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Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): We'll bring our meeting to order.

As part of our ongoing study on the loss of Canadian citizenship for the years 1947, 1977, and 2007, we've heard from a number of witnesses. Today we're very pleased to welcome representatives from the Institute for Canadian Citizenship. I want to welcome John Ralston Saul, co-chair, and Sander Dankelman, special projects coordinator.

Thank you for coming here today to share your thoughts with us. I'm going to pass it right over to you now for your opening statements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Ralston Saul (Co-Chair, Institute for Canadian Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's a great honour to have been invited to appear before your committee. I must say that since I first visited one of these three buildings, at the age of 14 or thereabouts, to attend Question Period, each time I return, I am overwhelmed to find myself at the centre of Canadian democracy. I also have to admit that it's been a long time since I was last invited to appear before a committee, for obvious reasons. I'm delighted to be back again speaking to a parliamentary committee.

Adrienne Clarkson, my Co-Chair of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, really wanted to be here today with me, but the Secretary General of the Commonwealth invited her to serve on the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding which is engaged in more or less the same type of discussions on immigration, citizenship, integration and so forth. She is in London for a meeting of the commission, which is composed of eight prominent Commonwealth personalities. She has asked me to convey to you her best wishes.

[*English*]

She asked me to excuse her and send her very best wishes to the committee.

I know that you've been talking about the question of loss of Canadian citizenship. I've read most of your conversations and debates on the subject. I am not at all an expert in this area. Our institute, which is brand new, is not at all an expert in this area. It's not that it could never be an area we would become more expert in, but it's not the area we were set up to work in. We've been working very hard to get ourselves going on other subjects. As you know, there are many areas that are difficult, complicated, and interesting around immigration and citizenship.

I've read all of the debates, discussions, and witness testimony. Much of it is incredibly moving and surprising. Don Chapman may not be a citizen, but he certainly seems to be the model of the engaged citizen as far as I can make out. That's what citizens are supposed to do: make themselves heard, get up there and put forward issues, and fight for them. He's a pretty good model for most Canadians. I wouldn't have any trouble saying he's the model for a Canadian citizen in the kind of work he's doing.

In reading this, although there are many unsolved issues surrounding this, as far as I can make out it seems you're working your way toward some solutions. Some of them seem to be already coming along. Some of them are more complicated and further away. But the sense—from somebody who's really interested but doesn't know, who comes at it and just sits down and reads four or five sessions—is that you've made a lot of progress in this. Obviously it's an area where no Canadian wants to feel that people have been left out who shouldn't be left out. So it's really important work you're doing.

Interestingly enough, as I was reading it—I should have thought of it before—I suddenly realized it was very personal to me, because my father was in the Winnipeg Rifles during the war. When he was in England he married a British woman who became a war bride. My older brother Alastair was born in Britain in 1944. They moved back to Canada and I was produced.

I wasn't able to reach him, but I suppose in 1968, about 48 hours before his 24th birthday, we suddenly discovered that if he didn't sign a piece of paper he was going to lose his citizenship because he had been born in England, had a war-bride mother, and so on. I actually remember this desperate work of 24 hours, because at the time he was out of the country and we had to get the Canadian embassy to intervene to get him to sign a piece of paper, and it was done. So having almost had it happen in our family, I can imagine things like that happening in many families. In a sense, these are issues that have to be dealt with—and this is a sort of segue.

We're a country of immigration, and have a history of having done many things right in immigration and a certain number of things wrong—we all know that. But I'm always amazed at how few big errors there have been. Clearly this whole discussion has raised some real problems, and I assume you're going to find your way to the end of them.

Let me raise three points next. You all know much more about this than I do; I realize most of you have been at it longer. But from an historic point of view I'm always struck by the fact that we're in an era when the rule of law is also the rule of detailed administration. It seems as if it were always that way, whereas of course the idea of citizenship being tied to passports and detailed regulations is really fairly recent, not simply in Canada but everywhere in the world. Most people travelled across borders in Europe without passports before the First World War. So all of this is really quite recent. The idea that you needed certain pieces of paper in order to be a citizen of a country is a new idea, and people thought of themselves as being British, Canadian, or French long before the administrative and legal things were accepted.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Secondly, what truly sets Canada apart from other countries like Australia and New Zealand is the fact that it is just about the only country that has adopted a clear position on the link between immigration and citizenship. We welcome immigrants so that they can become citizens. This philosophical and ethical principle is radically different from anything we see in Europe, hence the confusion surrounding this matter. Our position also differs from that of the United States. As you no doubt know, 82% or 83% of our immigrants become citizens. I believe the figure for the United States is 42%, and for Europe, 6% or 7%. Therefore, our approach to immigration and citizenship is truly different from that of other countries.

The principle behind this philosophy is this: if you're an immigrant, we want you, not simply because you might be a doctor or a plumber, but because you'll become a citizen. Canada's philosophical approach is very original. When a mistake is made, it usually involves this philosophical notion that immigrants come to Canada to become citizens.

