

Immigration Act, 1976

at least air the grievance, even if in procedural terms the matter may have to go back to the committee.

I ask the Hon. Member to abide by the long-standing rules of this place and take the complaint back to the committee. I would hope that it could be properly dealt with there.

I thank the Hon. Member for his concise and well-reasoned argument and I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for quite properly pointing out that there are procedural rules, traditions, and judgments by which I am bound in this case.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

IMMIGRATION ACT, 1976

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Gerry Weiner (for the Minister of Employment and Immigration) moved that Bill C-55, an Act to amend the Immigration Act, 1976 and to amend other Acts in consequence thereof, be now read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-55 now before this House for second reading. I do so encouraged by the broad public support the people of Canada have already shown for this proposed legislation, less because it excludes those who seek to abuse Canada's generosity than because it confirms our country's determination to do everything possible to help the genuine refugee in need of our protection. We can take pride that 75 per cent of those taking part in the recent Goldfarb poll on this issue responded positively to this long-standing commitment which lies at the very heart of this Bill.

Bill C-55 is about one thing. This Government will protect the genuine refugee in need of that protection, period. That is what C-55 is about, and that is all C-55 is about. Yet it has been opposed by many of those who share with us this one important principle.

It was John Locke who wrote almost 300 years ago that new opinions are always suspected and usually opposed without any other reason but because they are not already common. I do not question for one moment the sincerity and conviction of those who have criticized C-55. They speak with a voice that comes from the heart, from values and beliefs which go right to the core of what we Canadians are, what we as a society and nation stand for. It is precisely because these values are so important to all of us that we must not belittle them, either through intemperate rhetoric or actions which only serve to divide us, or through our inherent distrust of new ways and new ideas of achieving the same objectives that the old ways and the old ideas failed to achieve.

I understand the concerns about access, review, and the concept of safe third countries which in particular led to opposition to and criticism of this legislation. What I ask those

critics to understand, however, is the intent of C-55, an intent which I believe answers those concerns.

[Translation]

We want it to enable us to process the cases and give the same importance to the factors speed, justice and equity. We want it always to give the benefit of the doubt so as to ensure that genuine refugees who really need our protection will indeed get that protection.

That is our only objective. There is no other, absolutely no other. However, the points we are debating and the reasons why it has been necessary to design a new refugee status determination process are more complex.

Consider these reasons for a moment: the ever increasing world-wide pressures of migratory movements of an economic nature; the shameful manipulation of people desperately seeking better conditions elsewhere, which led to the mushrooming number of false claims; the adoption of new immigrant and refugee legislation in the United States and in certain European countries, with the resulting scramble here in Canada to obtain landing rights or some sort of official status.

[English]

Clearly the old refugee determination system is unable to handle these and other new realities. It was never intended to. It was designed for circumstances and for a time which, while only a few short years ago, today we can look back at as being far more innocent and far less sophisticated than our own. We could all wish it were otherwise but we cannot turn the clock back. We simply do not have that luxury.

The reality is that before we introduced control measures on refugee claims in February those claims were being made at a weekly rate equal to the annual rate just six or seven years earlier. Those control measures have been a temporary answer to the most blatant abuse, but they are not a solution.

• (1550)

It is the Government's view, and one I believe is implicit in Bill C-55, that such a solution will not come about unless we adhere to one principle above all others, namely, that Canada's refugee determination system be able to distinguish between the genuine refugee in need of our protection and all other claimants not in need of that protection.

You may call it maintaining the integrity of our refugee determination system, although the expression seems to set off alarm bells. "Integrity" has become a dirty word. However, I have no trouble with the idea of preserving the integrity of our system and process here in Canada if it means this principle will be met.

I have no trouble with that at all because distinguishing between need and no need, between genuine and false claims, is not dumping, orbiting, or any of the other practices by which some nations may be reneging on their obligations and commitments. We place no limit, in theory or in fact, upon refugees in real need whom we will help today or tomorrow.