

It was pointed out in the following session that a difficulty would arise in the case of women who had voted previously in the Dominion of Canada and that a number of them might be deprived of the franchise in the ensuing general election. As soon as that was brought to the attention of Parliament at the last session, the difficulty was remedied, as the member for North Waterloo has pointed out. But the reason for the legislation is the reason which I have sought to give to the House. As another year has now elapsed, there may not be quite as much reason for this restriction as there was two or three years ago. It may be that as time goes on there will be less reason for it. But in my humble judgment the restriction then adopted was a reasonable and proper one, and it met with the approval of the House of Commons at that time.

Now, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) intimated to the House this afternoon that the Government will in all probability bring down during the present session some amendments to the Elections Act. I have no doubt that at every session for a number of years it will be found expedient to amend that act, and I would like to see what amendments the Government proposes before definitely passing on a motion such as the one we have before us at the present time. I cannot say that I have any very strong opinion upon this question myself, but others may differ from me. I do not believe that the law in its working out created any injustice to any considerable portion of the foreign-born women. I know that it has been charged that in some places it was difficult to obtain certificates, but I think that any woman with any reasonable degree of effort could in the long time which intervened before the general election have obtained a certificate entitling her to vote if she so desired. The law was passed in 1920, and amended in 1921, and the election was held on the 6th of December last, so there were months and months and months during which the certificates might have been obtained from any judge having jurisdiction in the Dominion of Canada. I do not think any great injury arose by reason of the enactment. However, as I say, it is a fair matter for consideration now, and I think my hon. friend from North Waterloo might well consider letting his motion stand until we see just what amendments the Government proposes to bring down in regard to this question. Personally, I have no very strong opinion about it.

Mr. S. W. JACOBS (George Etienne Cartier): Mr. Speaker, if I were of a vindictive disposition I would be willing to concur in the view expressed by the former Solicitor-General (Mr. Guthrie) and allow the law as it stands at present to remain on the statute books until another general election. But in view of the fact that I come of a race which likes to practise charity to all, I think it is only just, now that we are placed in the seats of the mighty, that we should try to even up matters and give those gentlemen opposite a reasonable run for their money when the next general election takes place.

I want to tell my friends on the opposite side that if I received a majority of something like seven or eight thousand in my division in the last election, it was largely due to this section 29 of the Elections Act which is now up for discussion. I had in my division something like five or six thousand foreign-born women. It was expected by the government that a large number of them would be prohibited from voting under this peculiar section 29, but I saw to it that every one of them was naturalized, and I venture to say that ninety-nine out of every hundred who were naturalized voted against the government which put upon the statute books this miserable and nefarious section. It is only natural that it should be so. I do not mind admitting frankly here that I sedulously circulated the fact that the reason why these women were standing in queues of thirty and forty and fifty in front of the judge's room, and in front of the court house before it was opened, in below zero weather, was that the government insisted that they should be put upon a plane different from that of their sisters born in Mexico, Guatemala, Hayti, Honduras and other portions of Central America.

The former Solicitor General tells us that the reasons at present are not so pointed as they were in 1920 when this law was put upon the statute books. I agree with him that the reasons are not so pointed now. Before 1920, when the reasons were pointed, these gentlemen were obliged within a very few months of that time to take the political jump, and that is the reason why they proposed by this act to disfranchise a large number of the people whom they thought and rightly so were going to vote against them. But even if this law had not been put into force, I believe these women would have voted against the government for their other sins of omission and commission during their four or five years of power.