

Canadian treatment of Chilean refugees is deplorable

CANADIAN POLICY with regard to the Chilean refugee crisis has been, and is, irresponsible and anti-humanitarian.

Since the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Allende government in Chile last September by the right wing military junta of General Pinochet, Canada has consistently refused to allow thousands of Chileans — many in danger of their lives — special consideration in immigration procedures.

Immigration Minister Andras boasted of his department's "processing" of all 1600 "special" applications received in Chile. He also has stated that the department has placed a ceiling of 800 applications to be approved. The department has admitted receiving 3000 other applications; the same ceiling apparently applies to the whole group. What the department doesn't officially admit is that the special "team" sent to Chile (to speed Immigration application processing in the wake of the coup) reported being swamped by in excess of 1000 applications per day, resulting in an "administrative crisis of major proportions".

At about the same point in time as this report, officials of the Immigration and External Affairs Departments stated that they regard the rising number of immigration inquiries from Chileans "not as a refugee problem but a normal immigration one".

This marked lack of frankness is deplorable enough, but considered along with the extreme danger many of these applicants are in, the governments official policy verges on the sinister.

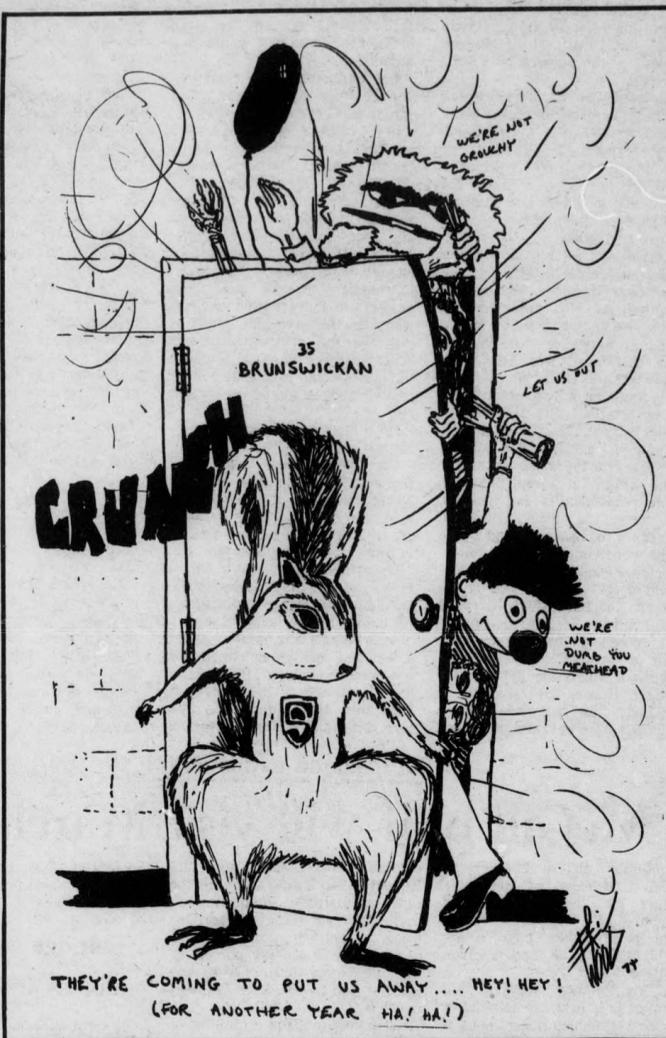
The vast majority of the "special" applicants are non-Chileans — who had fled fascistic regimes in Brazil and Uruguay to safety in Allende-run Chile. They now find themselves in far greater peril of death at the hands of the junta, or deportation to certain imprisonment, repression, and perhaps death in their home countries. Yet the immigration department is flatly refusing to consider admitting more than 50

per cent of their applications. These people are presently being held mainly in a single concentration camp in Santiago. The conditions there are described in a report by the Social Science Research Council of Canada as being "appalling". Sanctuary at the Canadian Embassy has been denied to all refugees of the military regime by order from External Affairs as of February. The embassy was quick to close their doors. Not that they were ever really open; Canada afforded sanctuary to only 71 refugees in comparison to 2500 by Cuba and approximately 400 by each of Sweden, West Germany, France, Panama and Honduras.

Of the special team sent to Santiago, supposedly to speed immigration response to the crisis, only a few could speak Spanish. Most of the contingent were RCMP officers who were rumoured to have spent much of their time scouring Marxist journals for immigration applicants names. It goes without saying that applicants whose names have been found in questionable papers would be refused entrance to Canada, in fact some have.

Reports of torture of Allende sympathizers are commonplace. Weekend Magazine reports harassment of the general public by means of forced curfews, media repression, intermittent incarceration and interrogation of those suspected of having left-wing leanings, and frequent shows of force. Junta soldiers are reported to have publicly displayed mutilated bodies of political prisoners in Santiago and other parts of the country.

Most university officials, professors, and students have been fired or suspended. Those who have supported the Allende regime have little hope of regaining their safety, let alone their jobs. More than 480 University of Toronto faculty have signed letters protesting the imprisonment of three leading Chilean academics. They state in a letter to Minister of External Affairs Mitchell Sharp that "the personal safety of these persons is



threatened." In the light of these facts how can the Canadian Government state that most Chileans are "not really interested in coming to Canada"? How can the Immigration Department blandly state that only 800 of many thousands of threatened Chileans may be allowed to enter the country?

It's undoubtedly true that Canada's numerous financial interests in Chile would be endangered by official affirmative action in response to the plight of

these refugees; but is this a viable reason for throwing Canada's humanitarian tradition of helping victims of political and social upheavals right to the winds?

Canada's response to the situation in terms of immigration and External Affairs Department policy on the besieged country does not seem to be that of a democratic government. If Canada does not reform official policy soon, the blood of thousands could be on our hands.

Neil Dickie

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