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RICHARD COHEN

Refugees

REFUGEES

President Reagan might be surprised to learn that ideology does not much figure in what Maria says. She left Guatemala some time ago but keeps in touch with her old village. As a result, she can provide the names and the ages of those killed, but there are some things she does not know. She cannot tell you, for instance, who killed them or, for that matter, why. She knows only that her former neighbors are dead.

Roberto was decapitated. Men in uniform came to the prayer room in the church where he slept and took him away. It is not known if he was killed by soldiers or by guerrillas wearing army uniforms. All that is known is that Roberto was decapitated.

Pepe, 23, married and with two children, disappeared.

Juan, 45, was roused from his sleep at night and has not been seen since. He was married and the father of three. The military said he was a guerrilla, although they do not say that they killed him.

Ernesto, 20, went to the market and never came back.

Gabriel, 25, married and the father of three children, was taken from his house at night. He was held for two weeks by the military before friends managed to free him. Too late. By then, he had been blinded.

President Reagan said the other day that if we lose in El Salvador and then maybe in Honduras, America will be inundated with refugees fleeing communist tyranny. Maybe he is right. But what he did not say is that the refugees are already here, some of them running from just the sort of terror the president thinks will follow a leftist victory in Central America.

In the heart of any big city you can find Salvadorans or Guatemalans who have fled the terror and, of course, others who have fled poverty, and others who have fled both. In Washington, there are so many immigrants from tiny Salvador that 10 percent of the local Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union is from that country and the Adams Morgan section of town is now Little Central America. Unless they are sadly deceived people, they did not come to Washington for the weather.

The threat of a wave of immigration has always been a reason—although a largely unspoken one—for opposing the establishment of leftist regimes in Central America. Especially in the Southwest, where illegal immigration is already a considerable problem, the word has been going around that the only thing that stands between us and a tidal wave of refugees from Central America is the continued existence of friendly regimes there. Should they collapse, so the argument goes, there would be an exodus of even greater dimensions than that from Vietnam—"foot people and not boat people" as the president put it.

Even if you give the president the benefit of the doubt and excuse what amounts to pandering to xenophobia, there are still two things wrong with what he said. The first is that it presupposes that all leftist regimes, even Marxist ones, are alike—that what happened in Vietnam will happen in, say, El Salvador. This overlooks the differences between the two countries—ethnic as well as ideological—and conveniently ignores the fact that there has been no great exodus from Nicaragua.

The second reason is none other than Maria herself. She left Guatemala simply because things there were rotten for her. That's why other members of her family came here, why they live now in crowded apartments and work for less than the minimum wage at jobs they would not touch back home. It hardly matters to them what the government calls itself—Marxist, democratic—or whether it is friendly to the U.S. What matters is the life they live—in some cases, whether they live at all.

History teaches that a Marxist regime is likely to be undemocratic, sometimes brutal, often totalitarian. But then that is a fair description of the Somoza regime that preceded the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and from the standpoint of the Indians, it comes close to describing the regime of Gen. Rios Montt in Guatemala.

Once again, the president has introduced ideology where it does not belong. As Maria can tell you, it does not matter what the man who is beating you believes. What matters is that he is beating you.

REMARKS AT EUROPEAN REFUGEE PROCESSING CONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 28-29, 1983
GENEVA
BY
RICHARD D. ENGLISH

In this morning's session, as we turn our attention to the domestic aspects of refugee problems, it is important to put the presence of almost a million refugees in the United States into the proper perspective. In point of fact, the admission of large numbers of refugees in the United States represents from the perspective of history an element of continuity rather than an element of change. Persons who would meet the definition of "refugee" in current American law have been arriving in America since its beginnings, and the ethnic diversity that the recent arrivals represent are only a continuation of the ethnic diversity which began with the arrival of five Polish artisans in the Jamestown Colony of Virginia in 1608.

President Reagan put it best in July of 1980 when he asked:

Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely: Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan, and our own countrymen held in savage captivity.

It is important for us to remember that this is one of the things that America stands for, not only in the understanding of peoples abroad but in our understanding of ourselves.

