

Immigration Act, 1976

I cannot help but feel that in practice they will go a long way to answering those reservations which still exist toward Bill C-55.

I share as much as I value the opinion of my good friend and colleague, the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes), when he said in the House last Friday that even without amendments at this last stage the refugee determination system contained in the Bill would be the finest in the world. It really is no less than that.

We have not transferred to others, as others have done to us, our responsibility for refugees. Under Bill C-55 we honour as we have always honoured our international obligations without limit, and it is no surprise to me, although it might be to some, that the representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees testified that the essential features of this new system do not contravene the Convention.

[*Translation*]

But more than anything else, more than what the amendments—indeed a complete overhaul of the Bill—might ever produce, there is one thing which should rally the full support of Bill C-55 critics, an aspect which faithfully mirrors the sincerity of the Government which is determined to ensure that people needing the protection of Canada will indeed get it, and I am referring, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Gordon Fairweather's appointment as Chairman of the new Immigration and Refugee Board.

[*English*]

Gordon Fairweather is a man of unparalleled commitment and compassion for the politically oppressed and persecuted. There may be someone somewhere in our country who matches his dedication to human rights, but there is none who exceeds him. His integrity, his indisputable honesty and courage should encourage all but the most mean-spirited and partisan opponents of the Government.

It should encourage them to see that when the Government promises a refugee determination system and personnel of exceptional quality and calibre, it delivers and will go on delivering in this field as in every other.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has always lived up to its responsibilities and will continue to do so. We continue to honour the commitment made with respect to world refugees, a commitment of which we can be proud and which we will maintain.

We also respect our commitment to Canadians.

Let Hon. Members or anybody else not delude themselves: We have made a name for ourselves because of our assistance to refugees, but our reputation is not due to this Government nor any previous administration, but only to the generosity and openmindedness of Canadian men and women.

[*English*]

We have not failed that trust and Bill C-55 is proof of that. Our duty of protecting the genuine refugee through this new determination system will be done. But we have never suggested that this is the total of our duty. Far from it.

I have already mentioned specific programs directed to refugee relief and assistance. One can add to them direct ministerial discretion through which thousands of people are helped every year, people who do not qualify under normal criteria even today, but who, on humanitarian grounds, still merit our assistance. That same ministerial discretion will apply after Bill C-55, as it does now. Yet one more safeguard, and perhaps the best of all for that discretion may be applied at any stage of the process.

● (1140)

I will not pretend to the House that the impulse behind Bill C-55 is not reactive. Obviously, it is a reaction to shortfalls and inadequacies in the refugee determination system that we inherited from the previous administration. It is a reaction to massive abuse.

But in other ways our policy toward refugees is in the forefront of innovation. We are leading the world in looking for new solutions to this universal problem of the 20th century. Canada has also initiated programs targeting specific groups in need of special assistance, including women refugees who are at risk, and other refugees with special needs.

We are determined that the world shall not turn its back on those in need of safe haven. We will argue that need whenever, wherever, and to whomever we can.

Bill C-55 draws a line that both common sense and justice demand be drawn. But we draw it in a manner which includes far more than it excludes. This Minister and this Government will not sit idly by and see that generosity and openness flagrantly and blatantly abused. Neither will we endanger our country's long-standing welcome of the immigrant because we failed to act.

One more time, Mr. Speaker, our duty and our responsibility is to aid the genuine refugee in need of our help. We can only do that through a determination system which once and for all will end the abuse of false or unjustified claims. Bill C-55 will get that job done simply, expeditiously, and fairly. It is time the Parliament of Canada got its job done by passing this Bill.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Official Opposition to third reading of Bill C-55, the refugee determination system.

In his opening remarks today, the Minister outlined that Canadians are mixed up with respect to immigration and refugees. One good reason why they are mixed up—if the Minister wishes to use those words—is because they have received mixed signals from the Government during the