

Address given by Peter Aage Jørgensen at the annual conference of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada, on May 29, 2004, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Subject: Dual Danish-Canadian Citizenship: retaining your birthright

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am very happy to see you all and to be able to address such a representative group of what is Danish in Canada.

To those of you who have read the Danish Canadian Society's Newsletter announcing that I will speak about my experiences in German Concentration Camps you can relax.

I am not going to spoil a good lunch talking about a subject totally devoid of any human rights. The more so since you can read all about it in the yearbook.

Suffice it to say that it was written in Danish in 1945, when I was 19 years old, and it was translated into English by my sister and brother in law in Vancouver.

I wrote it to put this whole experience behind me and move forward with my life, and until a few years ago I do not think any of my Danish and Canadian friends here, ever heard me speak about it.

4-5 years ago I was contacted by the Dachau Club, which was formed back in 1945 as a club for the Danish prisoners in Dachau, and the last 4 years my wife and I have participated in the Dachau Club's annual 5-day get together, and it has been absolutely wonderful to renew these friendships and to visit some of these old friends individually as well. I had lunch with 3 of them last week and learned that of the 364 Danes originally sent to Dachau, there are now only 23 left, so you are looking at an endangered specie.

But we are here to talk about human rights.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a 5 page document listing 30 articles.

Today I will address only one human right, namely your birthright. If you were born in Denmark, and at least one of your parents was Danish, it is your birthright to be Danish, and it is my strongly held opinion that nobody including the Danish Government has the right to take that birthright away from you.

But it is still law in Denmark, that if you accept another citizenship, or obtain foreign citizenship by entering public service in another country, you loose your right to Danish citizenship. This has no doubt affected many of you, who have acquired Canadian

citizenship. In many cases you really do not have a choice. For example if you are an engineer you cannot sign your own drawings if you are not a Canadian citizen.

Then there are the shining examples of Inger Hansen, born in Denmark in 1929 and a graduate of University of Copenhagen in 1952, who became Canada's first ombudsman, and Ole Ingstrup, a Danish lawyer who worked as a Commissioner for the Correctional Services of Canada during a time of significant improvements and 10 years as Canadian Deputy Minister.

Both of these well known personalities, of course, were guilty of working for a foreign Government and therefore punishable by loss of Danish citizenship. It seems to me that Denmark should be proud of such people, and everyone of you here today are clearly great ambassadors for Denmark and do not deserve to be treated as if you had committed treason by taking Canadian Citizenship.

I am still a Danish citizen but for the past 20 years I have corresponded with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Udenrigsministeriet) and

The Ministry of the Interior (Indenrigsministeriet)

which administrated the citizenship laws for many years until in 1993

The Ministry of Justice (Justitsministeriet)

took over this administration but transferred it in 2001 to

The Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration (Ministeriet for Flygtninge, Indvandrere og Integration)

.....from Interior to Justice to Refugees.....

and I have had a number of meetings with these Ministries.

How do you like the fact that your birthright is now administrated by a Ministry that proclaims to be for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration. You are not even mentioned. Except, of course, that you will need to be integrated, if you should decide to move back to Denmark. Clearly you are assumed to have committed a punishable sin, when you accepted Canadian citizenship, and if you want to become again, what you were born, have always been and will always be, you must apply, hat in hand, to be integrated and it will take you a couple of years to regain your birthright. I think that is just terrible. And I also think it is very unwise to treat naturally born Danes this way.

Mind you, I really don't think what I just said is a completely fair description of the situation. It would appear that it is more a case of "letting sleeping dogs lie" and not deal with the matter because the Government are up to their ears in dealing with unforeseen consequences of the large immigration of people from other cultures and religions, who

do not integrate as smoothly as the Danes would wish them to. As one official said to me: “The Minister’s interest in or concern about Danes living abroad take up very little space”.

There are exceptions to the ban on dual citizenship. For example my son, who is born Canadian, has, as a child of two Danish parents, been granted Danish citizenship without any conditions and thus has dual citizenship.

There are many Turkish immigrants in Denmark. If a mother or a father in a Turkish family gives up his Turkish citizenship to become Danish, the children will automatically become Danish but can retain their Turkish citizenship because either the mother or the father is still Turkish. This leads to these young Turks being allowed dual citizenship not available to a naturally born Dane.

Or if you are from Morocco, Portugal or Greece, where they do not allow their citizens to give up their natural citizenship, Denmark will allow you dual citizenship.

Or if you are from Iran or Liberia.

Or from USA. In a letter of May 12, 2000 the American Embassy in Copenhagen denied an applicants request to be released from his US Citizenship, pointing out that United States would not accept lesser treatment than was given to other countries, such as Morocco, Greece and Portugal, and Denmark therefore allowed the American to keep his US Citizenship and also get the Danish Citizenship. If all other countries followed the example of United States it would mean that Denmark would allow dual citizenship to all nationalities except the Danes.

