

Immigration Act

Mr. Decore: Well, it would make it mandatory for an immigrant to apply for a certificate of citizenship within one year after acquiring domicile, otherwise he would lose such domicile for an additional period of five years. The hon. member has stated that this does not compel a newcomer to become a citizen. I might go along with him and agree on that, but it does imply compulsion because of the fact that a newcomer would be subjected to this penalty. You might as well put it in the form of a penalty because, by having failed to make his application within the year in question, he would have to wait an additional five years.

If this amendment passed I would think probably more people would become Canadian citizens; that is, newcomers to the country. But is that what we want? We certainly want newcomers to become Canadian citizens, but do we want to use any form of compulsion to require those people who do not apply within a certain period to wait another five years? If we resort to this method we might have more people apply, and in that way the object the hon. member has in mind might to some extent be attained.

I think this is in violation of a very important principle of our way of life. It is simply this. In a democracy we should respect the freedom of the conscience of the individual. Just as religious faith is a matter of conscience, so should citizenship be a matter of conscience in a democratic country. Citizenship is something that is not for sale. Pressure should not be used to make people conform. All the people who come into this country want to become Canadian citizens eventually, but it takes time. The desires of a newcomer are these. First of all he would like to get acquainted with the language of this country. He would like to have economic security. He would like to be socially acceptable in the community or in the area in which he finds himself.

I think we all know that until recently we have not been very effective in selling Canadianism to Canadians. In the early days of the settlement of the west many people were told to become naturalized Canadians because that was the only way in which they could obtain a patent or a title to their homestead. Of course that was not the right way to approach this very important matter. I feel that since the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect in 1947, very important steps have been taken in the right direction. We are becoming more and more conscious of our responsibilities as Canadian citizens.

At this time the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, with the assistance of some of our organizations such as the Imperial

Order of Daughters of the Empire, are doing very good work in first of all trying to get the newcomer acquainted with the facts of this country, the geography, the language and the economic conditions. Second, they are trying to do their best to create a warm and friendly feeling that he is desirable, that he is wanted and that he is also one of us. We may not be doing enough. Probably more should be done along those lines, but certainly in my opinion if this amendment is passed it will not help the situation.

The hon. member pointed out very well that many of those newcomers who came from that area of Europe where there was turmoil, where they found themselves in displaced persons' camps where they were stateless, when they reached the shores of this country were most anxious to obtain their citizenship certificates as soon as possible because they would have something they were not able to get in other places they ran away from. But the fact is some of these other immigrants have come from Holland. Let us not forget that these people come from a different country. They had been very loyal to their queen and to their way of living. They had their roots deep in that country, and after they come to a new land it takes time to get themselves acquainted with the language, to get their new roots in. The reason they came here was that they wanted to become Canadian citizens.

We would be far better off when any newcomer takes the solemn oath to which the hon. member referred, if we knew that he was not taking it because if he did not take it now he would have to wait another five years. We want him to take the oath because he sincerely feels that he is loyal to this country and wants to be a Canadian citizen.

Many things could be said about this amendment, Mr. Speaker. I am afraid I shall have to vote against it.

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Vegreville, I have every sympathy with the purpose behind the bill which has been introduced by the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. MacKenzie), but like the hon. member for Vegreville it would not be possible for me to support the bill.

Indeed, I would hope that my hon. friend would not feel like pressing it upon the house at all. It will serve a quite useful purpose to have had this subject raised and to have a little attention drawn to the fact that there is a desire—and I think from the spirit of the house there can be no doubt that the desire is shared by hon. members on both sides of the house and in every corner of the house