

*Committee Reports*

Today, however, I can only respond in a very general way, and I trust the Minister will understand.

[*English*]

When the Deschênes Commission was launched I had the opportunity, on behalf of my Party, to indicate our position. I want to remind the House of the degree of approval which I indicated for the choice of Mr. Justice Deschênes to head this commission. Without having read the report from cover to cover, I believe that what I did see in it shows a degree of workmanship, a degree of commitment which lasted years beyond his original undertaking, a willingness to examine all issues raised, and a willingness to pursue all suspects identified, which deserve the commendation of this House. As I said at the outset, I would like to indicate once again how felicitous the choice of Mr. Justice Deschênes was for this project and how well he has redeemed the confidence which was shown in him when he was asked to undertake this assignment.

At the same time as I expressed confidence in Mr. Justice Deschênes I expressed two reservations, and I want to refer to those briefly now as well. I expressed the reservation that the Government would do nothing on the prosecution of war criminals for the entire time that the commission sat. I expected then that it would be a relatively short period of time. It has turned out to be a long period of time and, regrettably, the concern which I expressed was validated by events. During the entire process, although there were cases under investigation as indicated and referred to in the House by the Minister of Justice of the day, nothing was done during this very, very long period. I regret that during that long process the projects which the Deschênes Commission recognized as having been commenced by the former Government were not pursued by the present Government.

The other concern which I expressed, to which I want to refer again, was a concern that the fabric of Canadian society could be affected by a process in which there would be allegations, not related to particular individuals who would be charged, but which might find a reference to communities, allegations which could disturb the harmony of the Canadian society. Regrettably, and through no fault of Mr. Justice Deschênes, in my opinion, there have been tensions during the period that the Deschênes Commission conducted its work.

However, those are behind us now and the report is before us. It is incumbent upon the Liberal Party, and it is our desire, to look to the future, to look to the degree to which this report will settle issues of public concern and the degree to which the Government will respond to it. It is to those issues that I want to turn now.

However much the fabric of Canadian unity may have been affected by the report, there is a full opportunity for national unity to be strengthened, for the understanding among Canadian communities to be enhanced, and for the report and the action of the Government to be an experience which will enrich Canadian society and reinforce our commitment to fundamental justice, which surely includes the inability of a

democratic society to accept among it the presence of those who have committed some of the worst crimes in world history and have remained unpunished.

• (1140)

The formula for a very good ending exists. I had an opportunity to read the Minister's statement beforehand and I want to say that I think the Government is indicating that it will be on the right track. It will have the support of this Party to carry out the program that the Minister has indicated.

I want to examine some of the important issues that are raised in the report. Again, I think Canadians can find reassurance from some of the conclusions on serious key issues with which the Deschênes Commission dealt.

The first question I want to examine is: why has it taken so long for Nazi war criminals to be addressed and brought to justice? The report deals with that issue and finds, I hope to the relief of all Canadians, that there has been no conspiracy to harbour war criminals in Canada, that no one was providing cover or protection for war criminals, and that no one encouraged them to come to Canada. The report finds that the number who got here, regrettable as it is, came here through the same kinds of circumstances in which they got to other countries. While Canada's record is not satisfactory, it is no worse if no better than the record of a number of other western countries which were similarly countries of refuge for those fleeing the war, including a number of war criminals. That should be a relief to Canadians. I hope it will be generally accepted and will provide more cement for good relations among the communities that live in this wonderful country.

A second finding that I believe is valuable and important as well as reassuring is the finding that the number of war criminals who are here is small. One is too many, and I am glad the Minister addressed that theme in his remarks. If there is one among us who can be brought to justice, that individual should be brought to justice. However, I am reassured, as I hope other Canadians are reassured, to learn that there are not 6,000 or 3,000 but a number small enough that there should be no more excuses for not taking the necessary steps to bring them all to justice so that Canadians can feel, when this process is completed, that the problem has been dealt with and we are not a country which offered asylum and did nothing about war criminals who in one way or another—fortunately not through complicity or support—managed to make Canada their hiding place for so many decades. That is reassuring.

Finally, I want to refer to one example because the report makes a great deal of it. It is the example of the Galicia Division in Ukraine. I am Jewish. I grew up in the Jewish community. It has always been thought and said that that division represented a symbol of evil. While I want to read his examination fully, I am prepared and I want to accept the examination by Mr. Justice Deschênes in which he tells us that that division is made up of individuals, some of whom are clearly not guilty of any war crimes, not only in the opinion of