

Immigration Act, 1976

whether it be at home or abroad. Third country nationals cannot decide for Canadians who should jump the line or who should have priority.

Canadians have rights too, as my colleague, the Hon. Member for Chambly (Mr. Grisé), mentioned earlier this afternoon. Through our laws, and with the assistance of very competent officers both at home and abroad, they can decide who will be allowed into Canada and under what conditions.

My constituents especially favour family reunification and do not want to tell their relatives to jump the line. As Eli Weisel, the Nobel Prize laureate reminded us not too long ago: "A society can be measured and judged by its attitude to strangers". I believe we have measured up to these humanitarian standards time and time again. This legislation will allow us to continue to open our doors to strangers, and more particularly, the neediest among them.

Let us look at the principles of the new system. Let us examine how this obligation is honoured in the structure of the new system.

The new system will deal quickly with claims. That is, it will deal quickly with those submitting bogus claims and will attend quickly to those whose claims have real merit. This is what hundreds of my constituents in Willowdale have told me over the past number of weeks: deal with the problem quickly and do it now.

My constituents understand that the current immigration and refugee processing system was set in motion some time ago by the previous Liberal regime, reinforced by the Charter of Rights. This system has gone haywire and is now abused.

My constituents in Willowdale want a fair and open system. This is an open system. Everyone will have the opportunity to make a claim to Canada's protection at home and also abroad. No one will be turned away without having an opportunity to appear before a member of the refugee board.

It is a system which establishes the highest standards of fundamental justice. First, proceedings are oral. Second, the claimant is entitled to be represented by counsel. Third, in many cases, legal representation is provided even free of charge. Decision-making on arguable cases will be made by an independent quasi judicial panel and, once again, individuals will present their claims in a non-adversarial and oral hearing. Those awaiting their hearings before a refugee board will be allowed to work and attend school. Welfare and health care benefits will be provided through federal-provincial cost-sharing programs, which is not the case under the current system. Successful claimants will be entitled to apply for permanent residence. These are the principles and the benefits delivered in the body of the Act.

• (1620)

To date we have heard many arguments. We have heard criticisms and demands that the Bill be withdrawn or postponed. Some have argued that the Bill does not say what we

think it says. If there is a legitimate doubt about all this, let us talk about it and consider amendments if necessary. There are other criticisms. However, what is abundantly clear is that this system will stand up where the current system does not. The existing system is based on principles which just do not work in practice, for instance, full access of all claimants to the refugee board for refugee determination, and there are two levels of review.

It does not really matter how you arrange the steps of the process. This is a system which just does not work for everyone because the principles are wrong. They were wrong when the system was conceived, and I referred to that earlier, and their inability to stand the test of events and time has been shown again and again.

We are not the first who have come this route. Other countries have tried and failed. I say to those who still criticize to look at what is being proposed under the new system as a whole, as it has been designed. Look at the insistence on quality, on fairness above all and on the benefit of the doubt being given at every stage. In short, I believe Bill C-55 will provide the solution to the problems which have been plaguing us and that it will allow our refugee determination system to distinguish between the genuine refugee in need of our protection and all other claimants who are not in need of our protection.

The principles behind Bill C-55 are right for Canada. They are right for the present and they will be right for the future. My constituency of Willowdale, and the country, support these principles. I would hope, therefore, that during the course of this debate we could focus on improving the Bill, smoothing the rough edges and clarifying the ambiguities. Further delay is not going to solve anything. It is not going to benefit anyone, least of all the people in need of our protection.

I urge all those who would still be a dissenting voice to keep in mind the objective, which I believe we all share and which this legislation honours, which is to support the genuine refugees in need of help regardless of number and without limit. But the economic migrants and the queue jumpers must obey our Canadian laws. They cannot continue to lie and cheat their way into this country.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question of my colleague who is on the multicultural committee, namely, the Hon. Member for Willowdale (Mr. Ostrom). He has endeavoured in his comments on Bill C-55 to provide the right rhetoric required for the Government to put this Bill forward. He talks about it being fair and open and so on. He suggests it is going to provide for our future needs. Yet I sense in his comments as he talked about bogus refugees, his last observations on people who supposedly come to Canada primarily for economic reasons, a certain aversion to refugees and perhaps to immigrants generally.