

Immigration Act, 1976

● (1120)

[English]

Knowing how Canadians feel at the moment about refugee matters, I am wondering whether the time has come again to have an all-Party committee travelling across Canada and coming up with a kind of Green Paper. This would provide the committee with an opportunity to learn the feelings of Canadians and not only to receive but to give and to explain to Canadians in major cities and some well chosen rural areas across Canada, as we did some years ago, what refugees and immigration really mean to Canada.

I see a Minister of the Crown listening to what I am saying at the moment. I say to him that if we do not do that, we will have immense difficulty in Canada. More and more immigrants will not be the kinds of immigrants to which we are accustomed. We may require another kind of immigration in Canada if we are to continue to prosper and develop, as we have done so far, with an aging population and a low rate of mortality.

In conclusion, the time may have come for an educational process. I say openly—and I did not consult with my Party; I just rushed in here this morning—that I would be more than happy, if I were asked by my Party, to sit on that committee. It is not easy, but I would be willing to do that because I feel strongly about the matter and I feel convinced that we must do that.

The committee could travel across Canada. Its members could be well chosen for their openness, not people, as Rabbi Plaut said, who call on the bad sentiment which exists in every human being, including myself. We have people in all three Parties who are open-minded. The majority would accept appointments to such a committee to go across Canada, to listen to Canadians, and especially to answer them in a non-partisan way. It would give Canadians a better opinion on what immigration, refugees, and citizenship are all about.

An Hon. Member: Soon.

Mr. Prud'homme: I hear the word "soon". The Minister responsible for citizenship is in the House.

That would be the kind of process in which I would prefer to participate, rather than a debate in which everyone clashes with each other, which I would call useless and non-productive.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me a minute more, but let me repeat that it is the responsibility of certain Ministers to be educators, not only good administrators. Of course we expect a Minister to do a good job. However, in certain cases, especially in matters where human feelings are involved, it is the duty of a Minister to take the lead in the educational process to educate Canadians about their responsibilities.

If there is a subject which is highly important, it is that of immigration. I hope that the two Ministers responsible would see, as one of their major tasks, the educational part of the process and not only reflect in a tough law what Canadians may be feeling at the moment when they see illegals or a boat or two coming into Canada. At the same time, they should take measures to correct and should explain to Canadians what will be the Canada of tomorrow.

In order for the Canada of tomorrow to be the kind of Canada we would like to see—prosperous, open, and generous—we will have to start going on the road and explaining the difficulties.

I hope the two Ministers responsible for Immigration Canada will agree in a non-partisan way that they are not only administrators but also educators.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your patience.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in third reading debate of Bill C-84.

This Bill was put forward in response to what was deemed to be a national emergency and resulted in the recalling of Parliament from its summer recess. It deals with, if we listen to the Government, queue-jumping and coping with a massive influx of people who are attempting to enter the country illegally.

I will get to some of the details which led up to this Bill in a moment, but I want to begin my comments by pointing out that we in Canada have always had difficulty in dealing with the concept of "refugee". It has always been tinged, to a certain amount, by politics, depending upon the politics of the day and the reading of the Government of the day on what would be acceptable to the population. The term "refugee" has been broadly interpreted and at other times it has been very tight.

I should like to point to some of the periods in our history of which I am proud. For example, we permitted entry of refugees who were former slaves in the United States. We did that willingly and with open arms. They did not require the necessary papers which we are now saying must be available, because those people did not have papers. They did not even have a piece of paper saying who they were. The only paper about them which existed might have been a title saying that they belonged to a certain land owner in one of the southern states. They had no visas. They had no passports. They had nothing to indicate who in fact they were. Yet we, being wise at the time, permitted them to come into Canada. We were also quite open about accepting something like 60,000 boat people from southeast Asia.

Those were a couple of the good periods in Canadian history, but there were also bad ones. In 1914 we turned away a shipload of Sikhs from India, many of whom went back to