

*Immigration Act, 1976*

Unfortunately, Bill C-55, a lengthy and complex piece of legislation that even experts have trouble understanding, is actually raising new barriers and, contrary to international law, has opted for a policy of turning back people at the border.

Mr. Speaker, that is what we object to.

The Hon. Member wondered why the Liberal Party proposed a six-month hoist on Bill C-55. The Hon. Member, who has been sitting here in the House of Commons for three years, knows perfectly well that this is a technique used in the House by an opposition Party to indicate it is fundamentally opposed to a Bill. We in the New Democratic Party say to the Government that we are prepared to accept a Bill that follows the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration. We believe the committee has made valid and viable proposals that would respond to the concerns expressed by many Canadians since the July incident when 174 Sikhs, citizens of India, arrived on our shores in Nova Scotia, on board a German vessel.

[English]

Let us not be panicked by the fact that 174 Sikhs entered Canada a month ago. Let us not be panicked into saying that that proves that there are security questions which require that the House be called back at this time. We have known since the end of June that the Government was looking for one reason or another to have the House sit at this time. We have known as well that there are some serious questions as to whether or not the Government wants the House to be sitting around the first of October when the free trade negotiations reach their final stages. It has been suggested that the Government does not want to have Parliament around at that time because it does not want Parliament chiming in about what may occur at that time.

After listening to the Hon. Member for Chambly and the Minister of Employment and Immigration one must ask oneself this question. If there is a problem of illegal immigrants being brought to our shores in leaky lifeboats, then why did the Government not act a year ago? What was the reason for the delay at that time? Why is it suddenly beginning to act right now?

If the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) considered this to be an emergency two and a half weeks ago, why did he not call Parliament back immediately rather than going out in order to pose with his son Nicholas and his wife at all kinds of ethnic picnics and other events around the country for two and a half weeks before calling Parliament? When is an emergency not an emergency? To what extent is Parliament meeting right now because it is in the needs or interests of the Conservative Party, a Party which is desperate to find some way to get back into the good graces of Canadians, or to what extent is there a genuine emergency at this time?

• (1310)

It has been mentioned that Canada is a recipient of the Nansen Medal for its performance in accepting refugees. We

deserved that medal, but maybe we should consider giving it back if this Bill goes forward in its present form.

Those who are watching these proceedings right now should know what are the objectionable features of this Bill. If persons who were persecuted in their homeland because of race, religion, ideology, or some other reason, came to Canada's borders and said they would like to be considered for refugee status, they would face a series of new requirements which effectively make it more and more difficult for their case to be considered.

Canada takes in more than 10,000 refugees a year and that is something of which we can be proud. That is why we won the medal. However, we do not have an obligation just to take refugees in camps in southeast Asia, Africa, or on the borders of Afghanistan. There are people in Central America who are clearly refugees according to the UN definition. They have a well-founded fear of persecution. They make their way into Canada by all kinds of different means. The rules say that if they are judged at the border by the refugee board as having the opportunity to go back to a so-called safe country, they cannot come into Canada. If you are coming from Central America to Canada to seek refugee status, you have no choice but to go via the U.S. It is almost impossible to not travel that way. I presume the Cabinet is not going to say the U.S. is not a safe country. Yet the U.S. rejects 98 per cent of people from Central America seeking refugee status. Canada accepts half of those people who get to our borders seeking refugee status. In other words, the understanding in the two countries of what is a refugee is very different.

The reasons, of course, are very clear. It is because of the misbegotten policies, which most Canadians oppose, of the Reagan administration and its support of military and right-wing regimes in places like El Salvador, as well as its efforts to destabilize and overthrow the Government of Nicaragua. That in my opinion is in flagrant violation of international law.

If a refugee were to come from Sri Lanka prior to the apparent recent settlement, or some other part of Asia, they would have to travel through western Europe. The Government says if they were simply passing through western Europe on the way to Canada that would not meet the requirements concerning a safe third country and they could not be turned back. However, we are saying that if, for example, the refugee stopped in western Europe for a few days or a few weeks, possibly in order to acquire the resources necessary to continue, then they would have lost their chance of ever being a refugee here in Canada.

It is reminiscent of the rules in place before World War I which said anyone who wished to emigrate to Canada from the Indian subcontinent could do so provided they came here directly. A group of Sikhs did so in 1914 and they were turned