● (1640)

[*English*]

And I must say, whenever I meet people and it's evident that they're recent arrivals but maybe have been here several years, I ask them if they're a citizen yet. If they say they're not, I say, “Well, why aren't you a citizen yet?”, which is, of course, exactly the opposite of what would be said in most countries. They would say, “Do you really want to be a citizen?” or “Isn't it a bit soon?” or something, whereas my view is once you're into three and a half years, we really should be saying, “Hey, it's time to take up your obligations and responsibilities as a citizen, and we want you. We want you as part of the working pack of Canadians who are building the country.”

I think immigrants to this country—I've been to a lot of ceremonies, as I'm sure you, as members of Parliament, have all been to a lot of ceremonies—when you talk to them, they get that. There are immigrants here, immigrant citizens here. Right? They get it. They understand that that's the difference here, and therefore we have to judge ourselves on the basis of that philosophy.

That leads me to talking about the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, which I was told you were interested in hearing a bit about. As a lead-up to that, having said that we have this very original approach towards immigration and citizenship, in spite of that we've never really had a full debate in Canada in modern times about what we mean by citizenship, what we're hoping to accomplish. There are lots of sentences that we use. There are lots of clichés. There are things we hope, but we haven't really had an interesting debate.

Here we are, probably the most experimental nation in the world, and that's a positive thing, and yet we haven't really had a very interesting national conversation about the experiment. We've sort of taken things for granted. Many of them are good things, but it's important also to have the discussion. That's another reason why I think the work that you're doing is so interesting. I think it's particularly interesting because other countries have very, very different models. You can go country by country and identify models that are really quite different from ours. They have their relationships, but they are not the same models.

One of the reasons I think we haven't had the debate is because this is a country that specializes in the ad hoc, so we build things bit by bit as a way of avoiding crises and trying to pick the good stuff and how to get ahead. Ad hoc can get you quite a way, and it has advantages and different disadvantages, but we have to be careful at a certain point that we've done so much ad hoc and we really haven't said, “Okay, this seems to work. Now why does it work? What are we trying to accomplish? What's the right language?”

Most other countries have very interesting language, much of which I disagree with personally, but they have interesting language. We haven't done much work on the language to describe what it is that we're doing. I think there is some real work to be done there.

[*Translation*]

According to an article in this morning's edition of La Presse, approximately 800,000 people have applied and are waiting to come to Canada. I believe the number used to be around 600,000, but things do move fairly quickly. I know that in recent years, we have welcomed approximately 250,000 immigrants annually. Last year, suprisingly, we had 250,000 new citizens. We lead all world countries in terms of the number of immigrants, new citizens and so forth. This is one of the rare fields in which Canada is truly a world leader.

[*English*]

We're way out on a cutting edge. I think that's very good. But being out on a cutting edge means that you have to be conscious that you're doing something no one else is doing.

I notice when I'm in Europe, for example, whatever I'm there to talk about, whatever I've been invited to give a speech about, within ten minutes, they don't want to talk about it, and they say, “Now we'd like to talk about immigration and citizenship in Canada”, because that's what most people in the world think is the first and most interesting thing about Canada—our citizenship and immigration policies.

We can only get so far on goodwill and good luck. We need to understand our own experiment.

The Institute for Canadian Citizenship comes out of a tradition that was begun with the first Canadian Governor General, General Vanier, and Madame Vanier. And the idea was that when a Governor General leaves, if they have an area they're particularly devoted to, the government will help them set up an institute or a program to work on that in their post-Rideau Hall days.

The Micheners did something quite different. The Sauvés have a very interesting program, which is having a big effect on youth.

Adrienne and I, for really a good part of the time at Rideau Hall, as we went to almost 400 communities and met tens of thousands of people, literally, thought about how this was working and what these people were saying and what we could do to help in this area.

So the government and Parliament have very generously helped us to get it going, which we have now done. It's a non-profit, non-governmental organization. It was begun with the support of government, but it's not governmental. It's in its very early stages. It's national. It's volunteer-based, and it's therefore really grassroots. It's as grassroots as you can possibly be. That's what really interested us in it.

The core idea is essentially to encourage citizen engagement, citizen involvement. It's as simple as that. The first big step of the institute is really to work with new citizens.

Traditionally, in the 19th century and early 20th century, we took it for granted that it would take maybe two and a half generations for an immigrant family to become so involved that they would start running for Parliament, or writing books, or doing things that are, let's say, non-utilitarian. Now we just don't have that kind of time. Within five or ten years of someone's becoming a new citizen, we really need them to become involved.

