

*Immigration Act, 1976*

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that Canada's humanitarian tradition of dealing with refugees may come to an end if we do not put a stop to the abuse of our system. To do nothing would be irresponsible and sound the death knell of an honoured Canadian tradition. I will not let that happen, nor will my Government. The Government will never let that happen. The Canadian people want measures to be introduced now, and we are going to do that.

The House was recalled for a specific task. We must stem the increasing flow of migrants arriving in Canada. We must put a stop to the organized and systematic abuse of our system for determining refugee status. We must take measures to put a stop to the exploitation of human misery by people who could be qualified as refugee traffickers.

● (1230)

[*English*]

Today, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-55, a vital piece of legislation which will introduce both fairness and control to the refugee determination process. It is the ultimate step in our plan of action to deal with a problem that has international implications.

For most Canadians the dramatic arrival of 155 Tamils in Newfoundland one year ago was their first inkling that we have a refugee problem. That is not surprising when one considers that just six years ago only 1,600 people came to Canada claiming refugee status. However, by 1986 the number had swelled to 18,000. This year we expect that it will reach 30,000. More important than sheer numbers is the fact that many of these claims are not genuine. Our studies show that last year 70 per cent of refugee claimants were not refugees at all, and that many others had already found safe haven elsewhere before seeking refugee status in our country.

The arrival of the Tamils reinforced our resolve to take action to stem the flow of phoney refugees. Quick action was necessary because of wide media interest in the Tamil boat people. The predictable happened—more and more illegal aliens poured into Canada.

We acted by improving measures to curb the flow of illegals to our shores. The control measures we introduced in February had a limited impact. Refugee claimant numbers which were averaging 1,200 a week in February have dropped to 500 a week today. The control measures and the expanded powers that we are now seeking will deal effectively with short-term solutions to the refugee problem. But a long-term solution will only be found through the passage into law of Bill C-55.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows why we have been called to this place. It is because of a system already over-loaded by a backlog of applications which is being exploited by queue-jumpers who are not legitimate refugees in need of our protection. Unscrupulous racketeers are also taking advantage

of the situation and misleading men and women into believing that they will be able to get them the papers required to gain admission to Canada. Those racketeers bring these people to Canada under conditions which are often intolerable, unacceptable even for animals, and absolutely shocking in the case of human beings. Legitimate refugees suffer from delays in the system and are put at a disadvantage because of the increasing number and cleverness of fraudulent claims. Mr. Speaker, Canadians are getting more and more concerned about the inequity of the present system, which they believe to be incapable of putting an end to these abuses.

The patience even the most generous and humanitarian of Canadians is running out. Too many people enter Canada without the required documents and constitute a threat to our security. We are obviously faced with a series of potentially explosive conditions which are unacceptable to the Canadian public and this Government. The situation requires that the Government take the necessary steps. We are determined to put a stop to this traffic in human beings.

I also believe it important to throw some light on another implicit component of this Bill. The purpose of the proposed changes is not to discourage legitimate refugees who need our protection. Bill C-55, combined with the other measures we have taken, will enable us to protect legitimate refugees. With this Bill, we shall establish a fairer, faster and more effective refugee determination system which will benefit all legitimate refugees. This system will respect the basic rights of all those who are entitled to claim refugee status.

Bill C-55 contains key provisions which will simplify the processing of claims, ensure faster rejection of unfounded claims and strengthen the powers of the Government. This will allow the Government to send back to third countries those whose claims are unfounded while respecting their fundamental rights.

We hope that the urgency of taking action and the increasing pressures throughout the world will convince this time the Opposition to be more objective about the importance of Bill C-55.

The temporary measures we imposed in February were indeed only temporary. Bill C-55 goes further. It constitutes the long-term solution required by this problem, and this solution is both fair and judicious.

This legislation allows us to regain control over our refugee determination system which past abuses have rendered ineffective. This is a valid solution, Mr. Speaker. The Bill clearly and concisely defines the new process which I repeat will be an equitable one.

As I have already said, we are here to conclude work undertaken several months ago, and Bill C-55 and the Bill on detention and deterrence are a result of this work. The two