

*Private Members' Business*

In the case of passport babies there is no commitment to the country and there is no fulfilment of the responsibilities of citizenship. There is no growing up in the country or understanding what it takes to be a good citizen. There is no commitment to the country until the child possibly chooses to return at, say, age 18. Is the original motive simply to sponsor their parents when they arrive? The whole essence of the intrinsic value of citizenship is rendered meaningless and in the long term society is not strengthened or furthered in its advancement in terms of the contribution of its members.

● (1740)

Furthermore at any point in time as a citizen that child is entitled, after a minimal residency requirement, to complete medical coverage and full education rights as well as all other Canadian social programs. In the extreme case these children could grow up to a life of crime in their home country and then decide to come to Canada. Because of their birthright citizenship, there would be nothing we could do to prevent them from coming here even though it would be obvious they would not share the values or responsibilities we cherish.

For those whose parents use our freely given citizenship as only a means of security or convenience in the future there is no shared contract or demonstration that they are committed to our country. It is a convenient and easily obtained commodity for the future value it may hold. This is a flagrant abuse of the generous visitor system.

Preservation of the integrity of Canadian citizenship became part of another consideration within the refugee determination system. The complexity of the system in our country has led to abuse by those who make refugee claims as a means of circumventing the immigration system. We have created an inland refugee system in Canada where the process of determining the claim of status can take up to three or four years before a final decision is rendered. During that period life goes on and of course babies are born.

How can a rejected refugee claimant be asked to leave in a final determination when one or two children born here in Canada have citizenship? Those rendering the decision must take into account the fact that the children are Canadian and are entitled to all the accompanying rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship.

Let us examine for a moment the process so we can appreciate the factors that go into the delay that creates the dilemma. First, let us consider a bogus refugee claimant, an individual with absolutely no right to legal status but with intent to use the system. He or she is interviewed by a senior immigration officer to assess grounds for a claim. They are given at least one month to supply supporting data and more time is often requested.

Most would have no such original documentation with them so they must create it.

They are also entitled to legal representation. On request legal aid will be provided to them. At that stage those claimants who fall into predefined categories are given an expedited hearing. All applicants are provided with a scenario for the qualifying categories of expedited hearing. The claimants then can tailor their claim according to what the government has given them as an outline.

A full hearing is held for others. There is usually a two to three month wait before the hearing can be convened. To this point the claimant has usually been in Canada for at least six months. The hearing takes place before a two-member board and both must agree on a decision not to grant refugee status, that is only one member must be convinced to grant refugee status.

If the claim is rejected a written statement of reasons must be given and these reasons will be examined by the Federal Court of Appeal. If rejected by the Federal Court there is a further review by the department on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The entire process can take two, three or even four years.

It is a fact that almost 80 per cent of refugee claimants eventually end up staying in Canada, even though only 35 per cent of claimants fit into the UN definition for convention refugee. Upon inquiry it seems impossible to garner data on how many of the 80 per cent are affected by the added consideration of having had children born in Canada.

It is unfortunate there are those who choose to abuse the very system designed to protect them. The vast majority of visitors and refugee applications are not seeking to use the present rules to their own end. The bill fully recognizes the need for provision for children born to bona fide participants in the due process of our refugee system. They will be fully recognized as citizens upon application after their parents have obtained their permanent status.

One consideration remains to be addressed. Some accommodation in law, perhaps through a simple amendment to the bill, is necessary to avoid a condition of statelessness for those born on Canadian soil. In conclusion, the present system that grants automatic citizenship to all those born in Canada regardless of their parents' residency status invites the intentional abuse of a shrinking and unpredictable world.

● (1745)

Immigration should provide access to those who choose to strengthen the fabric of their new home. The value of our citizenship and the value of our great country will be the sum of the values and the sense of belonging of its proud and prosperous people.