

Canada Elections Act

will be done on the basis of a recognition that those who are Canadian citizens under our law are automatically accepted as being so.

[Translation]

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Speaker, I am among those who think that this debate has lasted too long and, on the whole, that it has deviated from its purpose. It is important, I feel, to clarify certain things.

Some tried in their speeches to give the impression that there was a quarrel between French Canadians and English Canadians while there is nothing of the kind. We have proved, I think, that this is not so since we rejected the proposal of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) tending to grant French immigrants the same privilege as those from the Commonwealth.

I was surprised to find out that the most rabid separatists are not those from Quebec, as one would think, but rather those who persist in claiming special privileges while several New Canadians of all races, established in Canada for many decades, are as deserving as they are.

We want to decide, once and for all, whether Canada is self-governing country and whether all Canadians should be treated equally and enjoy the same rights so that nobody should have privileges.

I can understand that in the past privileges have been granted to some classes of citizens. It should not have been so perhaps and if it had not been the case, there would have probably been less misunderstanding and division in this country. I believe that we are now mature enough to decide that the status of Canadian citizen entails certain conditions that everybody will have to fill.

Some hon. members are shocked to be obliged to produce a proof of citizenship in order to go to vote but, after all, we are all required to do so. My ancestors came to this country in 1629 and this is much earlier than those of most of those who are protesting against regularizing a situation which has lasted too long already. And yet, we are obliged to prove that we are Canadian citizens in all sorts of circumstances where it is requested to produce our baptismal certificates in order to establish that we have the right to vote in such and such circumstance, which, besides, is the practice in every country in the world.

• (4:30 p.m.)

Those who since this morning have turned the debate into a racial conflict have done a

[Mr. Winch.]

disservice to the Canadian nation and to Parliament. The subject matter we are dealing with is injustice. Canada is a member of the Commonwealth, an organization that comprises 26 countries. Only eight of them give the franchise to Canadians and two do not give them the right to be candidates in any election. Why should we be asked to be more generous toward foreigners? In most cases, they are citizens of very small countries.

We are talking of injustice, Mr. Chairman. We are not disfranchising anyone. We simply say to foreigners: Go and register as Canadian citizens, then, you will vote in the next election. We do not want to deprive you of your privileges, because you have been just as good Canadians as the others, you served during the war, you paid taxes and contributed to the economic development of Canada about which we are so proud.

I do not think that hon. members from Quebec could be blamed for bringing racial considerations into the debate. On the contrary, we have proved since the beginning that we wanted to build a united and independent Canada. Indeed, I think that we have had some merit since all year round we fight against those of us who advocate separatism, who tear at the fabric of Confederation. I do not understand that some of our opponents, who wish to perpetuate this system of privileges, to which no other Canadian is entitled, do not realize that they are those who are responsible for the division from which we are suffering at this time in Canada, and which we are trying to minimize by all sorts of means.

Mr. Chairman, again I say that we are not taking anything away from anybody, that anyone wishing to vote could register. The formality is very simple, but if they do not deem the Canadian citizenship worth that small effort, they do not deserve to be considered as Canadians.

In opening my remarks, I said I thought that this debate had lasted too long. I shall not dwell on this, except to urge all my colleagues to talk with all possible objectivity, even if they are influenced by some particular considerations. Therefore, may I be permitted to ask my colleagues to put an end to this discussion and to proceed to the vote, so that this question might be settled once and for all.

[English]

The Chairman: Is the committee ready for the question?