

Immigration Act, 1976

● (1730)

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate once again. This legislation has been with us for some time.

I want to say up front that the manner in which I would characterize the Government's actions with regard to Bill C-84, legislation to amend the refugee determination process, is that the Government is being opportunistic with this legislation. It is playing petty politics and seeking to stir up favourable public opinion. It is making a cheap grab at headlines and simply going for quick results in the public opinion polls. I see the actions of this Government with a very jaundiced eye.

Those statements can be backed up quite convincingly. On the one hand the Government has chosen the option of playing politics with the refugee determination process. On the other hand, there is the option of the *status quo*, leaving things as they are, and doing nothing. The Government has accused the Opposition of advocating this. I wish to look at those two approaches to the refugee determination process. I also want to examine the notion of whether there is any other way to come to grips with this problem.

First, I have stated that this Government is playing politics with the refugee determination process. It is trying to whip up public sentiment and gain public favour by appearing to be the strongman with regard to the refugee determination process. I came to that conclusion for the following reasons.

I remember the time last August when the media were full of people approaching Canada by boat. Concerns were raised about whether someone was going to get into this country illegally, or whether someone was going to get into this country illegitimately, or through the back door. Among immigrant communities the fear was raised that while they were waiting for years to have their relatives come into this country to reunify their families, others were simply chartering a boat, jumping on it and being able to come into Canada without any difficulty whatsoever, and that this was somehow a major loophole in our law. This was on the television screens and whipping up public feelings of unfairness.

The Conservative Government was at the bottom of the public opinion polls, and during the summer recess it broke an agreed upon calendar that was negotiated as part of parliamentary reform that the House would not be sitting in July and August. The Government tore up that calendar, threw it aside, and made a grab for the headlines. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) announced that there was going to be an emergency recall of Parliament in order to put a stop to this abuse of Canada's refugee determination system and our immigration laws. So the Prime Minister made this grandstand.

The irony of ironies is that as this grandstand was made, a number of weeks later when Parliament still had not been recalled journalists and other people began to ask questions.

The House Leader of the Government was asked why Parliament still had not been recalled for this so-called emergency. The response was that government Members were working on other things and they were too busy to have written the letter to the Speaker to ask for the emergency recall of Parliament. What a farce. There was this great emergency and they did not have the opportunity or the time to sit down and write a letter.

Eventually the letter was written, unfortunately. Parliament was recalled in August, 1987. Presumably this emergency legislation had to be put in place immediately in order to deal with a crisis. Did it get passed? Did it become the central focus of an emergency parliamentary session? No. Not at all. We are still dealing with the legislation today and we are into 1988. The year 1987 has come and gone. The headlines and the television screens of 1987 are in the past. And we are still dealing with this legislation.

The Government had a summer session of Parliament. In fact, it became the fall session and then the ongoing session. We dealt with all sorts of legislation touching many subjects. What an emergency. The Government breaks the calendar that was established through negotiations in this House as part of the parliamentary reform system, an emergency session is called, and that session deals with a variety of legislation. It never comes to grip with the legislation that the Government said was an emergency and had to be passed within hours, days, or weeks. Clearly that was no emergency whatsoever. It was a publicity stunt, a grab for the headlines, and an attempt to stir up public emotions and gain favour.

The Government has been playing politics with the refugee determination system. It has been playing politics with many Canadian families of various ethnic origins who are recent immigrants to Canada, for example, the Portuguese, the Filipinos, and people of all racial origin who have become Canadian citizens and who are working very hard to bring their family members to this country in order that they can live as one family rather than having some relatives in this country and brothers and sisters in another country. The Government is playing with those people's feelings. They were saying to those people who have been waiting for years to bring their son, daughter, brother, sister, mother, or father to this country, "Here are those people chartering a boat and entering Canada instantaneously".

Even while the legislation was introduced, the Government promised that it would ease up on the family reunification process. It would make it easier for families to be reunified and for relatives to come into this country in order to ease the frustration of the members of the ethnic communities in this country. Has the Government done anything substantive in that area? The Government has changed a few regulations, for which it deserves credit. But by and large the members of the ethnic communities in my riding are still waiting in frustration for their relatives to be allowed into this country and for their families to be once more unified.