So that's the area we're really putting our efforts into at the moment. We have a series of programs. One of them is really going already, and it's basically something we're doing in partnership with both the citizenship judges and the department, and it has to do with the citizenship ceremonies. There were 3,200 ceremonies last year, with a very small number of judges and not as many civil servants as one might imagine to organize all of this. Very few of them are community ceremonies. Technically, I think over 200 are, but in reality under 100 of them would really be community ceremonies.

What we began to work out when we were still at Rideau Hall and now have begun to put in place with them is a new approach towards the ceremonies. You take something that normally lasts about an hour, and you expand it to about three hours. This is a very important moment in people's lives, and you know that. It's a very important moment. So you expand it to make it an even more important moment in their lives.

The first hour is a discussion, the second hour is the ceremony, and the third hour is the relaxed get-together. The discussion is a round table on citizenship issues between established, engaged citizens—members of the Order of Canada, who can actually swear in citizens—leaders of non-governmental organizations, and leading community members, who come and sit down with the new citizens for an hour and chair a series of round tables, with somebody chairing the whole thing, and they discuss citizenship.

It's not at all maternalistic or paternalistic. It's really a discussion. And often the established, engaged citizens learn more than the new citizens do. And often they're as eager as the new citizens to be part of this, because it's an astonishing opportunity to sit down with the people in your town who are going to be your co-citizens and find out what they're thinking, and then try to encourage them to become involved. It's a great opportunity, frankly, for the volunteer sector to capture new citizens.

● (1645)

If we look at the volunteer sector, as many of you know, it's looking older and older and white—not entirely, but older and older and white. We have a desperate need to get these new citizens in. There are invisible barriers, and these round tables are partly designed to interest new citizens in what we're doing and to come to the next meeting. These round tables are also designed to find out what the real problems are. We've heard a lot already about loneliness and obviously about job qualifications. I've been sitting at these round tables when somebody says they can't figure out how to do something, and somebody says they'll do it for them. Working out what established citizens can do on a volunteer basis for new citizens is core to it.

We've done three formal ones so far, which doesn't sound like much, but we don't want to make mistakes, so we're going quite carefully. The first was in St. James Town, which is 30,000 new immigrants in about five skyscrapers in Toronto, and then one in Red Deer, which is perhaps the leading small city in terms of experimenting with how to attract and keep citizens, and one in Vancouver in March. We have an expansion program, which will now move quite fast.

This year we have three committees up and running. We'll have 16 this year, we hope—and it's a hope—and do 20 ceremonies in 2008; this is our aim. Forty committees doing 100 ceremonies in 2009, then 100 committees doing 300 ceremonies, and so on. The idea is not to move as fast as we can, but you know how hard it is to do volunteer grassroots stuff at a national level. You can't just pop it out on a 24-hour basis. You have to get these citizens involved. We already have people asking to set up committees in Yukon, in Hamilton at Mohawk College, two in Waterloo, in British Columbia through the 2010 Legacies Now initiative, the University of Toronto, and we have a plan to roll out. Obviously, we have nothing yet in the Maritimes, nothing in Quebec. So to move quite probably toward Sherbrooke,

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Montreal and Quebec City, where we've had some discussions, and to other parts of the country, where we hope to set up more committees.

Why are so few ceremonies held in communities? Because of the formalities involved. We've been able to hold this kind of ceremony since 1947, but each time, it's done on an ad hoc basis. It takes time, effort and the participation of government employees.

[*English*]

This idea is you have permanent volunteer committees and they establish a certain number of places, places of the public good—Parliament, city halls, legislatures, schools, universities, and they do more than one ceremony in each place—two, three, four, five ceremonies a year in each place. So it costs less and less as you do it. It takes less and less of civil servant time. It's more and more efficient, and everybody gets used to working together. We hope we'll be able to draw in the high school kids who are doing citizenship courses, to help organize these. So it's not just about ceremonies. It's about using the ceremonies as a break point where you get a chance to work with every single new citizen and see if you can work back toward their needs earlier in their arrival and their needs later, after they become citizens.

Sorry, I should stop.

The Chair: Could I interrupt for a moment? We have bells at 5:30 for a vote at a quarter to six. I think the committee members are very anxious to have some questions, Mr. Saul.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much, by the way, for your very interesting comments.

We'll go to Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Saul.

Let me say I concur with you wholeheartedly, as I'm sure the committee does, that the thing you're promoting, citizen engagement and citizen involvement, is exemplified by Mr. Chapman. We all look forward to going to his citizenship ceremony, where what was taken away will be properly restored.

As much as we are promoting the concept of citizenship and involvement, I think it's also important for us to get our Citizenship Act right so it really reflects what you're talking about. One of the concerns I have had, having worked on this file since 1998, is paying attention to Canada's history and some of the things that happened—the Asian exclusion act, internments, colour barriers to immigration—and making sure we get things right.

In terms of our citizenship, we have a policy that I think is best described in *The Economist* as "Lost in Kafkaland", where we do not recognize religious marriages of Mennonites, and we have the problem, as much as we want to honour soldiers, that we do not recognize the birthright of their offspring—and the list goes on and on. Kafkaland is a very apt definition of it.

