



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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No. 60/28 WORLD REFUGEE YEAR--THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME

An address in Toronto on June 29 by Mr. W.B. Nesbitt, Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, at a luncheon meeting of the Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year marking the formal end of World Refugee Year in Canada.

... The Canadian Government was one of the early supporters of the concept of World Refugee Year. On December 5, 1958, the Canadian Delegation supported a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly calling for a World Refugee Year and shortly thereafter the Secretary-General was informed that Canada would actively participate in the programme.

From the outset it was evident that this was a project in which there should be both governmental and private participation. The Government took the view that it should contribute in two ways. In the first place it could undertake specific projects which were costly and difficult and somewhat beyond the scope of the voluntary organizations. The Government could also create conditions which would encourage private individuals and groups to give their support to the voluntary WRY programme. The most important thing was to provide a strong lead in the early months of WRY and to announce significant action by the Government. In this way the public could be made to realize that WRY was something to be taken seriously, something which merited active support.

Before dealing with the special steps taken by the Government in support of WRY, I shall refer briefly to the regular annual contributions which have been made by the Government to the various refugee assistance programmes being carried out by the United Nations. You may already be familiar with some or all of these contributions but it may help to keep the picture in perspective if I list them for you.

Canada's Contribution

In 1959 Canada made the following contributions to the regular budget of continuing refugee programmes:

- (a) To the Camp Clearance Programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees.....\$ 290,000

- (b) To the 1959 budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.....\$ 500,000 in cash
1,500,000 in wheat flour
- (c) In addition, Canada contributed in 1959 the sum of \$60,000 to the Far Eastern project carried out jointly by the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. Under this programme refugees of European origin in China, many of whom have been refugees for close to 40 years, are being resettled elsewhere. This contribution was made in 1959 but was made applicable to the 1958 budget of the Far Eastern project.

In 1959, therefore, Canada contributed \$2,350,000 to regular budgets of programmes being carried out by the United Nations refugee agencies. Last winter Canada pledged a further \$290,000 to the 1960 regular budget of the High Commissioner for Refugees and \$500,000 in cash to the 1960 budget of UNRWA. In May last the Government announced a further contribution for 1960 of \$1,500,000 in wheat flour to UNRWA. I might add that the gift of wheat flour was not, as has been alleged, a gift which was forced upon a reluctant recipient. During his visit to Ottawa in March, the Director of UNRWA urgently requested a contribution of wheat flour to assist in the feeding of nearly one million Arab refugees and it was in response to this request that the grant of wheat flour was made.

It is well to keep in mind that, for the latest year for which complete figures are available, Canada was surpassed only by the United States in its contribution to the programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees and only by the United Kingdom and the United States in its contribution to UNRWA. Canada is the only middle power which contributes on this scale to these United Nations agencies. I sometimes hear statements to the effect that some other countries are doing more for refugees than Canada, but when the world-wide picture is considered, it is clear that Canada's support for refugees need not take second place to that of other powers, who often concentrate their efforts in one region.

Admission of Casual Refugees

Canada does not merely contribute money as part of its regular programme of assistance to refugees. I have been surprised to hear some people say that, prior to WRY, Canada did nothing to provide resettlement opportunities for refugees. For years Canada has admitted refugees from the European camps and many who were not actually in the camps. Since World War II it is estimated that more than 250,000 refugees have been admitted to Canada. It is difficult to give an accurate figure because Canada has followed the policy of admitting all new arrivals as immigrants without establishing a special category or label of "refugee". Very often

the documents submitted by the new arrival do not indicate clearly whether he is a refugee or not, and it is possible that considerably more than 250,000 refugees have been admitted to Canada.

The flow of refugees varies from year to year. There was a particularly heavy flow immediately after World War II and another large contingent after the uprising in Hungary. In other years the number has been smaller but it is accurate to say that in every year since 1945 there have been thousands of refugees admitted to Canada. In the last six months of 1959 (that is to say, the first six months of World Refugee Year) between 1,300 and 1,400 refugees arrived in Canada as part of the normal immigration programme. You will realize that I am not in a position to say very much authoritatively on behalf of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, but I have been informed by Mr. George Davidson, Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, that the flow of refugees to Canada under the normal immigration programme during 1960 is expected to be considerably heavier than it was in 1959.

