

Immigration Act

States consulate and he said they have a similar regulation, that you must reside in the United States five years before you are eligible to make an application for citizenship papers. I said I understood they had something called first and second papers which led to citizenship. He said that was something the same as our own notice of intention. It is a notice that you intend to do this some time. It does help one to hold a job if you have filed a notice of intention or first papers showing that you do intend to become a citizen of the country, but it does not necessarily mean you are going to have your citizenship papers. Certainly it does not mean you are going to have them any sooner.

Mr. Green: Does the United States have any provision compelling a person to take out citizenship, similar to the proposal the hon. member is asking to have written into our law?

Mr. MacKenzie: I am coming to that in just a minute. As a matter of fact I do not think there is any compulsion in this amendment I am submitting. I did mention to my friend that since we lived fairly close to Detroit I remembered quite well that during the depression some Canadians who had gone to Detroit and taken their first papers were let out of their employment and returned home. I said that I knew some of them had their first and second papers, but they were let out. He said that was not an over-all regulation in the United States, but was really instituted by the city to look after their own relief rolls.

I agree that the most normal, and probably the only, way to have citizenship in the true form is to have a desire in your own heart and soul to become a citizen. A person has to be anxious to become a citizen. You cannot compel a person to become a citizen. I do not believe the amendment I have submitted does compel anybody to become a citizen. There is nothing compulsory about it. If you reside in this country for five years, then normally you have three months to wait before you get your citizenship papers. This amendment proposes that you have one year in which to make up your mind. There is the five years residence, and then you have one full year to make up your mind whether or not you want to become a citizen. If you do not make that application within one year, then you simply lose the first five years residence and start all over again.

Mr. Macdonnell: May I ask a question at this point? Would there be nothing whatever that could serve as a sufficient excuse or reason, I mean illness or anything, for having let the year expire?

[Mr. MacKenzie.]

Mr. MacKenzie: There is no such provision in this amendment. This is only a suggestion to the members of the house. It is up to the members to make these suggestions. I would think that if you lived in a country for five full years, and then had one more year making six years in all, you would have some idea of whether or not you wanted to become a citizen. If you put in an application, then that clears you.

If you do not put in an application, then you lose the first five years residence. You can pick it up again, and it is only a matter of extending it five years more. A person may live his life in Canada, may engage in business and become quite prosperous without ever taking out his citizenship papers. In fact, some of them do that. Nobody molests them; nobody says anything about it. It is quite optional.

I cannot see how the amendment I am proposing has any compulsion about it. It is entirely voluntary. It is just an added incentive. If you want to put in your application, all right; but if you do not nobody is going to molest you as long as you obey the laws of the land and do not become a public charge. I believe we all agree that the sooner the immigrant becomes a Canadian citizen, becomes integrated into our Canadian life and assumes the responsibilities which are his as a citizen, just as he accepts the privileges and benefits, the better it is for all concerned. I say again, in submitting this proposed amendment to the Immigration Act, I feel it is something that does not have any compulsion in it. It is a matter of creating greater interest and enthusiasm amongst ourselves so there will be a greater number of enthusiastic Canadians in our country.

Mr. John Decore (Vegreville): I want to make a few remarks in connection with this proposed amendment to the Immigration Act, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the hon. member who proposed the amendment, it appears to me that probably his prime intention is to get more of our newcomers to become Canadian citizens as soon as possible. This feeling is understandable, because I believe it is a feeling that is shared by many of us in this house. We like newcomers to become Canadians and to assume the duties and obligations, as well as the privileges, of Canadian citizens.

Although I am sympathetic with his intentions, I am afraid I must disagree with his methods. This amendment would make it mandatory, according to the note of explanation—

Mr. MacKenzie: I do not like the word "mandatory"; I am sorry.