

Government Orders

Pursuant to Standing Order 135(2), the bill is deemed to have been read a first time and ordered for second reading at the next sitting of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration) moved that Bill C-86, an act to amend the Immigration act and other Acts in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee in the Departmental envelope.

He said: Mr. Speaker, hon. members, a few days ago I proposed to Parliament a number of important changes to the Immigration Act.

These changes will give us the means to more effectively manage the immigration program, to better respond to the changes which have taken place since the current act was passed in 1976 and to position ourselves to meet the immigration challenges of the future.

[*English*]

However, before I address the substance of the proposed amendments, it is important to establish the context for change. Why now? What perspectives do we bring to bear when proposing these changes?

We begin this debate at a time when two issues of great importance dominate the national agenda and preoccupy the minds of Canadians. At kitchen tables, in coffee shops, in cafeterias, on buses, and in church halls across this nation, Canadians are talking about the unity of their country and about Canadian economic prosperity. These are bedrock issues for this country.

Canadians instinctively understand that you cannot have one without the other and yet incredibly we find ourselves debating that very possibility. I raise these issues because they are both inextricably linked to the issue of immigration.

This is a point I made in my presentation to the standing committee last month. It is a point that is well

worth restating here on the floor of the House of Commons as we begin this debate on these important amendments to our immigration program.

In many ways, Canada's immigration policy is symbolic of the country itself and of the challenges that we face as a people. When Canadians are asked to describe themselves, to identify what makes them different from others, we often speak with pride about our compassionate and tolerant nature as a people.

We describe Canada as a welcoming nation. Whether we know it or not, we are talking about the values which underpin our immigration and refugee policies. Those policies are part of the face we present to the world. They are a calling card and observers judge us on the basis of what those policies tell them about Canada. The message is one of generosity and openness.

At the same time, these policies that we have shaped as a nation have in turn shaped us. They have helped us understand who we are as a people. They provide us with a mirror to look into our soul as a nation and while the reflection is far from perfect, it does represent a face that the world has come to trust. It is an honest face, one which conveys a compassion and pragmatism of an immigration policy that has served this nation well.

[*Translation*]

Like immigration, our unity debate is about who we are and who we trust. It is my belief, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians will demonstrate the same compassion and tolerance toward each other as we have had the wisdom to adopt in welcoming newcomers to our shores. It may be our newest citizens who are best able to see Canada as it is.

Nineteen years ago, writer Neil Bissoondath moved here from Trinidad. He was 15 at the time. Today he writes: "Canada is a grand country, and it is that grandeur that I wish to leave to my daughter; its beauties, its immensities, its incomparable diversities. Those diversities include the duality that is her heritage from both her parents, for in her are blended white and brown, francophone and anglophone, native born and immigrant. To accept the division of this country is to betray decades of vision and effort. It is to betray generations, those of yesterday and those of tomorrow."