One of the problems we have had over the last thirteen and a half years is that we have had eight Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration. Under the Liberals, on average every two years we had a new minister, and under the Conservatives now we have two in one year. So it really becomes a problem, and it's in desperate need of a fix.

To me, the commonality we have as Canadians, given that we represent everybody from the world, is our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which I think evolved from some of the hardships that were suffered by various waves of Canadians coming to Canada.

To have a Citizenship Act—the first Citizenship Act—that is 60 years old this year, to have a Charter of Rights that is now 25 years old, and to have an act that doesn't comply with the charter, which has been so ruled by one federal court, with indications along those lines by other federal courts, is really hard for me, as a Canadian by choice, to fathom. It seems to me we have to bring those things into compliance. We should be doing it this year and celebrating the fact that it is the 60th anniversary of citizenship, that this is the 25th anniversary of the charter. I think the time has come to bring them together.

I might recommend to you a book by Barbara Ann Roberts. I'm not sure if you've read it. It's called *Whence They Came*.

● (1655)

Mr. John Ralston Saul: No, I haven't read it.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: It outlines some of the horror stories as to what happened in the immigration department and how we actually shovelled out people who came here—"undesirables", as we called them at the time.

Would you concur with me that given that this is the 60th anniversary of the Citizenship Act and the 25th anniversary of the charter, those two have to be in compliance?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: It would be impossible to argue that acts should not be in compliance with the charter. I would find it impossible to argue that, at any rate. As I said at the beginning, my impression is you're working your way towards a solution.

As a citizen, I've always looked at cabinets and thought there were certain jobs that needed a long time in occupancy. I would say the three that probably require the longest time in occupancy are finance, foreign affairs, and citizenship and immigration—and heritage, perhaps—because they're just so complicated that to get an idea of how they really work and to get on top of the files is very difficult, very complicated.

You're right, we have a history that is, by international standards, pretty good, but by our standards it has some really serious flaws in it. After all, I have a Chinese wife who isn't part of that original Chinese diaspora. So I know those cases where we failed very well, as all of you do—where we failed with Jews, where we failed with Ukrainians, where we failed with Japanese—and we learned a lot.

You're right, I think the charter is to a great extent a reflection of that, and I guess we have to now find our way through this baggage that we still have. I suppose there always will be baggage, but each time it comes along we have to find our way through it as fast as possible.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Just in closing, we have one case—you might look it up, I'm not sure if you saw it—and it's the case of Mr. Joe Taylor, who is the son of a war bride. The real disquiet on that is when the Federal Court ordered the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to restore Mr. Taylor's citizenship because it violated section 15 of the charter—the equality section—and the legal section of the charter to have taken it away in first place, the response of the government was to get rid of the intervenor funding for these kinds of cases, and to let Mr. Taylor know that they were going to appeal his case all the way to the Supreme Court. And it is very difficult for someone to get the resources to fight for justice in front of the Supreme Court. I think you'll probably concur that justice should be not based on the size of your pocketbook, but the merit of your case.

● (1700)

Mr. John Ralston Saul: I read about the case. This is where you're entering into an area where—I'm somebody who believes very strongly in justice; I think justice should be done. I am not a lawyer. I read the different arguments, but it sounds as if you're very much on top of arguing the situation regarding that case. Decisions seem to have been made, but I'm not an expert in that area.

I think the answer to the question, frankly, is that the laws of Canada will always have to be in line with the charter. There is no way around that, nor should there be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Telegdi.

I'll go to Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank Mr. Saul for joining us today.

I was the one who asked that you be invited here. I felt it was important for us to learn about the work your new organization is doing. Since you've travelled extensively throughout the world and have been in contact with a number of Canadian communities abroad, your input is invaluable to us. I know you were very critical of Canadian practices in the area of globalization. You have also given a number of lectures on the danger of harmonizing our policies with US policies. Citizen mobility is another consideration.

In your opinion, what rights to Canadians living around the world actually have? Right now, we're discussing the fate of such Canadians who lost their citizenship between 1947 and 1977. Perhaps you can share with us some of the figures that the Institute has compiled and give us an idea of the number of Canadians living in the United States and Australia during that time period. This information is important because we need to know what rights these Canadians and their children actually have.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: As I stated at the outset, this is not one of the areas on which the Institute has really focussed. We're in the process of bringing in other programs, for example, the Best Practices program, because some things work extremely well in one community, but are virtually unknown in others. We're trying to institute these practices on a Canada-wide basis.

For example—and I'll come back to your question after—the residents of Red Deer have clearly understood what it takes to attract and retain immigrants. Conversely, I've had discussions with Quebec residents who want to do the same thing, but haven't figured out exactly what to do. We want to institute a program where communities are twinned, so that small communities are able to attract and retain a larger number of immigrants.