Despite the attitude of the American government, which welcomes new peoples to our shores, substantial problems are to be found in the resettlement process. The dependence of large numbers of refugees on welfare is creating great concern among the American people and in the American Congress. We should be concerned about high rates of welfare dependency, not so much because it costs the taxpayer great sums of money, but because it is the refugees who are the victims of this dependency. Their potential for enjoying the opportunities that the American economy affords is frustrated by a system which tends to obscure the presence of those opportunities from their view. Yet many refugees who have been admitted since 1975 with very few competitive advantages except innate ability and determination have made a successful transition to American life. The problem and the challenge is that too many remain dependent on welfare.

The problem of transition of refugees into the mainstream of American life can be analyzed by dividing it into three parts: one part is the process of acquiring skills in the use of the English language; a second part is the process of coming to understand the customs and folkways of American life; and the third part is the acquisition of those capabilities and skills on which economic self-sufficiency are based -- in other words, the process of acquiring employment.

But it is important to note that none of these three processes proceeds in isolation. Quite to the contrary, progress in one process is a foundation for progress in the others. For example, acquisition of skill in the use of the English language tends to facilitate employment and tends to facilitate entry into employment in jobs demanding greater skills and affording higher pay. At the same time, the fact of employment itself tends to place benign demands on the refugee to use his English language skills, and those constant demands that the refugee practice his use of English tends to enhance his skills in the use of English. Thus these three interdependent processes reinforce each other, and it is important to note that within them the acquisition of employment can do as much as anything else to facilitate the transition of the newly arrived immigrant into the mainstream of American life.

In our thinking about refugee resettlement, we must consider not only the problems which we face in refugee resettlement domestically but also the very significant strengths of American institutions for dealing with them. It is very easy to concentrate so exclusively on the enormity and the complexity of problems that we tend to ignore the very substantial strengths in our society which could facilitate their solution. It is very easy, especially in the past 20 years, to conceive of our society as consisting only of individuals on the one hand and government on the other.

The individual is very important in American society. Our customs and institutions place a great deal of emphasis on the assumption of personal responsibility by the individual for his own economic well-being. Often refugees from societies with less emphasis on the individual and on individual responsibility have some trouble adjusting to this aspect of American life. Such a refugee may expect government to do more than it will. However, the emphasis on government, on the one hand, and the individual, on the other, is misplaced. Our society is much more complex than that.

In a nation of more than 230 million people, the individual may often feel overwhelmed by the size of the nation and the enormity of its larger structures. Concern about the role of the individual in a society as being dominated by big government, big business, big labor, and big media has been a constant theme for the past 20 years. In a society that prides itself on being democratic, the individual may become alienated from very large institutions that neither address his needs nor represent his values. We who work with people of diverse nationalities and who have a heightened consciousness of the ethnic diversity of America have a special perspective from which to understand this problem. We also have special insights to understand what it means for an individual from a different culture and a distant land to become overwhelmed by the strange ways of a new country.

It is for this reason that it is fortunate that there are institutions in American society which serve to stand between the individual and the large structures, the megastructures, of American life. In a society that is extraordinarily diverse, these institutions stand between the megastructures and individuals so that the needs of individuals can be more readily addressed. They provide a way in which his values can be represented and his dreams can often be fulfilled. These institutions have been called mediating structures because they provide a link between the megastructures of the society and the individual. The mediating structures can also provide a means for addressing problems that are considered public responsibilities and at the same time perform those functions sometimes more effectively than government. The experience of the past eight years has shown them to be crucial to the ways in which refugee resettlement problems have been addressed in the United States.

The mediating structures, those institutions that stand between the individual and big government, big business, big labor, and big media, have been identified as five leading institutions of American life. They are: the family, the neighborhood, the ethnic group, the voluntary association, and the religious organization. All have played critical roles in domestic refugee resettlement. They should continue to play

those critical roles, and we who are serving in government should not only ensure that they continue to play those critical roles but also seek to find ways to strengthen them. Let us examine the role of each of these institutions in domestic refugee resettlement.

The first of these mediating structures is the family. In some ways the family is a more important unit of society than the individual. While the individual is a very important unit of any society, it is the family, which for many purposes is the better analytical unit.

Within our refugee admissions and resettlement programs, our policies recognize the importance of the family. Both the priority system for admissions and the placement policy in resettlement recognize the importance of families.

