

the amendments we originally thought were necessary for the sake of focusing on the more important ones.

This amendment, which would give refugee claimants a chance to work and earn their living within 60 days of their arrival, is extremely important to metropolitan Toronto and the surrounding municipalities. The majority of refugees who have come to Canada are in the Toronto region.

Welfare costs are already very high because Toronto now has higher than average official unemployment, higher than the Canadian average. It is not as high as Newfoundland or Montreal but it is higher than the average for Canada. This has been going on for several years and it has affected welfare costs.

One neighbouring municipality has complained about the number of refugees on welfare even though the numbers are not that great.

In fact, the government is well aware that by putting a cap on the welfare payments it is making it next to impossible for municipalities in Toronto and the region to cover the cost of the refugees whom the government will not allow to work.

Under the new system the government says it take three, four or five months at most until there is a decision. It will not agree to give a work permit at the end of two months because it claims there would be fraud.

I do not understand how the minister can support that with a straight face because he told our committee publicly that the vast majority of refugee claimants are real refugees. Those were the minister's words: "The vast majority are real refugees". In fact he has repeated it.

If the vast majority are refugees how many people are going to travel thousands of miles—whether it is from east, west or south, they do not come across the pole—for what cannot be more than two or three months work at low wages? This is not an attempt to protect the country against a flood of frauds. This is an attempt to punish refugees for being refugees. It is an attempt to punish people who are being persecuted, who are being threatened with persecution, because they have come to seek safety in a country which in the past,

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before the last four or five years, earned a great reputation for accepting people in need of protection.

There is no good reason for refusing to let these people work. They want to work. They did not come here to live off welfare. They want to earn their way.

The municipalities want them to work and have said so. The Association of Canadian Municipalities said that to the committee. Yet this government refuses to allow them to work and it can only be because the government is adopting the policy of what is called humane deterrents, as expressed by a previous director of refugee affairs, Raphael Girard. We will not shoot them at the border, we will not send them away without a hearing, but if possible we will make them wish they had never come there by making life miserable with delays and under-funded refugee processing systems and by making it as hard as possible for them to earn a living or to pay for legal help.

This has increasingly become the growing policy of this government. Its refusal in committee to give us any answers to our questions on this point shows it is not willing to listen to reason, unless it has a last minute change of heart now.

**Mr. Ross Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, first I would like to comment on the amendment and then I will continue in the time remaining to comment on the earlier comments of my colleagues.

In terms of the amendment, the bill does not provide for any specific point at which authorization for a work permit will be given. That is in response to the flexibility that is essential to changing conditions.

There is no question that there has been quite a broad debate on this subject. It is a concern that a number have raised, particularly the municipalities, in terms of access to a work permit.

I think what is important, and I would disagree with my colleague for Trinity—Spadina on this one point, is that a great deal of the refugee sections of this bill are in response to a number of people who were concerned that the process needs to be speeded up to be more humane and to provide for better service for refugees.

The intent of this legislation is to ensure that positive determinations are reached within two or three months, which is essentially the same effect as that of the proposed amendment. What we do not provide for