

have it in a few weeks. When I asked a question in the House on May 10 she said it would be published very shortly. It is now June and there is no word yet of that report.

● (1825)

This causes people to wonder and worry about rumours. What is she planning to do? Does she plan a sort of double shuffle of the Immigration Appeal Board? Does she plan to increase its numbers, but cut down its quorum so that it can run refugee claimants through an oral hearing like sausages through a sausage machine, and run most of them out of the country? Is that the plan that Cal Best of the Department of Immigration is forcing upon the Minister as her official advisor?

The Immigration Appeal Board does a good job on ordinary appeals, but it lacks the expertise that the Refugee Status Advisory Committee has in hearing refugee appeals. In fact, it is infected with the bias of Cal Best and senior officials of the Department of Immigration. There is the danger that a series of hasty decisions could be made which would be biased against refugees, sending some of them into very dangerous conditions.

I would urge the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) to give consideration to a resolution which was put forward by the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees. That organization met last week and recommended:

—that a universal program of special measures be adopted—

That could be done without the delay of legislation. The Minister could declare the programs tomorrow under existing legislation. The resolution continued:

—special measures be adopted by the government to speedily facilitate a humanitarian solution to all persons in the refugee determination process on April 4, 1985. The special measures should apply equally to all people caught by our faulty process regardless of nationality or ethnic origin. It would be unjust to ask people, many of whom have been in our old and inadequate process for several years, to return to the beginning to start over.

I call on the Minister to adopt some just action at the present time. If she cannot think of anything better, then she should adopt the resolution of the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees.

There are only three weeks left before the summer recess. I urge the Minister not to drag out the matter until next fall, or next Christmas, in defiance of the decision of the Supreme Court.

Mr. Mel Gass (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I would like to expand on the reply which was given on May 10, 1985, by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) to the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap), regarding the very important matter of refugee determination in Canada.

Adjournment Debate

As most Members are aware, Rabbi Gunther Plaut, a noted humanitarian and scholar, has been conducting an in-depth review of our refugee determination system. The review was made necessary by the severe pressures that have been placed on the process in recent years by increasing numbers of persons coming to Canada and seeking refugee status here. That has created a large backlog of cases which are awaiting consideration.

Obviously, the backlog situation is unacceptable. It means, in fact, that bona fide refugees, who have already undergone traumatic experiences, face an uncertain future when they must wait 18 months or longer until their fate in Canada can be decided. For others who may have made claims to refugee status as a way of trying to circumvent normal immigration procedures, it means that they have bought time in Canada.

It should be explained that refugee claims have been determined in Canada fairly and objectively for about 13 years. Refugee claims are not judged in the Canadian system by immigration officers. The review in the first instance is carried out by the Refugee Status Advisory Committee, which is an independent entity within the Commission, that makes recommendations to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The claims which are not accepted can be reintroduced at the Immigration Appeal Board.

In a decision rendered on April 4, 1985, the Supreme Court ruled that all refugee claimants were entitled to an oral hearing. Until now, it was only the exceptional cases which were heard orally. The Minister fully supports that decision. To a considerable degree, the decision is the culmination of a process that has made the refugee determination process in Canada one of the most open and equitable processes of this kind which exists in any country.

However, the blueprint for a new procedure that would give effect to the Supreme Court decision is not a simply thing. The process must be fair, but at the same time it must function efficiently and with a minimum of delay. Once Rabbi Plaut's study is available to the public, the Government will have a better idea of the way in which these diverse elements can be reconciled. Also, because changes to legislation will be required, Members will have an opportunity to debate the issue.

I call upon all Members to support the positive and effective legislative changes which will be introduced, so that Canada will be able to continue to respond generously to humanitarian needs.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at eleven o'clock a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 2(1).

The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.