

remained in Canada since then, as well as those people who have lived here without legal status for years, has only become possible now as part of this change which protects the future of the appeal system. I want to stress that applications made for immigrant status by these people will be judged in the light of such criteria as length of residence in this country, family relationships, financial stability, employment record and, as well, compelling grounds for compassionate consideration will be taken into account. I also want to stress, for those few whose applications are rejected, that they will have the right of appeal to the Immigration Appeal Board which, as I have already mentioned, has and retains the discretionary power to set aside a deportation order on grounds of compassionate consideration or unusual hardship.

As we see it now, we would expect that the greater majority of those who come forward to qualify for landed status at the examination stage will be successful. But to ensure that there is no misunderstanding, I want to spell out as clearly as I can that this program is not open to persons classed as prohibited by the Immigration Act on grounds other than their status under the Immigration Act itself. Convicted criminals, unless of course they are entitled under the act to be recognized as rehabilitated, are not eligible. Persons already reported for special inquiry or ordered deported and awaiting the disposition of their appeal here in Canada prior to November 30 and who have remained here since that date, will have their cases reviewed to determine their admissibility under the landing criteria established in the adjustment program.

I hope hon. members on both sides of the House will join me in emphasizing this throughout the land, because I do not think it can be over-emphasized—that is, the importance of applying within the 60 days. The clock starts ticking on the day this bill is proclaimed and the opportunity runs out, permanently, 60 days later. This program is being introduced in the interest of fairness, and I think that this advance notice that it will last for 60 days only, is fair warning.

We expect and we certainly hope, Mr. Speaker, that if and when this legislation is adopted it should then be possible to clear the backlog within a reasonable period of time. I wish I could be more precise about how long that will be, but it really is impossible to forecast because we do not know at this moment, and we do not have any way of predicting, how many appeals will be added to the present backlog as a result of this adjustment process. The main point I want to make is that I believe the legislation provides the flexibility necessary to deal with the present situation and to ensure that the appeal board is able to keep its work up to date once the backlog has been cleared. Members will note that the act permits the government to revoke the temporary provision when the overload of the appeal system has been corrected.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, in 1967, parliament enacted the Immigration Appeal Board Act setting up an untried and very generous appeal system. It is regrettable, but experience has shown that it was open to misuse and the purposes of the bill before the House today is to stop that misuse while remaining true to the original spirit of the act. I think this bill does remain consistent with parliament's original intent which was expressed as a consensus

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of all groups in this House at this time. It retains the board as an independent appeal body, preserving its authority to make final, binding decisions and at the same time it recognizes that everyone who has a reasonable claim to consideration should retain their right to appeal.

Having been urged by members on both sides to bring this legislation forward quickly, having heard members opposite as well as in my own party suggest in committee many of the changes now included in this bill, I am extremely hopeful that parliament will see fit to deal with these questions before it rises for the summer recess.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Simcoe North has a question.

Mr. Rynard: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister if there will be any health examination of these people who are coming forward, those of whom we have lost sight of as well as others. I say this in view of the fact that tropical diseases are not mentioned. I think it is a caution that should be thrown in because many people are here without the necessary tests, and we have no way of knowing whether they are carrying diseases or are sick.

Mr. Andras: In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the standard examinations will be necessary.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I take great delight in participating in this debate. I do not necessarily want to stand here and thank the minister for bringing in this bill because I think we have to condemn the attitude of this government. I have to hold back a bit in respect of the minister as he has only had the portfolio for five or six months. In all fairness, I think he has attempted to do what was necessary as quickly as he could, keeping in mind that the government House leader did not give this legislation the same priority as he does.

The attitude of this and prior governments since 1967 has been scandalous. There has been a callous disregard of the rights of the individual and a disregard of human dignity. The government has shown a lack of compassion and has acted in the most inhumane way; I want to put that on the record. When I look at the horrendous situation which has developed since 1969 I can arrive at no other conclusion.

We on this side of the House, and I would respectfully suggest maybe even members from both sides of the House, have continually pressed the government and the government House leader for action on this problem. The minister was prepared to introduce this bill on Monday and we were supposed to conclude our examination of it overnight. We did not know what was to be in the bill. We thought perhaps more members would be added to the board, that perhaps one member might sit on an appeal, and that the board might travel around the country more. As we did not know what was to be in it, we did not have the opportunity of becoming involved in a consideration of this bill until Monday afternoon, when we heard that it was to be debated on Wednesday.