

Immigration Act, 1976

morning, I used the old term "safe country". It is no longer called a safe country, but amounts to the same thing. It is a slight improvement, as the Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) pointed out, but it is still part of a preliminary process of selecting refugees before they get a full hearing on their application for refugee status.

The Bill as reported from the committee now states in Section 48.01(1):

A person who claims to be a Convention refugee is not eligible to have the claim determined by the Refugee Division if

(b) the claimant came to Canada from a country—that has been prescribed as a country that complies with Article 33 of the Convention—

Several Members have pointed out that this wording is still vague. The Parliamentary Secretary seems to believe that it is satisfactory and will ensure that all legitimate applicants for refugee status will get through and have a full hearing. However, some people have suggested that such countries as Chile may be considered to be a country complying with Article 33 of the Convention. There could be others. There is no absolute process for ensuring the safety of people who would be returned to these countries.

The Liberal Party stands for universal access to a fair, efficient, effective method for determining refugee status, that is open to all those who feel they are refugees. Send them back if they are found to be phoney refugees after they go through that process, but it is unacceptable to have a preliminary process to weed out people before they have a full and fair hearing. That is why we have made this amendment. That is why we will persist in opposing this Bill as long as those provisions are in it.

● (1540)

The Plaut Commission was before the Government, I believe in late 1984 or early 1985. It goes back at least two years. Yet it took the Government until May 5 of this year to table this Bill. Even then, although the Government controls the business of the House, it did not put it forward for debate until a few days before the summer adjournment. Then it recalled us in the middle of summer to deal with the Bill because there was a so-called crisis on our shores. The Government has been derelict all along. Several Members on this side of the House—and I recall rising several times myself—asked the Government to proceed with the recommendations of the standing committee or with the Plaut report, but no action was taken month after month. Finally the Government produced the Bill and it did not even bother calling the Bill for debate.

On the basis of the landing of, I believe, 157 people on the shores of this country, the Government declared it a critical emergency and rush us all back to deal with this Bill and with Bill C-84, which we dealt with last week, because the matter had to be dealt with in an urgent way. But the Government had ignored the recommendations of the committee and the Plaut Commission over several years.

The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) referred to some of the statistics. However, the numbers of refugees and immigrants coming to our shores in recent years are not large compared to those who came in past years. During the Hungarian revolution we had over 50,000 refugees, who have all now settled in this country and are making a grand contribution to it. Because of the situation in Czechoslovakia, in Uganda, and because of the Vietnam situation when the boat people arrived, a great many more people have come to this country, and those people have settled in and integrated into our society and, on the whole, are contributing very well. Of course, in all groups of people there are some who will perhaps break the law. However, they are a very small percentage of those who have come. These people who are the target of this Bill are no different from those who came in the past and were accepted by this country.

The subject was brought home to me this summer when I travelled to Israel and visited the Holocaust memorial. During my visit I learned again with great emphasis how several countries in the 1930s turned back boats of immigrants fleeing from Nazi Germany. These people were seeking refugee status to come to safe countries, but they were turned back. Of course, we learned after the war that many of those people were sent to the ovens and were annihilated.

Let us not put in place measures which could lead to the same situation. Let us make sure that this country, which won awards for its humanitarian refugee policies, allows those who apply for refugee status because they are fleeing from countries where there is political, religious and racial persecution at least to have a chance to demonstrate their case fully. If they cannot demonstrate their case, we can send them back, but at least we should give them a chance for a full and fair hearing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The question is on Motion No. 11 standing in the name of the Hon. Member for York West (Mr. Marchi). Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Pursuant to the suggestion made by the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) this morning, shall the Chair conclude that the recorded division shall be deferred?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The next question is on Motion No. 13 standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap).