

Citizenship

I assume that we are anxious to help others obtain it, "it" being citizenship. The House is no doubt anxious to hear from my colleagues who will want to participate in this debate. We will support the bill going to committee. My colleagues wish to say some things about the bill during the present stage of debate. They will make other suggestions to improve the bill when it is before the committee. Mr. Speaker, we will support Bill C-20 moving to Committee.

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker,—

An hon. Member: You are the only NDP member present.

Mr. Symes: I see how crowded the benches are for this afternoon's important debate. On behalf of the NDP, I welcome Bill C-20, the new citizenship bill, for it removes many of the inequities and anomalies in existing citizenship legislation. This bill changes the whole situation. Previously, citizenship was a privilege, granted at the discretion of the minister. By virtue of this bill, citizenship becomes a right, available after fulfilment of specified conditions.

We entertain serious reservations about clause 33 which deals with non-citizen ownership of land. We shall explore this matter further in committee and ask the minister to clarify the provision, as it may conflict with provincial government legislation which has been passed in an attempt to restrict foreign ownership of provincial land. I shall discuss this in greater detail later.

I should be lacking in manners if I did not mention and pay tribute to a number of hon. members of this House, especially of my party, who have proposed a series of private members' bills designed to improve the old citizenship legislation which came into force in 1947 and has been amended 61 times. I refer to Bill C-260, standing in the name of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the aim of which is to allow a child born outside Canada the right to claim Canadian citizenship through the mother. I am happy to note that this idea has been incorporated in Bill C-20.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre also proposed another private member's bill, C-317, the aim of which is to give the alien husband of a Canadian wife the same privileges as are given to an alien wife in the application for Canadian citizenship. I am happy to note that the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) in Bill C-283, for reducing the minimum residence requirement from five to three years, has been adopted. The proposal put forward by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre in his private member's public bill, C-319, has not been totally incorporated in Bill C-20. I urge the minister to consider the purpose of the hon. member's bill. The explanatory note reads in part:

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Canadian Citizenship Act to provide that persons residing in Canada by virtue of a minister's permit—

The reference there is to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration.

—may have such time of residence counted for purposes of qualifying as time of permanent residence for purposes of the act.

● (1720)

I see in Bill C-20 that the only credit given for people in those circumstances would be that each day in Canada would count as a half day toward fulfilling the residence requirement. I think a full-day provision is quite logical because many of the people here under minister's permits are in Canada under special circumstances. I think that time should be counted for them. As I said, I am happy to see that the ideas behind private members' bills are being incorporated in this new citizenship bill.

The minister briefly pointed out some of the changes in the legislation, changes that many members on all sides of the House have been urging on the government to bring about a greater degree of fairness in the Citizenship Act. We now know, of course, that the period of residence requirement to obtain citizenship will be reduced from five years to three. The age of majority is now reduced from 21 years to 18, and men and women will be treated equally. All applicants for Canadian citizenship will be required to meet the three years' residence qualification without regard to any marital connection with a citizen. Children born abroad will now derive citizenship from either parent. Either parent will be able to apply for citizenship on behalf of a minor child. Women who lost their Canadian citizenship through marriage to an alien prior to 1947 will be able to recover it automatically upon notice to the minister.

Under the new act, British subjects will no longer be exempt from the requirement to be examined by a citizenship judge or to attend a ceremony to take the oath of allegiance. I think those are measures that are quite fair and long overdue, especially the points that end the discrimination against women. That would make a former colleague of mine, Mrs. Grace MacInnis, very happy. When she was a member of this House, year after year she vigorously urged that discrimination against women in the Citizenship Act be ended.

I am also happy to see that we now have recognized citizenship judges by this bill. There are presently 21 such judges in Canada. Also, the bill now incorporates the right of appeal for an applicant against any decision granted by a citizenship judge. In the past we had the problem of a citizenship judge denying citizenship and the applicant having no right of appeal. The concept of appeal is one that is of long-standing in our democracy and legal system. I am happy to see that it is now restored in the aspects of granting of citizenship.

In one sense, this is a motherhood bill. It is something that all members can agree on—the need to reform and update our Citizenship Act. There is very little to be critical about. However, there is one clause that does concern me. I mentioned this at the outset. I refer to clause 33 of the bill. It applies to property, non-Canadian ownership of Canadian property, especially Canadian land. We have a concern on the part of the provinces, especially Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and indeed my own province of Ontario, about the degree of foreign ownership of provincial land. Because the federal government has failed to take any real initiative in this area, the provinces, which under the constitution have authority to regulate property, have been taking initiatives and passing bills to restrict non-resident, non-Canadian ownership