

Government Orders

The minister unjustifiably rejected our recommendations. Let us take only one example, as time is running out. Let us consider the minimum two-year limit that we propose as a guideline. The minister replied that this proposal was not credible because the duration of the sentence handed down varies according to geographical and other arbitrary factors. He would rather keep the theoretical ten-year limit, when the courts use well-established rules to determine sentencing. These rules take into account the mitigating circumstances surrounding the crime. The minister thinks he is better able to determine an individual's fate than the courts. Instead of relying on the court, he prefers to decide himself whether or not he should use his power for humanitarian reasons. That coming from the same person who said barely a year ago that there should be less political involvement in the immigration system. It is easy to see that he is already under some pressure. What will happen when he and his colleagues are continuously subjected to strong public pressure?

For all the reasons I mentioned in my speech, the opposition cannot support this bill.

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on her excellent speech. Several of the problems that Bill C-44 touches on could be dealt with administratively. In this regard, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the malfunction of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration through a number of examples.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain information from immigration officials for a number of reasons: there has been enormous personnel cuts in the department and there are more to come. This has caused a lot of motivation problems within the department.

In the Montreal area, for any information, you have to dial 496-1010. Everyone knows this number: the lawyers, anyone who works with immigrants and refugees. The mere mention of this telephone number can provoke an allergic reaction, because there are six stages involved and it takes several minutes to get a final answer. If you ask to speak to an official, you are told: "Sorry, the line is busy."

That is no good for us members of Parliament, as a large part of our work consists in resolving immigration problems. Last year, the department put out guidelines saying: "If you want information, send us a fax." But it received so many faxes that we never got an answer. Now, they are telling us: "Phone instead." But it is even worse than last year. It is incredibly difficult for government services users because they never get to talk to a department official. In some instances, they come from abroad and do not know the language spoken here, let alone how our telephone system works, a completely dehumanized system. You have a machine answering calls, instead of people. It is

becoming increasingly difficult for us, members of Parliament, to fulfill our role as representatives of the public, particularly as regards immigration. When we write to the minister, it takes two to three months to receive an acknowledgement, and another month or two to get a substantive answer. Yet, these are not minor issues: sometimes, what is at stake is the life of refugees who want to bring to Canada family members who are abroad.

• (1600)

The minister should take action to solve these administrative problems within the Department of Immigration, because these problems will become more serious once Bill C-44 is passed. The decision-making process regarding immigration issues is becoming increasingly politicized. The minister and his senior officials will make the decisions.

We, members of Parliament, will constantly have to contact the minister. We will not get answers within reasonable delays and this will generate a lot of frustration for the users of that service. I ask the minister to take the necessary steps to correct the problem as quickly as possible.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a comment.

I listened with great interest to the excellent presentation made by the hon. member for Québec. I liked the way she described the public's perception of the crime rate in Canada.

I agree that for some time people have been saying, especially certain opposition members, and even members of the general public, that more and more young people are involved in crime. This is just not true. In fact, according to statistics compiled by the Solicitor General and other departments, there has been no increase in youth crime, contrary to public opinion. Indeed, according to a Maclean Hunter poll, nearly 60 per cent of Canadians thought, and this of course includes Quebecers, that crime was on the increase.

I would also like to say that with respect to immigration, there is a general consensus in this country on the importance of recognizing not only the work done by the department but also by new immigrants to this country. We must not forget that during the eighties, nearly 90,000 immigrants came to Canada each year. As you know, Canada is known as a host country that is generous and tolerant. In fact, more and more people in other countries are interested in becoming citizens of the country with the best reputation in the world.

We now receive nearly 300,000 immigrants annually. Our strength is immigration, attracting people from other countries to come here and settle and become full fledged Canadians and contribute to the economic prosperity of the country.