

*Canada Elections Act*

I say to the hon. member for Matane—who is sometimes in his seat and now I see him in the chamber—as well as any French speaking Canadian: Do not start to tamper retroactively with the rights that have come down through history. If you do you will shake the whole foundation, the whole platform of trust and confidence which it has been so difficult to build over the past 100 years. I am not referring to British subjects who come to this country today or who will come tomorrow or a year from now. I agree with the hon. member for Saint-Denis and the hon. member for Matane that these new Canadians, be they of Ukrainian, British, Italian or American origin, should all be treated the same. That should be the tenet of the just society. But I cannot be a member of a Parliament that refers to a just society and at the same time produces an amendment that unjustly and retroactively affects rights that were given to a certain class of Canadians long before we became Members of Parliament. This is what the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Matane seeks to do.

As I read clause 14 (3), it is a happy compromise and a good clause. It may not find agreement with all members of the House, but for any member who is not aware of what it says let me point out that it states clearly it would not apply to those British Canadians who came here before the last election. Perhaps if we had been members of the House back in 1867 there would have been a different law on citizenship and a different law regarding voting, but that is not the reality now. We are faced with a law that affects those British subjects who came to Canada and, rightly or wrongly, were given a certain privilege. This privilege should not be continued in the future, but certainly it should be preserved and not taken away retroactively today. What clause 14 (3) says is that British subjects who voted in the last election, and who are still resident in Canada, because of the conditions under which they came to Canada they shall keep the right to vote.

Since the act, as I understand it, is silent with regard to British subjects who came here after June 25, 1968, which was the date of the last election, those British subjects will face the same duties and responsibilities as the Italian, Spanish, German and other immigrants. If I misinterpreted this, I hope someone will correct me. In the future, from the day this clause is proclaimed, all new Canadians coming to this country will be treated

equally. I think that is just. But I point out seriously to my French speaking friends, and especially to the hon. member for Roberval who spoke with such conviction about his own concept of Canada, and also to the hon. member for Papineau, who uttered some interesting sounds just before noon; stop, look and listen. If I understood correctly the contributions of hon. members this morning, I share with them the view that we should build a new constitution on the reality of today, looking forward to tomorrow, and perhaps forget about the reality of 100 years ago.

• (3:40 p.m.)

I say to the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour that whether we like it or not we have a constitution, but because of the history of our country there is a difference in the interpretation of it. Was it a contract that was entered into in 1867? Coming closer to Mr. Pearson's day and perhaps the reality of the situation, was the objective to help build a land based on two founding nations?

This Parliament passed the Official Languages Act. It was because of the rights established in 1867, and it was because of the precedents and traditions that flowed from those rights that, in effect, we have two special groups in this country, English speaking and French speaking Canadians. Some hon. members may take exception to that statement, but I point out to some of my hon. friends who said, "Forget about history" that I share some of the views of the so-called third force. Are we to try to create a new constitution looking only at the retroactive rights acquired in 1867, at all of the good will and some ill will that flowed down to us during those 100 years? I say we should look at the reality of Canada today, and not only at the founding races in 1867. We should look at all of the races represented here today, and build our new constitution on that basis. One of the reasons we are so bogged down in the constitutional morass, and stuck in the swampland of constitutional debate, is that we have been looking backwards.

If the hon. member for Saint-Denis wants to project what I am saying into constitutional development, then I might go along with him, and with the hon. member for Matane on this bill, particularly if they want to forget the rights given by Parliament to certain people. The hon. member for Fraser Valley East mentioned that rights are changed every day, that we amend laws every day. I would ask him to stand up in this chamber this