

Canada Elections Act

fair treatment for all those British subjects who arrive in Canada prior to the coming into force of this bill. Those who arrive after that will be treated the same as any other immigrant. They will know about this change when they arrive. They will not be told about it after they arrive, thinking they have the right to vote in a federal election, or after they have voted in a federal election.

I commend this amendment to the committee, and I hope it will prove acceptable to all members as an addition to what I think is the generally welcomed principle being established under this new election law.

Mr. Prud'homme: I will be very short, Mr. Chairman. Let me bring to the attention of the hon. member that if we agree to this amendment we will not only have two classes of Canadian electors, but within one of those two classes we are creating two classes of British citizen in Canada, those who were here before and those who came after. We will have more division created among British citizens because of these two classes of electors of British origin.

Mr. Benjamin: It seems to me that what is now in the bill does that. Our defeat of the previous amendment, in effect, confirms what is in the bill. All my amendment does is extend this principle for a further short period. It extends the present status of British subjects under our law. This bill creates two classes now. The committee has had ample evidence that hon. members do not agree with the amendment. They agreed generally with the principle in the bill. All my amendment does is extend that principle for a short period of time.

Mr. Macquarrie: I should like to commend the hon. member for Regina Lake Centre on his excellent amendment. I wish he had brought it before the committee. He would have improved our wisdom then and, heaven knows, we might have been away over to page 199 by now. In a sense, I think the hon. member has tidied up this whole matter in that he has brought the question right up to the proper time. I have reference to the time of the passage of this Act. With reference to my friend and fellow traveller, the hon. member for Saint-Denis, it is very difficult it seems to me to avoid this matter of having two types of British citizen because we have already voted down one amendment which would take away for the duration of this legislation those rights which people have had

[Mr. Benjamin.]

for a long time. We have now just voted down an amendment which would extend those rights.

What it seems to me we are doing, to use a non-legal term, is phasing-out rights which were granted to people in times past. I think the most logical way of approaching this is the way suggested by the hon. member; that is, up to the passage of this legislation those rights which were granted would be honoured. Surely, this is what we have been looking for all the way through. This is a very reasonable method of dealing with this whole matter. We have agreed wisely, as a committee, that we should neither extend these rights in the future nor cut off those rights that were legitimately extended in the past. It seems to me that the hon. member has bridged the gap. He is a very thoughtful member and I am sure he has also considered the change in the age group. There will not be this five-year gap with people being deprived of rights which were granted to them. This amendment will do away with that retroactive problem. This is a very commendable measure and I urge support for it.

Mr. Allmand: I have just a few words, Mr. Chairman. My principal objection to the amendment now before the House is that it perpetuates the right of a group of people who will, until they die, have the right to vote without becoming Canadian citizens. It even goes beyond what the government has in the bill. The government would perpetuate the rights of a group of people who had the right to vote up to June 25, 1968. They will continue to have that right until they die. This amendment would go beyond that group and include all those who arrive in Canada up until the date this Act is put into force.

I much prefer the amendment suggested by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra which would give these people five years to obtain their Canadian citizenship. He suggested an incentive in the law which would continue for the time being the right to vote but would place an obligation on these people to obtain their Canadian citizenship within five years. The amendment before the House does not bring any end to this privilege, and I call it a privilege. I am afraid I will have to vote against it. I hope the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra will introduce his amendment so I can vote for it.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Mr. St. Pierre: Mr. Chairman, a few moments ago I expressed myself in favour of