We plan to do some research, not necessarily in this field, but on practices that don't work in Canada. We're keeping an open mind. The Lafontaine-Baldwin lecture series serves as an important forum for discussing that which is collectively good for Canada. On the international front, we've observed that people are interesting in knowing what works well for us.

For example, we hosted a delegation from the Netherlands that came here to learn about our system. That country is in the process of establishing an immigration and citizenship system somewhat similar to ours. We are actively working in these areas.

As for the Canadian diaspora, that's a unique, long-standing problem that presents itself in different ways. For instance, British communities have survived for centuries in Turkey. Situations like this are very difficult for governments to manage. It's a matter of determining if someone who has never lived in a country is a citizen and what obligations that citizenship entails.

That's why I stated at the outset that it would be interesting to hold a truly national debate, rather than an apolitical conversation, if I can call it that, on the nature of citizenship. For example, if we believe that citizenship entails certain obligations, what does that mean for Canadian citizens who do not live in this country? At the same time, we mustn't claim that only those living here in this country can become citizens.

As I see it, we must be very careful to avoid thinking about this in very narrow terms. The Europeans, for instance, are adversely affected by the fact that their definition of citizens is overly neat and tidy. They are incapable of dealing with the true complexity of the subject, with the fact very different cases can arise.

● (1705)

Ms. Meili Faille: However, citizenship isn't just associated with immigration. All of the people born in this country are citizens.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Yes, of course.

Ms. Meili Faille: That's right.

Therefore, as I see it, people who were born in Canada and end up living abroad because they work for a multinational company, or those who ultimately decide to live in the United States, have rights as citizens, as do their children.

We're talking here about citizens who were penalized between 1947 and 1977. It would be interesting if you could send us some figures or information uncovered during the course of your research on the number of Canadians living abroad, to give us an idea of the sheer scope of the problem.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Absolutely. As I've already mentioned, my mother was a war bride, so I'm even more fascinated by this.

Ms. Meili Faille: Are you a Canadian?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Yes.

Ms. Meili Faille: Are you certain about that?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: I believe so. I have a passport.

Ms. Meili Faille: That's no guarantee.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: You're quite right to ask the question.

Ms. Meili Faille: I may have another question. No? All right then.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Are you certain?

Ms. Meili Faille: Can I put my question? It will only take a few seconds.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have a full minute left, so ask away.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: A full minute is a real luxury. Usually, I'm thirty seconds over my allotted time.

Have you introduced into your research and your documents a discussion on the recognition of Quebec as a nation?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: This is not something that you will find in the documents of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship. We have not had any discussions on the definition of citizenship. I have written a great deal on the subject and my views are stated clearly in my writings.

Ms. Meili Faille: However, do you feel that this recognition will come about one day?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: I think that could be part of an interesting debate. In Canada, we must always be careful not to debate semantics rather than the fundamental issue. Obviously, the danger of that happening arises each time we debate words. That's a very interesting and very important debate.

Ms. Meili Faille: Fine then. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Faille.

Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the witnesses this afternoon.

I want to pick up on the comment that was made about what we mean by citizenship. You've spoken about citizenship as not only a sense of pride, but as a democratic responsibility and an opportunity for renewed citizen engagement. Obviously citizenship also entails certain rights, responsibilities, and access to certain benefits. It's a legal question too.

Something that I've been made aware of is that while we have lots of immigration specialists, immigration lawyers, we don't have citizenship lawyers. It's not a specialized branch of law. I'd like to know if you are aware of that, if this is something you've come across, and whether you think this ought to be a branch of legal study. Should we encourage lawyers to become specialists in citizenship as well as immigration law?

● (1710)

Mr. John Ralston Saul: That's a fascinating point. I had never focused on that.

Since you raise it, I think that's part of what I'm talking about. We haven't really had the discussion about citizenship. If we did, many of the things you are struggling with here would fall into place more easily. You'd say, oh, that falls in there. That makes sense because now we have a theory of citizenship that includes these people who were excluded, as opposed to saying, well, there's a problem; let's just change a line or something. I think there's room for some thought.

We have an idea of citizenship that is so complex in Canada, it's very important to try to expand it. I don't know of another country that accepts the idea that at the same time we stay the same and we change.

In many ways, you can find the principles of Canadian democracy in Louis-Hyppolyte LaFontaine's address to the electors of Terrebonne in 1840. I pulled out a couple of things, which I could give to your chair, and they can be photocopied for you. LaFontaine made a statement on immigration in 1840, and this is the basic document that led to democracy in 1848. You could take that paragraph, and most people would think it was written by you today. There is a theory underneath what we're doing, but it's not evoked sufficiently.

We don't really talk enough about how not only immigrants change and stay the same when they become citizens, but other Canadians change and stay the same when immigrants become citizens. It's a constant metamorphosis of what it is to be citizen and a person who is very stable and yet changing all the time.

