

Britain's economic decline has been well publicized. The high unemployment rates in the old industrial cities of Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester have made headlines. In the midst of this employment crisis, Britain took in over 16,000 Southeast Asian refugees. How have they fared?

Three recent publications of Peter Jones* document Britain's program of resettlement of Indochinese refugees, the largest proportion of whom were ethnic Chinese from North Vietnam. Unfortunately, Jones generalizes from the British experience incorrectly to conclude that, "the majority (of refugees from Vietnam) have been expelled because of their ethnic identity." (p.2, *Vietnamese Refugees*) This and other minor flaws detract only slightly from Jones' study of the resettlement of the Indochinese refugees in Britain. But his generalizations caution one to suspect that many British generalizations reflect more on the particularity of Britain than on general truths.

As in Canada, where the escalation of our involvement began with the intake of refugees from the ship the "Hai Hong," Britain's escalated involvement began in October 1978 when the British ship, the "Wellpark", rescued over 380 boat people at sea and the "Anco Sceptre" rescued 100 later that same year. In 1979, Britain began by agreeing to take in 1,500 refugees from camps in Hong Kong and ended up rescuing over 1,400 refugees at sea and pledging to take in 10,000 more from Hong Kong at the landmark conference in July of 1979.

In Britain, even when the largest proportion of refugees were ethnic Chinese, there was, according to Jones, "the almost complete absence of an established ethnic community" for support. This is in spite of the fact that Hong Kong is a crown colony. The cultural divide was considered enormous. Britain saw its ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the same light as Canada viewed its Vietnamese, Kampucheans and Laotians. There was another similarity. Unlike the United States which received, at least in

the early waves, a high proportion of the managerial-professional class of Vietnamese, in Britain, as in Canada, the proportions were relatively small.

What makes the situation of the Southeast Asian refugees in Britain unique is the rate of unemployment. For refugees resident in Britain for over two years, the male employment rate is only 36%. *Only 36% employed!* Was the source of the problem Britain's dire economic circumstances?

Three non-government organizations assisted in the reception and resettlement of the refugees: the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR), the Ockenden Venture, and the Save the Children Fund (SCF) which combined with government representatives to form the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV).

Unlike Canada, but characteristic of Europe, the refugees to be settled in Britain were first brought to reception centres (intended initially to be for 3-4 months) under a policy of dispersed clusters so that not too many would be settled in any one area while, at the same time, there would be sufficient numbers to constitute a community for mutual support.

There was a third and major difference between the U.K. program and that of other countries. Resettlement of the refugees became the charge of the local authorities, the volunteer agencies and the local support group with very little central funding allocated to the resettlement stage after the refugees left the reception centres. Contrast this with the Canadian two-track system of strong federal and provincial support complemented by strong commitments of local support groups, the private sponsors.

The main problem in Britain is housing because there is virtually no private market in low priced accommodation. Local authorities and housing associations which controlled the housing stock were called upon to make housing available which they did in response to

the media blitz on the refugees and which they later failed to do as the refugees receded from the headlines. The result was increasing lengths of stay in reception centres.

The U.K. also had problems with its ESL program, not simply the common ones of co-ordination and lack of fully developed and satisfactory teaching materials, but a unique one of displacement. Unlike the continent, the refugees were not kept in reception areas until they had mastered a basic understand-

Refugee Ne

A number of studies are underway in Canada, assessing the adaptation of the Southeast Asian refugees to Canadian life and the effectiveness of Canadian programs. One of the first of these to reach publication stage is the Ottawa-Carleton Southeast Asian Refugee Research Project entitled, "Refugee Needs Assessment", written by Dr. San Duy Nguyen, Terence Cooke and Tuan Q. Phung.

The key issues, as this report reveals, are, jobs, language and family reunification.

Based on a survey of refugees, sponsors and service agencies, the report assesses the adjustment of the refugees and their needs and problems. In the survey group, 43.5% were ethnic Chinese, 32.7% Vietnamese, 14.0% Cambodian and 9.8% Laotian, almost equally divided between men and women. The spouses of one-sixth of the household heads were not living in Canada.

