

Adjournment Debate

tion of individual liberties, which get virtual consensus in our country.

Mr. Speaker, I am amazed at the good conscience of the minister's advisers in this field. It is obvious that their vision of the Argentine situation is quite different from what my colleagues and I have been able to see during the week we spent there last October. This difference was already clear during the long discussions we had with our representatives in Buenos Aires. According to what they said, you would have thought that the coup of last March 24 was only one more incident in the political history of Argentina, and that the conditions of the political refugees coming from neighbouring countries had been only slightly affected when the army took over in Argentina.

One should know, Mr. Speaker, that Argentina today is no longer the open land that it traditionally was for political dissidents from surrounding countries. Because the new regime is hostile to them, they live in a climate of fear that the commendable efforts of the UNHCR are not enough to alleviate. Indeed, they had good reason to be fearful. One only has to recall the kidnapping last May right in the middle of Buenos Aires and the subsequent assassination of two Uruguayan refugees, Senator Michelini, a former minister of industry and commerce of Uruguay, and his fellow citizen, Mr. Gutierrez Ruiz who was Chairman of the Congress in his country. Yet those were two politicians belonging to moderate formations whom the Uruguay security forces, apparently acting with the tacit consent of Argentine authorities, picked up in a hotel rented by the United Nations High Commissioner right under the nose of the Argentine police. In that respect, it must be said that the protection offered by the police varies from day to day and that at certain times it is virtually nonexistent.

At the very time we were in Argentina, a raid was made by the security forces in a place housing refugees registered with the United Nations in Argentina's second biggest city, Rosario. Some fifty persons were thus detained during 24 hours, without any apparent reason.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that a large number of those refugees should strongly desire to leave Argentina. In fact, about a quarter of the 10,000 refugees registered with the High Commissioner for Refugees are considered urgent cases, that is individuals whose physical security can not be assured. So I am surprised that it could be suggested that few refugees want to find refuge in Canada because it goes without saying that the majority of those individuals would be quite happy to be in Canada. Indeed, a visit we made in a place accommodating refugees in that category showed us the obvious interest they have for Canada. We were literally assailed by many requests, for representations to the Canadian government by those living there.

Mr. Speaker, it must be recognized that Canada generally contributed a much larger share than the rest of the whole world to the solution of those difficult problems. However, this should not appease our conscience to the point where we should close our eyes to the miserable plight of people whose

only fault for most was wanting to create a fairer social order in their country.

It is interesting to know, Mr. Speaker, that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees rejects about half of the request for political refugee status that are made to him. As to Canada, it rejected 70 per cent of the 1,284 cases submitted by the High Commissioner between January and September of this year. It is a scandalous rate of rejection of which we cannot be proud.

● (2210)

Furthermore, the Canadian embassy is known for being unable to react quickly in emergency situations so that fewer and fewer cases are referred to it. Last week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asked for a meeting with the officials of the embassy in Buenos Aires to make them aware of the problems created by the slowness of our admission procedure. So we cannot say that the relationship with the High Commissioner is really good.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that those who report to the minister on the situation in Argentina do not really understand the political events happening in that country. They do not realize that it is improper to unduly extend the stay in Argentina of people who are not welcomed there and who, according to a senior official of the ministry of interior that we met, will be deported to their country of origin if a third country is not prepared to receive them.

And how shall we establish if a refugee can stay or not in Argentina? The decision is based on the information given by the government of the country from which they fled in terror. Of course, they would not be welcomed back very warmly.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is essential that the minister decide to give more credibility to his young officials who perceived the distorted reality through a prism formed by three parliamentarians from political parties who got 95 per cent of the popular vote at the last elections and who have a long experience of those problems. If he cannot make a decision I encourage him to make arrangements so that an experienced official of the Department of External Affairs may go there and evaluate the political situation in the near future.

It must be remembered that it is only after the political situation was assessed by a high ranking official of recognized competence that Canada could start to decently discharge its responsibilities in Chile after the coup of September 1973.

Mr. Arthur Portelance (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as indicated previously by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), immigration applications by Chilean and Uruguayan refugees are normally processed within two to four months. In cases where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or one of our officers identify an instance of particular urgency, a refugee can be accepted within days. There is no interview waiting list in Buenos Aires. Refugees are interviewed as soon as their application is received. Right now the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees