

REFUGE

c/o Refugee Documentation Project,
York University, 4700 Keele Street,
Downsview, Ontario M3J 2R6

Editor:

Howard Adelman

Managing Editor:

Caroline Stephens

Editorial Assistant:

Shirra Freeman

Alex Zisman

Technical Assistant:

Patricia Sandquist

Editorial Board:

Douglas Cohen, Montreal

Claudio Duran, Toronto

Arie van Eek, Burlington

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Michael Pitman, Toronto

Linda Weigl, Regina

Typesetting and Layout:

Publications Department,
York University

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Letters

To the Editor:

I was happy to receive the October 1983 issue of *Refuge* in the mail. I am reading it with great interest.

Please pass along my best wishes to Howard Adelman, whom I had the pleasure to meet at the Manitoba conference in August. He mentioned his son's experiences in Central America; I thought Jeremy Adelman's article, "The Insecurity of El Salvadorean Refugees," was excellent.

Shelly Pitterman
Northwestern University

I'm writing now because I've just seen your review of *Refugee Issues: Current Status and Directions for the Future*, that you did in your October 1983 *Refuge* newsletter. As you may have noticed in the introduction, I wrote the manuscript for this pamphlet. It's a fine review and I thank you for it.

On your one point of disagreement, I of course concur that the presence of economic motives for flight does not preclude the possibility that someone could be a refugee. What I meant to say is that the intermixture of economics and political motivations generally makes it very hard to decide in any single case why a person left a country. Haitians in the U.S. now, for example, flee both oppression and poverty. To the degree they flee oppression, no other fact should figure in their case. But some may be fleeing only poverty and it is hard to separate them out from the others, but this is necessary if we are to maintain the integrity of the refugee definition. This is all I meant to say.

Gary E. Rubin, Director,
AJC Center on Immigration
and Acculturation, New York

Quebec's Unaccompanied Minors Programmes

English translation on page 3.

L'article paru dans votre publication d'avril 83, Vol.2 No.4 "Quebec's unaccompanied minors programs" signé par M. John Forrester m'a beaucoup intéressée. Il décrit bien la réalité vécue par les jeunes réfugiés, leur adaptation, celle des familles d'accueil, mais permettez que je vous parle de l'application de ce programme comme il se vit encore aujourd'hui à l'A.M.I.E. (Aide Médicale Internationale à l'Enfance). Notre approche a été différente et nous continuons de fonctionner d'une façon particulière, très proche des foyers d'accueil.

Dès juillet 79 l'A.M.I.E. recevait huit adolescents âgés de 15 à 17 ans, mais ce n'est qu'à l'automne qu'un véritable programme structuré fut mis en place. Les intervenants étaient les ministères de l'Immigration et des Affaires Sociales et quatre organisations (dont TDH et l'A.M.I.E.) qui jeunes, de les placer en famille, d'assurer un accompagnement aux familles et aux enfants. Les Affaires sociales n'incluant pas ces jeunes dans le réseau des enfants aidés ici au Québec, les familles que nous retenions pour accueillir des jeunes devaient cependant être visitées et acceptées par les CSS.

Il est vrai que plusieurs réunions furent appelées où tous les intervenants jetaient ensemble les bases d'une aventure humanitaire dans une orientation nouvelle provoquée par une guerre particulièrement cruelle. Le fonctionnarisme bien encadré par des lois, surtout à l'immigration, acceptait de s'ouvrir, d'adoucir les règles pour collaborer à une action humanitaire plus engageante que tout ce qui avait déjà été fait.

Il fut bien convenu au départ que les jeunes n'étaient pas éligibles à l'adoption à moins d'être officiellement orphelins. Ils sont arrivés en grand nombre en 80 mais chacun était confié à une famille dès son arrivée; nous n'avons pas eu de centre ou de "group-home" et jamais cela ne nous a paru une lacune. Quand l'Immigration nous prévenait, soit environ 8 jours avant l'arrivée des enfants,

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bien plus fort.

