

Immigration Act, 1976

the Government now tell us that a refugee will in all cases be given the benefit of the doubt? How can the Minister say as he had said umpteen times, and that is what is so infuriating about his attitude, that even when there is a shred of evidence supporting the claim, the claimant will be entitled to a hearing? That is a lot of garbage. It is just not so.

The Government suggests that the opponents of this Bill are advocating an open-door policy, a policy of taking in millions of refugees. One would think that hundreds of thousands of people were standing in the pipeline, as Rabbi Plaut put it several weeks ago. You would think that 155,000 Tamils had come to Canada last August. Last year we had 18,000 claimants, no more than would fill an average size hockey arena.

• (1940)

The NGOs, the churches, human rights organizations, lawyers who work with refugees, Rabbi Plaut, and the standing committee all called for a process which would discourage abuse by dealing with claims quickly. There is abuse today because the process is cumbersome. Anyone who comes here today is assured of two to five years of procedure and appeals. A person can get married and appeal to the Minister on compassionate grounds. There is an incentive to abuse the system. However, if the process turns these people around in three months there will be no incentive to abuse. That is the way to deal with abusers, not by imposing an arbitrary screening procedure such as is proposed in this legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the real question is how many can Canada accept? What evidence is there that the Canadian society cannot absorb any more refugees or immigrants? Have we reached our saturation point? All signs point to the contrary.

May I remind you of what Canada did five or six years ago to help refugees from Indochina. At the time, the Government had appealed to the generosity of Canadians who then organized refugee sponsoring groups in various parts of the country. We opened our military bases and we chartered planes to bring in refugees from Indochina. Since 1979, we have received over 100,000 such refugees, including over 60,000 in 1979 and 1980 alone. Seven or eight years later, all these people are contributing something to our country.

In fact, since the war, Canada has received over 500,000 refugees. But can anyone claim sincerely that Canada is doing more than its share compared with other countries, especially those which have common borders with the refugee producing countries? I should like to quote a few figures, Mr. Speaker. Today, Pakistan has some 2.7 million refugees from Afghanistan within its borders; Sudan, 1.2 million; Somalia, 700,000; Hong Kong, 200,000; Thailand has welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Today, there are still some 250,000 refugees in camps situated along the Cambodian border. Mexico has some 175,000 refugees; France, 174,000; West Germany, 134,000; England,

135,000. Who, then, can say that Canada has done more than its share?

Mr. Speaker, let us not forget that Canada is the second largest country in the world. We have a very small population, compared to most other countries. Our natural resources are unbelievable. Which country will maintain a generous attitude toward refugees if not Canada? Canada should play a leading role in the protection of refugees. And it is not with the type of a bill introduced by this Tory Government that Canada will assume its responsibilities.

[English]

Therefore, in conclusion, I wish to indicate that I support the amendment proposed by my colleague from York West for a six-month hoist. I do not agree with the Hon. Member for Calgary West that this Bill merits second reading.

I would like to make an additional comment. The Minister and other spokesmen for the Conservative Party have said very few countries will be on the list of safe third countries. The Minister tells us to have faith in him because he is a good guy. I remind him that the basis of protection is in law, not in speeches of the Minister. When the people who preside at the initial hearing have to decide the case they will look at the Act, the regulations and the manual. They are not going to look at the speeches the Minister made all over the country trying to promote his Bill. This law will be applied long after the Minister is gone. I ask him, why have a provision if it is not going to be applied?

It is incredible to suggest that the public, legislators, and people who work with refugees should rely on the Minister's good faith and not on what the law says. That is what the Minister has been telling us for the past few weeks. I say to him in all sincerity that that kind of an argument is totally unacceptable. We cannot pass a law on the basis of the Minister's good intentions. We have to study, judge and pass a law on the basis of the very clear language in which it is written.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments.

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for his remarks. He was very interested in this issue long before this legislation arrived here for second reading. No one in this Party wishes to stop this legislation from going to committee. Obviously we look forward to having another round with witnesses who can again make their representations on this legislation. What has worried us the most is that after three years of consultation a major segment of what was proposed by the NGOs were not listened to. As a result, we are afraid that the same process will take place in committee for a second time.

We heard from the Hon. Member for Calgary. We heard from NDP Members. Both myself and the Hon. Member for Laurier (Mr. Berger) have spoken as well. All of this was in the hope that the Government will pay attention to the needed