

the Minister knows, before July, 1986, refugee claimants were given generic work permits following their first inquiry when they indicated their decision to claim refugee status. Since then the Government has made it impossible for these people to work until after their statement under oath has been taken. As a result there are now about 7,000 refugee families in Metro Toronto waiting a minimum of eight months each, at a welfare cost of \$500 per month.

• (1450)

Will the Minister restore to the refugee claimants permission to work as soon as they have had their initial inquiries so that they can regain their self respect by supporting themselves?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the current backlog, which is now nearly 50,000 people as I was informed this morning, has reached such a level that it would be much more difficult today to apply the policy which was in effect when there was only a backlog of a few hundred or thousand people. I believe that the best thing to do would be to allow us to take care of this backlog, and the Hon. Member knows exactly what he has to do in that regard.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Spadina on a short supplementary.

[English]

REQUEST THAT PROVISIONAL PERMITS BE ISSUED

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that many of the delays are caused by the Department's scheduling problems. Therefore, if he is withholding the work permits as claimed in order to pressure people to make their statements, why not follow the advice of the Bar Association a year and a half ago and make the permits subject to revocation if there is undue delay? Let them support themselves.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to understand the coherence of a policy which gives a permit and revokes the permit if they are not refugees. The fact of the matter is that those persons have claimed refugee status. There are 50,000 in this country. It is unacceptable for all Canadians.

I believe that my hon. friend is honest enough to understand that, as long as we do not have what is needed. He knows very well that if the policy just on the other side of the wall is released, that will be the best answer for all refugee claimants in this country.

[Translation]

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

FAMILY VIOLENCE—CONCLUSIONS OF MINISTERS OF JUSTICE

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Last month, I asked the Minister whether he would agree to federal-provincial action with a view to reducing family violence. Within the last six months, three women have been killed by their husband or spouse. A federal-provincial meeting of Justice Ministers was held on March 16, 17 and 18. I would like the Minister to tell us what came out of that meeting and what conclusions the Ministers reach concerning this issue.

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Hon. Member. I want to report to her and Members of the House that the federal-provincial meeting held in Saskatchewan on March 17 and March 18 was directed towards some specific topics. We are meeting again at the federal-provincial level in Québec on May 26 and May 27, at which time there will be an opportunity for more extensive discussions on a number of topics.

I should tell the Hon. Member that in connection with the particular representation she has made on the matter of family violence, my colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and I have been working closely together with respect to a federal response.

As far as my responsibility for the criminal law is concerned, I am working with my provincial counterparts to look at areas of the Criminal Code which require reform to make sure that we can improve the law. This particular area is certainly one that our Department is considering.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Outremont on a very short supplementary, please.

REQUEST THAT SUBJECT BE PLACED ON AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): I simply want to remind the Minister that, on February 29, he promised this House that this matter would be on the agenda. I would like the Minister to assure us that the issue will definitely be discussed at the next meeting in May.

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member is fully conversant with the complexities of this issue. The question of family violence is not something that should be dealt with solely and exclusively by the criminal law.