

Canada Elections Act

know where he was, what he did and what he said in 1954 in his province when the provincial government took this right away from British citizens who were not Canadians and who have not had the right to vote in provincial elections since. As the hon. member knows, in his province this right has not existed since 1964. What action did the people take then and what was their feeling? Was the feeling divisive?

● (12:20 p.m.)

Mr. Macquarrie: May I say, since the hon. member asked me, that there was a little misunderstanding when the election was called, but with their usual wisdom the people of Prince Edward Island handled it quite well.

Mr. Cafik: I would like to say a few words on this subject. The general intention of Bill C-215 is to allow British subjects who have voted in previous federal elections to vote in the future. I have just been considering whether this provision in fact includes people of Irish descent. Under the previous Act those of Irish descent were considered to be in the same classification as British subjects, and I think it is quite clear that those from Southern Ireland are not so considered in Bill C-215. It may well be debatable whether the term "British subject" in fact covers those that the draftsman of the bill had in mind.

I should like to suggest later, as I did before in the House, that we clarify not only that point but other points. If the clause stands, I will propose the striking out the words "British subject" and replacing them by the word "person". The net effect is almost the same because those who were not citizens and who were eligible to vote in the last federal election were in fact either British subjects or, I suggest, citizens of Southern Ireland.

Speaking on the amendment of the hon. member for Matane I should like to review for a moment, if I may, what a Canadian citizen is and what the effect of the proposed amendment would be. First of all, I understand that a Canadian citizen is one who has taken out his Canadian citizenship papers. This can be done by one who has been in Canada for five years and who has made the proper application, if he is not a British subject, or, if he is a British subject he is given the special privilege of taking out Canadian citizenship after one year. In addition to going through these formalities, one has to pay a \$10 fee.

[Mr. Prud'homme.]

The fee itself is not very significant for most people but I suggest that it may well be significant for many people who are retired. We all know the pressures that have been put on them, because of inflation. I suggest that perhaps it is not appropriate to ask them to pay the \$10 fee particularly if they have lived in this country for 40 or 50 years, in order to take out citizenship in a country of which most of them really believe they are citizens now.

In addition, anyone who is born in Canada is a Canadian citizen, and so is a British subject under certain circumstances stemming from the passing of the Citizenship Act of 1947. That Act outlined that those then living in Canada who were landed immigrants for a period of five years prior to the passing of the Act were automatically considered to be Canadian citizens, and those who were not landed immigrants but who were British subjects and who had been in this country for a period of 20 years prior to the passing of the act were deemed to be Canadian citizens.

The implications of these two provisions of the Act of 1947 are quite significant to this debate. Let us look at the practical implications of the amendment before us, which in effect says that only those who have taken out Canadian citizenship or who were born in this country and thereby are Canadian citizens or who are Canadian citizens under the act of 1947 will be allowed to vote. The proposition in Bill C-215 allows those who could vote in the past to still vote in the future.

Let us find out who in fact would be disenfranchised if this amendment were to be passed. I am not prejudging the situation one way or the other, at the moment; I would just like to review the facts.

First of all, under this amendment landed immigrants who came to this country since 1942, unless they went through the formality of becoming Canadian citizens, would in fact be disenfranchised even though many would have lived here for a period of 26 years. This means that a person who has lived here for 26 years and cast a ballot in every federal election since that time would wake up one morning after this amendment is passed and all of a sudden, or perhaps more unfortunately just prior to the next federal election, find out he is no longer entitled to vote. Psychologically this is a very bad thing to do to such a person but, more important, consider the person who was not a landed immigrant in Canada but who is a British subject. He could