The employment profile, with 23% listed as unemployed, gives cause for concern; though the rate declined relative to the length of stay in Canada. Surprising are the differences among the ethnic groups; Laotians were below the average with an unemployment rate of 17.2%, while Cambodians were well above the norm with almost 35% unemployed. This is balanced by the fact that in two-thirds of households a second member of the family was working, though almost all the refugees had low level jobs. Only 15% of privately

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ing of the language but were resettled where and when housing became available. Not only did this result in a second resettlement without adequate linguistic tools, but the local authorities frequently lacked the wherewithal to provide an adequate level of ESL training. Further, the language training in the reception areas was disrupted as refugees flowed through with widely differing lengths of stays.

If the economic situation in the U.K., the lack of central sustained resettlement

support, the housing bottleneck, and the disruptions in ESL training were not sufficient, the volunteer agencies had their own weaknesses. BCAR's problems arose largely because the staff were recruited based on experience in Southeast Asia, or at least on colonial experience, rather than familiarity with problems related to a social work within the U.K.

The U.K. experience can be viewed from another perspective. Ontario, for example, resettled approximately one-third of the 80,000 Southeast Asian refugees who came to Canada. Between Project 4000 in Ottawa, the various branches of Operation Lifeline and other local support groups, there was a maximum of 25 employees in total in Ontario to resettle 27,000 refugees; roughly one employee per 1,000 refugees in the non-governmental sector. In the U.K., the Ockenden Venture grew from a very small organization into "an agency with over 200 staff and 26 reception areas" to settle an estimated 5,000 refugees in the northwest of Britain; that is, one staff per 25 refugees and one reception area for 200 refugees. The bureaucratization of refugee resettlement in the non-government organizations is staggering, so one is surprised to read that "Ockenden is characterized by a strong philosophy of voluntary help."

The Save the Children Fund operated in the far north and north-east of Great Britain and adopted a very decentralized structure. The result was a staffing ratio of one per twelve refugees. In reading the report, one gets the strong impression that the resettlement of Indochinese refugees produced employment for the British. If there was a staffing ratio of 1:12 and only one-third of the refugees obtained jobs after two years, the result is one job for a Brit for every four jobs for refugees — a highly inventive but unproductive way to provide employment. It is not surprising that, "lengthy stays (in reception centres) caused a certain degree of institutionalization amongst refugees who, upon resettlement, came to expect a

degree of aid from support group workers."

The U.S. policy pushed towards extreme *laissez faire*. The U.K. policy seemed to be based on a policy of non-government welfarism, but one which benefited the British and left the refugees with housing bottlenecks, inadequate ESL training (a sizeable majority of the refugees have regressed in English proficiency since reception) and high unemployment.

The employment figures provided in Jones' report are staggering. "Of some 3,450 refugees eligible to work (i.e., aged 17-65) only 16% were employed at the time of the survey." Contrast this with Canada where unemployment of Indochinese refugee youth is lower than for Canadian youth. In the 20-39 age group in Britain only 18% were unemployed. Britain is similar to Canada in one respect — the unemployment of the older age group of refugees over 45 is higher than that of the native population. But although the unemployment rate in Canada exceeds 14%, in Britain the employment rate is only 14%. Among refugees in their fifties, only 5% held a job.

Blaming the newness of the refugees for the shocking unemployment rates is nonsense when one provides a comparison with jurisdictions such as Canada. Perhaps Jones is correct that they face "discrimination in the job market." Whatever the explanation, the report is much more of an insight into Britain's structural deficiencies and its decline. It provides valuable information on how and where *not* to resettle refugees.

And if British representatives at international conferences argue that resettlement of refugees is no longer a viable alternative, one can only suspect they are projecting and universalizing from their own structural deficiencies. H.A.

*Peter R. Jones, *Vietnamese Refugees*, Paper 13, Research and Planning Unit, Home Office; London, HMSO; "The Vietnamese in Britain," Bulletin 15, 'Home Office', London, HMSO; "Vietnamese Refugees in the United Kingdom", *New Community*, 1983.

in Canada

sponsored refugees were unemployed while government-sponsored refugees had an unemployment rate of 31%. Nevertheless, 15% were on general welfare assistance, 36.8% owned cars and, of the 83.5% who had television, half had cable service.

As could be expected, the inadequacy of language training received the greatest number (80%) of complaints. But the most serious problems were psychological, primarily caused by the dislocation of families. Such dislocation was widespread with 62% separated from immediate family members.

