

*Statements by Ministers*

What was that transition to which I have referred? We are no longer experiencing the luxury we experienced in the 1960s and the 1970s of going abroad to select quotas of refugees in a very orderly and sensible way. In the early 1980s, the situation shifted so that people came to our shores to make application from here without waiting for visa officers to visit them in their camps. That is why the previous administration commissioned Rabbi Gunther Plaut to recommend a system that would evolve with the times and adapt to the new phenomenon. We did not want to have a system that continuously operated in the past but one that was updated, one that works.

We would not have allowed the Plaut report and its recommendations, the report of the Standing Committee on Employment, Labour and Immigration and the reports made by countless NGOs and church bodies throughout the country, to have sat for three years without taking any action on them. The Government preferred to engage in public relations exercises in order to try to address public opinion rather than to deal in a substantive way with the matter of policy and the way the process would work. That is the aspect of this situation that is so troublesome. It is not the case that the Government discovered only this past summer that there was a problem with the refugee processing system. Those problems have multiplied since 1984 because our system has not been able to react fairly enough on the one hand and quickly enough on the other.

Therefore, we as a Party advocated separating the current system into four basic steps. There would be an inquiry at the border, an oral hearing, the possibility for a review, and, if that review was refused, then there would be the possibility of an appeal to the Federal Court. We were trying to suggest a system that would be able to deal with the numbers that were coming to our shores rather than to get Canadians hysterical and to undermine our traditions and international obligations.

The Government cannot say two opposite things. It cannot be more restrictive and regressive on one hand while on the other hand expect to live up to its international obligations under the Geneva Convention. The Government is trying to suggest that some opposition Parties or other Members of Parliament are in favour of abuse. For nearly two years we have been suggesting that the abuse must be cut out. Why is this? If we value the legitimacy of *bona fide* refugees, if we value the integrity of our system and the respect for it, then we need to curb abuse. We need to stamp out the practice of putting forward fraudulent claims.

More important, we advocated for two years that the Government clamp down on the growing networks of illegal and phoney immigration consultants and smugglers who traffic and trade in human lives and make huge and immoral profits. Communities provided names of such consultants operating in Toronto, but what happened? As we speak today those individuals are on the streets of this nation conducting business as usual. The RCMP did make raids on a number of consultants and their operations but without the full force of the law. There was no cease and desist order from the courts and

therefore those individuals will not have to appear in court for perhaps another couple of years. In the meantime, they are conducting business with immigrants around the world. At that time, in the House of Commons, in committee and during Question Period, we were very much on the side of cutting out abuse.

We have looked at the new piece of legislation that was introduced by the Minister and we are prepared to consider the options the Government has tabled through Bill C-84. For instance, higher penalties for so-called consultants or smugglers is not something with which my Party has a problem. If it can be proven that con artists continue to carry out their schemes and their scams, then those individuals deserve to feel the full brunt of our law, and that will send out the right message.

Clamping down on the various transportation companies and having them begin to scrutinize the documentation of passengers much more severely is a provision that could be amendable through debate in Parliament. However, we cannot be so rigid as to suggest that anyone without documentation is suddenly and automatically a cheater. All parliamentarians have experienced in their own constituencies the cases of individuals who have fled certain regimes but who were not able to have the luxury of presenting themselves to consulates and embassies for fear of persecution, for fear that the secret police would monitor things, and Chile is a perfect example of this.

While we do not condone fraudulent or misleading documentation, we are not prepared to say holus-bolus that anyone who does not arrive with documentation is automatically perceived to be a cheater. That would be counter to the reality of legitimate refugees who run for their lives because of political, religious or other pressures. That is the reality of the world of disorder that the refugee lives in. Any legislation we propose has to deal with that reality and not the public opinion polls or the Government's 23 per cent popularity.

● (1150)

Canadians very desperately want the Government to get the message this time. The system needs to be reformed and improved so it will have the confidence of Canadians. That is why I suggested to the Government House Leader that we need parliamentary scrutiny of the legislation so that six months hence we will not have glaring loopholes staring us in the face. We want to avoid court challenges under the Charter based on some parts of the proposed legislation. That would lead to a system even more chaotic than the one we find ourselves with now. In those circumstances the confidence of Canadians is undermined.

Canadians have not been demonstrating bigoted or racist attitudes in the last several weeks. They are becoming impatient with a Government which has failed to come to grips with the problem of developing a system to help the *bona fide* refugee. After all, it was only with the support and confidence