

Oral Questions

the issues first with the people who are most vitally concerned. Then at that time I will make a decision.

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● (1500)

IMMIGRATION

ISSUANCE OF MINISTERIAL PERMITS

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. It concerns a report submitted to the Prime Minister by the Toronto Conservative Caucus which promotes a scandalous strategy to exploit politically Canada's immigrant community. I quote from it because it is very important. It says that "the political potential of ministerial permits is obviously being allowed to fall by the wayside" and that "it should be handled exclusively by the Minister, rather than allowing politically non-aligned bureaucrats free rein". Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree with the recommendation to turn the ministerial permit, which is used judiciously and compassionately, into a partisan tool to aid the Conservative Party of Canada?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of State (Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the report, but I have never seen it, and I have never read it. The Immigration Act gives the Minister the discretion to act on humanitarian grounds, that is, family reunification, refugee settlement, or in the national interest, or on compassionate grounds. The sheer volume of ministerial permits precludes them from being issued by the Minister's office. In 1985 almost 15,000 permits were issued inside and outside of Canada. I can tell the Hon. Member that those figures are reported to Parliament each year.

Mr. Marchi: The Minister has completely refused to exercise any moral judgment or moral leadership.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Would the Hon. Member put his question?

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister is aware of the report, will he completely reject this advice and assure Canadians and the House that in the future the Immigration Department will not be undermined or abused by such political motives from Toronto Conservative Members of Parliament?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of State (Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, I said clearly that I have never seen it and that I have never read it.

Mr. Marchi: Are you rejecting it, then?

Mr. Weiner: We act only on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. We have concern for the individuals, the people.

There are frustrations with the Act. There are constraints. The Act has not been amended in 10 years. We have a quality of service which has been defined as less than acceptable. We intend to do things about those frustrations. We have changing conditions in a changing world, and our concern is for the people. We have a moral obligation—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

OBSERVANCE OF AGREEMENTS WITH INDIAN BANDS

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Given that documents now made public show, contrary to his assertion yesterday, that the Department's signed agreements with Indian Bands have in fact been broken, and broken systematically and deliberately, what steps will he take to ensure that that does not happen again?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, there is an ongoing concern going back—

Mr. Orlikow: No action.

Mr. McKnight: I would have thought that someone on that side would like an answer to a very serious and important question. There is ongoing concern. As I said yesterday, I am not aware and I have not been aware of signed agreements which have been broken by the Department. If the Hon. Member has those agreements, I would ask him to bring them forward. The Hon. Member should also understand, with his experience with the Department of Indian Affairs, that going back through several Auditors General there is a concern about the management of the Department. My predecessor had taken steps to make changes, and I assure the Hon. Member that I will continue to take steps to change the management of that Department.

MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOLS

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same Minister. I assure him that I will supply the documents I have seen. In view of the major deficiency in the school maintenance account—education, operations, and maintenance—which has been identified relative to his Department's own measured standards, what action will the Minister take to make up that deficiency so that in fact the schools do not fall down before their time?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, the operation and maintenance dollars which are provided for the maintenance of