

Immigration

a few moments ago I find that I still cannot find too much fault with that statement of policy.

Mr. Pickersgill: Neither can we.

Mr. Shaw: I do not suppose there will be too much criticism advanced today of that broad general statement of policy. It is when you get inside it that you start finding differences of opinion or criticisms. The prime minister of that day said the policy of the government was to foster the growth of population in Canada by the encouragement of immigration. He said the government would seek by legislation and regulation and vigorous administration to ensure a careful selection of permanent settlers of such numbers as could advantageously be absorbed into our national economy. That was on May 1, 1947.

Then he went on to deal with what he called the long-range program for immigration, and he emphasized again the first purpose, namely that of enlarging the population of the country. He pointed out in connection therewith that there was always danger in having a wealthy country like this so sparsely populated, especially when that picture was placed alongside the situation which prevailed in so many countries of the world where you have large populations jammed into small areas with a low level of existence among the people, with at times actual starvation. I stated at that time that that was a statement with which we could agree.

The prime minister then went on to point out that a larger population would help to develop our resources, that there would be more consumers for our domestic products and less necessity for exporting our primary products. That holds as true today.

He next referred to the fact that in his opinion immigration must relate to the country's absorptive capacity. That is an intriguing term. The hon. member for York South (Mr. Noseworthy) registered some criticism. I am wondering in my own mind if any effort has actually ever been made to determine the absorptive capacity of Canada at any specific time. As the prime minister of that day indicated, it will change from time to time and that is understandable. I wonder if in the past eight years the government has advanced at all in the determination of a formula which might guide us in this particular field.

The prime minister did say—I could quote his exact words—that a figure representing

[Mr. Shaw.]

the absorptive capacity would vary from year to year in response to economic conditions. We agree with that, but at the same time we wonder what has been done. We are going to look to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to elucidate when it comes to that particular field. I just wonder what the department has done.

Then of course he referred to this question of selection of immigrants. I am one who has always felt and who still feels—if this is government policy, I agree—that Canada has a perfect right to select those persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. I have always opposed the open door policy, and I still oppose it. While we do not differentiate between Canadians who are born here and those who have been admitted as immigrants and have become citizens, we have the right to choose those who will be permitted to enter the country. We do not discriminate between those two groups, for they are all Canadians interested in the development of this great Canada of ours. But after all this is our Canada, and we have some right to adopt certain policies in this regard. I am not personally familiar with any country that has not some policy restricting certain —“types” is not the right word—persons from entering their country, and I cannot agree for one second with any person who implies we should throw our doors open and allow all and sundry into Canada.

It is true that there are vast open spaces here. This is a big country, and there is room for many people. But in my opinion we must be selective in our policy. I agree with what the late prime minister said—and I think these are his words—that it is not a fundamental human right of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. Certainly we wholeheartedly agree with that. As far as I am aware, though I may be wrong, we have not been committed to any other policy by virtue of our membership in the United Nations or by anything else. I would be one of the severest critics of the government if they were to enter into any kind of agreement which would have the effect of taking from us the right to determine who shall enter this country as a future Canadian citizen.

I would hasten to add that we must prevent any objectionable type of discrimination. If someone were to ask me to define that I might have some trouble, but I can easily think of a situation where hundreds, or hundreds of thousands if you like, of communists were desirous of coming in here, or whose government was desirous of sending them here from Russia, to become citizens