Handicapped Refugees

Canada has also for a number of years permitted the sponsorship of handicapped refugees who would not meet the normal criteria for entry into Canada. Under this programme relatives or one of five recognized church agencies could sponsor specific refugee families from Europe by undertaking certain responsibilities which, in essence, served as assurance that the handicapped family would not become public charges after their admission. Although the federal authorities could not fix a time limit for these responsibilities, it was, of course, open to the various provinces to exercise their jurisdiction in respect of welfare assistance so as to accept responsibility for any future assistance required by the sponsored refugees and thereby terminate the financial undertakings of the sponsors. As you will be aware, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced last autumn that the categories of eligible sponsors would be broadened for WRY so that private individuals, voluntary organizations, and municipal and provincial authorities could act as sponsors for handicapped refugees. On March 17, the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that this arrangement would be extended beyond the end of WRY.

It is interesting to note that several special schemes for the admission of handicapped refugees which have been announced by other governments as special projects for WRY are almost identical with the normal sponsorship programme which has been carried on by Canada for years. I might also point out that the sponsorship responsibilities required by the Canadian Government are no more extensive, and in some cases less extensive, than the conditions of sponsorship imposed by the other major countries of immigration.

Jurisdictional Problems

There have been suggestions that the burden of sponsorship is too heavy for most Canadian voluntary groups to accept, and in March the Canadian Welfare Council presented to the Government a number of recommendations designed, among other things, to facilitate the sponsorship of handicapped refugees by limiting the responsibilities placed on sponsors. This involves a question of financial arrangements between the federal authorities and the provinces and I need hardly tell you that questions involving federal and provincial jurisdiction are extremely complex. The matter is further complicated by the fact that present arrangements between the Federal Government and the various provinces are not uniform, and the question of changing existing arrangements for an indefinite period is one that requires careful study, and often long periods of negotiation before final agreement can be reached. I can assure you that the government departments concerned have been carefully studying all aspects of this problem over the past two or three months. It has been the view of the Government for the reasons just expressed that it was not essential to complete this study before the end of WRY, since the arrangements for sponsorship which have been in effect during WRY will continue in the future. It is, of course, open to the provinces and the municipalities to alter their present rules of eligibility for welfare assistance. Ontario, for example, has reduced the period of residence required in order to claim such benefits to six months in the case of handicapped refugees.

At the present time, although the Federal Government has not taken its final decision on the responsibilities of sponsorship, there are 100 handicapped cases (involving a total of 249 persons) that are now being processed by the Immigration Branch. These 100 cases are being sponsored by community groups, and voluntary or religious organizations and do not include cases being sponsored by relatives in Canada. The groups that have undertaken to sponsor refugees deserve the warmest commendation and it is gratifying to know that they are finding the responsibilities of sponsorship are not, in fact, a prohibitive burden. I am informed by the Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that there is no sign that the interest in private sponsorship of refugees will slacken at the end of WRY. It seems probable, therefore, that the private sponsorship programme will permit a significant contribution to be made to the programme for the resettlement of European refugees.

Admission of TB Patients

The Government's major special contribution to WRY is, of course, the programme for the admission of tuberculous refugees and their families to Canada for treatment and rehabilitation. In considering what special contribution could be made, the Government had in mind the fact that a large number of refugees who had been in the European camps for a prolonged period had developed tuberculosis and it was extremely difficult to persuade countries of immigration to accept these refugees. If the European camps were to be closed, it was necessary to make some arrangements to relocate the hard-core cases, of which the most notable segment were those suffering from TB.

The Government initiated discussions with the High Commissioner for Refugees and consulted the provinces. In consequence, on September 24, 1959, the Secretary of State for External Affairs was able to announce in the General Assembly that, as a special contribution to WRY, Canada would waive immigration regulations and admit a substantial number of tuberculous refugees and their families for treatment. At a press conference immediately following his statement Mr. Green said that the number to be admitted would be at least 100 and possibly more. In the first instance it was decided to admit 100 TB cases since the project involved many novel problems and was a new departure in federal-provincial co-operation. With the co-operation of the provinces, a good deal of red tape was dispensed with and the 100 TB refugee families arrived in Canada by early 1960. As a matter of fact, a senior representative of the High Commissioner for Refugees stated that in all his experience he had never seen a project of this sort implemented so swiftly.

The Canadian TB refugee scheme attracted favourable notice all over the world, and there is no doubt it helped stimulate the world-wide support which built up through the winter for WRY. The High Commissioner for Refugees termed the project a "breakthrough" in that Canada was the first country outside Western Europe to accept refugees afflicted with tuberculosis from the European camps and to accept full financial responsibility for them.

