

Government Orders

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this bill in principle and to indicate that our party will be voting for the adoption of the bill and also to support the amendment that has been moved by the hon. member for York West.

While the bill is essentially what is needed and there is some urgency about it, there are certain unsatisfactory aspects to it, some of which have been pointed out by the hon. member for York West.

This is a bill to amend the Immigration Act from 1978 which has been amended several times already on this point in the section that provides for loans to immigrants, to help immigrants pay their transportation or to help them pay for their medical examination. It has been especially important for refugees. The normal case with most immigrants is that they are able to pay their way, and they prefer to, as most of us would, rather than to borrow. But many other people who are refugees and living in refugee camps do not have the means. Therefore, this provision has become very important during the past decade for making Canada's refugee acceptance policies workable. It does this by amending the present law in two ways.

First, it removes from Parliament the power to set a limit on the loan. Second, it delegates that power to the minister and the cabinet. It does this by amending Section 114, subsection (1) so it would now read:

"(u.1) prescribing the maximum amount of outstanding advances to the Minister under subsection 119(1);"

In other words, instead of setting the limit as it previously did in the act, it refers this to the minister. It further amends Section 119(3) to read:

"(3) The total amount of outstanding advances to the Minister under subsection (1) shall not at any time exceed the amount prescribed under paragraph 114(1)(u.1)".

The effect of that is to leave the matter with the cabinet. As has been pointed out by my colleague from York West, while we understand the rationale put forward by the government—and there is an element of truth in it—there is also more than the truth in that rationale. Therefore, we are somewhat dissatisfied with it.

The bill is very necessary, particularly for refugees who often do not have the means to pay their way. These are not the refugees who have found their way to Canada and claim, after they arrived in Canada, that they are

refugees, and are handled by our new refugee determination system under the refugee board chaired by Mr. Fairweather. These are the ones who are selected overseas by our immigration officers. When they are selected they are then, if necessary, and most of them do need it, offered the chance to borrow the money from this fund to pay for the medical examination and travel. After they come to Canada they are expected to repay the loan.

In the case of refugees, and any other immigrants to whom the loans have been made, the record has been startlingly good. There has been 98 per cent repayment of the loans at whatever interest the minister may have required with authorization of the cabinet. It is a very necessary humanitarian provision, otherwise many of these refugees after they have been selected simply could not come here. What is unsatisfactory about the manner in which this has been handled is that it was prompted by a crisis which the government allowed to run for half a year or more.

The government was aware that these loans were being taken up more quickly than before, as the member for Burlington said, because of events in eastern Europe. These events were not secret. They were published almost daily in *The Globe and Mail*. The minister and her staff were surely aware of them, and that the take up of the loans would for a while be faster than the rate of repayment, even though there is no dissatisfaction with the efforts of the refugees, or immigrants already here, in repaying their loans.

It seems it was a matter of some indifference to the minister and the cabinet during the first of these months, even though a year ago last June the government promised to take \$5 million from this loan, according to what the member for Burlington has told us, to help in the special emergency in Southeast Asia, which was a good thing to do. But the government knew what it had done; at least I hope that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. It knew that the loan fund was running low, but it waited until April of this year before taking any effective action.

• (1200)

In April of this year it notified all the sponsoring organizations of private sponsorships in Canada that as of the date of notification there would be no more loans until further notice.