

Adjournment Debate

lessons learned as a result of this and that there will be an adequate reporting made of it.

I am not blaming the Hon. Member for this, because it is early in the session. However, I am saying to him that one week is not very much time when we are looking at a cross-section of agencies involved in this activity.

I take his point very seriously. It is important that the Canadian people have an assurance that this type of reporting and integration will take place. When the agencies work together as an out-growth of the FLEUR Report, it is important that there will be a reporting of it. I give the Member the assurance that I will be happy to work with him to ensure that those agencies work together in a co-ordinated way in order that the people of Canada will have confidence in the integration of all of these agencies.

IMMIGRATION-REFUGEE CLAIMANT APPLICATIONS
BACKLOG

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Madam Speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity during the adjournment debate to pursue a question that I posed to the Government, namely, the Minister for Employment and Immigration (Mrs. McDougall) on April 11. The question was in regard to the refugee backlog that has been completely mismanaged and ignored in terms of any agenda of priority that the Government may have had for the last session and also for this session.

It is useful to keep in mind that when the Government took office in 1984 there was a backlog accumulating in the number of 8,000 to 10,000 individuals. At that time the Liberal Government commissioned Rabbi Plaut to come up with recommendations to change the system to prevent the backlog from mushrooming.

As we debate this evening, the backlog numbers approximately 110,000 individuals in this country. It is an absolute shame that the Government has allowed that backlog to reach those numbers.

Last December 28 the Government added insult to injury when the Minister of Employment and Immigration announced programs or an initiative to speedily clear up the backlog. A few weeks ago, on March 31, the Government called a press conference and indicated that no processing on that backlog had started. For three months there was absolutely nothing done to ease the pressure of that human backlog that is festering. On top

of that, the Government has suggested that the processing will not start until this summer at the very earliest.

Canadians, myself and my colleagues on this side of the House, are beginning to ask if the Minister will come in the summer and tell us that the processing will start at Christmas, or in the following year? I believe it is time the Government commenced its easing of the backlog. It is a sore point, not only in terms of the credibility of our system, but it is also very unfair to 110,000 individuals, some of whom have been in the country for two and three years and separated from their families and who simply want to know what the future holds for them. If they are to be accepted, then that is one set of equations. If they are not to be accepted, then obviously they will be deported and have to pick up their life from that point in time.

It does not behoove the Government to continually blame the Opposition, the constituency, the churches, or the social service agencies when the problem is staring at Government Members in the reflection of that giant mirror.

Time and again we have suggested to the Government that it attempt an administrative review, something which has been turned down, and to become sensitive and interested in the backlog that has not become better, but has become worse. In terms of undermining confidence in the system, it does us a disservice.

I urge the Parliamentary Secretary who will be responding for the Minister to come to grips with this problem. It is not good enough to simply say: "We are thinking about it. We are putting it into motion. It is going to take us some time for the administration of the exercise to take shape." We have not been articulating this problem and frustration for the last week, the last month, or for two months. It has been an ongoing situation for the better part of close to three years.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, I think it is a tragic situation for the majority of these claimants who come from Quebec and Ontario. It is a tragedy for their families. It is a tragedy for our refugee system. It is a tragedy for our country because it is unable to give these people an answer, a future. While the Government is saying that we need more people and more immigration, it does nothing about this backlog, and it has taken a very negative stance toward new claimants.