

Immigration Act, 1976

Governor General was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the Royal Assent to the following bills:

Bill C-60, an Act to amend the Copyright Act and to amend other Acts in consequence thereof—Chapter No. 15.

Bill C-102, an Act to amend the Western Arctic (Inuvialuit) Claims Settlement Act—Chapter No. 16.

Bill C-113, an Act to promote the development and diversification of the economy of Western Canada, to establish the Department of Western Economic Diversification and to make consequential amendments to other Acts—Chapter No. 17.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

IMMIGRATION ACT, 1976

MEASURE TO AMEND—CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

The House resumed consideration of second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-55, an Act to amend the Immigration Act, 1976 and to amend other Acts in consequence thereof.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to have you and my colleagues back in the House. As I was explaining previously, many emotions are brought into a debate that deals with individuals who are seeking refugee status, whether here or anywhere else. Of course, many emotional arguments are brought into the equation, and we as a Parliament must deal with them. However, there are also the legal implications on which I ended my previous remarks. Those implications are very important because they deal not only with the legalities of the legislation but with a potential haemorrhaging of the confidence of all Canadians if this refugee system is to be struck down and found wanting constitutionally by one of our courts. Let us try to fathom the repercussions of such an event.

The questions of general immigration policy and refugee policy have been very much on the public mind because of what I believe has been a great deal of ineptitude on the part of this administration in trying to come to grips with the situation of a changing phenomenon. We are not castigating the Government about this because it only found out about this situation last week, last month or last year and did not have time to prepare proper legislation. For almost four years, we in the Official Opposition, my friends and colleagues in the New Democratic Party and colleagues on the government side have been urging the Government to reform the system. A parliamentary committee made a unanimous recommendation to the Government several years ago. We have raised questions and made statements. Non-governmental organizations have submitted recommendations and reports to the Government by the dozen.

When this Government took office, it received the report of Rabbi Gunther Plaut who was commissioned by the previous

administration to evaluate the refugee phenomenon so that Canada could come to grips with it in a logical, fair and effective way. This Government says that it was the previous Government's fault because it did not do anything about this phenomenon, but that is false. The Government would want us to believe that we are still living with the phenomenon of the 1960s and the 1970s, but we are not.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, we sent visa officers to refugee camps to select a quota of applicants to bring back to this country. It was a clean, orderly and effective system and there were not too many problems with it. The reality of the 80s has changed dramatically. Millions upon millions of legitimate refugees are trying to find human decency on this planet of ours and are on the move. Many of them are no longer waiting in refugee camps, and are approaching various countries. Our challenge is to change the system as we go through this very significant transition from selecting refugees to trying to process them as they appear on our shores.

It is very obvious that we need a new system that is capable of meeting the challenge of the new phenomenon, not the old one. That is why for close to four years, we have tried to press the Government into action. We tried to do this before the situation was aggravated. Now we know how many are in the backlog. The multiplier effect has ensued from a course of inaction. A course of preventive remedies would certainly have helped keep the numbers to a manageable level.

That is water under the bridge. The Government did not act when we hoped it would and we are now debating this Bill. That is why we put forward the amendments we moved at second and third reading and in committee. That is why the Senators have moved amendments as well. I compliment the Senate committee composed of both Liberal and Conservative Senators who are equally concerned about the refugee phenomenon.

We have emotional arguments, we have legal arguments and we have the technical arguments of prescreening, counsel and appeal. There is a fourth argument that deals with our international reputation, what this will mean not only domestically but throughout the world. What will other countries read into this legislation and what impact will our stance have on that of the other countries of the world? That argument should not be underestimated.

We have to recognize that Canada itself cannot solve the refugee problem. Yes, we can do our part and be as progressive as possible or strive to be, but Canada should not and cannot accept the 10 million to 15 million refugees who are trying to find peace of mind and safety of body somewhere on the globe. Therefore, I am pointing to the fact that the refugee problem is an international one. Therefore, the refugee solution must be an international solution.

What are we doing to achieve an international solution through this legislation? I believe we are doing nothing, because to date, we have enjoyed a tradition among our partners on the globe, our international friends, of being a