

Statements by Ministers

Basically, there is a profound question of confidence at stake. It boils down to the question, can we have confidence in the promises made by the Prime Minister and this Minister in light of the performance of this Government? Canadians are wary of these promises.

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin by thanking the Hon. Minister for both the prompt and early delivery of his 1988 levels report to the critics and also for a generous appendix of useful statistics.

His report brings one important piece of hopeful news but unfortunately ducks or obscures most of the issues. The hopeful news, is that unmarried children over 21 years of age, we are told, will now be admitted as members of the family class. We understand that to mean without employment criteria, without being screened for education, skills, job offers, or any of the criteria which apply to independent immigrants and assisted relatives. If they are married, we are told, and come as independent immigrants, they will receive a 15 point bonus for kinship instead of a 10 point bonus, and we welcome that also.

We are also assured that if more than the planned 50,000 apply—and I welcome the increase in the planning from 45,000 to 50,000—and are eligible, they will be welcomed.

However, there is no promise to increase the overseas staff which a year ago was planned to be increased but was cut back by the action of the Department of External Affairs, and no promise to redeploy the overseas visa officers so as to reflect the actual volume of applications in different parts of the world. Therefore, it is very questionable whether the Minister can succeed in the increase he has promised.

The news, however, of the enlargement of the concept of the family is good news. It not only helps immigrants to settle into Canada, that is, by bringing in immigrants who already have a family to welcome them, it also directly benefits families in building family life, reflecting the Government's attention to the values of family life, and enabling Canadians to develop those small support systems that are centred in the family. For that the New Democratic Party is grateful because we have urged this change for several years, and we do commend the Minister for this move.

Otherwise, the news is mostly gloomy. It is mainly that the brain drain still reigns as the chief concern in Canada's immigration policy. The point system still tries to scoop the skilled and educated elite from around the world to Canada's benefit, regardless of what is done in the former colonial countries. Furthermore, there is very little practical result yet to be seen for the Minister's claim that he has streamlined and speeded up the immigration procedures.

There is also an interesting contrast. While the Minister has increased family reunification a little, the increase for refugees is stingy considering the needs of the persecuted and Canada's unusually rich resources. The Government is increasing the over-all planning level for Government sponsored selected

refugees by only 1,000. It is cutting back by 3,000 on the planning level for humanitarian admissions. In other words, the Government, while it brags about stepping forward by 1,000—from 12,000 to 13,000—is in fact stepping backward by 2,000. That is in light of the fact that Canada's commitment is not merely narrowly to the UN convention on refugees but more broadly—which in the past years Canada has honoured—has a statutory commitment to a humanitarian goal in our immigration policy. That goal is being sharply reduced by the Minister.

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We also have no assurance that there will be action to respond to the complaints of the churches, which have advised the Minister and the legislative committees that studied the Minister's repressive refugee legislation, of very specific details of how seriously the Government's red tape cuts back on the number of people that churches are able to sponsor. The churches, when they have undertaken a certain number of sponsorships, find that they cannot bring in all those people because of the Government's red tape.

For example, Chileans I know of in Buenos Aires, who have been recognized by the UN as refugees and sponsored by Canadian churches, have been refused by the Minister's Department for reasons that were never properly explained. Therefore, when the Minister says that he hopes that the churches will sponsor perhaps 7,000 or 6,000 refugees, he should have undertaken to cut the red tape which hinders them from doing that.

The third point is that while the Government has promised 2,000 refugee claimants to be landed by the refugee status advisory committee during the year 1988, he conceals the fact that these are cases left over from previous years. If Bill C-84 and Bill C-55 ever become law, that flow of claimants recognized in Canada will dry up very sharply since nearly all the claimants will be turned away unheard.

The Minister has bragged about the example that Canada sets to other countries of resettlement. The example that Canada will set, if Bill C-55 becomes law, is that a large number of people—according to the Government's estimates probably the majority—who come to Canada claiming refugee status will be sent away without the full oral hearing that is required by the Supreme Court of Canada's interpretation of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

They will be sent away without Canada having decided whether or not they are in fact refugees. They will be sent away to some other country, perhaps a country to which they passed through. The example Canada is setting is that we will not even ask, we will not even listen to their refugee claims. We will send them on, whether it is to Germany, France or wherever. We expect those countries to deal with that hot potato that we will not deal with. That is a disgraceful example. It is a denial of Canada's signature on the United Nations's Convention regarding the status of refugees.