

Supply—Citizenship and Immigration

think it would take very long to give an explanation in this regard, because as far as I can tell hon. members of all parties who have commented on this case are agreed that the difficulty that arose with regard to the Bergsmas should not have arisen. I have read editorials in four or five Canadian newspapers on the matter. All the Toronto newspapers carried editorials dealing with the case and they were all unanimous that the Bergsmas should not, on the basis of information which is available, have had any difficulty in getting their citizenship papers. It seems to me that the committee ought to have some simple statement from the minister as to the steps the department thinks it can take and what steps it will take to try to ensure that the same situation will not arise again in the future with regard to other people.

[Translation]

Mr. Tremblay: Mr. Chairman, I can assure the hon. member that I am just as concerned as he and other hon. members are with the problem raised when, through a judgment of the court, the Bergsma couple were refused the right to obtain their Canadian citizenship because they had stated they did not belong to any religion.

I am glad, therefore, in co-operation with my colleague the Minister of Justice (Mr. Favreau), to take all necessary steps so that persons who do not profess any religion in Canada may not find themselves in a situation where they could be refused their citizenship certificates, even if the application of such a policy, in future, should involve bringing certain amendments to the citizenship act.

[Text]

Mr. Howard: Mr. Chairman, I wonder whether the minister would make some comment on the references to delays in transmitting citizenship certificates to people of Chinese origin after they have passed the examination. There have been complaints about the inordinately long period of time it takes to receive these certificates. I would also ask the minister to comment on this situation. It is my understanding that people who apply for Canadian citizenship and have their applications rejected are not given the reasons for such rejection. Would the minister tell the committee whether there is any intention on the part of the government to change this policy and give people the reasons why they are not acceptable as Canadian citizens.

[Translation]

Mr. Tremblay: Mr. Chairman, I must tell the hon. member that there has been no ques-

[Mr. Orlikow.]

tion of racial discrimination in the case of applications for citizenship from Chinese people.

If, as the hon. member has pointed out, there have been fairly long delays in many cases where Chinese applicants were involved, that is because, as he very well knows, serious irregularities have occurred in the past few years where Chinese immigration is concerned; this frequently involves investigations that last for months on end before the status of some Chinese person who wants to get his citizenship certificates can be cleared up.

As far as the administration of the department is concerned, I can assure the house that I shall order my officials to speed up as much as possible the handling of individual cases. We have no intention of discriminating against potential Chinese immigrants.

Coming now to the extremely delicate problem of the final information the minister must secure before granting a certificate of citizenship I should like to say to the hon. member that since the present government has taken over, we have been actively considering all the implications of the final information the minister must get before granting either citizenship or the status of a landed immigrant, and I hope it will be possible to improve substantially the methods used until now in that respect.

[Text]

Mr. Howard: Mr. Chairman, the other day as an aside the hon. member for Lapointe asked the Prime Minister whether or not it would be desirable for ministers to reply to questions in the same language in which they were asked, and the Prime Minister said yes, it seemed to him a reasonable suggestion. I would merely point out that that did not happen just now, and quite frankly I disagree with the contention of the Prime Minister that it was a reasonable suggestion. As far as I am concerned if any hon. member, especially the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, desires to speak in English or French then that is his prerogative and right and it should be respected. I think the Prime Minister was in error the other day in saying that it was a commendable suggestion.

Mr. Benidickson: I think he meant a written question.

Mr. Howard: There was no indication that it was a written question whatever. The suggestion was to answer questions in the language they were asked in order to assist members. Whether they were written or oral is immaterial. I think this just proves the point that the Prime Minister once again was