

Supply

They said we cannot jeopardize a good policy. We did win the national humanitarian award. There is integrity in the system.

• (1720)

There are convention refugees who cannot come into Canada because of jumping the queue. It is not the Conservative Government that does not want more refugees and it is not the Liberal Party nor the NDP. It has nothing to do with partisanship. It bothers me when there is this twisting of the facts.

We have increased the number of refugees and, I would think, we will increase it again. That is natural in the Canadian context. Hon. Members may put forward their partisan views but I would hope that they would at least put them forward with a factual point of view rather than to score political points based simply on information that is not factual.

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the Hon. Minister but I must ask him to get in touch with some of the people he knows in the Mennonite Church and ask them about their position on the Government's current policies. It is not just members of the misguided Opposition who are saying what I have said. I refer to the comments of Rabbi Plaut. He said that we have signalled the return to a former practice which made Canada all too often inaccessible to those most in need of succour. Does the Minister think that Rabbi Plaut is also misguided?

I would point out that I did mention the initiative begun by the Government which was led by the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead. That initiative was based on a much sounder moral ground than the one of the current Government. The policy as it related to Indo-Chinese refugees was very humanitarian and was carried through by our Government.

The Hon. Member spoke of refugees that we select at our visa offices abroad. I would point out that we did not fill the number of positions available for those selected abroad last year. Does the Minister think that that kind of procedure is appropriate for all refugees? Does he think that refugees should put their lives in danger in many cases by openly presenting themselves at Canadian offices abroad and indicating that they want to leave their country permanently? Does he think that this is an acceptable risk for many refugees to take?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions are coming from the Hon. Member who made the speech and the Minister is answering. Is there unanimous consent to allow the Minister to make a comment and to allow the Hon. Member to make a final reply?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer the Hon. Member. In Mennonite communities, there is the same kind of division of opinion as that expressed by the Hon. Member. My father who is a member of the Mennonite

Central Committee was a refugee who came through that system. Always there was respect for the manner in which one had to address the issues, laws and regulations of the country.

Many people do not understand immigration. Immigration has been good for Canada. However, we cannot leave the impression that those who come here through conventions or by being sponsored by voluntary organizations are not coming here under the laws of Canada. The Hon. Member has asked if people should put their lives in jeopardy. At present, Canada does take people who are not convention refugees and cannot have a hearing. The regulations are quite clear on that.

Let us take a look at the number of refugees. In 1981, the total number of refugees, both convention and otherwise, was 14,996. In 1982, it was 16,908, in 1983 it was 13,643, in 1984 it was 15,400, in 1985 it was 16,550 and in 1986 it was 18,625. The Minister of Immigration has indicated that he is looking at an increase in that number. However, it must be done in a way that does not put immigration as a whole in jeopardy. That is the point we are making, and I think many Canadians agree with that point. That has always been the bottom line for immigration in Canada.

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the Minister, as I have throughout my comments, that under the guise of stemming abuse, the Government has slammed the doors of Canada shut. The Minister talks about the need to respect and address the laws of the country. I suggest that our country has an obligation under international refugee conventions and our Government is not respecting the spirit and the letter of those obligations.

Refugees who would run great risks in presenting themselves at our visa offices abroad will be shut out from any recourse by the policies the Government implemented last February 20. I would ask the Minister to think about the situation in which some people find themselves. There are those who do not have the time to present themselves at a Canadian Embassy abroad and there are those to whom no such embassies are accessible. Some embassies have been closed down by the Government because of the financial straits in which it finds itself from time to time.

Refugees from Lebanon often find that their home towns are bombed flat in the middle of a war. They do not always have the time to line up at a visa office abroad.

Again, I would suggest that under the guise of stemming abuse, the Government's policy has slammed the doors shut on many refugees who really counted on Canada as being one of the last countries in the world to present an open door and a humanitarian attitude. If the Minister is really sincere about wanting to address the problem of refugees, I would suggest that he encourage his colleagues to implement as quickly as possible the recommendations of the Plaut report and the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Immigration. The standing committee recommended that a new refugee determination process be instituted, a process which would be independent, impartial, quick and fair to refugees. Refugees