

which it felt there were strong compassionate or humanitarian considerations which should be taken into account.

At about the same time the Department of Manpower and Immigration, in close co-operation with other departments, initiated a joint program to facilitate tourism by speeding up inspection at the major ports of entry to Canada, especially the international airports. This program, involving the inspection of arriving passengers by a single officer representing four inspection services, has been highly successful in expediting the flow of the 38 million foreign visitors who come to Canada each year. It has made it much more difficult, however, to detect the fraudulent visitor who is really a clandestine immigrant.

When these generous changes in policies and procedures were made it was recognized that there would certainly be an increase in the number of visitors, bona fide and otherwise, who would apply for landed immigrant status in Canada. There was no way of foreseeing, however, that the number would skyrocket. From one or two thousand cases a year before 1967 it has shot up to about 45,000 persons each year, or something in the neighbourhood of 20 per cent to 25 per cent of all applications received from all around the world.

You can appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the impact this has had on offices in Canada unprepared both as to number and kind of staff required to cope with the workload. The inevitable effect, despite the often maligned but nevertheless heroic efforts of the staff, was the gradual development of backlogs in many offices, especially those receiving the greatest number of applications. By September of last year the total backlog across Canada has reached more than 7,000 cases. If the hon. member had submitted his motion at that time it would undeniably have contained some substance.

I am happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that the situation to which I have just referred no longer exists. By means of still greater efforts than were being made before, by diversion of both staff and resources from other areas of the department's work, it has been possible to effectively eliminate the backlog so that it may now be said that applications are dealt with on a current basis.

This is not to say that an individual application will be decided, as compared to put into process, without some delay. The determination of a person's suitability as a resident and future citizen of Canada requires, by law, an interview, medical examination, certain documentation and certain background checks. These cannot be completed overnight and, as I indicated earlier, they cannot be done as easily in Canada as would be the case if the applicant were in his usual country of residence. Nevertheless, decisions are rendered in many cases in as little as six or eight weeks, although some, depending on the country from which the person came to Canada, may take several months. Everything possible is done to keep these delays to a minimum. Nobody, be it the applicant, the department or Canada itself stands to gain anything by having cases drag on longer than is absolutely necessary.

• (1700)

I suppose that the hon. member might also have in mind delays in immigration processing after the examination stage. Because of factors that I mentioned earlier, such as

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the reduction of initial inspection at ports of entry, the facility of applying for landing within Canada and the independent and very powerful appeal board, the provision for applications in Canada is being used not only by genuine visitors but by many people who are immigrants all along and who know or suspect they would be refused if examined overseas. Indeed, they may already have been refused overseas. The result is that a substantial proportion of applications in Canada must be refused.

If the applicant declines to leave Canada on receipt of the decision, as most do, the department has no choice under the law but to undertake deportation proceedings. Because of the large number of applications and the large number now completing the examination stage, it is quite true that there is a large backlog awaiting attention by departmental enforcement staff. I must point out, however, that at this stage it is no longer a question of "entitlement to status and payment of benefits", as mentioned in the hon. member's motion; rather, it is a question of determining whether the person is in Canada lawfully at all and, if not, whether his removal should be directed. The same is true of the third and final stage, the appeal against a resulting deportation order. Although there is also a well publicized backlog at this third stage, I do not consider either the second or the third stage to fall within the terms of the hon. member's motion.

May I assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of the House that the minister and the officials of the department are not insensitive to the plight of people caught in delays at any of the stages, even though many have brought the difficulties upon themselves. The minister has not assumed his new responsibilities in order to rest on the status quo. Consideration is being actively given to administrative and legislative measures to provide solutions to the situation that has developed as a result of the desires of so many people to immigrate and settle in Canada.

The second point that I should like to deal with is that of unemployment insurance. There are reports originating in Toronto that the welfare department of the province of Ontario is seeking to recover from \$1 million to \$2 million from the federal government. The sums, it is claimed, are additional welfare payments made to certain unemployment insurance claimants arising from alleged delays in the processing of claims. I am advised that this matter was in fact discussed on March 3 in the provincial legislature. At that time the Ontario minister of social and family services, in reply to questions concerning delays in payment of unemployment insurance, indicated that his department had been working closely with federal officials in efforts to establish arrangements whereby moneys that had been paid to municipalities could be recovered from payments of unemployment insurance.

In light of these events it is indeed difficult to understand that the Ontario minister would say that the new unemployment insurance program is causing extra costs to the province in welfare payments. Recent surveys have indicated that welfare payments generally have decreased primarily as a result of the more generous provisions of the new program. In actual fact, the unemployment insurance program, combined with the special employment program will save social welfare agencies, local taxpayers