

● (1300)

I think many people had hoped that there would be some fundamental changes to Bill C-55 and Bill C-84 when the Hon. Member for St. Paul's (Mrs. McDougall) took over the portfolio of Employment and Immigration. I thought she would return with legislation which would exclude the possibility of turning a boat away. I would have thought that she would have done that because in a period of war this country, not Vancouver, not Toronto, not a specific community, responded in a racist way by turning away a ship full of Jewish refugees who were seeking solace here. Eventually that ship was sent back and those people went to their deaths. That is a tragedy that should hang on the consciences of all Canadians, because that decision was made by a Government representing the people of Canada. We have made mistakes, and that one was a deadly and racist mistake that resulted in sending people to their deaths.

Why should we today, through a new piece of legislation, grant future Ministers the right to commit the same deadly errors that were committed in the past? Unless amendments are accepted, the Minister will actually be able to give responsibility for such a decision to someone else. A Minister or even a civil servant would be able to decide, on behalf of the people of Canada, to turn away a ship full of people.

I do not think anyone is suggesting that owners of ships who trade in human flesh and are trying to milk desperate people for hundreds and even thousands of dollars should not be dealt with, but surely the best way to achieve the dual objectives of opening the arms of our country to refugees and at the same time making sure that those who exploit them are dealt with in a severe fashion is a different way than the one proposed by this Bill. We can do it in a better and more humane way.

We can achieve those goals by permitting those who arrive on a boat to land in the same way as any other refugee. At the same time, we can bring in legislation which permits the seizure and sale of ships so that those who actually try to trade in human flesh will realize that they cannot sell passage to desperate people and walk away from it.

The owner of the ship that came in last summer walked away with hundreds of thousands of dollars. He was never dealt with. If we had seized that ship, fined the owner, and perhaps imprisoned him, that would have been the right way to deal with the culprit without victimizing the victims who are genuine refugees or, at the very least, people who have the right to be heard. These people had the right to plead their case without having a political decision being made by a Minister responding to the hot political climate of that particular summer. There should not have been a sudden determination that anyone who comes to this country of a different colour or race might not be desirable and therefore may be sent back.

I do not think we want to repeat the racist mistakes that Canada made in the past and for which we are all responsible. If we pass this legislation as it is currently written, we will be

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conferring on future Governments the ability to commit the same deadly errors that were committed when we sent a boatload of Jewish refugees to their deaths during war. I do not think we want to do that.

I do not think the Government has thought through the impact of the legislation it is asking Canadians to accept. All Canadians are proud of the fact that Canada is the only country that has actually been awarded international recognition for our contribution to the resettlement of refugees from Vietnam. Individuals have been recognized over the years, but Canada is the only country to have been awarded such international recognition.

With these two pieces of legislation we will destroy, in one fell swoop, Canada's reputation as a country with a humane policy toward people who are desperate, people who are without a homeland, people who are so desperate that they will pay someone thousands of dollars to get on a ship that may lead to nowhere. These people could be put on a life-raft out in the middle of the ocean, but they are so desperate because they are homeless and stateless that they are willing to take that chance. As a native born Canadian, I cannot even conceive of the desperation that I would feel if I would have to pack up my family—

**Mr. Nickerson:** Sit on this side; you will know what desperation feels like after listening to this nonsense.

**Ms. Copps:** The Hon. Member says that if I sit on that side I will know what desperation feels like. I can understand how he feels, given the potential results on Monday.

I cannot imagine how desperate some people must be that they would pack up their families, pay thousands of dollars to someone who at the very least has a questionable business background, and head off on a boat going God knows where, maybe nowhere, potentially to their deaths. Yet we are being asked to pass legislation which will tell those people that they will not even be given a fair hearing in this country. That is one provision of the Bill which absolutely must be changed.

The second area of concern deals with the safe third country concept. Because the Government does not wish to give potential refugees the opportunity to have their cases heard in our country, they will be sent to a third country.

The Government believes that the list of safe third countries should be drawn up by a committee which ultimately reports to the Minister. First, I would suggest that the safe third country concept is not a functional concept in the turbulent political time in which Canada finds itself in relation to other countries. Let us take the United States, as an example.

Most of us would consider the United States a safe country. However, is it safe for a refugee who comes from Central America, lands in Canada, and is then sent to the United States? Do we have any kind of guarantee that the United States will not send that person back to a place like El Salvador where he may in fact be facing certain death, or to a