

Canada's concern for refugees

Since the Second World War, Canada has contributed millions of dollars towards international efforts to solve refugee problems, welcoming more than 350,000 displaced and persecuted people, or about one of every ten immigrants, reports *Panorama*, Vol. 2, No. 2.

Current commitments include special programs for refugees from Southeast Asia, South America and Eastern Europe, but in recent months the Southeast Asian refugee problem has been the most visible.

Since the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, thousands of people have fled to seek asylum in neighbouring countries.

International consultations

The seriousness of the increasing exodus of refugees from Indochina was made apparent in mid-December, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees convened international consultations in Geneva to discuss the situation. Those meetings reflected the concern that there were already some 200,000 refugees waiting in camps in Southeast Asia, making the burden on the countries of first asylum almost unbearable. There was no more room; the camps were full, and there was not enough food, housing, medicine or money to take care of all the people living there.

In response to the Geneva meetings Canada expanded its Indochinese program to permit the admission of 5,000 Indochinese refugees in 1979 at the rate of about 200 families each month — almost triple the previous commitment to accept 70 families a month.

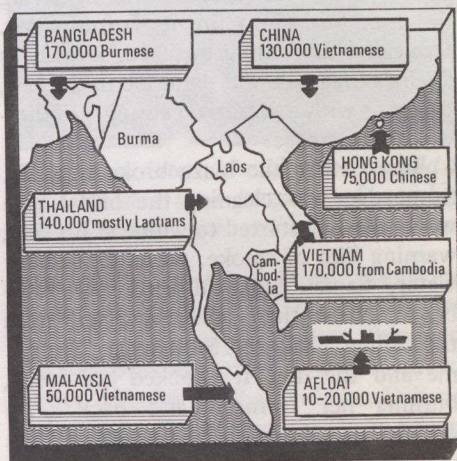
On the heels of that announcement came the news of two more refugee ships — the *Huey Fong* anchored off Hong Kong with 3,300 refugees, half of them children, and the *Tung An* anchored off Manila in the Philippines with 2,300. Conditions on the *Huey Fong* and *Tung An* were similar to those aboard the *Hai Hong* — hundreds of people crowded together without enough food or water to sustain them, many too sick or weak to move. Meanwhile, the countries concerned maintained that their camps were too full to take any more refugees ashore.

Canadian arrangement

On January 16, Canada proposed an arrangement to the Governments of Hong Kong and the Philippines. If they would

allow the ships' passengers to land and be housed in transit camps where the main essentials of life — water, food sanitation and medical attention — could be adequately provided, we would take a reasonable number of refugees from the camps in each country. Other countries, including Britain and West Germany, followed suit, and on January 19, refugees aboard the *Huey Fong* were allowed to disembark.

Where the refugees are



Taking refugees from the camps, rather than from the ships, endorses the premise that refugees on large boats should not automatically take precedence over the tens of thousands who have lived in temporary camps in desolate conditions throughout the region for years.

Despite such positive action by Canada and other countries, there are still thousands of people living a "limbo-like" existence on freighters in Southeast Asian coastal waters and in the camps, waiting for the chance to be allowed to start a new life in another part of the world.

Canada is continuing to work with the United Nations and other major refugee-receiving countries to find a solution.

Industrial hygiene lab opens

Canada's new \$90,000-Industrial Hygiene Laboratory, which opened in Ottawa April 27, will analyze organic and inorganic dusts, fumes, vapours and gases to determine their toxic properties. This work is done under the authority of, and to satisfy the requirements of, Part IV of the Canada Labour Code which is administered by Labour Canada.

Most of the work originates with the regional offices of Labour Canada. Re-

gional staff obtain environmental samples from workplaces under federal jurisdiction (approximately 20,000 workplaces and 600,000 employees) to evaluate occupational health hazards.

Accuracy of lab analyses is of prime importance. Quality of work is essential so that directives issued to employers, following environmental monitoring, are based on reliable data and secondly, if necessary, the accuracy can be substantiated in a court of law.

Minority governments

Public opinion surveys have shown that most people in Canada prefer majority governments. However, since Canadians cannot always decide on which majority government they want, they have elected five minority governments in the past 22 years. As this issue went to press, May 15, the latest decision, as to majority or minority government, was still a week away from the May 22 federal election.

1957-1958	Conservative	Minority
1958-1962	Conservative	Majority
1962-1963	Conservative	Minority
1963-1965	Liberal	Minority
1965-1968	Liberal	Minority
1968-1972	Liberal	Majority
1972-1974	Liberal	Minority
1974-1979	Liberal	Majority
1979-		

If, after an election, no single party has a majority of seats in the House of Commons, a minority government is formed. The party with the greatest number of Commons seats usually assumes power. It is possible for the party ranked second to form a government if it has enough support from the "third parties".

Its subsequent success or failure depends on its ability to secure sufficient votes from one or more opposition parties. This support is necessary to pass bills and to defeat motions of "non-confidence" directed against the government.

Since Confederation in 1867, three governments have been defeated in the House of Commons. An election call usually results. This occurred prior to Canada's last federal election in 1974.

The situation facing a prime minister with a minority government is similar in some respects to a U.S. president who must assemble the necessary congressional support for each piece of legislation.