

Adjournment Debate

matter. By making the claim, they must be allowed to stay for the refugee process because the Minister and the bureaucrats have delayed any action to correct the law to close that loophole.

These claims could still be expeditiously disposed of by a report our committee delivered in December, just before Christmas. It is not 120 days, but no law prevents the Minister from acting upon the report before 120 days. That report showed ways that could be followed without legislative change on the basis of the present Immigration Act. By some adjustment of regulations to meet the crisis, most of the claimants, whether they are Portuguese, Guyanese, Iranian, Sikh, Bangladeshi, African, Latin American, no matter from where they come, most of them, according to the officials' admission, could be settled here on grounds of family reunification, on grounds of effective integration into Canada, or on grounds of extreme hardship and compassionate consideration. That would have saved untold human hardship and would have saved many millions of dollars to this Government. Instead, the Minister still delays, is building up the hardship and the cause and building up bitterness. Unscrupulous journalists are using false figures to slander these refugee claimants. They are likely to destroy Canada's good refugee determination system which needs improvement, but not destruction. Perhaps what is sought is a way of bringing in cheap, illegal labour for the labour market in Canada and returning to the bad old days of the worst immigration policies we have had.

● (1815)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Hudon (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to reply to the question on behalf of the Minister.

However, I would like to start in a lighter vein. Last week I accused my Liberal friends and colleagues of being a "bottoms-up gang" because they could always be found burrowing in some waste basket or other, looking for letters and papers to bring before the public eye. I think my hon. colleague has caught the same habit: it must be contagious on that side of the House. And always the intimations that a series of assumptions and documents will be forthcoming.

Mr. Speaker, from my experience as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Ms. MacDonald) for almost a year, I can say that every week, the Minister receives tens, and when it is really busy even hundreds, of proposals varying from the most complex to the most farfetched.

We signed the Geneva Convention, and according to the Convention which was in fact ratified in 1951, it is strictly prohibited to expel anyone before entry. We signed the Convention and we intend to observe our international commitments.

Regarding the crux of the Hon. Member's question, Mr. Speaker, it is absurd to imply that the Canadian Government

could be endangering the lives of refugees by expelling people who, in fleeing their country, pass through another country.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that in the legislative committee and in this House we had a debate on a Bill to increase the number of appeal commissioners from 18 to 50, which was vehemently opposed. Keep in mind that we now have 20,000 cases. Admittedly these are not all refugee cases, but you know there is no distinction between refugee cases and regular immigration cases. Twenty thousand cases are pending and we simply must find a way to give them a hearing.

With respect to the implementation of the Geneva Convention, as I said a moment ago there is a well established principle whereby the summary expulsion of a refugee to a third country which in turn deports the refugee to his or her country of origin constitutes an expulsion. The expulsion or forced return of a refugee to the country where he was persecuted is a procedure to which convention signatories are not allowed to resort. Canada happens to be among the signatories, Mr. Speaker, and it has no intention of using such tactics. Obviously we have never authorized the drafting or publication of proposals which would breach that non-expulsion principle and which would be unfair to Canadians and others who may wish to become Canadian citizens.

[English]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE—COLLECTION OF BENEFITS BY BRICKLAYERS

Mr. Andrew Witer (Parkdale-High Park): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to expand on my question regarding unemployed Metro Toronto bricklayers. I feel that the issue raised in the question is one which goes beyond bricklayers and hiring hall agreements to the very core of the unemployment insurance system. The issue is now to ensure that only those who are genuinely unable to find work receive benefits.

My intent is not to single out bricklayers as abusers. In fact, I would think that the ratio of abusers among bricklayers is likely no higher than that among any other occupation. I merely wish to illustrate the problems that exist within the program.

According to recent reports, 1,400 bricklayers in the Metropolitan Toronto area are presently receiving unemployment insurance benefits. Yet builders have set up an emergency manpower committee to try to locate qualified bricklayers to fill the urgent demand for their services.

Bricklayers have countered charges of abuse by stating that weather conditions are such that they cannot perform the work. When builders are asked about this, they state that tenting building sites with tarpaulin creates adequate conditions for laying bricks.

If the builders are correct, then some 1,400 individuals are collecting benefits to which they should not legally be entitled. If they are wrong, then bricklayers' work would appear to be seasonal and under unemployment insurance regulations, they