

*Immigration Act, 1976*

This Bill will be remembered as the Bill that turned back ships at sea and provided penalties for those church groups and interested citizens who acted in good conscience as world citizens to protect those people whose lives and livelihoods were in danger. We in Canada have been fortunate because for over 100 years, we have not experienced war. Our political process has been free. We have had the right to participate without loss of life or liberty.

I was born in Canada during the Second World War. My family is of Scottish and British heritage. While my family was not rich, we are privileged. We have never had to live in fear of authorities because of our political views. A member of our family has never been taken away in the middle of the night and never seen again. We have never been persecuted because of our religion, our colour, our ethnic origin or our culture.

In 1939, if I had been of a different ethnic origin, of a different religion, from a different country, I may have been one of those Jews who were turned away from Canadian shores to die in a concentration camp. However, I was fortunate. I was a Canadian.

Recently I spent time travelling in South and Central America. I met people who were afraid to speak, people who had been punished for speaking out against their Government, people who lived in fear, people who because they fight for what they believe in were not just ostracized by their society, not simply ridiculed by their peers but were put into a situation that was a matter of life and death. I suggest that very few Canadians can truly know what that means. Some people may feel that it has been exaggerated and that that is not the way it really is in other parts of the world today. Alas, this is not the case.

One of the most difficult challenges faced by citizens of free countries is first to acknowledge that we are privileged and second to acknowledge that this privilege carries with it a tremendous responsibility, a responsibility to understand what not being free means. As legislators, we are free to disagree publicly and to appear on television or in the media challenging the Government. We must accept responsibility and acknowledge that just because we are all right and safe, we should not become smug. Nor can we have the luxury of isolating ourselves from the realities of a harsher world.

We must accept that freedom undefended is freedom lost. Certainly we cannot have control over other countries, but we must do our utmost to give refuge to those who live in peril and fear because of their beliefs. We cannot turn a blind eye to them. I suggest that as Members not only of this House but of the media learn more about political life in countries outside Canada, we are forced to acknowledge that our safe, free world is not the whole world. One is reminded of Marshall McLuhan who wrote that the world is a global village.

Certainly few of us can be isolated. Few of us can simply say: "Just don't bother us because everything is fine here".

For a moment, let us review the history of refugees whose descendants make up part of our safe, free and democratic society today. They are the blacks who fled pre-Civil War America to escape from a system of slavery which was then legal south of the border. They are Irish immigrants who fled the famine in their native country in the 1800s. They are refugees from Marxist Russia, Mennonites, Hungarians, Czechoslovakians and Indo-Chinese boat people. All these people came here because they wanted to be free to participate in our democracy and in many cases, they were fleeing for their lives.

By and large, these people have integrated into society. I am sure many of their descendants are represented on legislatures all across Canada. In fact, one could suggest that for some of us, though not for myself, it might be very difficult to do in one's country of origin what one can do freely and openly in Canada, and that is, to argue against the Government and the Government's policies, something we are doing today in an open and democratic society.

Canadians have long had pride in our international reputation as a host to legitimate refugees. In past decades, refugees from many other places have formed a valued part of our social fabric. The Government's response makes a mockery of the contribution these former refugees have made to our country by offering a type of legislation in Bill C-84 that treats all potential refugees as criminals rather than as prospective citizens. It is based in many instances on a presumption of guilt as opposed to a presumption of innocence until, through a fair hearing, it can be proven whether or not a person is a legitimate refugee.

I suggest that the Government has generated a great deal of misinformation to justify anti-refugee legislation. Let me take a moment to discuss three of the most commonly heard myths used to justify this legislation. First, it has been said that refugee claimants in Canada are queue jumpers who make it more difficult for legitimate refugees to come to Canada. I do not know who first used the term "queue jumpers", but it gives a visual image of a nice, neat line-up of people standing there with documents in hand waiting to get into Canada. Then someone comes along and elbows them out of the way to get ahead. That is an image none of us like, and one can see the public's response. In fact, people who have gone through the immigration process do not see it as a nice, neat line. They waited many years and it is often a very complex process.

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Problems in the immigration process certainly contribute to the current refugee question. We believe they are solvable and must be addressed. While the Government has attempted to do this, its tactics and methods are much more severe than necessary.

I have also heard expressed the opinion that Canada has too many immigrants. Other speakers have addressed this point. How many immigrants Canada should have is partly a matter