



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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EDITORIAL

The Canadian Council for Refugees recently held its semi-annual meeting in Montreal. This issue reprints an edited version of some of the resolutions passed at the meeting. This issue also endorses the call for an immediate reconsideration of the backlog program, though from a slightly different perspective than that of the Interchurch Committee. We have joined the non-government sector on repeated occasions in their critiques of government refugee policy. What we have not done previously is criticize the NGO sector. It is time to remedy that omission.

There is a risk. I find that it is easier to criticize mandarins and politicians than dedicated volunteers and underpaid workers in the NGO sector. The problem is not the status and role of refugee workers in the private sector. It is the proneness among some to brand a critic as an enemy and sellout to the government position. I find government officials and politicians acculturated to receiving criticism as if it is their destiny in life. I find many individuals in the private sector prone to adopting a sense of immunity to criticism because their stance is so morally correct.

The problem is not that the NGO criticisms are not generally valid. They

usually are. The problem is the strident, self-righteous tone conveying a sense of permanent moral rectitude and total accuracy whereas the government embodies moral cowardice if not wickedness combined with misrepresentation if not downright deceit.

With all the good will, dedicated work, commitment and conviction, indeed of tremendous sacrifice, of the those in the private sector committed to helping refugees, the tone of the diatribe that has evolved now leaves me with a bad taste. The CCR meeting is the only one that I can remember where an individual actually boasted about being paranoid, as if paranoia were no longer a state of irrationality but had become a revered stance to adopt when dealing with government refugee programs and proposals.

The fact is the NGO sector needs to develop a degree of self criticism and not simply continue to play the role of superego to the government.

As a member of the CCR and active in the NGO community, let me try to initiate some of that self-criticism.

Let us take some of the resolutions passed at the CCR meeting and, ignoring for the moment the verbal excesses, attend to the content and the rationale. Let me start with a tough issue that in itself almost demands that we rally and support it - the grilling of survivors of torture by security and intelligence officials. The resolution calls for an end to such practices. Victims of torture immediately demand genuine sympathy and concern. Representatives of spy agencies invite scorn from humanitarians.

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