

# MONTREAL, TABLE DE CONCERTATION AU SERVICE DES REFUGIES VOLUME 1, 1983, OCCASIONAL

— A Review —

The Table de Concertation, a group of social service NGOs now in its fourth year of activities for refugees, has launched this occasional periodical which contains a mix of articles about settlement of refugees in Montréal, personal testimonies, short poems, and news items of interest to refugees and their advocates. Editor Constantin Stoiciu has put the accent on questions of cultural adaptation of refugees (and to a lesser extent newly-arrived immigrants from developing countries) in the Montréal area.

Each issue appearing last year revolved about a separate topic: la semaine des réfugiés (May 7-14, 1983); intercultural integration and cultural adaptation in Montréal (July and September, 1983), and the October 21 demonstration on behalf of inland refugee claimants (December issue). Correspondingly, the themes of bureaucratic litigation, phenomenological and critical appreciations of cultural life, and unification of refugees for particular political purposes occupy much of the space of the respective issues.

Although the theme of inland refugee claimant determination problems is a persistent matter throughout Canada, Montréal is particularly affected because of a relatively large number of such claimants (more than 1200). The Table de Concertation has established a shelter and series of services to assist these claimants since other forms of financial assistance formerly provided by the federal government were withdrawn in November, 1980. Forceful arguments are advanced about the serious problems in family and personal life which ensue upon delays of 6 months to 3 years in the claimant process. The executive of the Table de Concertation and another service organization deposited a brief with Immigration Canada calling for a moratorium on the withdrawal of medical and social benefits to such claimants, while requesting that the Québec Ministère d'Immigration intervienne officially in the granting of immigrant status and that Canada add an additional "first country of asylum" status to its categories of

eligibility for residents of Canada.

The editor transformed the strident political tone of the spring issue to a critical appreciation of cultural life in later issues. He solicited articulate and sensitive testimony from former refugees and immigrants of a wide variety of backgrounds, all of whom have written professionally since their arrival in Montréal. Despite considerable shifts from article to article in style, content and approach, each exemplifies the intent of the journal: to indicate that a plurality of cultures need not imply homogenized contributions.

Nevertheless, the December issue underlines the necessity for unification of refugees in order to support the distressed situations of refugee claimants, for whom NGOs and earlier-arriving refugees have publicized and politicized a question which previously appeared to have only administrative implications. Still, the editor reinforced his conviction that Montréal (and the rest of Québec? and the rest of Canada?) should move toward "interculturalism" rather than "integration" as a model for assimilation of refugees and new immigrants. Admittedly optimistic and filled with serious social complexities, the goal of the preservation of cultural

integrity of the immigrant's original culture cannot be subsumed by a pan-Québec/Canadian cultural overlay.

The editor's dual focus on the political and cultural does not easily resolve into a single image for this very promising periodical. Clearly, its occasional appearance does not strengthen its ability to advocate immediate political questions. Furthermore, it is unlikely that a journal which attempts to represent the integrity of various cultural backgrounds as expressed in contemporary Montréal can afford the allocation of time or the shift of social and psychological space without weakening the impact of the cultural message. While there are several political arenas available, the cultural life of refugees has received far too little attention. If the editor intends to illuminate a subject clearly, without interference, he would be well advised to develop his themes of "interculturalism" and critical appreciation of life in Montréal from the multiple optics of the newly-arrived residents. A challenge filled with risk and promise.

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## WELFARE DEPENDENCY AGAIN

In several past articles of *Refuge* we have questioned reports that the Indochinese refugees have become dependent on welfare in the United States. A survey by the Church World Service on the American Immigration and Refugee Program entitled, "Making It On Their Own: From Refugee Sponsorship to Self-sufficiency", concludes "that there is no evidence of any significant long-term welfare dependence among refugees". From 1980 to early 1983, sponsors and churches across the country contributed over \$133 million in cash and kind to assist refugee families in moving toward self-sufficiency. The unemployment rate of refugees who have been here over three years drops to 14%, and most of them are actively seeking work. Almost half of them are mothers at home with young children. Only 2% of the refugees are reported to be unwilling to work and only 1% are reported to be not looking for work because they are on public assistance. Again, these results run contrary to some congressional reports which are critical of the refugees.