Nous déplorons les difficultés et les lenteurs du processus de sélection et d'admission des jeunes réfugiés mais avant de rejeter tout le blême sur des services anonymes, évaluons les sentiments exprimés par nos populations. Que de lignes ouvertes et d'articles dans les journaux pour dire "C'est assez"! Que tous ceux qui veulent "personnellement" sauver un enfant le disent à leur ministre de l'immigration, ne laissez pas des organismes faire seuls les représentations. Chaque citoyen à sa part à faire. Des centaines de mineurs seuls dans les camps espèrent encore; ils n'ont plus 6-8 ou 10 ans, ce sont des adolescents. Leur passé les a sans doute marqués, ils ont besoin de s'appuyer sur des adultes, de retrouver en même temps que la liberté une sécurité intérieure nécessaire pour grandir.

Ni le Canada, ni le Québec ne peut prendre l'engagement d'accueillir un plus grand nombre de jeunes si dans la population on ne peut plus les recevoir, les aider, les aimer.

A l'A.M.I.E. nous sommes convaincus que pour sauver ces jeunes et les adapter à notre monde nouveau pour eux, il faut passer par la famille. L'orphelinat ou le centre d'accueil où certains pays continuent de placer ces enfants ne feront jamais d'eux des citoyens à part entière.

Il y a cependant urgence pour nos gouvernants de se pencher sur le statut de ces jeunes. Leur document d'entrée en fait des "immigrants reçus" mais ils ne peuvent avoir accès à la citoyenneté avant leur 18 ans, à cet âge ils pourront la demander. Ceux qui ont 10 ans aujourd'hui, qui se savent seuls au monde resteront-ils ainsi bien des années, citoyens d'aucun pays et en quelque sorte prisonniers de notre pays qui les a accueillis? Nos familles d'accueil doivent passer par bien des démarches chaque fois qu'elles veulent voyager avec leur enfant hors du pays. Sans citoyenneté pas d'accès aux prêts et bourses pour des études prolongées et que d'autres inconvénients! Il est urgent que tous les intervenants dans ce programme s'arrêtent pour bien penser la continuité de cette action humanitaire si bien commencée afin que "nos" enfants ne soient pas de perpétuels "étrangers".

Madeleine LeBlanc.
A.M.I.E.

belonging is now much stronger.

We deplore the difficulties and delays in the process of selection and admission of young refugees; but before casting the blame upon anonymous functionaries, let us examine the sentiments expressed by our own population. What about open-line programmes and newspaper articles saying, "That's enough"! What about those who want *personally* to save a child and indicate same to their ministry of immigration: don't let organizations make the only representations. Each citizen has a role to play. Hundreds of minors are alone in the camps, holding onto hope; they are no more than 6-8 or 10 years old. They are adolescents. Their past has doubtless left its mark; they need to lean on adults, to regain at the same time as their freedom a necessary interior sense of security in order to grow.

Neither Canada nor Québec can undertake to receive greater numbers of minors if the population cannot receive them, aid them, love them.

At A.M.I.E., we are convinced that in order to save these young persons and have them adapt to our world — a new one for them — they must live in a family. An orphanage or group home where in certain countries children continue to be placed will never make them full citizens.

It is urgent, however, for our governing bodies to reconsider the status of these young persons. Their entry papers classify them as landed immigrants, but they may not have access to citizenship before their eighteenth year, at which age they may request it. Those who are ten years old today, who know themselves to be alone in the world, will they remain so, for so many years — citizens of no country and veritable prisoners of our country that has received them? Our sponsor families go through a great deal of red tape every time they want to travel with their child outside the country. Without citizenship, there is no access to student loans and grants for higher studies, among other roadblocks! It is urgent that all those officially connected with this programme stop to think carefully about the continuity of this humanitarian action so well begun, so that our children no longer be the "perpetual stranger".

Madeleine LeBlanc
Translated by C.M. Lanphier

To the Editor

A review of my work on South East Asian refugees which appeared in *Refuge* (Vol. 3, No.1) though rightly pointing to some of the serious difficulties faced by the refugees in Britain contains several factual errors and some serious misinterpretations of the British refugee programme. Since the review will, for many Canadians, be the only insight they have of the British refugee situation I would be grateful for an opportunity to correct some of the false impressions which it might create.

