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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.

