



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES
REFUGEE

*American Indochinese Refugees:
 Are They Welfare Bums?*

Studies of refugees are an excellent vantage point to gain an insight into the political life, economic policies and values of society.* Studies of studies of refugees provide a shortcut to the same goal. A report of the Appropriations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives argues that 67% of the Indochinese refugees settled in the United States have become dependent on the state. The source of the problem is public welfare and its partner, a poor bureaucracy which provides ineffective management, direction and administration for the refugee assistance program.

"Even though there has been a heavy commitment of funds, resources, and personnel at the Federal, State, and local government levels, the refugee assistance programs have not succeeded in their basic objective of decreasing the level of dependency of refugees participating in the programs. In fact, the dependency rate or percentage of the refugee population receiving cash assistance and other benefits has steadily increased since 1975, the year the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program was initiated. As of June 1981, the nationwide dependency rate reported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) was 67% and growing. For FY 1983, ORR is predicting a nationwide dependency rate of 70%."

This is a shocking conclusion for Canadians who take great pride in the way Indochinese refugees in Canada have adapted so well in spite of a severe downturn in the economy which has affected them disproportionately. But before one asks why the Indochinese refugees have fared

so poorly in the U.S., one must ask first if it is true.

The report draws even more drastic conclusions. The refugees are developing a welfare mentality.

"What is even more worrisome than the immediate dismal situation are indications that a strong 'constituency' is being formed among refugees which expects continued assistance over a prolonged period of time. Most of the aid recipients are being nurtured so that all their wants are being catered to without much work, effort, or sacrifice on their part. Thus, a philosophy or attitude is being engendered — directly and indirectly — that they have a vested right, entitlement, if you will, to: money, housing, food, clothing, medical attention, and educational allowances from Federal, State, and local government sources."

What are the facts? Can you measure dependency?

One method entails comparing refugee resettlement expenditures in different

*See Page 2. Indochinese Refugee Social Assistance Programs in Europe and the United States.

jurisdictions. (Fortunately, the European report, though weak on assessment, evaluation and policy recommendations, has excellent basic data.) The Netherlands, for example, spent FL32,000 (U.S.\$11,500 approx.) per refugee for help and resettlement. The average cost of resettlement per refugee in the U.S.A. was less than one-tenth that figure (\$936.00), including cash allowances for resettlement, medicare and social service costs. In Canada, the cost of resettlement per refugee was U.S.\$4,100 if all costs are considered. For direct social assistance, the cost per refugee was in the order of U.S.\$2,100.

If Americans spend so little to resettle each refugee, how can this be reconciled with the claim that 67% are dependent on the state? The report, unfortunately, never defines dependency. However, one can tease out its meaning by reading the whole report. The contrast with

Cont. on page 3

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

FACT FINDING VISIT TO CENTRAL AMERICA:
 excerpts from the Dawson Report 7

With a commentary by Professor Meyer Brownstone 8

HUMAN RIGHTS AND MASSIVE EXODUS,
 the Aga Khan Report 12

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: a report on
 the UNHCR Executive Committee Meeting 5