I don't think most Canadians understand that we're now one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world. If I were to make one criticism of members of Parliament, it would be that you use the words “new country” too much—maybe not you, but others. It should be taken out of all speeches.

A voice: New government?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ralston Saul: We have been using fundamentally the same constitution since 1848, which was rewritten in 1867. The principles are basically the same; it is enormously stable. I would argue that we're the oldest continuous democratic federation in the world. France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and the United States all went through civil wars, breakdowns, *coups d'état*, but we didn't.

Our citizens have a remarkable experience of stability and change. Of course, the only area where we fall most behind is in reintegrating the essential aboriginal element into the idea of our citizenship—not dealing with aboriginal problems, which is the way we tend to think of it, but actually integrating the aboriginal idea back into the core of our idea of citizenship and democracy as a nation.

Ms. Peggy Nash: I just wonder if we had that kind of debate that you're describing and perhaps if we had people who made it their focus, made the area of citizenship and citizenship law, for example, their area of focus, that the kinds of injustices as have been brought to our attention of people being denied citizenship might perhaps have been dealt with in a more preventative way, a more efficient way, and we wouldn't just be sticking our finger in the dike every so often when problems arise.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: That's right. I agree.

When I say “public debate”, we're not caught in this situation that other countries are of people being for and against. We're very lucky. Most Canadians are “for”, so once you have a really big national consensus it becomes so important to say, “What are the roots of this national consensus? How does it work? How can we make it work better? How can we get to the roots of the problems? Why do we have these problems?” Somehow they have been lost, perhaps because of a technicality, but that technicality wouldn't have held had the theories been clearer and more popularly understood.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nash.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll share whatever time is left with my colleagues.

● (1715)

The Chair: Yes. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Certainly it's been—

Mr. John Ralston Saul: I'm in no rush, by the way. You may be, but I'm not.

The Chair: I guess we'll be in a rush when 5:30 rolls around.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Certainly you put an interesting perspective on citizenship and the issues related to it. It's certainly insightful. Even though we face a lot of challenges, it also presents itself as an exciting opportunity for us to accomplish perhaps some uniqueness to the solution into who we are as Canadian citizens.

I found that appearing at the citizenship ceremony and then having a social aspect after where we intermingled to be quite touching and more moving than I would have expected it to be. It certainly has that element to it. There is a bonding that takes place. And when you speak to the new citizens and interact with them, it certainly also identifies some of the unique obstacles, if you want to call them that, that they face and the challenges they have.

Proceeding beyond that in terms of round tables and further discussion I think is a good thing, and certainly it will help us along. I know that there are of course needs for fixes. I know my colleague, the Honourable Andrew Telegdi, doesn't pass up an opportunity to pinpoint those and sharpen the points for us to see.

I sense from you that although there is a desperate need for a fix, we should do it in a principled way and not rush ourselves into a short-term, knee-jerk reaction, but look at it more on a long-term basis. Certainly the charter compliance is something that would be hard to argue against. But it would take a bit of doing to ensure that the act was done properly, to see that it was indeed compliant.

I know that we've talked a bit about what it means to be a citizen, what the privileges or rights might be, what the responsibilities might be, and whether there are various definitions that might be involved. You mentioned building maybe a national consensus and perhaps the principles of it. In what type of forum would you see this taking place? What type of structure or administration might you set in place to evoke that type of consensus or principles that might be the underpinnings for where the future Citizenship Act might go?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: You know, I think that's almost more your domain than mine. I think there are many ways it can be done, and I don't think it needs to be done in a single way. I think that if members of Parliament and senators and people like us started to talk about the ideas of citizenship, and in great numbers, and really started to search for it, we'd begin to see a discussion develop.

You wouldn't want to close it into something that was too administrative. Because of course when you have problems like the problems you're dealing with now, you have to do both the short-term and the long-term at the same time, as you know. There are fixes that need to happen really fast when there's injustice. There are things that are more complicated that take a little longer. And then there's the need to start, really, as soon as one can, thinking about the larger picture and how we can avoid getting into these situations again and thinking about what the principles are.

I'm sure you've all been to citizenship ceremonies. What do you say to new citizens? What you would say to a new citizen is what you would say to your child. It's the basis upon which you would have a relationship with another citizen. When I go back—and I suppose I could claim to be an expert as a kind of Canadian historian, but it's a little dangerous to say it, since I don't earn a living doing it—the recurring themes of what's best in this country are the ideas of building justice and egalitarianism and place. So there are three very interesting ideas that are not really what you would find in most countries.

The idea of justice you'll find in other places, although the type of justice has already been defined pretty clearly by the charter.

