



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 56/37

SPECIAL SESSION - 22nd PARLIAMENTHUNGARIAN REFUGEES

Following is the text of a statement in the House of Commons by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Hon. J. W. Pickersgill, on Wednesday, November 28, 1956.

The other evening when I spoke on the address I reported to the House everything which the Government had decided to do up to that time; but this afternoon the Government had an opportunity, for tragic reasons, to give further consideration to this question, and it was decided that as almost all refugees have nothing with them, have nothing they can bring with them except the clothes they are wearing, and as many of them have little or no money, it was not reasonable to expect them to try to establish themselves in this country with a debt over their heads at the very start.

It has therefore been decided by the Government not to make the assisted passage a loan but to make it free. This policy, of course, will also apply to those who have already arrived and to those who are en route and who have given an undertaking to make repayment.

I think perhaps I should also tell Hon. Members the Government decided this afternoon, in order to be quite satisfied everything was being done that could and should be done to move as quickly as possible to Canada those Hungarian refugees who wish to come here, that it might be desirable for a member of the Government to go to Vienna to see that everything was being done that could be done. I am proposing therefore to leave on Friday afternoon, and I expect to be in Vienna on Saturday.

S/C

SPECIAL SESSION - 22nd PARLIAMENT

THE SITUATION IN HUNGARY

Following is the text of a statement in the House of Commons by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Hon. J. W. Pickersgill, on Monday, November 26, 1956.

"I am going to try, as objectively and dispassionately as I can, to explain the situation as it has been reported to me and as I understand it what is the precise problem. I shall try as precisely as I can to indicate what the government of Canada has so far done about it.

As hon. members know, the Russians moved against Hungary on Sunday, November 4, and they began shooting down people in a frightful manner, not only in Budapest but all over Hungary. Almost immediately there was a stream of refugees across the Austrian border, a stream which has not ceased to flow, a stream which with every day that passes is creating more difficult problems for the government of Austria. Austria has improvised camps for the temporary relief of these refugees, and it is their desire to get the people out of those camps and moved to some other country just as quickly as possible. It is not that they are not hospitable, it is simply that they want to use their limited resources in order to take care of the new people who are crossing the border.

On the morning of November 6 I issued instructions to our office in Vienna that priority was to be given to applications from these Hungarian refugees, that any such applications were to be processed at once, and that if there were other things the Austrian government wanted us to do in order to help in this matter our officers were to let us know what they were. They were to advise as quickly as they could how much extra staff would be required, and they were given full authority to engage any local help that was necessary. They were told that we would transfer staff from any other office in Europe without delay, and regardless of whether it impeded other operations, in order to cope with whatever flow of refugees there might be.

I think anyone who has stopped to reflect on this matter for two minutes will realize that in the first week or for the most of the first ten days of this movement of refugees very few of them would be thinking about crossing the Atlantic or going to Australia. They were thinking about where they would get their next meal, they were thinking about what had happened to the other members of their families who had not escaped, they were wondering what was going on in Hungary and whether the revolution from which they had hoped so much, was going to be crushed or whether in fact a situation would be created which would enable them to go back to Hungary. I think the majority of them are still preoccupied mainly with those considerations.

But within a week there was an increasing number of people who decided that the best thing to do would be to go to Canada, the United States or Australia, at least to settle down for a while because there was not much hope in Hungary. We discussed with the Austrian government whether we should send teams into the camps and they asked us not to do so. They said, "You cannot send people across the Atlantic or to Australia unless they want to go". That means you have to ask questions and delay their movement. It does no great harm to anyone to be sent to Switzerland, Sweden, Germany or some other adjacent country from which he could go back home without too much trouble and where he can remain while he makes up his mind. They told us that they wanted to move these people from the camps, as quickly as possible, to other countries, where other countries had offered refuge. They told us that what they wanted was to have the United States, Canada and Australia deal promptly with those people who had indicated that they were interested in going to one of those countries. They told us that they would send such people to us, and that is the way the thing has been proceeding so far.

We indicated on the morning of November 6 that not only was priority to be given to whatever applicants there were, not only was the staff to be increased to handle whatever flow there was, but that anyone who wanted to come and who was physically in position to come would be given assisted passage without regard to what means he had. That was the case and it has remained the case. We did not inquire whether the loan would be paid back. We hope it will be paid back in due course, because I believe most of these people are going to have little difficulty in getting established in Canada in the next few months.

