

Immigration Act, 1976

Another area I would like to refer to is the necessity for documentation. It is quite impossible to have documentation when you are fleeing a country. That is only common sense.

• (1330)

In conclusion, I urge Members to think about improvements to this Bill. We can solve the problem without abusing others and being repressive.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blackburn (Jonquière): As I was listening to the remarks made by my hon. friend, I felt again it was necessary to remind the House of the reasons behind this Bill C-84 dealing with immigrants and refugees. Mr. Speaker, why did Canada come to the conclusion that it had to pass a new legislation in this area? It is because of the immigrants who were arriving in increasing number at our border points seeking refugee status while not being truly refugees. When you realize that there were 1,600 refugees in 1980, 18,000 in 1986, and as many as 16,500 over the past seven months, it is clear that the Government had to take steps to remedy the situation. It is still more pressing when we see boat people coming to our shores and trying to enter Canada illegally, while other people follow the usual channel, respecting our Canadian laws and regulations, and trying to enter Canada legally.

Faced with this wave of people coming to Canada seeking refugee status while not being necessarily true refugees, Canada had to act to remedy the situation.

Moreover, what the Bill is doing, Mr. Speaker, is to impose heavier penalties on smugglers who are helping people enter Canada illegally. In addition to imposing heavier penalties on them, it will make it possible for immigration authorities to detain these people until they make sure of their identities. I want to remind my hon. friend of this: When someone arrives in Canada without proper documents, we are going simply to detain him or her until we can make sure of his or her identity. It seems to me to be normal for us, as the Government, to do our utmost to protect our fellow Canadians and make sure we know those who are coming to Canada. If they are true refugees, Mr. Speaker, they will be allowed to enter Canada. Otherwise, they will not be allowed to enter this country, and I suggest it is our duty as the Government—and I suggest the Opposition should support the Government in this endeavour—to make sure that the people entering this country do so legally, following the usual channels, and that they submit to the normal process to enter this country as immigrants.

[*English*]

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's comments. He asks if we should let people in without documentation. I would say yes, because it is very difficult to get documentation, receive a proper hearing and have a proper investigation. Anyone who has visited a country from which many refugees come would be naive to assume that

one could simply go to the friendly immigration office or Minister of Immigration to obtain the proper papers in order to flee the country for being outspoken. Those people should simply be given a proper hearing, and if they are found not to be legitimate refugees, proper action can then be taken. However, they should be entitled to a fair and proper hearing.

Second, it has not often been stated that part of the problem may be with the immigration process as it exists. There is not enough processing of immigrants in many of the countries from which they come. Those who could apply under the regular immigration process are frustrated by the lack of personnel and delay in processing, and therefore try to use other routes.

Many refugees in the world are women. This is of special concern because often they are the most disadvantaged, subject to the most physical and mental abuse, and often have dependent children. They are frequently in dangerous situations, with no ability to control their fertility.

While they are perhaps one of the most disadvantaged people, our immigration policies have not looked upon them favourably.

We cannot be naive about the ability of refugees to obtain documents. Second, an improvement to the immigration process would greatly alleviate the problem of refugees attempting to enter by other means.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, the Government introduced a Bill at a time when the House is supposed to be in recess. It says that we are faced with an emergency. The Hon. Member for Jonquière (Mr. Blackburn), voiced a similar sentiment a couple of minutes ago. He talked about the flood of refugees and how we must deal with them quickly.

Does my colleague not find this strange when the Government permitted hundreds of Portuguese people to come to Canada claiming refugee status because they were Jehovah's Witnesses and were being mistreated in Portugal, and permitted hundreds of Turks who, having lived through a military dictatorship were moving toward a democratic system and came to this country claiming refugee status? Yet the Government could not get its act together to pass a simple regulation that those coming from Turkey and Portugal who wanted to claim refugee status would at least need to have a Canadian visa before coming to Canada. If the Government did not believe quick action was necessary in those cases, how can it now say that we are facing an emergency and must pass the kind of repressive legislation it is proposing?

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, I am probably not very qualified to comment on what is and what is not an emergency in the House, having only been here for a few weeks. However, I refer again to the issue of immigration policy and the definition of who is a refugee and who is an immigrant. That has become very clouded, not only in the minds of the public but in the minds of those who are attempting to come to this country.