And there are more such exceptions.

However, early last year I wrote to the Chairman of the Danish Parliament (Formanden for Folketinget) about citizenship and enclosed my story from the war. One of the last things he did, before he died of a heart attack, was to turn the letter and the story over to the parliamentary committee for citizenship (Folketingets Indfødsretsudvalg) and in October last year I received a very nice letter from the chairperson of the committee, Else Theill Sørensen, who told me that the committee had found that my case warranted an exception from the law, so as to permit me dual citizenship, and that the committee had requested this from the Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, but the minister refused, saying no dispensation was possible under the law.

No dispensation, except for Moroccans, Portuguese, Greeks, Iranians, Lebanese Turks and Americans, that’s what he should have said!

Clearly it is time to wipe the slate clean and allow Danes dual citizenship.

Until recently the Nordic countries, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland all agreed to limit dual citizenship, and Denmark, again and again refer to the fact that nothing has changed in a 100 years, - as if this is a good thing!

But in Sweden they established a committee in January 1997 and in its conclusions in 1999 the committee said the citizenship law dates from 1951, a time that is markedly different from present conditions. Firstly there has been a development giving foreigners living in Sweden same rights as naturally born Swedes. The committee notes that where you live and reside is increasing in importance for a person's rights and duties, while citizenship can be said to have correspondingly less significance.

Also society has, since 1951, become internationalized in a way which could not have been foreseen in 1951. Modern society has increasingly given space for international contacts, which have made it more and more common that Swedish citizens work and live abroad. And international exchange of students is fast growing. Family ties between Swedish and foreign citizens is a natural result of the internationalizing.

These developments have also had as a consequence that people to a large extent feel a true and deep attachment to more than one country and consequently more and more wish to be citizens of more than one country.

I could not have said it better myself and I am very happy to say that as per July 1st, 2001 Sweden fully accept dual citizenship.

Finland followed the Swedish example and has allowed dual citizenship since June 1st, 2003

Iceland jumped on the wagon one month later and has allowed dual citizenship since July 1st, 2003.

In Norway a committee was established in 1999 and in its conclusions a majority (3 of the 4 members) closely followed the Swedish points of view and recommended dual citizenship. But so far the Norwegian Government has not acted on the recommendation.

And in good old Denmark, the Government sticks to its guns and will not hear of dual citizenship, but I for one feel convinced that the day cannot be far away when you will regain your birthright.

In a most recent (2004) Publication from Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag: "Indfødsretsloven med kommentarer" by Birgit Kleis & Niels Beckman, the last paragraph of section 2 reads:

"Nonetheless it is a fact, that it is the tendency of the times, that more and more states both inside and outside Europe leave the principle of limiting dual citizenship, partly in

recognition that dual citizenship can improve integration, and that it normally does not seem to create significant problems that a person possesses more than one citizenship.”

Niels Beckman worked for the Ministry of the Interior and in 1990 wrote to me that it was unthinkable that Denmark would not follow the other Nordic countries as far as dual citizenship is concerned. He now works for the Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, and when I met with him back in August last year and reminded him of that letter, he said with a grin, that it was unthinkable - in 1990. I met him again two weeks ago and he encouraged me to keep up the good work. At that time I also met with the head of the department, Oluf Engberg and his secretary, and together we checked my draft for this speech, so I could be sure I did not tell you something that would not be true. They were indeed very cooperative, and when I left they wished me good luck with my mission.

Already in 1992 Italy changed their laws to allow dual citizenship for Italians outside the European Union, and suddenly hundreds of thousands of Canadian immigrants from Italy regained their Italian citizenship.

Dual citizenship is also allowed in USA, Canada, Spain, France, Britain and Scotland and is being considered in Holland and Austria.

Two weeks ago I also visited Else Theill Sørensen to thank her for her very kind letter. She is the chair person of the 17 member parliamentary committee for citizenship, which I had mistakenly assumed to be considering dual citizenship like the Norwegian committee established for this purpose. But that is not the case, and the Danish committee simply deals with all questions relating to citizenship. She pointed out to me that there was no parliamentary majority for changing the existing laws to permit dual citizenship.

To sum up, there are many very solid arguments for dual citizenship and really no solid argument against it. The question is therefore how we can persuade the Danish politicians to do the right thing, and I call upon all of you to come up with ideas and actions that will accomplice this. A proud nation should support its sons and daughters wherever they are.

And think about it. With Sweden, Finland, Island and Norway having seen the light, how long can Denmark remain in darkness?

I ask you to all stand up with me as I propose a toast to a free Denmark that includes all Danes, no matter where they reside.

**LONG LIVE DENMARK AND FREE DANES ALL OVER THE WORLD**