

Government Orders

us, forced to leave the country. This provision of the bill could constitute, in our opinion, a violation of the Geneva Convention. The manual of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees states that, depending on the nature of the crime presumed to have been committed, all of the pertinent factors, including extenuating circumstances, must be taken into consideration. In our opinion, bill C-44 should take these considerations into account.

Another aspect that is ignored in the bill is the distinction between political crimes and common law crimes. It seems imprudent to deport persons convicted for political reasons to their country of origin without taking into account the risks they will face there. This kind of regulation is clearly lacking in flexibility and humanity. Would it not be better to take a closer look at the anticipated risks as compared to the seriousness of the crimes committed?

Other important issues are of concern to me, and I ask myself what will happen to permanent residents who have been living in Canada for several years. In some cases, they arrived in this country when they were quite small. Today, they are adults, they work here, are part of the same family and have only vague memories of their country of origin. They have no more relatives and often no more friends over there. Since these people are now Quebecers and Canadians, is returning them to their country of origin the answer?

Other aspects of the bill also deserve closer scrutiny. The bill proposes to authorize immigration officers to seize and open any parcel or document if they suspect it may be used for fraudulent purposes. Is this not a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? One of the principles of our judiciary system is the presumption of innocence, but these provisions on seizing mail reverse the burden of proof. On what grounds will seizures be made and how can the criminal nature of the contents be identified? That is something to think about.

• (1550)

The bill also provides that certain decisions that were formerly made by the Immigration and Refugee Board will, from now on, be made by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and its officials. The minister and his officials are being given new powers to appeal decisions made by an adjudicator in the course of an inquiry, but on the other hand, the commission is being deprived of its power to review cases on humanitarian grounds. Does this mean the administrative process is being politicized? Is this an attack on the independence of the IRB? Would it not be better to improve the way the IRB operates?

I would also like to mention the findings of a study by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration which were released last summer. According to the study, 1,888 foreign criminals who were to be deported were still at large. Is there a way to find these people and try and prevent others from doing

the same thing in the future, without necessarily making it harder to enter the country and running the risk of creating situations that are just as embarrassing as the one I just described? Is the problem of foreign criminals at large specific? In other words, are there more foreigners at large than Canadians or Quebecers that were born here? How many Canadians and Quebecers are now wanted by the police? Do they represent a percentage of Canadians that is significantly smaller than the percentage of immigrants in the same situation? We think the government should provide all the facts on the subject in order to better inform the public and set the record straight on the number of foreign criminals at large. In that way we would stop the witch hunt for immigrants and refugee claimants.

I would like to say again that the Bloc Québécois is aware of the problems associated with foreign criminals presently in Canada. We also know that crime causes turmoil and terror in our communities. We will support the government in its attempts to arrive at an enduring and fair solution to this problem. We agree wholeheartedly that immigrants and refugee claimants cannot use the legislation or reputation of Canada or Quebec to escape their country of origin if they have committed serious offences.

We will not be distracted by unfounded observations which, as we have emphasized, do not reflect reality. The Canadian government seems at this time to be toughening its stance in order to appeal to certain voters. Consider for instance the Young Offenders Act passed during the last session or the increasing hesitation of Liberal caucus members in respect of gun control, or even motion M-157, tabled by the Liberal member for Scarborough—Rouge River, which aims to restrict immigration during periods of recession.

And while we are on the subject, I would also like to point out that Bill C-44, like many other government initiatives, does not reflect the situation in Quebec. In fact, public opinion in Quebec differs greatly from that in the rest of Canada in regards to the link between crime and immigration. As the *Globe and Mail* reminded us last week, Quebecers did not let the few bad cases recently experienced in Canada—which we deplore—influence their attitude and behaviour. This may be another aspect of Quebec's distinctiveness.

Immigrants make a fundamental and undeniable contribution to Quebec and Canadian society's collective wealth. A law designed to prevent criminals from enjoying the right of admission to and asylum in Canada should not be misused. The goals set are not always consistent with the measures put forward to achieve them.

That, unfortunately, seems to be the problem with Bill C-44 as it now stands.

• (1555)

Unfortunately, the government caved in to public pressure from certain groups and ignored our recommendations.