

*Canada Elections Act*

have had a period of up to 46 years in which he cast a ballot in every consecutive federal election. Under this amendment he would be disenfranchised without ever having the opportunity of voting again unless he does something different from what he has done in the past, namely, take out Canadian citizenship. These two groups will be disenfranchised. I presume, that we also disenfranchise people from Southern Ireland who could vote in the past, because they are not included in the act or in the amendments.

I understand that the categories I am speaking about represent about 1,500,000 people in Canada who could have voted or did vote in the last federal election and who will not be allowed to vote in the next federal election unless they take out Canadian citizenship. It can well be argued that they should in fact take out Canadian citizenship, that this is a highly desirable thing. I agree and I would encourage every non-citizen, whether he is a British subject or of other origin, to do so. I do not think anyone can argue about that. I have no particular axe to grind for British subjects. I myself am of different ethnic origin. I am Ukrainian and I am proud of it, just as proud as anyone would be of their national origin. I think that would indicate I have no vested interest in this matter.

However, I believe it is a serious matter to say to people who have grown accustomed to a certain kind of rule, who have grown accustomed to casting a vote, that we are changing the law retroactively, as it were, and that they are no longer entitled to vote. I should like to ask those who think as highly as I do of Canadian citizenship—and there is no one in this chamber who values it more highly—what is the hurry? Surely we do not want a special class of citizens in this country. Surely we want to pass an Act under which everyone who comes to this country from abroad will be treated equally. However, is it necessary to say that those who have come to Canada under certain rules and who have grown accustomed to exercising a certain privilege will be denied the right to vote because we are impatient to make them toe the line, which I am not too sure in their case is that significant?

I beg of you to consider that problem. I do not think it is a simple or unimportant thing to take away one of man's most valuable possessions in a free society, the right of casting a ballot to determine the direction in which the country will go. It is not that

simple to say to a man that he could vote yesterday but tomorrow he cannot do so. That does not seem to me to be fair.

It is true that we want Canadian unity, and I can see that giving special privileges to any class of people has a tendency to destroy national unity because other ethnic groups as well as the French, our other founding race, feel that a special privilege has been given to a certain class of people. Let us do away with that special privilege, but let us not back up. Why do we have to insult all these people? Is it necessary that we do it? I suggest that it serves no useful purpose in connection with Canadian unity.

• (12:30 p.m.)

I can think of a practical example of the emotional effect upon people. My mother, who is dead now, God rest her soul, died the day after the last general election. She was over 70 years old. She was of Scottish descent. She came to this country in the early 1900's. She had two husbands, the first of whom died in the First World War, and the second of whom fought and died as a result of the Second World War. Is it right that we should say to people like her that they can no longer vote in this country that they love, the country they have worked for and of which they are proud? I do not think it is fair or necessary to do that. All such persons should be encouraged to take out citizenship, but I see no need to force them to do so in order to exercise a right they have always had the privilege of exercising.

So far as I am concerned the bill is a little inadequate. I pointed that out in my opening remarks. I believe that the amendment that is put forward is even more inadequate. I did not believe so previously, but I did a lot of thinking about it over the weekend and I now feel we are in too much of a hurry. I do not make accusations but it will appear to many people that we are not only anxious to say that they are not special citizens but that we want to step on them in some way and say that they cannot do what they did previously. I do not see any useful purpose in that.

I can understand why people have divergent views on an issue such as this. Frankly, Mr. Chairman, it was almost a toss of a coin with respect to which side I was going to come down on, whether in favour of the amendment moved by the hon. member for Matane or in favour of the original bill. But I have thought about the matter and I do not think I have come down on a side that is