

scams taking place in the foreign offices. I would like to ask what kind of security arrangements are in place in immigration offices around the world? For example, when we worked on this act in 1976, I was on the committee which studied this particular legislation and I badgered the health officials from the department asking them for a provision which would allow for a second opinion in terms of health. It is all too easy for an applicant to become the victim of one person's judgment in another country. Immigrants have come to me suspecting the medical officer is "on the take." Can the minister give the House an indication of what security arrangements there are in immigration offices around the world to make sure that applicants are not victims of any kind of scam?

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Chairman, I tried to explain when we had the discussion on Friday; it is necessary to look at the changes in the act introduced in 1976 to understand why, in many respects, we are facing long delays. I think members of Parliament in their wisdom decided to put the major priority in our immigration law upon family reunification and set certain clear guidelines for what that reunification would involve, particularly in the opportunity to bring in relatives under the age of 21 as long as they were accompanied by a parent.

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Those circumstances brought about an enormous requirement for the evaluation and checking of documentation. I think the hon. member would recognize that in countries where there are serious economic conditions of poverty, deprivation and suffering many people are anxious to get out. This is not the fault of the countries; it is just that there are serious problems. In these circumstances there is a tendency to use the immigration route as one very handy way of escaping from those tough conditions. The ability to test and evaluate documents becomes quite critical, because the act is quite clear that if you are under 21 you are allowed to come in, and if you are over 21 you are not. What this has really meant is that our officers abroad must spend an inordinate amount of time determining whether documents of proof of age are accurate, legitimate, proper and genuine. As a result, the system is slowed down in order that our officers may be assured that they are administering the act in a proper and legitimate way. Often this means going back and checking school records and voters list, looking at birth certificates and sometimes having to travel to small villages to try to determine sources, because that is the way the act reads.

At the same time there has been a substantial change in the composition of immigration. Close to 50 per cent of those coming into this country are now coming in the family class category, which again creates an increasing need for the checks I just mentioned. If there is any explanation for the long delays which are being encountered, it really is in some very real measure those major changes which were taking place under the act.

What I have done in the meantime, as I explained to the House before, is establish a task force to look at regulations,

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procedures and processing under the act. That task force is presently examining all aspects and is focussing on this issue of whether it is possible to speed up application processing.

As far as security is concerned, there are security officers available at posts, but I do not think that is the problem. I think this is part of the rumour mill. People become frustrated and try to explain their frustration by looking for a victim or a scapegoat. In large part the system is overloaded at this point; applications in some countries number 200,000.

Hon. members can imagine the difficulty. The system simply bogs down with those large numbers. In the meantime, in defence of officials of various governments, including this one, the previous one and ones previous to that, we have been following a policy of restraint, which means that we have been quite careful about applying new person-years to the immigration service. The numbers have not gone up as much as is necessary. I have asked for some additional person-years this year. I hope to be able to get them, but at the same time our offices in many cases are understaffed compared with the workload they face simply because of the continuing restraint policy. Sometimes we are hammered by hon. members opposite. We are told there are too many public officials. At the same time hon. members opposite want good service for their constituents. In this case good service requires additional personnel to make sure processing takes place in a more expeditious fashion.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I have heard explanations like that given by the minister many times, and I can understand the problem, particularly in Third World countries where there may be a paucity of records. However, the minister can also understand that if 50 per cent of immigrants come under the family class category and if there is some one who is 18 years old when he applies, it is easy for one official to victimize that person when he nears the 21-year-old bracket.

Of all of the applicants coming to me, people wanting me to help them bring relatives to Canada, the single most difficult constituent I have to help is a constituent who has relatives in the United Kingdom. I would like to ask the minister why it is so difficult for people in the United Kingdom to qualify to come into Canada.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Chairman, I will ask my officials to get the exact number, but I can tell the hon. member that with the exception of the large number of Vietnamese refugees we have taken this year the largest source of immigration to Canada is still the United Kingdom. It has traditionally been that way, and it continues to be that way. My official has the number. I can give it directly to the hon. member just by way of example. The totals for the first six months of 1980 were as follows: 10,272 from Europe; 4,410 from the Middle East; 38,000 from Asia—that includes the large number of refugees who were coming in—and 8,625 from Great Britain. That is one country compared with all the European countries. The number of immigrants from the United States was 4,144; and 6,000 came from the Americas, that is, the entire Latin America-Caribbean region. The hon. member can see that Great Britain is