

Immigration Act, 1976

The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) is a former Minister of Immigration and I think he will understand the complexity. I think he would agree that it is understandable that people might want to prejudge who is a refugee and who is not, yet that cannot be the final judgment.

The NDP is always worried about our sovereignty. If Canada is going to express itself as a sovereign nation, Canada has the right to determine who is a refugee and what definition we use. Is it going to be decided by law, or on a whim? Are we going to decide by an equitable and universal standard, or are we going to let every interest group decide who is a refugee? Is it going to be decided by a refugee determination process, or is it going to be determined or predetermined by a particular lobbyist?

I suppose we might say that is the process we are going through right now. We are defining the nature of a refugee, and what I cannot understand is that certain lobby groups and special interest groups, while they may have good intentions and the best interests of people at heart, feel they have a right to determine ahead of time who is a refugee.

The most important quality of a refugee determination system is fairness. It seems to me that to be fair it must be even-handed. In order to be even-handed it has to be done by law. We cannot have individuals, just because they feel harassed by an economic situation, deciding on behalf of the Government and people of Canada ahead of time what constitutes a refugee or deciding that they in particular are refugees. It must be defined by law, otherwise we live by exceptions.

As I said at the outset, we are dealing here with legislation that deals with deterrence and detention. As I also said at the outset, there is a kind of new morality out there that says it is okay to circumvent the law. In fact, in some cases it is a point of morality to circumvent the law. However, we are saying it is not okay to try and beat the system. It is not okay to organize fraudulent claims. It is not okay to bring boatloads of people into the country clandestinely. That is simply an effort to beat the immigration system by declaring themselves refugees. That is not okay.

• (1540)

The people of Canada have a right to decide who is a refugee. In order to be fair, the decisions must be made through a legal process, a refugee determination process which is fair. There are those who have decided that morality and ethical superiority legitimizes a fraudulent process of bringing people into the country. The Government has the right to say that it is unfair to the rest of the population to allow that to happen.

Therefore, I give notice that the Government is taking charge. The Government is going to determine what is right for Canadian people. The Government is going to be as fair and humane as possible to every genuine refugee. We will not tolerate fraud. We will prosecute those who deal commercially

in human misery. We are determined to make the system work so that genuine refugees who are fleeing persecution and have lost their freedom can find haven in Canada as 500,000 have since the end of World War II.

Those who apply legitimately at our borders will get a fair hearing and, I might add, will not have to face the stigma of a label which has become anathema to a broad section of our society. There are thousands of people across Canada who now equate refugee with fraud. That is unfair to the refugee. It is our determination to restore dignity to the refugee, to ensure that when he applies honestly and legally to become a refugee in Canada he can do it with the dignity God has given him and which the Canadian people will respect.

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat taken aback by the comments of the Parliamentary Secretary who said, toward the end of his speech, that the words "refugee" and "immigration" have adopted a bad name in this country. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to do some soul-searching if he really wants to find the answer. He can start by looking at the record of his own Government.

A number of months have passed since the debate last summer and we can remove ourselves from the very heated and emotional exchange which Parliament witnessed. Why did the Government try to communicate to Canadians that the arrival of 300 individuals on our shores constituted a crisis and emergency?

We remember that only a few short years ago, led initially in 1979 by the then Prime Minister, the present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark), and followed up by the Government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, we in this country accepted a plea from the international community to pitch in and help with the Vietnamese boat refugee crisis. In two years we accepted 106,000 individuals into our country. I know that the Member will say that they came in in an orderly way and that we went to them. The fact remains that those Governments, in partnership with Canadians, had the progressive will to accept within our society 106,000 people who are all integrated into the main stream of Canadian life as we speak today.

If 300 people constitute an emergency and a crisis, how would the present Government or Governments of the past have been able to lead Canadians to help out 106,000 people above and beyond all the other programs of the Department of Immigration at that time?

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that the most successful refugee program conducted in recent history was carried out under the Clark Government in 1979. It was successful because it was carried out partly by the Government and partly by the private sector. Social agencies, service clubs, and churches all across Canada sponsored a number of these people equal to the number sponsored by the Government. It was the finest display of government-private sector co-operation that we have seen in many years. That is why it