I also made it clear in Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver or wherever anyone asked me about it that any responsible individual or organization in Canada was at liberty to sponsor immigrants, either people they might know about or simply to make facilities available for people whom they did not know. This would include people who were not able to look after themselves and even people who were in need of medical treatment. I also said that if some of these people required medical treatment and therefore could not by law be admitted to this country as immigrants, I would use the powers that parliament gave to the minister under the Immigration Act and admit these people for treatment wherever, whenever and as often as arrangements could be made for that treatment. I also said that every application to any immigration office anywhere in Canada by Hungarians or Hungarian-Canadians for specific people was to be received and every possible effort was to be made to locate these people if there was a reasonable prospect of their being among the refugees or if there was any prospect of their getting here in any other way.

I have been in very close touch with the situation in Vienna. We get reports every day, We have been in a telephonic communication three or four times, and the one thing I have been most insistent about is that the flow must not be stopped, that as many cases as come along are to be dealt with regardless of whether that involves not filling out forms, whether it involves cutting out X-rays, whether it involves doing away with almost any other kind of red tape, if you like to call it that, or normal procedure. Every one of these procedures is useful in settling people here and if they are not carried out the problems when they get here are going to be greater, but we will have to cope with them when they do get here. That is the view I have taken that the main thing to do is to keep the stream flowing. So far there has been no difficulty about doing that.

It also became quite apparent to me when I got back from the Pacific coast at the beginning of last week that the numbers were reaching proportions that were going to be well beyond the capacity of normal transportation to deal with. I took steps at once to get in touch with Canadian Pacific Airlines, Trans-Canada Air Lines and the shipping companies to see what special arrangements could be made, and I announced on Friday that an airlift was being organized. I may say that we got every aircraft that C.P.A. or T.C.A. could

make available, and I announced that publicly. It was given to the newspapers. Some of them did not see fit to give the announcement very much prominence. Perhaps this is not objective, but I do confess that I was a little surprised to read in the Globe and Mail on Saturday that somebody ought to establish an airlift, and because the federal government would not do it somebody else should. Actually I think we are getting every aircraft we know anything about on which we can lay our hands.

We also canvassed the possibility through Trans-Canada Air Lines and the steamship companies of getting enough space to deal with this problem either by air or by sea. On Saturday we learned that between 300 and 400 passengers could be taken on a ship sailing from Bremen at the end of this week, and I gave directions that the whole of the space was to be taken at once. That space will be all filled at the end of the week.

I was a little concerned lest the officer in charge in Vienna was going to be so harassed by the day to day business of the office that he would not be able to look ahead and try to meet the problems that might arise two or three days hence. In consequence I have sent one of the senior officers of the admissions branch of the department to Vienna. He will be there before the middle of the week and he has blanket authority to do everything that is necessary to see that there is no stoppage of this flow.

Of course one can never be sure that all these things will synchronize perfectly, but I have very high hopes that we will be able to take all the people who show any interest in coming to Canada and that in one way or another without too much delay we will be able to find some transportation to bring them here. This is not the problem that worries me. The problem that worries me and that ought to worry every responsible member of the house and every Canadian who is properly concerned about this problem is what is going to happen to these people when they arrive. It is very easy, as the hon. member for Peace River says, to say that we will throw the doors wide open and let anybody into the country, but I hope everybody who advocates that course will be just as anxious to see that some responsible

person is willing to look after these people 20 years from now if we get some of the kind of people who need care for that long.

That is the kind of problem that anyone who has any sense of responsibility has to think about and think about seriously when he is tearing up human beings by the roots and moving them to some other place. I intend to follow the advice of the hon. member for Peace River. I intend, and I have the authority of my colleagues to go ahead and do this, to let in the people who want to come here, and we intend to try to distribute them across the country to the best of our ability. I am very pleased that Canadian Pacific Airlines are going to have their flights direct to Vancouver. I think that is a very good thing. When I was in Vancouver the other day I found there was a good deal of complaint that immigrants, because it cost more to get there, never got there, though that is not borne out by the statistics. But I felt that here was one occasion when we would get some of them to British Columbia first.

I have also arranged a meeting between the social agencies that are concerned about immigration and the officials of my department tomorrow to try to co-ordinate reception, because it just cannot be left to purely local efforts any longer. It can this week, but I think by next week the numbers are going to be so great that there will have to be a lot more organization than there is now.

