

*Immigration Act, 1976*

Why do lobby groups and special interest groups feel they have the right to determine who is a refugee?

That is a red herring and completely beside the point. There is no debate about the definition of a refugee, either in Bill C-84, or in Bill C-55. The definition of a refugee is found in the UN Convention of 1951. That is the definition used by Governments around the world to determine who is and who is not a refugee. Therefore, it is incredible that the Parliamentary Secretary would stand in this House and impute motives to well-meaning, honest people who have been advocating changes in our refugee determination system, and cast aspersions on their arguments.

He referred time and time again to special interest and lobby groups. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy), referred to this aspect of his argument. At some time there was an honest attempt to make common cause with people who work with and are knowledgeable about refugees. That is an effort which was started when the Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry was the Minister of Employment and Immigration and continued in the first days of this Government. However, since the election of 1984, and particularly since last spring when the Government tabled Bill C-55, all pretence at making common cause with these groups has fallen by the wayside.

• (1700)

Who are these interest groups and lobby groups? Are these people who would subvert the Government of Canada? Are these people who do not have Canada's best interests at heart? I imagine the Member is referring to someone like Rabbi Plaut, the author of an important report on our refugee determination system who himself was a refugee and should know something about what it is like to be a refugee and about the standards which our country should adopt in trying to determine who is a refugee.

Perhaps he was referring to someone like Nancy Pocock who is a member of the Inter-church Committee for Refugees and was featured in a television report around Christmas time. She has devoted many years of her life to helping dispossessed and needy people, refugees who find her home in Toronto a haven where they can go when they arrive in Canada to meet friends, learn about a new country, establish themselves, and get support and aid from Canadians. On the television show prior to Christmas about Nancy Pocock it was said that refugees fleeing from Latin American countries are given her name and telephone number. She may be the only person they know when they arrive in Canada but she is someone to whom they can turn for the help they desperately require when they arrive in our country. Are these the interest groups and lobby groups which the Hon. Member denigrates in his comments?

With regard to the numbers of refugees who are apparently coming to Canada, in his comments today the Hon. Member referred to 15 million refugees in the world. He has come down somewhat in his estimates since the debate last August when I

heard him refer, on a number of occasions, to the five billion people in the world. He was suggesting that if we did not drastically revise our laws we in Canada were in danger of having some five billion people come to our shores. Today he is down to 15 million refugees. I suggest to this House that that is a gross misrepresentation of the actual situation.

I participated in a conference in Montreal in early December organized by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation on the issue of human rights and the protection of refugees under international law. We were reminded at that conference that most refugees are not coming to Canada or the United States. Only a small fraction of the 12 million to 15 million refugees in the world are trying to make their way here. Resettlement is an option for only a small portion of refugees.

Canada has many means to restrict the flow of people who come to our shores. The obligatory visas which are required for people from practically all refugee-producing countries is perhaps the most effective power which the Government has at its disposal to keep refugees away from our shores. That is not to mention, of course, the factor of geography. Canada is not on the border of any refugee-producing country. Therefore, it is impractical and impossible for most refugees to make their way to Canada.

West Germany had some 100,000 refugee claimants in the last year. Pakistan has probably two million or three million Afghan refugees on its border. Mexico has hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees, and Mexico is not exactly a wealthy country. How many Iranian refugees are on Turkish soil today?

Therefore, I find it reprehensible for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Immigration to stand in this House and defend the legislation before us on the basis that there are some 15 million refugees in the world, and imply to Canadians that if we do not pass this legislation there is a possibility that these 15 million refugees will actually come to Canada.

I find it reprehensible also that the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard) and the Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. Weiner) have constantly harped on the danger of a public backlash against refugees. We hear that time and time again from spokespersons for the Government. There have been no attempts by the Minister to put the matter into perspective. There has been no attempt to compare Canada's situation with that of other countries as Rabbi Plaut did at the conference which I attended. He compared the number of refugees received by Canada to that received by a tiny country like Costa Rica. I believe that Costa Rica has had more refugee claimants in the past several years than has Canada with its great size and wealth.

I take offence also at the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Immigration in reference to the actions of the western European countries. I do not think that we have to set our standards by those of European or any other countries. Canada's situation is