

*Government Orders*

objective criteria which are aimed at the ability of the immigrant to adapt in Canada and to settle in Canada.

It goes on to say in those goals of our immigration policy that Canada has a legal obligation with respect to refugees and to uphold its humanitarian tradition, a great tradition which we have had. The minister mentioned that we won the Nansen Medal a few years ago for our record with respect to refugees.

It is also the purpose of our immigration policy to foster a strong and vibrant economy in Canada to maintain and protect the health, safety and good order of Canadian society and to promote international order and justice by denying the use of Canadian territory to criminals, terrorists, and so on.

Those are the goals of our immigration policy as set out in the law. Those have not been changed and it will be our job, our task, in this debate to evaluate the amendments that the government has put before us to see whether they correspond with those goals.

The bill before us contains very significant changes. In fact I would say that this bill sets out a series of amendments which are the most extensive we have had since the present act was enacted in 1976. We had Bill C-55 a few years ago, but these amendments are the most extensive amendments to the law up until this time. I would like to go through some of those more significant amendments in the bill.

In the bill the government proposes ending the so-called first stage hearings for refugees, the credible basis hearing, and we think that is a good thing. We congratulate the government for doing that.

Those first stage hearings were for the most part in recent months a waste of time and resources. The large majority of cases were being accepted. Consequently, those first stage hearings did not serve any great purpose.

On the other hand, the government in terminating the first stage hearings, the credibility stage hearings, has now given some of the authority that tribunal had at the first stage hearing to officers at ports of entry. It appears it has given them that authority without providing for due process of law.

What we have now is power being given to immigration officers and senior immigration officers at the border to refuse refugees who present themselves and make a claim for refugee status.

In some of the cases the matter will be sent on to an inquiry under an adjudicator. In other cases, the individual will be sent back from the country. In some cases, the refugee will be sent back to a so-called safe third country, and I will discuss that in a minute, in other cases sent back to the United States, and in other cases simply turned down without any hearing by an inquiry or an adjudicator.

With respect to the safe third country, we in this party have not accepted that concept. We did not accept it when it was proposed with respect to Bill C-55 a few years ago and we continued to reject it. We believe the International Convention on Refugees, which we have signed, and the protocol give those who claim refugee status universal access to a fair hearing to determine whether or not they are really a refugee.

We know that the United States which is a democratic country for many purposes has not been as democratic with respect to its refugee policy. As a matter of fact, for the last number of years the refugee policy of the United States has been tied to its foreign policy and has been politically motivated.

If the refugee came from a country which was more or less a right wing dictatorship and was being opposed by left wing freedom fighters, the United States was not favourable to those individuals fleeing those right wing dictatorships. I have in mind in particular Guatemala, El Salvador and other Latin American countries.

On the other hand, if the refugee claimant going to the United States came from a left wing dictatorship, such as some of the communist countries in Europe, the refugee was received very openly and warmly in the United States.

In other words, in our opinion, the refugee convention was not applied evenly to all types of refugees who appeared in the United States. Therefore, for Canada to return refugee claimants to the United States because we considered it a safe third country and the refugee claimant had to come through the United States by plane, truck, train, boat, or whatever, and to say to them that they do not belong here, they belong in the United States because it was a safe third country, we do not think this is a proper way to deal with legitimate refugee applicants.

Another change in the bill is the fact that the government is proposing that the refugee panel of the Immigrant and Refugee Board now requires the agreement of two members in certain cases to recognize the applicant as a refugee. Up until now, the recognition of only one of