

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 30, 1973

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

TABLING OF MOTION RELATING TO OIL EXPORT TAX SUPERSEDING NOTICE OF SEPTEMBER 21, 1973

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I wish to table notice of a ways and means motion relating to oil export taxes pursuant to Standing Order 60(1). This notice supersedes the notice tabled on September 21, 1973 on the same matter.

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IMMIGRATION

STATEMENT ON MEASURES TO ASSIST CHILEAN REFUGEES WISHING TO COME TO CANADA

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, since the coup in Chile, the Canadian government has been following closely developments in that country. From the outset, one of our prime concerns has been the need to assist those people who either have recently left Chile or who now feel obliged to make a new life in another country.

Canada has had a lengthy and admirable record in contributing to the relief of international refugees and related movements. This has been a positive and humane approach designed to permit those persons displaced to make a new life for themselves in our country through immigration. However, each of these movements has had its own particular problems and requirements. In the case of Chile, many of the people caught up in the situation have not been seeking new homes to which to immigrate but rather a temporary safe haven in another country. From the outset, we have tried to assist those persons who want to make their homes in Canada. We are accordingly extending our refugee program to people to whom humanitarian considerations apply.

Within hours of the September 11 coup d'état, one of our officers was on hand in Santiago to keep us abreast of developments and take such immediate action as was called for. Contact was also made with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who took responsibility for co-ordinating the means by which assistance could be provided to those in Chile who felt themselves in danger, including identifying those who wished to settle in Canada.

Because the situation has been changing rapidly, a total of four special teams have been sent to Chile and third countries where evacuees have located to report on the situation and ensure that facilities were available to assist those who wished to immigrate to Canada.

Most recently a senior officer from the Department of External Affairs and a senior officer from the Department of Manpower and Immigration went to Panama and Honduras where they met with the groups of evacuees from Chile and the local authorities in order to determine the requirements for special procedures and assistance. Simultaneously, senior officers from the same two departments visited refugee camps and also appraised the demand coming from Chileans. Both teams compared views with our ambassadors accredited to those countries, and their findings have been considered by the government together with the data already provided by our representatives on the spot.

A figure of 13,000 refugees in Chile has been mentioned. This is not accurate. The figure of 13,000 refers to the estimated number of non-nationals living in Chile at the time of the coup, most of whom have given no indication of any desire to come to Canada. Two thousand persons have registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and our teams have talked with many of these people in the camps where they are located. In addition, application forms for admission to Canada have been made available to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for distribution to these refugees and to date the response has been slight. It is well known to them that Canada is receptive to refugee applications. This may stimulate increased interest in Canada and, in anticipation of this, an additional immigration officer and a medical officer have been sent to Santiago. Outside the UN centres there is an increasing interest on the part of Chileans in coming to Canada, and we are in a position to deal with these applicants.

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All of these teams, as well as the United Nations personnel on the spot, have confirmed the fact that until recently relatively few people had expressed interest in immigration to Canada. This is true for those in Chile as well as for those located in Panama, Honduras and Argentina, many of whom have been contacted by our special teams.

For those people who wish to settle in Canada as a result of the coup, the provisions of Canada's ongoing refugee program will be applied. These include: relaxed selection criteria, although medical and background checks will still be carried out; accelerated immigration processing; language training and job placement services; assistance to cover transportation costs; financial assistance to provide for accommodation, winter clothing and other such special support necessary to facilitate early