

Immigration

first week in September when the program had been under way for only three weeks. On a national basis, even at this early stage 69.7 per cent of those interrogated were aware of the program, and this high level of awareness was held by persons interviewed whose mother language was other than French or English. Of this number, 81.2 per cent knew that further information could be obtained from a Canada immigration centre or a Canada manpower centre.

As hon. members will recall, the adjustment of status program is only one of three measures referred to when I introduced Bill C-197 last June. Under the special administrative measures introduced in June, 1972 to review the backlog in the inquiry system, we have now dealt favourably with cases involving 13,500 persons. The Immigration Appeal Board has ruled favourably on 3,500 cases since June of this year, using the new authority to sit as single member panels. I am announcing later today the appointment of 13 temporary members under the new legislation, and among the cases they will hear, 17,800 appeals to the board have already been favourably reviewed by my officers against the relaxed criteria applicable under the adjustment of status program. Through these three special actions in the past 15 months there are, therefore, some 80,000 people who may now expect to gain the right to live in Canada and who were formerly in fear of deportation. By midnight tonight, that figure will be even greater.

Despite my conviction that the message has indeed been delivered, I have recently received some suggestions from thoughtful people that there may still be some potential registrants who have not heard of the program or that there may be some who are reluctant to come forward because of a fear, unfounded though it may be, but nevertheless a real fear of the bureaucracy. As I have said, I am satisfied that the program has reached its intended audience. I am also confident that we have done all we could to allay these fears. I recognize that it does take time to establish a climate of trust. That trust can only be really obtained when a person who is hanging back sees that his friends have been dealt with favourably. For the first part of the campaign, my officials were involved with the process of registering the thousands who came forward. An assessment of individual cases has to take place later. For some weeks we have been publicizing the success rate of applications and, as it has become known that the chances of success are very high indeed, there has been an indication that those who had been holding back have indeed been coming forward. From a daily average fluctuating between 550 and 870 registrants in the first seven weeks of the campaign, registrants are now coming forward at a much higher rate. There were new registrations on October 12, for example, involving 1,429 persons.

These figures lead me to believe that there is now great confidence in the program and that by midnight tonight when our offices close all those who wish to come forward will or should have done so.

In view of the concern expressed, not only by responsible organizations but also by responsible newspapers in Canada, that more time may be needed to allow the new climate of trust to take effect, we are assessing the situation closely as the time available to register draws to a

[Mr. Andras.]

close. I will also listen carefully to any of the comments made by hon. members. As hon. members are aware, any extension of the adjustment program would require new legislation to be passed by parliament.

In closing I would like to emphasize that whichever way we go, this involves a very serious decision, one which I do not think anybody here would suggest we take casually or too hastily. There are costs as well as benefits on either side of the suggestion. On the one hand, if extension is considered, the effect on attitudes of countless thousands of people abroad for whom Canada is so attractive that they will seek and test any loophole which would allow them to come here must be taken into account as well as any apparent lack of will to hold firm to our immigration laws as announced. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the effect of the commitment of resources to an ad hoc program of this type for a prolonged period of time. On the other hand, we must judge whether we have cleaned up the bulk of the problem with which we have been faced. Certainly, we do want to avoid mass deportations and we want to ensure that our program has been effective. In view of all the publicity which has been given to this program and all the effort put into it, we are entitled, before we make a decision, to get pretty substantial evidence that there may be or may not be great numbers of people who have not been reached by all our publicity before we act.

In closing, I should like to reiterate again that I will be very interested in the views of hon. members in the response to my statement.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank the minister for the courtesy he extended to me in allowing me to have his statement not only so that I could read it but so that the members of our caucus might see it. When I received the statement I smiled because, if this statement points out anything, it points out the hesitancy and uncertainty of this government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: Until yesterday the minister, without any equivocation whatsoever, was indicating to the whole country that there would not be an extension after October 15. I would like to read portions of his statement. On page 1 I find these words:

The opportunity given to them to make "our country, your country," ends at midnight tonight.

That is a statement of fact. Yet, when we review the minister's statement we find that later he says:

As I have said, I am satisfied that the program has reached its intended audience.

To demonstrate the equivocation of the minister and the frustration he is causing the people of Canada, particularly those who are interested in this most serious program, let me read certain other parts of the statement. He states:

These figures lead me to believe that there is now complete confidence in the program and that by midnight tonight when our offices close, all those who wish to come forward will have done so.