

Immigration Act, 1976

I want to ask the Hon. Member how in his defence of Bill C-55 this afternoon, with all his rhetoric, he can reconcile these observations with the fact that practically everyone concerned about refugees in Canada opposes Bill C-55? How can the Hon. Member reconcile what he calls this fair system in which people have to make their case very quickly when they arrive and can be turned away by an administrative decision? How can he reconcile his sense that Bill C-55 will protect refugees with the conclusion of those who work with the present system that Bill C-55 would have the effect of turning away 50 percent, perhaps 90 percent of people who make claims on Canada as refugees? Surely we do not have that many people making bogus claims. How can the Hon. Member reconcile his defence of the system with the rejection of Bill C-55 by everyone across the country who is concerned about Canada maintaining its record of providing a refuge to persons in danger of their lives elsewhere? How can he reconcile this with Canada's receipt of the Nansen Medal?

Mr. Oostrom: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I have resorted to rhetoric. I have only expressed the views of my constituents. I trust the judgment of my constituents in Willowdale.

With respect to generosity, Canada allowed in about 18,000 refugees last year and it looks as if we are going to have at least 20,000 this year. This is why we received the Nansen Medal. And this will continue. The generosity of Canadians will continue in the future. This administration has increased immigration year after year and we will continue to do so. As we do so, the levels of refugees will rise. Canadians are generous. We are humanitarian and will continue to be. I think the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp) is giving us a bit of rhetoric himself.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the House that we are presently debating an amendment of the Liberal Member for York West (Mr. Marchi). He moved that Bill C-55, an Act to amend the Immigration Act, 1976, and to amend other Acts in consequence thereof, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence. It is the position of the Liberal Party that debate and discussion on this Bill should be delayed for six months. This amendment was made by the first speaker on the Liberal Party side. It was supported by the New Democratic Party.

I ask the Hon. Member for Willowdale (Mr. Oostrom), how will the people in his constituency, those people who stand by law and order and the queue, take to the suggestion of the Liberal Party, supported by the NDP, that this Parliament not even discuss the Bill for six months? How do the members of the constituency of Willowdale feel about that suggestion?

Mr. Oostrom: Mr. Speaker, the feedback I have received over the past month is that we definitely should deal with it now. My constituents wanted me to come back. They phoned me while I was on a trip for a few days to the United States and asked me to come back. They will not stand for any postponement. They want us to deal with it right now. There

will be ample opportunity if we are here for one week, two weeks or three weeks. I am willing to stay for the whole month. There is no problem at all. Let us deal with this matter now. We have a large number of members here. We have members of the employment and immigration committee here. I think we should deal with it now and not later.

One of my constituents, Mr. Van Noord, has been waiting for 17 years to bring his sister-in-law here from Jamaica. He told me to deal with it now because this whole question has to be settled. He also mentioned that he would like the Minister to increase the family reunification program in the coming years. I am very happy to note this morning that the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard) has given some indication that this may be the case.

• (1630)

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, since the Parliamentary Secretary seems to rise after every speaker to bring the attention of the House to the fact that we are indeed debating an amendment to the main motion, I would like to make the point that the so-called main motion was part of a process that the Government initiated on May 5 last. After three years in power it decided to do something about this important problem. We do not disagree with the actions being taken by the Government. It left this matter sitting there from May 5 until June 18 when it called the Bill for all of one day's debate—some emergency! In approximately nine and one-half months of sitting time last year and after three years of being in power, disorganized as it is, that is all the time the Government could find to come to grips with this problem.

My question to the Hon. Member is this. The third country concept, the friendly third country concept, is in my view and in the view of my constituents one of the most important parts, and perhaps even one of the serious weaknesses, of Bill C-55. How does the Hon. Member feel about the safe third country concept? Does he feel comfortable with the fact that refugees, possibly bona fide refugees, will come to Canada and be told to go back to a safe third country? Will he wash his hands of the problem as Pontius Pilate did? Does the Hon. Member feel comfortable with that?

Mr. Oostrom: Mr. Speaker, I feel very comfortable indeed with it. I recently travelled through Holland and Germany. The Governments of Holland and Germany are very pleasantly surprised that Canada will take people from their countries, that Canada is willing and has even increased its staff in these countries to process genuine refugees. They give their full co-operation in this regard.

I am also pleased to note that the United States has given its assistance to us in that if there are genuine refugees in the United States who are in our stream, whether they be at border points, at consulates or embassies in the United States, it will not deport genuine refugees. I am very grateful that these countries co-operate with Canada to process refugees.