The review appears to voice some scepticism over the assertion that the Vietnamese refugees in Britain did not have a large established ethnic community which would provide support (as did, for example, the Ugandan Asians). The Chinese community in Britain numbers only 90,000 and is, with a few exceptions, very spatially dispersed.

It is an error to suggest that in Britain refugees 'were not kept in reception centres until they had mastered a basic understanding of the language but were resettled where and when housing became available'. A fundamental aspect of Britain's reception centre policy was the provision of a basic grounding in English. For this reason a minimum period of 3 months was established for refugee stays in these centres (though the average stay was 6 months) and a target of 20+ hours language tuition per week was set. Thus, the reception centre policy did not of itself result in 'a second resettlement without adequate linguistic tools'. Though the resettled refugees do have a poor level of English proficiency, this is more a consequence of the time available to learn (less than 18 months for most refugees in the sample) and the inadequacy of ESL provision during resettlement than of the reception policy.

Inaccuracies concerning ESL emerge again with the assertion that 'a sizable majority of the refugees have regressed in English proficiency since reception'. The actual proportion reported in the publication is 7 per cent. A further error concerns employment rates, the 18 percent in the 20-29 age group reported as unemployed in the review actually being the proportion who are *employed*.

The review stated that Canada has a 'two-track system of strong federal and provincial support complemented by strong commitments of local support'. This contrasts markedly with Britain where there are virtually no local or central government staff involved in the organisation and running of the refugee programme. Given such disparities, comparisons of staffing levels in the non-government sector alone are dangerously misleading. Furthermore, the inaccuracy of such comparisons is exacerbated when estimates of voluntary staff in

Britain are simply based on the numbers employed during the height of the reception programme. Most were short term temporary workers who dispersed as centres closed.

Finally, the review wrongly suggests that I (as I interpret the reference to "British representatives at international conferences") have argued against refugee resettlement as 'a viable alternative'. What I have argued, and still believe to be true, is that if Britain were to accept a further substantial refugee quota in addition to the boat rescue refugees it still receives, significant modifications would need to be made to the reception-resettlement programme adopted during 1979-83.

It is hoped that the points raised above go some way to removing the misleading impressions of the British refugee programme created by the review.

Peter R. Jones,
Senior Research Officer
Home Office, London

Dear Dr Adelman,

We were astounded to read the centre-page article in your October issue entitled "Britain's Southeast Asian Refugees", based on the brief research papers of Peter Jones. From this useful but limited data some very inaccurate conclusions have been drawn.

First, some general points: we do not claim that the resettlement programme for Vietnamese in the United Kingdom has been a resounding success, nor that the agencies' programmes do not merit criticism. The agencies' own report (JCRV Report 1982), which has been available for a year, makes this clear. What we must point out is that the refugees who came to Britain started out with unprecedented disadvantages. The 11,500 admitted under the quotas had virtually all been rejected by the countries of their choice (USA, Canada, Australia, France). Britain imposed no selection criteria (Canada's were notoriously strict). The refugees therefore arrived with no usable educational or employment qualifications. Between 60% and 70% had come to Hong Kong from North Vietnam and had had no previous contact with a westernised society. They arrived in a country with a rapidly growing unemployment problem where there was no existing Vietnamese community and no natural bond developed with the indigenous Chinese population. Moreover, Britain's social security system effectively discourages unskilled people with 5 or 6 children from working, since they are never likely to earn more than their entitlements under State benefit. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that satisfactory settlement has been slow for a great many of these people.

That said, can we address some of the points in the article:

We would not agree that "the main problem in Britain is housing". Good local authority housing has generally been available. The problem has been the non-availability of jobs in most resettlement areas and the consequent lack of incentive and opportunity to learn English in a natural way.

