

*Adjournment Debate**[English]*

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS—GUYANA—INCREASE IN RACIAL AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE. (B) VISA REQUIREMENT FOR GUYANESE IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, on March 14 I raised the question of Guyana, our sister commonwealth country, and the Guyanese people in Guyana and in Canada. I asked the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) whether Canada will condemn the systematic violence inflicted by the Burnham Government of Guyana on many of its people. I asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Roberts) whether he will institute a special program for the Guyanese whom he is now shutting out by his visa requirement. Neither of them gave a serious answer. Therefore I now wish to return to the question.

Guyana is experiencing a very serious crisis. This tiny country of 500,000 people, smaller than many Canadian cities, sent over 400 people as immigrants to Canada in 1982 and over 500 in 1983. In 1983 alone 48 people were recognized by Canada as refugees. These were people with a well founded fear of persecution if they returned home to this so-called democratic country.

Guyana has a very serious food crisis. By present laws and police practices a person may be jailed and fined thousands of dollars for the possession of wheat flour. Whereas, of course, the fine for possession of marijuana is only a few hundred dollars. That illustrates the bizarre crisis and the cause of very severe malnutrition in Guyana. However, the attempts of Guyanese people to correct that by producing what they need are seriously hindered by a very violent and repressive government.

● (1820)

The government systematically encourages racial conflict, especially between people of East Indian origin and African origin, and also between people of African and European origin. It seems to rule by the principle of divide and conquer.

The police and the army are often involved in crimes. There is little or no recourse available through the courts, and, in fact, the government appears to be allowing crime to run free since the enforcers of the law are, themselves, taking part in it.

The Guyanese government in this respect is different from some other South American governments that may be repressive, but at least do not condone ordinary crime and violence except when they commit it themselves.

The violence appears to be directed against particular communities in Guyana, including the East Indians, Portuguese, the Chinese and the whites. This is the term used in Guyana that applies mostly to British or Dutch. Of course, there are also many mixtures.

Part of the reason for such attacks may be that some of these smaller groups have the position of merchants. Part of the reason is simply that the government, which is controlled almost entirely by people of African origin, chooses to allow violence to occur against those other groups.

Furthermore, there is violence quite apparently directed against people who are perceived by the government of Guyana to be in opposition to it. The ruling party of Burnham, whose elections have been rigged and completely corrupt in the judgment of British and other international observers, is based on violent intimidation by black people who are primarily of African origin against other black persons, that is people of East Indian origin. In some cases, the support by an East Indian Guyanese of the opposition party, the Peoples' Progressive Party, is apparently enough to have him beaten and robbed of his land.

Another party in opposition, the Workers' Progressive Alliance, has attempted to bring people of different races together and, therefore, it is even more furiously attacked by the government of Burnham. Apparently they consider that racial unity among the people of Guyana would be a threat to their rule.

There is much evidence there of well founded fear of persecution on return, because it is almost impossible for a person who is blacklisted by the government in this small population to find another job. The government has taken over most of the enterprises and controls most of the jobs. Without a membership card in the People's National Congress, it is extremely difficult to find employment, especially for a person of East Indian origin.

Therefore, I am asking, in line with the letter written by the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent) to both the Minister of Employment and Immigration and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, that the government institute a special program, particularly a stay of deportation for up to a year, for Guyanese nationals in Canada who are claiming refugee status and whose cases need further examination because of the conditions in Guyana as yet unrecognized by our Government. I am asking that this Government monitor aid going to Guyana to see that it is going to the people who need it rather than to Government officials. I also ask that the Government publicly demand, within commonwealth channels, or in any other way, that the Government of Mr. Burnham in Guyana restore the practice of the protection of human rights and restore the practice of democratic elections, such as obtained there at the time of independence and for about ten years afterwards until the Burnham government took power about 20 years ago.

● (1825)

I hope the Government will respond to these points and not divert from them to other points.

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Beauchamp-Niquet (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with this opportunity to answer the question put by the Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) about human rights in Guyana and development assistance provided to that country.