Another source of longer term concern was the prevalence of depression and anxiety among the refugee population — 55% felt "isolated and lonely"; 85% felt "moderately awkward and out of place living in Canada". But 89% were optimistic about the future with 92% feeling that they were liked and accepted by Canadian people.

In the survey of sponsors, it was interesting to read that 92% maintained contact with the refugees they sponsored even though 24% had moved to other towns or cities. Forty-two percent were still interested in assisting other refugees. No one found the relationship between sponsors and refugees unsatisfactory and 92% said the experience was more than simply satisfactory.

Though far from perfect, an excellent report card. H.A.

Refugee Documentation Centres Meet

(Geneva, June 27 - July 1, 1983)

For the first time in history, a meeting of centres devoted to the collection and dissemination of refugee research and information was held in Geneva under the auspices of the IRIRC (International Refugee Integration Resources Centre) at the Institut Henri-Dunant in Geneva. Representatives of 13 centres (see box) from nine different countries as well as a number of observers from international agencies met to discuss modes of cooperation.

Some centres, such as the Swedish Immigration Board, are government centres (GOs). Others, such as the Australian, were non-government organizations (NGOs). Still others, such as the German, were quasi governmental organizations (Quango's). They also varied in the range of coverage. Some took on the full mandate of migration studies, others, the smaller mandate of displaced persons, and still others restricted themselves to refugees.

Some of these were even more specialized, concentrating on Southeast Asian refugees or only refugees seeking refugee status in the courts in contrast to those involved in mass movements.

In addition to becoming acquainted with each other's activities, the documentation centres agreed to set up an informal network in which the refugee documentation centre in each country would supply all other documentation centres with information and documents produced in its country. These would include: copies of very significant documents available free; publications of the member; lists of important publications available for purchase; abstracts of key documents of that country; an index of all other material produced in that country and acquired or located by the member with a key word index for easy reference; a list of refugee organizations and refugee-assisting organizations in that country.

IRIRC as an international clearing house, will be responsible for providing a working thesaurus for indexing, and

copies of very significant international documents. In addition, it would publish abstracts and a comprehensive index keyworded for easy reference as well as filling in gaps where a country lacked a full capacity documentation centre.

The symposium also passed a resolution urging that "in the planning and budgeting of specific programs, assessment of information, documentation, and research requirements should be made and appropriately supported."

The Refugee Documentation Project invites submissions of

- Abstracts
- Documents
- Reports
- Publications
- Articles
- Names of organizations
- Names of experts.

The RDP will arrange for their redistribution internationally.

Full Name	Acronym	Coverage	Library	Publications	Technical References
Clearing House on Migration issues	CHOMI (Australia)	migration	32 hours weekly	- quarterly abstracts - bibliographies - a magazine <i>Migration Action</i> - occasional papers and reprints	none
Refugee Documentation Project	RDP (Canada)	refugees	35 hours weekly	- bibliographies - periodical, <i>Refuge</i> - occasional papers - research reports	microcomputer d-Base II
Danish Refugee Council	DRC (Denmark)	not known	not known	- not known	not known
	CeDrasemi (France)	Southeast Asian refugees	Research only	- bibliographies - monographs (12)	no
Zentrale Documentations stelle Der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege Fur Fluchtlings, e. v.	ZDWF (Germany)	specializes in refugees and asylum seekers in West Germany	specialized library	- relevant jurisprudence - countries of origin - keyword catalogue	microfilm EDP data bank
Displaced Persons Centre	DPC (Netherlands)	refugees in Southeast Asia		- periodic Review - special Reports - monographs	no
Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems	HURIDOCs (Netherlands)	human rights	a co-op network	- Thesaurus on human rights	yes
Statens Invandrarverk (Swedish Immigration Board)	SIB in general	migration	yes	- not known	not yet
Cooperative Européenne Longo Mai	CEDRI (Switzerland)	Turkish & Kurdish refugees and immigrants in Europe	no	- Information Bulletin	no
	CREDIS (Switzerland)	research and documentation on refugee resettlement in Sweden	yes	- monographs	no
International Refugee Integration Resource Centre	IRIRC (Switzerland)	refugees with a focus on settlement issues	yes	- <i>Refugee Abstracts</i> - bibliographical indexes	data bank
Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem	ASWRP (Switzerland)				
Center for Migration Studies	CMS (U.S.)	migration	yes	- <i>International Migration Review</i> , special issues, monographs	not yet