

*Immigration Appeal Board Act*

we can get them out is by making it attractive for them to do so. First, we should start with advertising.

It appears at long last that the government realizes there is a problem related to its immigration policies as well as the Immigration Appeal Board Act. For some time the government has been dealing in statistics, not realizing that this approach ignored the fact that people were involved. People, rightly or wrongly, believed, and still do, that Canada is a land of golden opportunity, a land which welcomes all regardless of their race, creed, colour, sex or national origin as long as they are prepared to come in freedom, be respectful of our laws and are determined to make a significant contribution to Canada's destiny. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, what we have witnessed in the past six years, particularly in the past three years, has been an atmosphere of error, procrastination, inaction and indecision.

There can be no doubt about the government's lack of interest in the area of immigration. This is particularly true when it is noted that 10 different ministers have been involved with immigration in about 11 years, and about five of them since the 1967 change which was initiated by the now present Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) permitted visitors to seek landed immigrant status while here. This undoubtedly precipitated the crisis which we face today.

As far back as 1968, the chairman of the appeal board was crying in despair, pleading with the government to enlarge the panel to deal with a situation the like of which has not been seen in any industrially developed country. We have watched with concern the appeal backlog which has increased yearly from 200 on January 1, 1969 to 1,700 on January 1, 1970, 4,750 on January 1, 1971; 8,081 on January 1, 1972; 11,875 on January 1, 1973 and 17,472 on June 1, 1973. With appeals being filed at the rate of 1,000 a month, this would have placed us in the position of having some 25,000 cases filed with the Immigration Appeal Board. This would mean that, without government intervention, many persons would have had to wait up to 20 years before their appeals would be heard by the board. Such a situation would not only be chaotic, but grossly unfair to the would-be immigrant who, with every legal right, took advantage of our immigration policies.

Such a mess has made it extremely difficult for the department to process applications and, more important, to catch the few who would possibly be threats to Canada and its way of life. What a peculiar situation. However, with all of its peculiarities, I have no hesitation in stating that the past policies in this regard will be noted as a shameful blot on Canada's history. The attitude of the government, exhibited by a succession of immigration ministers, can only be looked upon as one lacking in compassion and inhumane. In all fairness, I must tread lightly with the present minister because he has not been around very long. I want to blast everybody else who has been around and I am not feeling too kindly toward this minister at this particular time. Perhaps he did not have enough "push" with the government House leader, who every day makes up a new list of priorities. Yet one of the most important priorities has to do with the dignity of man and human lives. But the government, through its House leader, kept shafting the poor Minister of Manpow-

[Mr. Alexander.]

er and Immigration until they found we were almost ready to go home; then they realized there was just about time to push this measure through. It is shameful.

● (1640)

What we have seen has been a court of record which, through the ineptness of this government and others before it, has become involved in one of the most colossal messes and breakdowns in which any court has been involved at any time. No court of record of which I am aware, even one of the worst they have in the southern United States—I don't want to get too deeply into that—has ever experienced or ever will experience a backlog of almost 18,000 cases. It is utterly ridiculous. The government realized the mess it was in, and in order to placate the electorate brought in the infamous regulation under date of November 3, 1972 to try to stem the tide. Like many other things done by the government, it did not prove successful.

How did this colossal and continuing immigration mess ever start? Well, it began with a press release dated September 12, 1967 issued by the office of Manpower and Immigration, the minister of the department at that time being the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). As a matter of fact, I think I got a copy of this press release from the minister. This press release went across the country and it went across the world. I quote from it in part:

A complete innovation in the new regulations is the provision for the admission to Canada for permanent residence of persons already present in Canada such as visitors. From now on, any visitor to Canada can apply for permanent residence. Previously, with the exception of the remedial action instituted in July, 1966, visitors while in Canada were not allowed in the normal way to apply for immigration. This innovation recognizes the growing ease of transportation. In fact, a person visiting in Canada to "look things over" before making his final decision was penalized for this initiative.

What kind of nonsense was the minister talking earlier when he spoke of "bona fide visitors"? That press release invited anybody from anywhere in the world to come to Canada as a visitor to "look things over". That is the gist of this news release. Therefore, anyone who is here in 1973 as a result of what was contained in that news release and directive has every right to walk up the steps of the appeal procedure right up to the federal court. I do not want the minister to try to give us a "snow job" about legitimate visitors and illegitimate visitors and bona fide visitors. When the department issued that press release it was talking about visitors, period.

It is my understanding that many on the other side of the House admit a mistake was made in 1967. I should like to point out once again that the Conservative party said an error was made when the change was introduced. The party to which I belong has reaffirmed its position many times in this regard. I have explained why we considered it to be an error in the earlier part of my speech. A Liberal government caused the mess and, through successive administrations, perpetuated it. But it would never admit to being at fault.

What have we heard in this regard? In a press release issued by the then minister of manpower and immigration on November 3, we read: