



CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

POLITICS AND REFUGEES:

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

By Howard Adelman

Political questions and refugee problems are inseparable. How should humanitarian organizations assisting refugees deal with the political questions? There are at least three approaches.

One approach assumes that since refugees are a by-product of politics, a refugee problem cannot be adequately addressed unless its political causes are confronted. This conviction characterizes the work of increasing numbers of non-governmental organizations.

The other two approaches give immediate humanitarian issues priority and adopt an outwardly neutral stance toward political issues. Both United Nations bodies assisting refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), adopt this stance. The difference between the second and third approaches - as exemplified by UNHCR and UNRWA - hinges on the issue of resettlement.

UNHCR provides temporary relief while pursuing the objective of finding permanent homes for the refugees as soon as possible - through repatriation, settlement in the country of first asylum or resettlement abroad. UNHCR refuses to get into the political rights and wrongs of a refugee issue, but

Howard Adelman is a professor of philosophy at York University in Toronto.

nonetheless affects the political equation indirectly. To the extent that Salvadorans, Chileans, Southeast Asians, Afghans, Lebanese, Ugandan Asians, Czechs, Hungarians, East Germans, Jews and other post World War II refugees are permanently settled rather than left in camps, an explosive reminder of the source of each refugee problem is removed. When masses of discontented and readily radicalized refugees are dispersed, a weakening in the moral outrage at the causes of their displacement follows.

Resettled ethnic groups have always been divided on the degree to which they ought to attempt to right historical injustice. Many simply want to get on with the job of reconstructing their lives in their new homelands. Estonians, for example, may gather together to remember and protest the elimination of their nation's State, but the protest grows weaker and weaker as the children become Canadianized or

Americanized.

The third approach, exemplified by UNRWA, attempts to completely separate humanitarian and political questions.¹ UNRWA was first established to provide temporary relief for Palestinian refugees. In contrast to UNHCR, it was not mandated to pursue resettlement. UNRWA developed on the assumption that the three solutions of repatriation, permanent settlement in countries of first asylum and resettlement abroad were not viable options: "It was soon recognized that few if any would be allowed to return to their homes at an early date, that countries in the area were economically incapable of absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugees and that the refugees themselves feared they might

¹"Political aspects of the Palestine refugee problem, as well as the question of repatriation and compensation, are the responsibility of United Nations bodies other than UNRWA." *UNRWA: A survey of United Nations assistance to Palestine refugees*, p. 1.

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE . . .

VIS A VIS VISAS 5

How accessible is Canada's refugee determination procedure?

By Michael Schelew

MEASURING GROSS NATIONAL REFUGEE PRODUCT 8

A framework for the classification of refugee source countries.

By Firdaus Kharas

forfeit their claim to return if they somehow managed to establish themselves on a permanent basis."² The political issues were ostensibly left up to the refugees themselves, while UNRWA became a quasi welfare state in charge of the health, welfare and education of the refugees.

What are the consequences of this third approach? What are the effects of allowing the political objectives of refugees to be determined by the refugees themselves while humanitarianism becomes the responsibility of an outside agency?

Since political questions and refugee problems are inseparable, any attempt to assist refugees must have some political consequences and be based on some political premises. One effect, therefore, of attempting to separate humanitarianism from politics is that the political premises become unquestioned assumptions. For example, the Palestinians assisted by UNRWA are by definition Palestinian Arabs. The Palestinian Jews who fled Nablus, other settlements in what is now the West Bank and the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem were not classified as refugees. Nor were the Jews who left

Yemen, Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, etc. Thus the historical past is distorted.

Humanitarian options for the future are cut off as well. For example, one assumption made by UNRWA was that countries in the area were economically incapable of absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugees.³ History has proven this false. All of the Palestinian refugees could have been resettled in Middle East countries just as over a million Jewish refugees from Arab countries were absorbed and resettled in Israel. In fact, most Palestinian refugees have been resettled in these countries. Almost 40% of the refugees live in a prosperous and thriving Jordan. Another 37.5% who fled the West Bank and Gaza when it was occupied and subsequently annexed by Jordan have been absorbed into the economy of Israel since Israel occupied those areas. Although the Palestinian Arabs understandably chafe and protest against Israeli administration and occupation, there is almost full employment in the area and the terrible conditions of the refugee camps are gradually being replaced by new housing developments. Of the over 12% of the refugees in Lebanon, many do continue to be a political problem, in part because they did not settle into a viable economic life. But, in general, the historical facts of the wealth of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Libya, etc., where many Palestinians are employed, prove overwhelmingly that UNRWA's premise that the area was economically incapable of absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugees was false.

UNRWA could not pursue humanitarian options of resettlement in countries of first asylum or in third countries because of a political obligation restricting its activities: the refugees' right to resettle at some date in the homes from which they fled, or to receive compensation if they chose not to do so.

The pure humanitarianism thus becomes politicized to a degree. Rights logically ascribe wrongs, when those rights are not permitted to be actualized. If it is assumed that the refugees have a right to return and they do not return, then the countries from which they fled must be judged guilty for preventing their return. Humanitarian agencies, ostensibly neutral on political questions, cannot help pointing out this corollary to the rights issue, for it creates a critical boundary condition for their activities. Thus, not only does UNRWA blame one party; it attributes the need for its continued existence to the failure of that same party: "Failure to implement the United Nations Resolutions that might have facilitated a solution has perpetuated the need for UNRWA's

³ Ibid.

services to the refugees."⁴ Further, UNRWA claims that "failure to maintain UNRWA's services could be harmful to the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."⁵ The goal of a refugee relief organization - refugee relief - has become tied to a political goal - peace. Whether the peace is just or not depends on one's political views.

The most serious consequence of attempting to pursue pure humanitarianism is that the humanitarian agency becomes part of the no-solution outlook. If resettlement in other countries is ruled out as a viable solution by one party, and return to the country of origin is ruled out by the other, then no solution is possible. UNRWA is destined not only to play its role in a non-solution, but to effectively perpetuate premises which inhibit a solution.

Viable solutions are eliminated because humanitarianism is separated from politics in a way which allows politics to dictate the boundary conditions for humanitarianism. Particular political rights are taken as prior to universal rights. The right of a refugee to return is not a universal right; it is a political demand. Refugees do have universal rights - the right to a home where they can live free of the fear of persecution and where they can provide for themselves. When humanitarian agencies base their efforts on universal rights they diffuse political issues. When humanitarian agencies base their mandates on political rights, the result is a severe limitation on the possibility of solving the refugee problem and an exacerbation of the political issues.

UNRWA, through its attempt at pure humanitarianism, is thoroughly politicized in its assumptions, its goals, its perceptions and its view of the necessity for its own role. If its moral purity is somewhat sullied, its welfare role is even more questionable.

Three factors determine eligibility for the services provided by UNRWA. First, the refugees must be registered as being "persons or descendants of persons whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of that conflict, lost both their homes and their livelihood." Second, the refugees must be in need. Third, they must have taken refuge in areas adjacent to 1948 Israel.

⁴ UNRWA: A survey of United Nations assistance to Palestine refugees. p. 2.

⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

To subscribe to *Refuge*, send your name and address to *Refuge*, 8 York Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1R2. (416) 363-0211.

A voluntary subscription payment of \$10 a year is requested where possible. Some back issues are available at no charge upon request.

² UNRWA "Fact Sheet" No. 9.

REFUGEE

Editor:

Kristin Hanson

Editorial Board:

Stuart Beaveridge, Victoria
Douglas Cohen, Montreal
Claudio Duran, Toronto
Arie van Eek, Burlington
Donald Ferguson, Toronto
James Hathaway, Moncton
Michael Pitman, Toronto
Linda Weigl, Regina

Typesetting and Layout:

Five Seven Nine Design

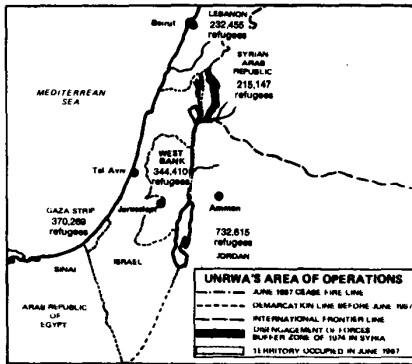
Refuge is dedicated to encouraging assistance to refugees, by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on Canadian and international issues pertaining to refugees. It is published five times a year, in September, November, January, March and May. It is a non-profit, independent newsletter supported by grants from the Canadian Foundation for Refugees, Wintario, Operation Lifeline, and the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission; by private donations; and by voluntary subscription payments of \$10 a year. It is a forum for discussion and the views expressed in it do not necessarily reflect those of its funders, staff or Editorial Board.

Submissions of articles under 2,000 words, letters, news items, facts, quotes, suggestions, announcements, drawings, photographs, documents and summaries of documents are invited. All material in *Refuge* may be reproduced without permission unless copyrighted or otherwise indicated. Credit should be given to the author or source if named.

Special thanks to Howard Adelman for his assistance in the preparation of this issue.

Thanks also to the artists of Dreadnaught Cooperative Inc., Toronto, for their donation of our logo design.

ISSN0229-5113



Source: UNRWA, June 30, 1981

In 1979 there were 1,803,564 refugees registered. In 1952, there had been approximately 1,000,000. In 1949 UNRWA provided a figure of 726,000 refugees.

Was the original figure correct? Even if it was, how did it grow by almost 250% in 30 years?

Emil Ghory, the Secretary of the Palestine Arab Higher Committee, estimated that there were 300,000 Palestinian refugees in July of 1948 following the second truce. Other Palestinians left after that date because they did not want to live in Israel. (They did not lose their homes and livelihood because of the conflict; they lost them because they did not like the results of the conflict. Nevertheless they were registered as refugees with UNRWA.)

Even the addition of these later refugees does not create a total of 726,000 Palestinian refugees in 1949. There was a maximum of 1,200,000

Arabs resident in Palestine in 1947⁶, of which 450,000 to 550,000 were not displaced or left in Israel. Hence, displacement could have totaled 726,000 equal to the total number of refugees UNRWA claims to have registered. But 160,000 Palestinian Arabs remained in their homes or were allowed to return to their homes in Israel.⁷ 40,000 emigrated to distant countries. 70,000 settled in the countries of first asylum but did not register. The maximum number of Palestinian refugees must have been under 500,000.

Where does the discrepancy of 226,000 between this figure and UNRWA's figure come from? Whether pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian sources are cited, it seems that the original number of registered refugees was grossly exaggerated by counting Palestinians resident in Jordan whom UNRWA registered as refugees, enabling them to get ration cards.

The original number of refugees was exaggerated. What about the increase? The Palestinians have a very high birth rate. In the West Bank in the period 1972-1975, for which there are accurate statistics, the birth rate averaged slightly under 45 births per thousand and the

mortality rate around 16 per thousand. If losses due to fighting and net migration are assumed to be minimal, the population could not have grown by more than 3% per year. And this presumes a lower mortality rate than would have been likely in the period 1948-1952, considering the conditions in the camps.

Perhaps it doesn't matter that the number of refugees is grossly exaggerated. Not all registered refugees are eligible for aid: only those in need. In 1979, 46% of the 1,803,564 registered refugees received basic rations. At the time, 37.5% of the refugees lived on the West Bank in Gaza where unemployment was almost nil; and 40% of the refugees were registered in Jordan which was booming with virtually full employment as well.

The original number of refugees was exaggerated. The level of growth was exaggerated. 44% of the refugees received rations although almost 80% lived in areas of full employment. And yet the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Olof Rydbach, argues that in 1980 over 600,000 refugees over and above the 800,000 refugees already receiving rations were really entitled to rations. Unfortunately, UNRWA was unable to provide them "because a limit was placed on the number of recipients several years ago."⁸

I recall visiting the Gaza Strip in 1977. At one major intersection in the Gaza refugee camp, I met a vendor selling flour, rice, oil and sugar. The bags of

⁶ Cf. Terence Prittee, "Middle East Refugees" in *The Palestinian*, Transaction Press, New Jersey, 1945.

⁷ A study very sympathetic to Palestinian nationalism estimates 650,000 refugees. Cf. *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*, William Quandt, Fuad Jabba, Ann Mosely Lesch, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA, 1973, p. 48. Cf. also Don Peretz, "The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem," in P.Y. Hamoud and Sidney S. Alexander, eds., *Political Dynamics in the Middle East*, New York: American Elsevier, 1972.

⁸ UNRWA 1981, p. 13.



Palestinian refugees in 1950 . . . and 1980.

flour and rice were clearly marked "UNRWA". I asked, through an interpreter, why he was selling UNRWA rations. He told us he had bought 140 ration cards. Evidently they are sold like taxi licenses in many cities, and the price fluctuates according to estimates of their future value; that is, estimates of how long and in what quantities they would entitle the holder to receive free UNRWA rations. (Currently the annual basic ration per card in the Gaza Strip is 60 kilos of flour, 4 kilos of rice, 4.5 kilos of oil and 2.4 kilos of sugar.)

UNRWA claims that it is on the brink of collapse from lack of money. It claims that its collapse would lead to "disaster for the Palestinian refugee community, for the host governments and for the peace and stability of the

Near East region."9 The only disaster for the Palestinian refugee community would be for the entrepreneurs and commodity traders who deal in UNRWA ration cards.

Nor would there be disaster for the host countries. Israel and Jordan would merely have to assume their full financial responsibilities for all their inhabitants who participate in their economies. 60% of the UNRWA budget goes to education. Why should the international community subsidize the Israeli and Jordanian governments which clearly could support the education and welfare needs of the refugees?

And as for UNRWA's collapse being a disaster for the peace and stability in the Near East - there is no peace and

9 Ibid, p. 6.

stability in the Near East. To the extent that some measure of progress was achieved through the Camp David agreements between Israel and Egypt, UNRWA had no relevant role.

When thirteen million refugees are in need of assistance, one needn't look far for better uses for the funds that support UNRWA. They could be used to help the refugees produced by the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Two years ago, UNRWA's annual budget was \$238 million per year, to which Canada was pledged to contribute \$3.6 million in cash and \$4.5 million in flour. Now the budget is almost \$300 million.

UNRWA is a costly lesson in how humanitarian organizations assisting refugees should deal with political questions. □

Do immigrant women have adequate access to language training in Canada?

What services is a refugee entitled to if he is sponsored to Canada by his family?

Should special employment services be provided for immigrants?

"WE'LL ANSWER THAT QUESTION WHEN OUR STUDY IS COMPLETED . . ."

A major review of Canada's policies and programs for settlement and integration of newcomers into Canadian society is now complete. The review has been a joint undertaking of the three federal departments involved in settlement: Employment and Immigration, Multiculturalism, and the Secretary of State. The three ministers plan to establish a position on the key policy and program issues raised in the report and make a joint submission to Cabinet. According to Mr. Axworthy the next stage will be consultation with the provincial governments and the private sector, probably in the autumn of 1982.

Sponsorship and Settlement TRENDS IN IMMIGRATION

Have changes in settlement services in Canada kept in step with changes in Canadian immigration patterns in recent years? Gordon Kaufman, Executive Director of the Toronto Region of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada, noted at a recent meeting on sponsorship and settlement services that whereas at one time occupational skills and experience provided the main criteria for

immigration selection, now family reunification is probably the most important consideration. This, together with the provisions for refugees in the new Immigration Act that took effect in 1978, means that most immigration to Canada now involves some form of sponsorship - from family members, from a private group or agency, or from the federal government itself.

Language Training and Settlement TOWARD A NATIONAL POLICY

A major aspect of the settlement review concerns language training for newcomers. Teaching English as a Second Language Across Canada (TESL Canada) has presented to the federal departments conducting the review a position paper on ESL for newcomers subtitled *Six Principles Toward a National Policy*. TESL Canada hopes to see its six principles embodied in any new policy:

- universal accessibility to ESL for all newcomers;
- greater flexibility and sufficiency of programs;
- national, provincial and local coordination;
- functional Canadian orientation and citizenship content in ESL material;
- increased support for community agencies providing settlement services;
- recognition of the key roles of the ESL professional and the ESL profession.

TESL Canada has also proposed a specific model for newcomer integration based on two stages:

Stage I: a full-time three-month reception ESL program called *Welcome to Canada*, available to all newcomers;
Stage II: referral to a more flexible range of Manpower-sponsored options, including "English in the Workplace" programs.

TRENDS IN CANADIAN IMMIGRATION, 1966-1980

YEAR	TOTAL	SPONSORED			INDEPENDENT
		FAMILY CLASS %	ASSISTED RELATIVES %	REFUGEES AND DESIGNATED CLASSES %	
1966	194,743	34.2			65.8
1967	222,876	33.4			66.6
1968	183,974	20.8	19.1		60.1
1969	161,531	20.8	24.2		55.0
1970	147,713	21.8	23.8		54.4
1971	121,900	27.4	24.1		48.5
1972	122,006	27.1	25.2	4.2	43.5
1973	184,200	22.6	24.0	1.3	52.1
1974	218,465	24.8	24.3	0.8	50.1
1975	187,881	34.1	24.3	3.0	38.6
1976	149,429	40.7	21.8	7.9	29.6
1977	114,914	44.7	22.7	6.4	26.2
1978	86,313	52.8	19.9	4.9	22.4
1979	112,096	41.7	10.2	24.9	23.2
1980	143,117	35.7	9.4	28.2	26.7

Source: Canada Employment and Immigration Commission