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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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## DOUBLE CHRISTMAS ISSUE

### Refugees in Central America

This issue contains a special section on Refugees in Central America. Included are two perspectives on the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. The articles entitled, "Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico" were written by Hubert Campfens and Jeremy Adelman, both of whom are Canadian scholarly observers who spent part of this past summer in the Chiapas area of Mexico. Although their explanations of the roots of the conflict extensively overlap, one account stresses the primacy of the class nature of the conflict while the other focuses on the racial character of the dispute. The interpretations of the ruthless Guatemalan military strategy combined with a misleading public relations campaign are congruent. So are the accounts of Guatemalan military incursions into Mexico.

The scholars' descriptions differ however with respect to the situation of the refugees within Mexico. Hubert Campfens provides a figure of 200,000 Guatemalan refugees out of a total of 250,000 refugees in Mexico. Further, he asserts that many of them trekked for months over great distances to cross the border. Jeremy Adelman cites from UNHCR

sources that 95% of the refugees come from border villages within a day's walk (though they may have spent months hiding in the jungle) and gives a figure of 40,000 official and 100,000 unofficial refugees. (The May UNHCR figures are 35,000; the U.S. Coordinator of Refugee Affairs says there are 35,000 to 45,000 Guatemalan refugees.)

While Hubert Campfens suggests that huge increases in refugee flows into Mexico are imminent, Jeremy Adelman seems to be more concerned with the plight of the displaced indigenous population in Guatemala. He implies that escape is difficult because of geography and the state of emergency in Guatemala and also, that most of these individuals are probably interned there in "camps".

These different perspectives may stem from the way in which the two authors view COMAR, the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees. Hubert Campfens regards COMAR as humanitarian in intention and authoritative as a source of information. Jeremy Adelman interprets COMAR in terms of the am-

bivalences of Mexican political life. As a result, Hubert Campfens appears much more empathetic to the Mexican officials and their concern to limit the flow, and, when critical, seems to displace part of the responsibility onto the Americans. Jeremy Adelman is openly critical of COMAR's increasingly hard-line posture.

The authors also differ on two points of fact. Hubert Campfens claims Mexico ended its policy of refoulement in 1981. Jeremy Adelman insists it continued until almost the end of 1982. The former claims Mexico signed the UN Refugee Convention in 1982, while the latter claims Mexico is still a non-signatory. (According to the Ottawa UNHCR office, Mexico is still a non-signatory.)

The special supplement on Refugees in Central America also contains important extracts from the "Report and Recommendations to the UNHCR Regarding the Protection of Refugees in Honduras and the Promotion of Durable Solutions" by Martin Barber and Meyer Brownstone.

H.A.



## REFUGE

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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,

### In This Issue

Letters.....	p. 2-6
Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico by Hubert Campfens.....	p. 7
by Jeremy Adelman.....	p. 7
Relocating Refugees in Honduras by Martin Barber and Meyer Brownstone.....	p. 12
Recommendations for Changes in Canada's Refugee Status Determination Procedures.....	p. 16
Refugee Policy: Who's Who in C.E.I.C.....	p. 19
The Canadian Input: the 34th Executive Committee, UNHCR.....	p. 22