

*Supply*

to the Government's immigration policy. The Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. Weiner), the junior Minister, does not have a word to say about the formulation of policy. But he has become the major apologist for the Government. The Minister of State for Immigration says that real refugees will never be sent back. He says that every claimant will be entitled to a fair and open hearing. Should we believe him? After all, the Minister of State is an honourable man. Let us examine what has happened in the past month.

On a snowy Sunday one week after our Government closed Canada's borders to refugees I visited a refugee shelter in Plattsburg, New York, 60 miles or so from Montreal. I talked to refugees at the shelter who are fleeing violence and death threats in Central America. Many have been living underground in the United States. They were homeless, penniless, scared and, in many cases, separated from their families. They came to our border and asked for Canada's protection. We told them: "Wait for a month or two in Plattsburg and then we will admit you to Canada for an immigration inquiry".

When they were turned back at the Canadian border these people had their first encounters with U.S. immigration authorities. They were forced to sign documents voluntarily agreeing to leave the United States. Many were living underground and had not had any previous contact with U.S. immigration authorities. If not accepted in Canada they will not be allowed to stay in the United States and, presumably, they will have to return to the countries they are fleeing, or face deportation. They were not quite sure what awaited them a month or so down the road in Montreal.

*[Translation]*

Among those I met, Mr. Speaker, there was a boy with his mother and sister, all three from Guatemala, whose father had been in Montreal for some time. Our Government is obliging them to wait at the border for at least a month, in uncertainty and squalor. Why make them wait? The Government is making them stay at the border pending an inquiry in Montreal that will rule on their application for refugee status, a process that may take several years. During that time, they will be able to stay in Canada. Making them wait at the border, I should point out, makes no difference to the investigation. Does it make sense to make them wait 60 miles from Montreal while they could just as well wait for the inquiry with their father in Montreal, and enjoy the support of the churches and various organizations that provide assistance to refugees? Why make them wait? Mr. Speaker, this is harassment. The Government is making them wait for no reason at all, in squalor and uncertainty, at the Canadian border, because the Government and the Minister want to discourage and prevent refugees from entering Canada.

● (1700)

*[English]*

As of February 20, the Government also requires transit visas for refugees from some 98 countries who plan to stop over in Canada *en route* to another destination. People from

these 98 countries include refugees who used to be on our non-deportable list. The countries include Afghanistan, El Salvador, Guatemala, Iran, Cambodia, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam. Just to recite the names of these countries tells us that they are countries torn by violence and war to which our Government, up until now, considered it too dangerous to deport refugees. They are countries, Mr. Speaker, in which neither you nor I would want to live and would think twice about visiting these days.

Refugees from these countries are often lucky to get out with their lives. Now they are told by the Minister of Employment and Immigration to put their lives in further danger by openly presenting themselves to Canadian embassies and consulates and indicating that they want to leave their countries permanently. Does the Minister not understand that going through such bureaucratic procedures is a luxury which refugees cannot afford? Does the Minister not understand that refugees are lucky if they have the time to pack a bag and run?

The Minister says that he wants an orderly process. I can tell him that he has succeeded. Transit visas are indeed very effective, as we can see from the example of the Chileans who were caught up in Argentina. The Minister did not even have the basic decency to allow for the fact that they had already left Chile for Canada at the time the new measures were announced on February 20.

Last August the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) urged Canadians to show compassion toward the Tamil boat people who had arrived on our shores. At the time he said: "It is not the presence of 155 frightened human beings searching for freedom and opportunity that is going to undermine Canada or our immigration policies". Never a finer statement was made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), but it begs a question. If 155 Tamil boat people will not upset our whole immigration policy, why would a few thousand bus people from Central America over the Christmas holidays upset it?

In recent months the Ministers responsible for immigration have actively promoted the idea that we in Canada are facing a wave or flood of refugees. I note the use of words which convey a sense of natural disaster. However, what evidence is there that we are facing an unmanageable number of refugee claimants?

Last year, 18,000 claims were made in Canada, not more than the number of people it would take to fill an average hockey arena in Canada. The Minister of State for Immigration stated on a number of occasions that because we took in a thousand a week in the first few weeks of 1987, we would have reached some 52,000 by the end of the year. Perhaps that is what he was afraid about. However, is it accurate that this number of refugees would have continued every week throughout 1987?

What evidence is there? The Minister has not given us an iota or scintilla of evidence to prove that his forecasts were anywhere near realistic. Indeed, a recent decision of the United States Supreme Court on the rights of refugees in that