In that connection I may say that I was very gratified this morning to have a telephone call from the office of the premier of Ontario and subsequently a telephone call from the minister of planning and development of Ontario, the department that interests itself, and quite properly under the constitution, in immigration in so far as it comes within provincial jurisdiction. I told them what we were doing and indicated some of the ways in which I thought they could be most helpful. I told Mr. Nickle, the minister, that I would send him a telegram to confirm what I had said, and as it contains a certain amount of information that is of general interest I think I might perhaps read the text of it to the house. It reads as follows:

In confirmation of our telephone conversation, I

thank the Ontario government for their offer of co-operation in the transportation to Canada and reception here of Hungarian refugees. The federal government, as I announced publicly last Friday, has already organized an airlift through Trans-Canada Air Lines and Canadian Pacific Airlines and we are negotiating for additional air transport. We also have arranged for a ship to sail from Bremen next week end with about 300 refugees.

I am told it will be considerably more than 300.

Where help will be most urgently needed is in reception of Hungarians on arrival in Canada, shelter and care pending settlement and medical care for those who may require it. This last is particularly important in view of relaxation of normal medical examinations in Vienna. We will especially welcome co-operation of the Ontario government in these fields and you are invited to send a representative of your department to a conference in Ottawa tomorrow with my officials and the social agencies on these problems.

Before coming into the house this evening I was advised that the deputy minister of Mr. Nickle's department will be here tomorrow for that meeting. Up to now I myself have not made any specific approach to any provincial government with one exception. The premier of British Columbia called on me the other day about another matter and at that time I took advantage--perhaps that is the right term to use--of his visit to tell him that I was not only the superintendent general of Indian affairs but also the Minister of Immigration and that in that capacity I expected to present the provincial authorities and the local authorities in British Columbia with some problems that I hoped they would do their share to meet.

Mr. Bennett assured me---and he said I could say so publicly; otherwise I would not be saying it--that they would do their share. Personally I hope they will do a little more than their share because they are so obviously wealthier than any of the rest of us. But at least if they do their share it will be a great help.

In that connection I think, at the risk of seeming to be sentimental, I should like to tell the house of something that happened in Vancouver a week ago Saturday afternoon.

I undertook to receive the executive of the native brotherhood of British Columbia. I also agreed at four o'clock that afternoon to receive a delegation of Hungarian Canadians who wanted to discuss this refugee problem. The two appointments slightly overlapped and I could see, through the glazed doors of the office, that the Hungarians had arrived before the meeting with the Indians was quite over. I said to the Indians that these Hungarian Canadians were coming to talk to me about the unfortunate refugees in Vienna and I thought it would be a rather nice thing if I brought them in before the Indians left so that the Indians could express their sympathy to these people. They came in and this happened very pleasantly.

Then that meeting ended and I started my discussion with the Hungarians. Within five minutes there was a knock on the door and the president and one of the other officers of the native brotherhood came in and said, "Mr. Pickersgill, there is one more thing we want to talk to you about". I started to excuse myself to go out and they said, "No; we do not want to go out. We have had a meeting out in the hall and we thought we should not just use words to express our feelings". They put \$50 on the table. I am confident that if other Canadians--all the rest of us who are descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves--do as much as these Indians, who are not very wealthy, did that day, and if we do our full share to help solve this problem we shall have no trouble in this country in absorbing all those Hungarians who are willing--and many of them will not be--to come to Canada in the winter.

For my part I think in due course the problem in Vienna will resolve itself, but that there will be another problem after that one. Many of these people who have gone to Germany, to England, to France or to other countries to go into refugee camps are not going to want to stay there. As time goes on and as this most immediate problem in Austria is alleviated, I think the next step we will want to take is to arrange to send teams into these camps and do what we can to get those people to come here also.

I do not want to conceal from the house my opinion, and the opinion upon which the government intend to proceed next year with our immigration policy, namely that we are

going to need all the people we can get next year in order to get done the essential work that ought to be done in this country. I am not at all worried about the able-bodied people, the people who are able to take any kind of work and are willing to do it, and who are able to support themselves. But, as I said before, I am somewhat worried about those who are going to come because of the policy we have undertaken and who, over the years, are going to be problems for themselves and for us. I do say that I will welcome, as will my department and the government and, as I am sure all of us will, every offer of co-operation; and by offer I mean a tangible, concrete offer on the line, with details about what is proposed to be done and not just vague expressions to the effect that the government ought to do something. We will do everything we can, but I do not want to be responsible for bringing to Canada people who are going to have to live for very long in our immigration halls. Handsome as they are, I do not think they are going to be very much happier in immigration halls than they would be in relief camps on the other side of the Atlantic.

As I said in Vancouver, I am all for bringing to Canada all of these people who will be better off and happier here. But the government alone cannot make them better off and happier. We are going to bring here as many as want to come and for whom we can provide transportation, but we are going to need all the help we can get from everyone able to help us if this thing is to be a real success and a credit to Canada.