

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S. O. 82—REFUGEES—GOVERNMENT POLICY

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Marchi:

That this House condemns the Government's refugee policy for its failing badly to uphold Canada's proud and humane record for refugee assistance and for abandoning our nation's respected international leadership on this tragic, world-wide human dilemma, which will serve to jeopardize a meaningful international solution to what is clearly an international phenomenon;

That this House further deplores the Government's refusal to assure refugee claimants full accessibility to, and a non-adversarial hearing before, an independent refugee board, and

That, therefore, this House urge the Government to establish a fair, accessible and efficient refugee administration system which would:

- (1) guarantee full accessibility to the system for refugee claimants by rejecting any pre-screening stage within the process;
- (2) ensure maximum protection and safety for all refugees and a comprehensive and adequate hearing of their claims by abolishing the highly restrictive "safe third country" concept as an integral part of the refugee determination process; and
- (3) provide every refugee with the opportunity of an appeal before a competent and independent refugee body that would consider all facts and circumstances of the appellant's claims.

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, in addressing this motion today, I would like to start by expressing the feeling of indebtedness felt by myself and my Party to the Hon. Member for York West (Mr. Marchi) in bringing forth this very important question of significant, compelling and, indeed, urgent interest to all Canadians. Bill C-55 has been tabled for first reading on May 5 and we will all come to debate it in due course. However, I think it is good that we have the opportunity today to, in a sense, pre-debate the Bill by raising some of the questions to which those who have looked at it find no answers, and also to enable Members of the House to put on the record and before Canadians some of the concerns which groups who are active, involved and committed to the plight of refugees have expressed.

After all, we are debating something that relates to what I think we could describe as a Canadian tradition of great worth. I do not say it is a great tradition because, after all, it has not been a consistent theme. Without going into some of the faults and errors of the past, because I would not like them to be misinterpreted in some way as a partisan comment, I think we would have to say that the more recent history of Canada's attitude and actions towards refugees within the world community has merited some accolades, most significant of which has been the Nansen Medal.

The Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand), who has a record of commitment to this particular question throughout his years of service in this House, went to some length in talking about the proud record of Canadian policy and hospitality, the welcoming of those who have had to leave their countries through no fault of their

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own but because they had the normal aspirations of freedom loving people everywhere. They were not able to exercise those aspirations within the confines of the countries in which they were brought up.

It is a proud and diverse record. Today Canada is home to the first generation of refugees from Chile, the fascist dictatorship of General Pinochet, from South Africa's apartheid regime, from the frightful oppression of the B'hai in Iran and the equally frightful oppression of those who supported opposition Parties. Canada is host to refugees from the lawlessness and murder in Guatemala and El Salvador, and from the genocide in what was previously known as Cambodia. It is also host to people who fled oppression in Vietnam, from Laos, and to people of Ukrainian, Hungarian and, more recently, Polish origin, who originally came to this country as refugees.

When I hear talk of Canada's refugee determination system having been abused, I become very uncomfortable because while it is perfectly true that there may be those who have abused the system in the past, I think we would have to say that this country as a whole has never been abused by refugees, as I am aware of Canadian history. Even if there have been some who have, so to speak, beaten the system in order to gain entry to the country, I do not think it could be said that after having done so, they abused Canada.

It should be a mark of pride for all Canadians to be awarded the Nansen Medal which, I would stress, did not go to the Government of Canada but to the people of Canada. It should be a mark of pride which we as Canadians should maintain in the face of some of the confusion which exists and which, I regret to say, is at times promulgated regarding the situation of refugees and particularly in terms of refugees as juxtaposed with immigrants.

There have been some nostrums peddled in this country which are false and which have gained some credibility. They are deserving and, indeed, demanding of refutation in this House. I will go into the details later. We have seen in recent years a wilful confusion at times and at other times an innocent confusion between the situation of refugees and immigrants. We have seen allegations, almost universally disproven or unsubstantiated, about the possible effects of refugees on employment in Canada. That was very well refuted in the speech of the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East. We have seen refugees used as a proxy target, as strawmen, by those who frankly are concerned to promote and promulgate racist theories, attitudes and practices. We have also seen a very legitimate concern, one which I think history and our experience very adequately answers, regarding the country's ability to absorb newcomers.

As one of those absorbed newcomers myself, I can hark back—although not from personal experience, obviously—to the year 1910 when approximately 400,000 immigrants, many of whom under today's system would be categorized as refugees, came to a country of some seven million or eight million people. We only have to go to our prairie and western