

Private Members' Business

Mr. Reimer: The member had his say before so I will continue now.

I think what the member is saying to us is if a person comes from somewhere other than our traditions, which have evolved out of the British model, and cannot quite comprehend how our system works, that somehow we have to change and accommodate that ignorance of our system.

What we do is bring that person to understand our system. Then the person will say: "Now I understand why Canada is one of the best places in the world to live. I can understand the evolution of Canadian society. I can see the values that you have developed in Canada. Now I really want to become a citizen because now I understand".

That is what we should be doing rather than going in the opposite way. The hon. member talked about a person who came to his office and did not want to swear an oath of allegiance or make an affirmation of allegiance to the Queen of England. Of course, he did stay. We have to be fair. He did say that he corrected the person. It is to the Queen of Canada. That is correct.

He mentioned some of our constitutional debates over the past few years. I want to quote from page 9 of the chairman's foreword in the report *The Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future*. Keith Spicer said something that is very important and it is important to this debate. He said: "This country is dying of ignorance and of our stubborn refusal to learn. Lazy cynical official minds have for too long dismissed the obvious practical answers to these problems as simplistic and naive: broad travel, exchange opportunities for example and better teaching of at least some shared history".

I think that Keith Spicer hit it right on. This country is dying of ignorance in our stubborn refusal to learn. If only we started to learn some of our history we would then understand what it means when we say Queen of Canada as opposed to Queen of England. Because we would say that as a Canadian we swear allegiance not to the Queen of England but to the Queen of Canada. That is what we do. If we understood our system properly, we would understand exactly what that means.

I think the member has it all backward. You do not swear allegiance to institutions. You swear allegiance to

the head of state. The head of the Canadian state is the Queen of Canada.

Look at the structure of the bill itself. What appears right on top of the bill? That this is the third session, 34th Parliament, 40th year of the reign of Elizabeth II. A little further down that it is by Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. It is right there all the way through.

When we became members of Parliament we also took an oath or an affirmation of allegiance. To whom? Not to the Queen of England, no, to the Queen of Canada. That is what we did and that is what we are asking every other person to do.

If an immigrant coming into Canada says this is the best place in the world to live and wants to live here and then somehow does not understand our process maybe we have done something wrong by making it too easy for them to become a citizen. Maybe what we should do is change from the three-year requirement we have now back to five years as it used to be in order for these people to be in Canada longer, to understand our institutions and some of our history.

We also have two other requirements for oath of citizenship or for qualifying to take the oath. We say that you should have at least an adequate knowledge of English or French. I think we should change that to a working knowledge of English or French. Now that would be more meaningful. It would not bar anyone from being a landed immigrant. It just might take them a little longer to learn one of our two official languages. That is all.

Instead of having a minimal understanding of Canadian traditions, institutions and geography which really means that they have to know the name of their member of Parliament, the mayor, the Prime Minister, and the premier, maybe we should elevate that to an understanding perhaps comparable to a grade 10 level of Canadian civics. Then we would not have members getting up in the House as we have one now saying that he does not understand or it is not clear about the Queen of Canada. Then they would understand.

These people would still be landed immigrants in Canada but they would then work at their citizenship and it would be more meaningful. Maybe we should consider that type of reform. If the hon. member were getting up on that type of reform I would listen to him.