The reference in your article to "reception areas" is perhaps at the root of the extraordinary statements about the staff employed by the three voluntary agencies. In Britain the refugees move from reception centres to resettlement areas. The staffing ratios you refer to apply only in the reception centres, which required all the administrative support characteristic of any hostel. Some Ockenden Venture and British Refugee Council reception centres catered for several hundred people. The staff therefore included administrators, teachers, cooks, cleaners, interpreters etc. If Ontario had 25 staff to settle 27,000 refugees, are we to assume that Ontario has ceased educating refugee children, or does not use interpreters to help the process? Many of the staff employed by the British agencies were themselves Vietnamese refugees who now form the majority of the total of 50 people still involved in resettlement work. These refugees have received intensive training in social skills.

The comments that Ockenden Venture "grew from a very small agency" to have one staff member for 25 refugees and one reception area for 200 refugees, and that the "Save The Children Fund operated in the far north and north-east of Great Britain" are typical of cavalier writing which is wide of the mark. The Ockenden Venture, though comparatively small, had, before the Vietnamese started coming to the UK, twelve residential centres and a regular staff of 65 for its refugee work in the United Kingdom and overseas. It also had a strong constituency of voluntary support. Save The Children Fund operated in the East Midlands and East Anglia as well as Scotland, Northeast England and Northern Ireland.

The article takes selective information from Peter Jones' reports and distorts it. If we were similarly to select a few facts from your accompanying article on Indochinese refugees in Canada, we discover that 80% found English/French language training inadequate, most refugees in Canada feel "isolated and lonely" and 85% feel out of place living in Canada. Does that constitute and "excellent report card"?

Finally, we would be interested to know which "British representatives at international conferences argue that resettlement of refugees is no longer a viable alternative"? We have never heard this. What some of us do say is that resettlement cannot be the *only* solution to any refugee problem and is not appropriate for many individual refugees.

We are in good company. Last month the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said in Geneva that it was now clear that resettlement could not be the only solution to the problem of Indochinese refugees in Southeast Asia.

Martin Barber - Director: British Refugee Council

Joyce Pearce - Executive Chairman: Ockenden Venture

Julia Meiklejohn - Director: Refugee Action (ex-SCF)

Editor's note:

We are grateful to Messrs. Jones, Barber et al for writing to clarify matters on our review article. We found the British Refugee Council's (BRC's) clarifications about the background of the refugees particularly helpful. We are also grateful to Jones for pointing out that the phrase "sizeable majority" in reference to regression in language proficiency is incorrect. In fact, our original manuscript had the term "sizeable minority" extracted from p.25 of the report and 'minority' somehow became transposed in the typescript to 'majority'. A similar error occurred in the alteration of 'employed' to 'unemployed'. We are most apologetic for the two errors.

However, we would like to clarify that no scepticism was stated, implied or intended about the absence of a large established ethnic community. We quoted Jones' statement about "the almost complete absence of an established ethnic community". What we did imply was surprise (not doubt) that this was the case given that Hong Kong is a Crown colony. Our surprise is somewhat diminished when we learn from Jones' letter that there were 90,000 ethnic Chinese. Evidently, "absence" referred to a concentrated community and not to the Chinese themselves.

We see no conflict between Jones' assertion that refugees were provided with a *basic* grounding in English and our interpretation of his report that refugees were not, as in continental Europe, kept in reception centres until they had *mastered* a basic understanding of a language. Jones, in his report writes (p.27), "The discussion has highlighted the low levels of English ability amongst the refugees and the relative paucity of E.S.L. provision following reception".

The BRC's disagreement with the assertion that the main problem was not housing but jobs in the resettlement areas seems to be a distinction without a difference. If refugees are not settled in areas where there are jobs because there is no housing, but are settled in areas where there is housing but no jobs, from our perspective the problem seems to be a lack of housing in areas of employment,

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since this is more easily corrected than lack of jobs in areas where housing was available.

The BRC's new information that many of the refugees were employed in the reception centres makes the unemployment figures quoted even more staggering, but it does not detract from our surprise as Canadians at the high ratio of employees to assisted refugees.

With respect to the assertion of cavalier writing re our comment that the Ockenden

Venture "grew from a very small agency", we can only quote from the report published by the British Home Office from which the comment was drawn: "The subsequent months saw Ockenden expand rapidly in size from what had been a very small organization...". It is not cavalier to accurately represent a British government report. Similarly, it may be much more accurate to detail the specific north, north-eastern and eastern areas of Great Britain, but the use of a more general geographical terminology is not cavalier.

