

*Immigration Act, 1976*

80,000 to 125,000 annually, while government sponsored refugees alone have increased from 9,000 to 12,000 annually. This is the best record ever for any Canadian Government in recent years.

• (1650)

This morning the Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. Weiner) took the high road on refugee measures, but not the Hon. Member for York West and previous Liberal Governments that only seemed to favour bogus refugees with money.

The Hon. Member for York West favours people who have money obtaining false passports and visas and paying large sums of money to transportation companies. The Conservative Government reaches out to the desperate and the needy in the world. The Government looks for places where they are waiting in camps. The Government goes there with its immigration officers and picks them up in Hong Kong, Bangkok, and other places where often the Americans got there before us to pick out the best.

The Conservative Government is not looking after the wealthy refugees, whom the Hon. Member for York West seems to be protecting, bogus refugees who pay fees to boat captains and immigration lawyers. The Government looks after all refugees in real need who have no other means to get to Canada.

The Conservative policy is clear. It is forward looking, humanitarian, and compassionate. As the Minister indicated this morning, it has three dimensions. First, the Government assists the UNHCR and Red Cross in many refugee camps in countries all over the world with food, shelter, and health costs. That is the first requirement for them to be safe. Second, we bring those refugees, especially the needy, to Canada in an orderly and timely fashion. Third, we assist those refugees and their families to settle properly in Canada. We assist them in finding shelter and jobs and in acquiring language skills.

The pre-1979 Liberal Government obtained only some 5,000 refugees from southeast Asia. However, what is the record of the Conservative Government? The Conservative Government, under the leadership of the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark), started to invite 50,000 Vietnamese from southeast Asia to Canada, which has been increased since then.

The pre-September 1984 Liberal Government sponsored only 9,000 government refugees annually, whereas the Conservative Government of today sponsors over 12,000 annually. Similar trends and figures can be cited for refugees from Central America from where very few refugees came to Canada under previous Liberal Governments. That has all changed today. The Conservative Government is far more humane toward Central and South American refugees.

Bill C-55 is part of a continuous process to ensure that our refugee policy is right for today's world. Canada's search for an updated refugee policy reflects our need to come to terms

with new global pressures. We are doing it in a way which respects our humanitarian tradition while seeking a practical solution to contemporary problems.

In this connection I should like to thank all church groups, the Jewish community, human rights groups, UNHCR, and others who not only assisted for many years in settling refugees in Canada but also assisted the Government with briefs and comments on both Bill C-55 and Bill C-84.

That Canada has a long and honourable tradition in helping refugees is beyond question. Even before the refugee was recognized as a legal entity, Canada was offering a safe haven to those who needed it. The United Empire Loyalists were probably the first group to come to Canada under those circumstances. Later, in the mid-1800s, black Americans fled slavery by making their way to Canada on the underground railway. After General Custer was defeated at Little Bighorn, Sioux Indians sought refuge in western Canada. Religious dissenters such as the Mennonites and the Doukhobors found freedom in Canada, along with many settlers who were fleeing persecution in their homeland.

However, it was not until after World War II that a specific policy for refugees began to emerge in Canada. Millions of people displaced by war were resettled throughout the world in those post-war years. Canada has done her share, offering haven to more than 500,000 refugees in the intervening years.

Although Canada participated in the drafting of the Convention on Refugees in 1951, refugees were still considered under general immigration policy. However, under those terms Canada accepted some 40,000 Hungarians after 1956 and some 12,000 Czechoslovakians after 1968.

One year later Canada signed the UN Convention and Protocol for Refugees, formally recognizing refugees as an entity separate from the general immigrant population. This marked an important watershed for the refugee policy. In the interim, Canada welcomed some 7,000 Ugandan refugees.

Our refugee policy continued to evolve. The proclamation of the Immigration Act in 1976 provided a legal framework for the determination of refugees among individuals arriving in Canada. The Act allowed us to control the intake of refugees based upon our priorities and international commitments. Refugees, like all other persons intending to settle in Canada, were expected to apply abroad. However, as a signatory of the Convention and Protocol for Refugees Canada also agreed that it would not return to their homeland those determined to be refugees and to whom we have granted protection.

Canada faces a different set of circumstances today from 1951, 1969, and even those of 1976. When Canada signed the Convention it was assumed that a number of applications by people who appeared spontaneously at our borders would be manageable, given Canada's relatively isolated position and her acceptance of refugees from abroad. However, refugee issues cannot be divorced from general world developments. We are currently in the midst of one of the largest migration