The egalitarian idea, which is different from the idea of equality—because the idea of equality is just about counting up the numbers—goes right back to the sources of Canadian democracy. It's right there in 1848. Again and again the best speeches on Canadian democracy, the best comments, the best writing, have all been about egalitarianism. There's a fabulous paragraph, again, from the address to the electors of Terrebonne on egalitarianism.

You know, this is the country where the source of possible cooperation between citizens—francophone and anglophone and others—is the egalitarian nature of the country. It's been there for 160 years. It's quite remarkable, again and again and again. It's very different from the United States. It's completely different from Britain. It's very different from France and Germany and so on.

The third element is this obsession with place, because we have a lot of it, and it's so difficult. At first, the immigrants thought place was all about developing it, but of course when we looked at it more seriously we realized that it was always more complicated, because the earlier immigrants understood, with the aboriginals, that it was actually about living in the place, not about just developing it. Now we're actually catching up with where we were in about 1740. That is to say that we're actually understanding what the pre-modern, if you like, the pre-1840 Canadians sort of understood, which was that in order to live here, you have to live with the place. Now it's called environmentalism. We've gone in this large loop.

I think those three things get you pretty close to the nature of the country: an idea of justice, a reality of egalitarianism, and an idea of the place in which you develop it and protect it and live with it at the same time.

I think the idea of volunteerism—We talk about volunteerism as if it's something different from citizenship. It's actually another word for the engaged citizen. We have this 20-something percent of engaged citizens—it's not high enough, they're not young enough, they're not varied enough. I think that's right at the core of it. Certainly, when I talk to anybody about citizenship, I say it's about getting involved in your local communities. It's about your local schools. It's about making things work on your street and in your communities. It's about making your public services work in your communities. And it's about speaking up and being engaged. I don't think we say that enough, that we really want people like Mr. Chapman, you know, people speaking up and making themselves as annoying as possible, because that is the nature of a healthy democracy.

For me, there you have the elements of a pretty good definition of citizenship, but that's just me.

● (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki, your colleague will have to wait. You've gone over your seven minutes. You were too long-winded, I think.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: I was, probably.

The Chair: We only have approximately ten minutes left, so the chair will use his discretion to try to get as many people in as possible.

We'll have Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Saul, you talked about a discussion on citizenship and what citizenship is all about. My fear is that with Canada's new government—they are afraid to use the word "Conservative" because they don't want to use the old brand, and we all know what this is—I'm not sharpening the knives here, Parliamentary Secretary Komarnicki. My fear is that once we start opening the dialogue of citizenship and what is citizenship, we might give Canada's Conservative government the opportunity to say that if you're out of the country for a couple of years, too bad, so sad, you're not a citizen any more. We all remember what happened last summer with the Lebanon crisis, where there were certain individuals who certainly spoke out, and they had bitter tastes in their mouths about people who might have been out of the country for five or six years, and they said you're no longer a citizen.

I'm sure Mr. Chapman will probably jump up and down when he's given citizenship and hopefully some time we'll be able to resolve this, and maybe the Prime Minister will do the honourable thing and step up to the plate and ask for forgiveness from the lost Canadians.

My whole fear with that is that when we start opening this can of worms that's called "what is citizenship", we're going to have people from all sides coming and saying you don't live in this country and you shouldn't be a citizen. I'm just wondering if you, on behalf of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, could comment on that.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: You know, I don't really worry too much about that. The danger in a public debate, as you know, being an elected member to Parliament, is when it breaks down into black and white, for and against, the Manichean division.

I think that there is a pretty good consensus in the country that our ideas of citizenship are tied to an idea of inclusion in justice, and that's another word, "inclusion", that I think is really important in our history. When you look at the Lebanese crisis, it went through, as I remember it, about three phases. The first was the horror, then there was a little bit of what you're describing, which I felt came mostly from some newspapers that were asking whether these were really Canadian citizens—they don't live here. There was that kind of thing. It seemed to me to be an attempt to create a for-and-against argument of the sort that you fear. But what I found was that it just died away. It didn't get any pick-up from Canadian citizens. Canadians weren't interested in taking that kind of divisive approach on that issue. That was my impression.

● (1725)

The Chair: I'm going to try to get in the four people I have here. I gave you three minutes, Mr. Karygiannis; I'll try the same thing for Mr. Gravel, Ms. Grewal, and Mr. Alghabra, and Mr. Wilson. A couple of minutes each, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): I hope you can clarify something for me.

You mentioned three points earlier and talked about Canada's philosophic principle whereby an immigrant is deemed a citizen. You stated that Europe takes a different approach to citizenship.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: That's right.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: From a philosophic perspective, which is the best model? The European model, or the Canadian model? Is it critically important to transform our immigrants into citizens? Could you clarify your position on this matter? You did point this out, but —

Mr. John Ralston Saul: If we look at the differences of opinion in Europe on such matters as immigration and culture, we note that they are considerable. These stem in large part from the fact that there is a lack of clarity as to what the relationship is between an immigrant, a term that isn't clearly defined, and a citizen.

