

Supply

would be fair at this point to mention their names in this House. Young people with technical skills, mechanics, electrical technicians and so on have been told in our U.K. offices that there is no job for them here. Clearly their families and family businesses here could put them to work right away. It strikes me as improper that these people should be kept out of Canada when they would fit into the country very well. They have an education standard at least as high as the average Canadian. They have families with businesses here where they could be immediately employed. Is there no difference in criteria for applicants from the United Kingdom, a nation of people who can easily adapt to Canada, or from Ireland, where there is a great deal of religious tension, a country whose people could easily adapt to Canadian life? For years our traditional flow of immigrants has come from these countries. At one time people were entitled, as an absolute right, to come to this country if they were British. Is there any reason why these people should not be given preference over people coming from other countries where their customs and language are not ours?

Mr. Axworthy: The immigration law does not recognize a special preference to any one country. The law is written by Parliament to apply certain standards, either for family, compassionate, humanitarian or economic reasons. The difficulty we often experience is that those who are coming from the United Kingdom often times make applications for cousins or more distant relatives. I know that is why the hon. member receives complaints. In those cases they must apply under the assisted-relative class. They must show some harmony with the labour market requirements and they must show job authorizations. We cannot and will not impose any special category to say that country of origin is important. The same standard must apply equally to everybody. I can understand the frustration in those cases and why some people do not understand it. But that is the way the law was written. I think it represented the wish of Parliament and of Canadians that we do not have a discriminatory immigration policy but one which is simply based upon criteria of what is required in our own labour markets, what is required to unify families and what is required to make judgments on humanitarian grounds. Those are the only criteria we can use.

Mr. Blenkarn: With respect to the task force the minister spoke of, will he add to it the obligation that they look at whether we should not also impose the criterion that the person have the ability to fit into our socioeconomic system in Canada? Should they not look at whether the applicant's cultural background and so on is similar to our culture, and that his language is similar to ours? Will the minister have the task force examine those as further criteria in determining the suitability of immigrants?

Mr. Axworthy: That really is not the mandate of the task force. I have instructed them to look at questions of regulations and procedures within the process of the act. If there were to be major amendments to the act—and that would require a major amendment—it would be something which

should go through Parliament and be considered by parliamentarians, not necessarily by outside consultants who are simply working to streamline the procedures.

● (2250)

I do not think this is the initiative which should be taken. The present Immigration Act has been in operation for a little less than two years and there is still much to learn about it. There may be a time when changes will be required, but I do not think that we should get into judging suitability. Obviously there is some judgment made by our officers abroad with regard to individual applications. There are in the act certain provisions which prevent undesirables, for example, people who have bad records, from coming into the country, and further restrictions on medical grounds. But if we start trying to determine who fits our country, we get into a very dicey area and one which I am sure we would not want to impose upon the officials abroad. I am most comfortable, as a Liberal, with the way the act is currently constructed.

Mr. Blenkarn: From time to time people in my riding who are clearly illegal immigrants into Canada come to see me. I also know that a person can get off the airplane at Toronto international airport and, if they look right, they will probably have no difficulty with the minister's staff, particularly if it appears they are coming here for a holiday and have lots of money to pay their hotel bills and so on.

When I go to Australia I am required, even as a member of Parliament and of this House, to get a visa. Why do we not have a visa system, aside from our obvious interaction with the United States. If I go to Mexico, or many other countries, I need a visa, but people who come from a great number of places around the world do not need visas when they come to Canada. Would that system not assist the minister in controlling illegal immigration? I say this to the minister because I happen to know a number of people in my constituency who are illegal immigrants. Some of them run businesses and own property, and I would not be surprised if they vote in federal elections.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Chairman, I am tempted to ask what party they vote for, but I already know the answer. There are presently some 80 countries from which we require visas. Any addition to that number is a matter of government policy and must be considered by cabinet each time. If the hon. member has information to suggest that some country is beginning to flood us with illegal immigrants, then we would have to take a look at imposing visa regulations. For example, we recently put visa regulations on Haiti in order to stem the flow of a large number of illegal immigrants from that country into Canada. We take a case by case approach and we are certainly prepared to receive any information which the hon. member might have.

Mr. Blenkarn: Is there any way the minister can speed up some of the answers to queries I have made of his office? The minister's staff is pretty good sometimes, but a number of situations have arisen where I have had to make a number of