It soon became evident that the first 100 families were being settled in Canada with a high degree of success. With the modern methods of treatment available in Canada the family member suffering from TB responded quickly, and by early spring, almost one-third of the cases were already cured. At the beginning of June, 75 of the cases had been discharged from sanatoria. On June 1, 54 of the men in the group admitted were employed and 31 women were employed. There were 28 other persons considered employable for whom the Government was seeking suitable employment. Those refugees who are out of hospital but not yet working are studying English or French. It is obvious that in the near future almost every family will be well integrated in the Canadian community.

Programme Extended

In view of this success, it was agreed to go ahead with an extension of the programme. The provinces expressed interest in joining in the extension and a similar arrangement was agreed upon, under which they accepted the cost of treatment in the provincial sanatoria; all other expenses (including transportation and maintenance where necessary until the families are reasonably able to support themselves) were paid by the Federal Government. Under the extension so far, arrangements have been made to bring 112 TB cases and their dependents from Europe to the various co-operating provinces in Canada. These cases will be arriving in Canada during the next few weeks. The Federal Government has spent or committed hundreds of thousands of dollars on the TB refugee project and the provincial governments have spent additional amounts. It is not possible to state now the final cost of the project.

The Canadian project has already accepted all the TB cases, located in refugee camps in Italy, Austria and Germany, who have indicated that they wish to come to Canada and who come within the broad criteria established for the programme. In fact, a number of TB cases from groups living outside the refugee camps have been declared eligible, although priority has been given to cases in camps.

Criteria of Selection

Initially the selection criteria were worked out for this project in consultation with the High Commissioner for Refugees and were very liberal. It was made clear to the High Commissioner for Refugees that we would accept refugee families with members who had the most advanced stages of TB and we were even prepared to accept heads of family with incurable TB. The High Commissioner was told that European refugee families would be accepted without regard to ethnic or religious background. Furthermore, physical handicaps such as an amputation would not necessarily bar a family from being selected.

We did suggest to the High Commissioner, in connection with the original 100-family movement, that for the time being we would select families with only one TB case in the family in order that as many refugees as possible might be admitted to Canada within the initial quota of 100 TB cases. It was stipulated, however, that this was not a definite limitation and that we would be prepared to alter this position if it appeared advisable to do so. As it turned out, the conditions of eligibility under the extension were explicitly altered to include families with more than one TB case as well as unmarried refugees with TB. In implementing the scheme the High Commissioner did nominate a number of cases with only moderate tuberculosis. This apparently reflected his view that some of the less severe cases should be given a chance to emigrate to Canada.

The major restriction which Canada did place on eligibility was that mental cases, criminal cases, and persons suffering from serious contagious illnesses (other than TB) would not be accepted. There was an obvious reason for imposing this limitation.

I think it is clear that the Government has given substantial support to the WRY programme and, from the official reports which I have seen, I think there is no doubt but that Canada's effort compares very well with those of other governments. Although we have reached the end of WRY, the Government will continue to support programmes of assistance to refugees. The Government will continue its substantial contributions to the regular budgets of the United Nations

refugee agencies, and although WRY is ending, the Government is at the moment considering further additional proposals designed to assist refugees.*

You should regard my remarks on the various parts of the Government's programme during World Refugee Year as a report placed in the perspective of other official efforts in the broad and important field of refugee assistance. It should, of course, be considered in the context of efforts which you have all been making in World Refugee Year. In the world-wide response to the pressing needs of these unfortunate but unwitting victims of upheaval and war, it could be clearly demonstrated from these proceedings today that Canada and Canadians have not been found wanting.

* On June 30, 1960, Mr. Howard Green, Secretary of State for External Affairs, announced in the House of Commons that "the Government has decided to grant to UNRWA an additional amount of flour to the value of \$1 million. This flour is being given as a special gift for World Refugee Year." Mr. Green went on to say: "We have already provided for \$1½ million worth of flour and for a cash payment of \$500,000. This will be an additional gift. It will be very beneficial, because it will mean that other sums will be available to UNRWA from the United States. It will also mean that the savings resulting from the gift of this flour will be used for the opening of two vocational schools in the areas where the refugees are now living." (Excerpts taken from Hansard for June 30, page 5,578.)

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