There are many positive points about the European continent, but its major weakness is precisely the approach Europeans have taken since the 1950s or 1960s to immigration and citizenship. Right now, they are trying to move in a different direction, but it's not been easy.

As I've stated, since Lafontaine's Address to the Electors of Terrebonne, I think we have abided by the same principle, namely that an immigrant and a citizen mean one and the same thing. There are simply two stages. Aside from the huge mistakes made in dealing with the Jews, the Chinese and other groups, this approach has served us very well. One of the most interesting things in Canada is the philosophical notion whereby immigrants are welcomed here so that they may become citizens. This is one of Canada's most lofty ideals.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saul.

Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Saul, thank you so much for your very insightful comments.

While all of us know that the problem of so-called "lost Canadians" is not new, and it has been around since 1977, my question is very simple. When you and your wife, the former Governor General, went around, having these round tables, was this question of problems surrounding the Citizenship Act ever brought up?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: No, it was not, but again, that might have been that we were basically seeing new citizens, so they were part of this process of 250,000 new Canadians every year. It's such a big area in Canada. That's what they were talking about, and their concerns were things like not being able to work in the area for which they were trained, and loneliness.

My guess would be that a good 25% of the immigrant citizens would like to go to smaller cities, but in a sense, the structures lead them to bigger cities. I'm guessing 25%. We're really not set up to help them do that. They come from smaller communities. They want to go to smaller communities.

So, no, that was not brought up, but of course now that I've read all of your testimony, I'm going to be asking different people different questions and trying to understand it better.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Saul, for coming here. It's a very interesting conversation we're having here today. It's regrettable that we don't have enough time to carry on this conversation.

I got most of what I was interested in hearing from you regarding the lost Canadians file, but I have a question that I'd like to pose to you and hopefully hear your thoughts. I agree with you; I don't think we've had an extensive discussion on the meaning of citizenship responsibilities and obligations. And while I understand that there is some reluctance because of the fear of the unknown that might come out of the discussion, I am actually confident in the system and the institutions and the way we could carry on that debate, and I think we should have it.

I'm interested in hearing your thoughts on this topic of debate or noise that's being made these days on reasonable accommodation. Can you share with us what your thoughts are on this concept? What do you take out of what you are hearing recently?

● (1730)

Mr. John Ralston Saul: First, on the fears that were expressed a little earlier, I think one of the reasons I don't have those fears is because, unlike Europe, which is the place where the most troubles are in terms of the democracies, we already have—look at this table—a lot of new Canadians in elected public positions, nominated public positions. We already have a critical mass, not enough, but a good start on involving the new waves of Canadians in Parliament, in the Senate, and in provincial legislatures. That changes the nature of the debate.

The problem in Europe is that they don't have that. They have sort of one person who's almost like a token, so they can't have a debate in a comfortable manner. They're very uncomfortable with it because it's the insiders and the outsiders.

On reasonable accommodation, when I said earlier that the interesting thing about Canadian citizenship was that it was both stable and moving all the time, every five to ten years we get some new wave from a different part of the world, and it changes all the time. There was an enormous argument when the Ukrainians and the Poles, and so on, came in the late 1930s, in the 20th century. There was a horrific debate, actually. We were far less sophisticated.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Wilson, a quick question, please.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Okay, a quick question.

Mr. Saul, thank you very much for coming today. It has been a great discussion, and I agree with your analysis of the Canadian citizenship process as being a progressive, evolutionary process, and that we live in a country as physically diverse as the people it shelters.

The question that I have for you is this: What do you see as the biggest threat in the future facing Canadian citizenship?

Mr. John Ralston Saul: The biggest threat is unconsciousness. In other words, the biggest threat would be to be away out on this cutting edge, which I like and most of us want, but not really to be conscious of it, of how interesting it is what we're doing, how different it is, how original it is and therefore to really be thinking about how we can model it a little bit differently, how can we open more here and firm it up there?

For example, do we have people abroad in our embassies whose job it is to help educate new immigrants before they arrive about what it's going to be like in Canada? We don't. We need more people abroad doing that kind of thing. Do we have enough people teaching second languages in our schools? How many of our school boards and provincial governments now have cut back on what they call "soft programming", which is now paid for by parents going out and raising money? Of course, you can only raise money in a middle-class neighbourhood, so who suffers? It is the poor neighbourhoods and the immigrant neighbourhoods. This is not a good thing.

The Chair: I really wish we had more time.

Thank you, sir, on behalf of our committee. Thank you.

Mr. John Ralston Saul: Mr. Chair, I would just say that we would be very happy, and I know my wife would be very happy, to come back when we've done a little more work, in six months or a year, if you'd like us to. We'd love to come back and chat with you, if it's helpful to you. It would certainly be helpful to us, I'm sure, to hear your ideas.

The Chair: We would appreciate that very much.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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