally shown by the clerks and other officials of these courts. I do think there are one or two places where I would hope there would be a little more interest taken by the judges and the clerks in arranging the ceremonies and in conducting the inquiries, because it does make a great deal of difference, I think, to the appreciation that newcomers have of Canadian citizenship if the formal act of acquiring citizenship takes place in an atmosphere which is at once friendly and dignified.

I have had the good fortune to be invited on two or three occasions to take some part in these ceremonies. I do hope that all hon. members who can find the time to do so on some convenient occasion will try to be present at one of the ceremonies, because they are really quite moving experiences. It is extraordinary the emotion that many of the applicants feel on these occasions.

If I were to criticize the work of my predecessors in preparing the present citizenship act—I know there are many arguments on either side—I would say that I sometimes