

Immigration Act

under the terms of the Convention, an opportunity to apply for recognition of their refugee status. That is why the Refugee Status Advisory Committee, which represents the first stage, and the Immigration Appeal Board, which is the second stage, were established. Appeal Board decisions may be ratified under Section 28 of the Federal court of Appeal Act. Some of these cases, however require hearings.

Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to claim that the protection offered by Canada to persons claiming refugee status is unequalled anywhere else in the world. Basically, a hearing is a well-established legal procedure which offers the person claiming refugee status an opportunity to be heard, and gives the examiners a chance to assess the person's good faith. Most countries use hearings to determine whether the claim is well-founded. The Canadian system provides for selection interviews of refugees abroad, but the hearing itself is not part of the process of claiming refugee status. Both the Refugee Status advisory Committee and the Immigration Appeal Board review the certified transcripts. The IAB will hold a hearing in the event that a claim is sustained. While this Bill is under consideration, that would slow down the process, contrary to the statement made earlier by my colleague from Spadina who was complaining that it takes too much time as it is. I listened to him when he was referring to authentic refugees and to other who seek to use the system to delay their deportation from Canada. Adding a new stage would only complicate matters and we should continue to study this question.

Under the system, there are two distinct examinations and two levels of appeal, and it can take over three years before completing all stages designed to protect refugees from being forced to return to their country of origin. It is practically impossible for an authentic refugee not to have his case heard. The problem is that all applications legitimate or otherwise, must be considered at all levels. The number of people seeking the status of refugee in Canada increases every year, and it has gone from 500 in 1977 to 2,800 in 1982 and 6,300 in 1983. The system as it is today might be able to process quickly 500-odd applications a year, but it is now overburdened as a result of the ever increasing number of applications, even despite the fact that extra staff have been hired.

It can take up to 200 days before the Refugee Status Advisory Board even begins to consider an application, and that is only the first stage in the process. We now have about 9,500 cases pending, and between 1,500 and 2,000 others are waiting for processing. And yet, all decisions—

● (1650)

[English]

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is bad enough being neglected by not being recognized, but now I am forced to hear the hon. gentleman reading from a prepared speech.

I would like to bring your attention to what occurred in the House on March 5, this year, as reported at page 1786 of *Hansard* when the Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault) was in the chair. He, quite properly, brought the Hon. Member for Timiskaming (Mr. MacDougall) to order for reading from a prepared speech. He was adamant that that was contrary to the rules of the House, except in certain specific cases, Cabinet Ministers being one, the Leader of an Opposition Party or somebody speaking in a language which was not his own.

None of these criteria apply to the Member who is now speaking. I would request that you direct that he not read from a prepared speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): The Hon. Member is correct. A Member is not supposed to read his speech. Nevertheless, the person making a speech is allowed to quote, at length, from whatever material he may have available to him in order to make his speech. However, the Hon. Member may take note of the complaint and attempt to read a little less.

[Translation]

Mr. Dubois: Mr. Speaker, this point of order was raised because the Hon. Member was not recognized. If he does not rise soon enough to be seen by the Chair, that is not my problem, and as for referring to notes while making speeches, I think that it is essential in the House that we should be able to do so. I shall therefore continue to refer to my notes, Mr. Speaker. If the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) is agreeable, I can quite easily deliver my speech either way. I find it most pleasing and quite possible to make a speech without any notes. However, in specific instances, such as when refugees are concerned, as is the case of the Bill standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Spadina, a relatively important Bill which we unfortunately cannot support, it is necessary for me to have certain data about the number of refugee claimants and the decisions made in such cases. I find it normal to provide information which is as relevant as possible. This is why I use notes to address this Bill and explain why we are against it. Next time, the Hon. Member will certainly rise more quickly if he wants to be recognized by the Chair.

Mr. Speaker, a claimant who decides today to use all the legal avenues available in Canada could spend well over three years in this country before being returned to his country of origin. It is therefore quite important to make sure that those who are in Canada can express their views as provided by the legislation.

Canada is a most welcoming country. If we were to add a further avenue for appeal to those already in existence, we would only add to the many bottlenecks already slowing down the process without improving in any way on the protection now available to refugee claimants.

The only ones who would stand to gain are those who have a real stake in lengthening the process considering at least 2,000 cases are decided every year, in addition to the number of