Concerning British representatives at international conferences who argue that resettlement of refugees is no longer a viable alternative, I assure you that it was not Mr. Jones nor the other writers, though it was stated in my presence by two British representatives at an international conference that both Mr. Barber and I attended.

Finally, we invite any of the British correspondents to write a review article on any Canadian reports or on our settlement policy and we would be pleased to publish it.

The Editor.

U.S. News

Senate Appropriations Committee Restores \$25 Million for Refugees

The Senate Appropriations Committee chaired by Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-OR) marked-up the Foreign Operations Appropriation bill and restored \$25 million to the Migration and Refugee Assistance fund which had been earlier deleted by Senate conservatives. This fund contains both domestic resettlement grants and international refugee assistance.

* * *

Humanitarian Aid to Central American Refugees

A report prepared at the request of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary found urgent humanitarian needs among a total of 754,200 refugees and displaced persons in Central America and called for increased humanitarian assistance to the area. Senator Edward M. Kennedy requested the report as Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee.

* * *

Reagan's Refugee Ceilings

The 72,000 worldwide refugee admission ceiling shall be allocated among the regions of the world as follows: 50,000 for East Asia; 12,000 for the Soviet Union/Eastern Europe; 6,000 for the Near East/South Asia; 3,000 for Africa; and 1,000 for Latin America/Caribbean; and an additional 5,000 refugee admission numbers shall be made available for the adjustment to permanent residence status of aliens who have been granted asylum in the United States, as this is justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest.

Refugee Welfare Dependency Rates in the U.S.

In the December 1982 issue of *Refuge* (Vol. 2, No. 2), we published an article criticizing the distorted use of refugee dependency rates in the U.S. Congress. The Refugee Policy Group published an analysis of the meaning of Welfare Dependency Rates as an Indication of the Adaptation of Indochinese Refugees in the U.S.†

The most recent increases in welfare dependency rates can be attributed fully to methodological and statistical variation rather than an actual change in patterns of welfare use. The seeming increase in welfare dependency from 1979 to 1981 was caused by two inter related factors:

- Changes in the distribution of the refugee population from greater proportions of older arrivals to greater proportions of new arrivals.
- The Refugee Act of 1980 restricted eligibility for refugee programme welfare benefits to not more than 36 months, resulting in a change in the time-frames used to calculate the welfare dependency rate.*

The seeming increase in welfare dependency rates was compounded by other changes in calculation methods that caused an overestimate in the 1981 rate.

Until 1981, the welfare dependency rate was calculated from data collected from all states participating in the refugee programme. In 1981, however, the statistic was based on a survey of nine states. Since these states actually accounted for a larger share of eligible refugees in 1981 than they did in previous years, it is likely that there were fewer refugee welfare recipients nationwide than was assumed.**

Further, included in the welfare recipient population in the 1981 survey were non-Indochinese and non-Cuban refugees, but these other groups were not included in the number of eligible refugees. Had the non-Indochinese refugees been removed from the recipient category or added to the eligible category, the welfare dependency rate would have been lower.

The welfare dependency rate of refugees who arrived in 1975 was lower during their first 36 months in the U.S. than that of refugees who have arrived within the last three years.

However, it is important to understand that the majority of 1975 arrivals were educated at the secondary or university level while the majority of post-1979 arrivals have had little or no education. The overall welfare dependency rate for each group has reflected the experiences of the dominant class within that group.

By adding a control factor for education level in calculating welfare dependency rates, much of the variation between pre and post 1979 arrivals would be eliminated.

Because of the susceptibility of these aggregate welfare dependency rates to variations caused by statistical factors, they are not the best statistics by which to measure the effectiveness of the refugee programme. It is likely, though, that welfare utilization patterns will continue to influence perceptions about refugee resettlement. Changes in methods of calculation should therefore be considered.

H.A.

*This change took effect on April 2, 1981.

**In reviewing this paper, an ORR representative notes that an adjustment factor was used, but that it underestimated the change in population size.