

Oral Questions

citizen for any Polish person or family to be entered into in any of our visa offices around the world. All these applications, rather than having to originate in Warsaw, can now come from any third country around the world. This will substantially increase the ability of Poles to come into this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REFUGEES ADMITTED UNDER PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I am pleased, and I am sure other members of the House are pleased, to know that the government has taken that additional step. I hope also that the government will consider very seriously, in light of the urgent circumstances, a further increase in the quota concerning Polish refugees in Austrian camps.

As the minister is aware, many Vietnamese refugees were sponsored privately by churches, by individuals and by families. Will the minister agree to apply to the Polish situation the principle of private sponsorship that was applied in the case of the Vietnamese refugees, so that additional Polish refugees will be able to come into Canada through the avenue of private sponsorship and not be included in the refugee total established by the government.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition will be pleased to know that over a year ago I signed an agreement with the Canadian Polish Congress which gives that organization the right to provide private sponsorship of refugees. Since that time the Canadian Polish Congress has provided that application for close to several hundred Polish individuals. That measure is already in effect. All I can say to the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition is that we will provide even further encouragement for other private sponsors or individuals in Canada, and we will be prepared to receive any application from any private sponsor who wants to bring in a Polish national.

QUERY RESPECTING EFFECT ON QUOTA

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, just to be clear on this matter, is the minister saying that these refugees, brought in through private sponsorship, are refugees in excess of the quota, or are they subject to the quota?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, under our immigration regulations we do not count those people brought in under private sponsorship as part of the set general level. All we need is an indication by an organization such as the Canadian Polish Congress, or any five individuals, that they are prepared to band together to give certain guarantees. They will not be considered under our normal levels and therefore, it is open as far as the numbers they wish to bring into Canada.

APPLICATIONS FOR LANDED IMMIGRANT STATUS

Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The minister has allowed Polish visitors in Canada, who do not have relatives here, to have permits for up to one year. At the end of that time he will review the situation again. Will the minister now entertain a plan to allow these people to apply for landed immigrant status immediately, because many of them do want to stay here now?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the reason why we established a ministerial permit was to provide some element of a choice for those individuals. We are not saying that every individual necessarily would ultimately want to decide to stay in Canada. They may want to remain here only until such time as the situation in Poland clarifies itself and at that time they may decide to return.

We have established a general principle of one year's residency in Canada and we are allowing them to work during that time. As I said in my original statement, we will be very receptive to their applications. Because it is such an exceptional measure, one we have only applied to a few other countries, such as El Salvador and others, I think we would want to maintain the argument that they should be here on ministerial permits. I am sure we would then be prepared, as I said at the time, to accept any application for permanent landing when their renewals come forward.

● (1425)

REQUEST THAT OPTION BE GIVEN TO HOLDERS OF WORK PERMITS

Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown): Madam Speaker, I will ask the minister again if he will give consideration to providing an option for those people who are here on that 12-month basis, because they are in a very uncertain period right now. Many of them feel they will have to go back to Austria after the one year is up, and apply for landed immigrant status from offshore. They are prepared to settle here and be good citizens, and they want to apply for landed immigrant status now from within Canada. Would the minister provide that as an option for those people who are now here on a one-year work permit?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, we are certainly prepared to look at such options, but I would think it would require a substantial change in the ways in which our immigration procedures are conducted. As it is, we have given very wide latitude already, allowing them to stay here on a ministerial permit, a privilege which is not given to many other people or groups around the world. I can assure hon. members of the House that we are keeping a very careful and very close watch on the situation there. We are in close touch and consultation with the Canadian Polish organization, and during that consultation if it comes forward that further measures are required, we will respond in as sensitive a way then as we have in the past.