

Immigration

problem, I share our spokesman's concerns and the concerns that have been expressed by other members of our party. I urge all members to withhold their support for this bill until all the facts are available and the minister has been more forthcoming about what he really intends to do by letting us see the regulations that will be issued under the authority of this bill.

Mr. Alex Patterson (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, in view of the importance of the subject currently under discussion I appreciate the opportunity of making a few comments on the question of immigration. Since there is some disposition, I believe, to conclude this part of the debate this evening, I shall try to govern myself accordingly so that second reading stage is concluded.

Canada has never had what one could term a long-range or far-sighted immigration policy. Rather, our immigration policy could quite correctly be called a short-term reactionary policy moulded by relatively short-term interests and pressure. The government traditionally has responded to these social and economic pressures by changing the regulations governing entry and residency in Canada.

In this debate we have heard the word "haphazard" used to describe the government's approach to immigration policy. We have also heard the term "government by regulation" to describe this approach. This is particularly disturbing because we had been expecting a piece of legislation on immigration that would deal with statute law rather than simply regulations. As I have pointed out, our history in immigration within the last few decades has been that of immigration by regulation, and now we find when we examine this bill that, when you strip away the rhetoric and facade, we really have a continuation of that arbitrary system where everything of import is decided by bureaucratic decision.

My understanding of the report of the joint committee on immigration that held meetings all over Canada was that there ought to be a better balance between statute law and regulation. From reading the speeches so far in this debate I gather that a number of other hon. members interpreted the committee's report in the same way. What are we presented with, however? We are presented with a piece of legislation that has no effective balance between principles enshrined in law and regulations. In this sense it is no better than the 1952 act.

In fact, as far as delegation of ministerial authority to the bureaucrats is concerned, this bill is even worse than the present act. The minister may, under this proposed new act, delegate authority to "such persons employed in the Public Service of Canada as he deems proper". My hon. colleague from Hamilton West called this "a complete abdication of powers to persons unknown". I agree with that analysis and I would submit that it is dangerous for any matter of such importance to be so lightly dealt with as to provide for its administration and implementation in such anonymous, abstract, and unclear terms.

The regulations must be made available for debate and, as other speakers from my party have stated, we will continue to push for this information until the government comes clean. As

[Mr. Schumacher.]

well, I think it important for the minister to be absolutely clear about who will be delegated authority, as the bill says, "to exercise or perform any of the powers, duties and functions that may or are required to be performed by him". What is this line of authority? Who are these persons employed in the Public Service of Canada that clause 123 talks about? Surely the people of Canada have a right to know this line of authority.

To the extent that this legislation has incorporated most of the recommendations of the special joint committee on immigration policy, the government is to be congratulated. To the extent to which it has changed those recommendations and corrupted them, however, it is not to be congratulated. The government has a facility for taking good ideas, twisting them around and implementing them so that the least amount of good can come from them. I am afraid that is the case with the recommendations from the special joint committee.

It is a positive step to lay down in relatively clear terms in statute law, first, what the objectives of Canadian immigration law should be. Presently there is no such enunciation of intention, and possibly the instability of our immigration policy, or non-policy, is a result of that fact. If we do not really know what we want to achieve by immigration it is almost impossible to develop a coherent, useful immigration policy. I believe that the fundamental objectives of our immigration policy should be formulated in terms of what could be called enlightened self-interest. We should proceed from the premise that immigration is a privilege, not a right. It cannot be otherwise. This is not to imply that immigrants ought to be second-class citizens, or that they are somehow not as good from now on as were previous immigrants. On the contrary, we ought to make it clear to those emigrating to our country that they are privileged persons.

● (2140)

In the past, and there are some who would argue this way now, immigration to Canada has sometimes been looked on as a right, especially if that immigration had political overtones to it. Refugees, for example, are a special class of immigrants, and so they should be. However, I have received letters, as have most hon. members I am sure, from people lobbying for the admission of certain individuals to Canada from the standpoint that we "ought" to admit them.

Let us be clear on this point: Canada is not "obliged" to admit anyone other than Canadian citizens and established residents. Every one else who is in this country is here by privilege, or is here illegally. And at this point let me reiterate what was said last week by my hon. colleague, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), that an amnesty program to make legal that which is illegal will not receive support from this side of the House.

In 1972 when the amnesty program was announced, we supported it because of the uncertainty caused by the change in regulations implemented by the government. We felt that there ought to be a time lag whereby people who were living in the country illegally could make their residency legal. There is