

Canada Elections Act

procedure just short of that followed by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, namely when hon. members are speaking to this particular amendment they could indicate alternatives that they will propose. We would then in effect have the full platter before us. As mentioned by the hon. member for Skeena, it is unlikely that we will complete the bill this evening. Once we have heard the full range of suggestions on this particular clause, we might go on to the subsequent one. This will offer the possibility of having discussions to see if general agreement can be reached.

Mr. Macquarrie: Without creating a precedent, I wish to say that I think the minister is speaking with wisdom.

The Chairman: If the amendment is mentioned in the course of hon. member's remarks, it creates no difficulty, as long as it is clear that the amendment having been discussed, mentioned and argued, should not then be put. Otherwise, we will have a whole series of amendments before the committee simultaneously. That is inconsistent with our practice. If it is agreed in committee that hon. members speak and mention the sort of amendment they wish to move, the members of the committee can then get together independent of the committee of the whole to work out a compromise that is acceptable. I will consider the amendments as being mentioned and not being put.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Chairman, I was going to make some comments on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Skeena. However, that has now been obviated by the wise decision of Your Honour. I do have an amendment that I intended to put before the committee this afternoon. In light of the comments that have been made, it might have that element of compromise that is so important in reaching decisions in this Parliament, particularly where those decisions lie in the area of a controversial or politically sensitive subject.

I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. member for Hillsborough when he pointed out that the amendment before the committee is entirely negative. He suggested that in this day and age of the global village, to use the McLuhan phrase, and the fact that the Commonwealth of Nations is the only realistic international body that is able to operate because it is established on the same basis of values and political traditions, rather than moving in a negative direction and retreating

to nationalistic chauvinism that was more appropriate in the 19th century than in the 20th century, we should move in a more positive direction. The hon. member for Skeena spoke in somewhat the same terms. He indicated that his opposition to the present motion is that it is restrictive rather than expansive.

● (5:00 p.m.)

I am sure all members of the committee agree that the right of the franchise is one of the most important ingredients of our democratic system, as well as being one of the most cherished rights of the citizens of this country. We must always remember that the institutions that we have followed in this high court of public opinion have been derived almost in total from the Mother of Parliaments at Westminster. However, in the early stages of the evolutionary process which has brought our system of responsible democracy to its present level of development, the franchise was restricted.

Since that time, every move in the direction of changing the franchise has been to expand the right of exercising the vote. It is interesting to note that in almost every case there has been a certain degree of controversy surrounding such changes. Even when the right to vote was extended to the women of Canada, as it was in other countries with democratic procedures, the change was not agreed to without some degree of controversy.

Looking at clause 14 in total, the major change proposed is in the direction of extending the franchise, of making it available to Canadians of 18 years of age. The proposal in subclause 3 is, of course, in exactly the opposite direction. For the first time in the history of Parliament and its decennial dealings with the Canada Elections Act, we are moving in a negative direction and removing voting privileges that were once extended to certain groups in this country.

I am sure that the substantial weight of opinion in this House is toward accentuating the positive rather than the negative, and with this in mind I am going to make a suggestion that can be put into the mill of the ad hoc committee that will consider a compromise solution to this question. My suggestion is in the form of an amendment to subclause 3 of clause 14 and is in the following words, which are substituted for the present subclause:

(3) Every British subject, Commonwealth citizen, and citizen of France who has landed immigrant status and who has lived continuously in Canada