

MEIGHEN TO EXPLAIN THE ALIEN SITUATION

Naturalization and Franchise Act Will Lead to Strong Controversy.

Special to The Star.

Ottawa, Ont., March 26.—It now seems evident that the main debate on the Franchise Act will hinge round that clause which requires "personal" naturalization as a qualification for the franchise. The clause reads as follows: "For the purposes of this Act, the allegiance or nationality of a person as it was at the birth of such person, shall be deemed incapable of being changed, or of having been changed merely by reason or in consequence of marriage or change of allegiance or naturalization of any other person, or otherwise than by personal naturalization of such first-mentioned person."

Purpose of Clause.

The main purport of the clause, says the Government, is to provide that a woman, not a British subject, who comes to Canada from some part of Europe and marries a Canadian, will not be entitled to vote unless she has the same residential and other qualifications as her husband. Were the clauses not in the bill, it is asserted, a woman coming from an alien country might only be in Canada a few weeks before she was married and be immediately entitled to the franchise. It was to avoid such a condition that the clauses were inserted. Similar clauses appear in the Women's Suffrage Act of two years ago and of the By-Elections Act of last year.

When debate is continued to-day, however, there is likelihood of further criticisms of the clauses considered objectionable. Under the provisions of the Naturalization Act of last year a person of German, Austrian, Turkish or Bulgarian birth cannot become naturalized in Canada for ten years, dating from the close of the war, and under the Franchise bill there must be personal naturalization to secure a vote; in other words, naturalization by marriage will be insufficient. It is held among the opposition that these provisions would operate not only to disqualify ~~enemy aliens~~ coming to Canada after the war, but also to disfranchise women of alien enemy birth already resident in Canada. They would be disfranchised, it is claimed, because personal naturalization is necessary to secure the vote and they cannot take out naturalization papers for another ten years. In the past they have been considered naturalized by the naturalization of their husbands.

Meighen to Explain.

As a result of the protest it is stated that Hon. Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior, will undertake this afternoon to interpret the provision of the Act which is under attack. In fact, it is stated that a small conference of Ministers took place at the close of the session last night and that there are differences of opinion in the Cabinet with regard to the clause.

Indeed the provision if not amended is liable to lead to strong controversy, inasmuch as there are members on the Government side who hold that disfranchisement of aliens, so called, should be complete.