As we consider the problems of refugee resettlement, we must consider ways in which the family is an institution providing a means for more effective resettlement. The family can provide means of reinforcing the processes of resettlement in a number of ways. For example, children tend to learn new languages more quickly and completely than their parents and thus serve as a bridge for the refugee family into the community. Working fathers and mothers will learn the ways of the American economic systems and the expectations of employers and pass information about these customs and folkways on to

their children. And, yet, grandparents can provide a much needed link to the past, and the support that a heritage will provide, as a foundation for stability. Generally, the family can be regarded as an institution of support and reinforcement for refugees and the processes of resettlement.

Beyond the family is the ethnic group, a group of persons defined by similarities of language, culture, and shared values, as well as past nationality. In the 1950's scholars of American society decided that the conventional wisdom which held that America was a melting pot was erroneous. They determined that the melting pot theory was a notion that required severe limitation and qualification. Will Herberg in Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in Beyond the Melting Pot found that the children and grandchildren of immigrants tended to retain certain features of their cultural heritage, more particularly those features that relate to religious affiliation. In the post-World War II period, we have come better to understand that pluralism in our society means that we can all be good Americans and still be Mexican-Americans, Czech-Americans, German-Americans, Polish-Americans, and, yes, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, too.

In the post-1975 era, we find that refugees are enriching America by contributing new cultures and new ideas to the American mainstream. Americans of older vintages are

discovering that Vietnamese refugees are beginning to show their initiative and enterprise by creating new businesses and graduating at the top of their high school classes. From a public policy perspective, it is perfectly right to allow, and even to encourage, new groups of immigrants to preserve their languages and cultures while they acquire the English language and social skills necessary for economic and social independence and self-sufficiency and for full participation in American life while, at the same time, we continue to insist that every individual be treated on his own merits. This is not to say that those three objectives do not contain some naturally conflicting implications and imperatives. But the idea of pluralism in America means that all three are worthy propositions.

It is important to consider the fact that refugees may find a degree of psychological and cultural support from the presence of others of a similar ethnic background in their new homeland, in their new cities, and in their new surroundings.

This second mediating structure, the ethnic group, is related very closely to the third -- the neighborhood. Neighborhood is essentially a geographic term, but it speaks of far more than geography. Although the original and core meaning of the term is simply one who dwells nearby, the very word "neighborhood" has, in the English language, a very

positive connotation of friendliness and helpfulness. A political scientist once wrote:

The most sensible way to locate the neighborhood is to ask people where it is, for people spend much time fixing its boundaries. *** Old people watch for its new faces. Children figure out safe routes. *** People walk their dogs through their neighborhood, but rarely beyond it.

Mere geographic proximity can provide both psychological and cultural support for groups of refugees entering an American society. Ethnic businesses, particularly restaurants, often tend to reinforce each other as much as they compete against each other for business. In the era of refugee resettlement since 1975 we have seen the difficulties which have arisen when authorities have attempted to place a few refugees in a community without the reinforcing support of ethnically similar neighbors. The refugees know something about their own needs, and where they desire to be among the ethnically similar, this desire should receive some respect from our policies and practices.

A more formally organized mediating structure of vast importance in domestic refugee resettlement is the voluntary association. Observers of American life since the time of Alexis de Tocqueville have noticed the pervasive tendency of Americans to form organizations. Indeed, it is a feature of American culture that children, some of whom are not even old enough to read, will often in their play create their own formal organization and promptly elect a president, vice

president, secretary, and treasurer. Although technically voluntary associations are not governments, political scientists such as Robert Dahl have sometimes labeled them governments, and 20th Century American political science has never felt comfortable excluding voluntary associations from their study.

It is interesting to note that while voluntary associations are essentially privately-controlled institutions, it is nevertheless true that they have a tremendous importance for public policy. Some strands of American thought have tended to dismiss the argument that private organizations have public consequences. Public policy has tended over the past 20 years to neglect the possibilities inherent in essentially private voluntary organizations for effectuating the ends of public policy. Yet, the networks of people bound together by the formality of a voluntary association provide a strength which should not be neglected by public policy. Moreover, the capacity of voluntary associations to address the needs of individuals in a non-bureaucratic fashion is also an important strength which should not be neglected.

A special kind of voluntary association is the religious organization. Religious associations have all the attributes of other voluntary associations but some special strengths that should be noted. Religious denominations tend to have deeper

commitments from larger numbers of people in comparison with other voluntary associations. Many denominations have vast networks throughout the United States. They have special insights into the problems of people and experience in delivering human services. Each has a strong sense of mission and a special capacity for compassion that is institutionally nurtured. It would be ironic to think that institutions, usually older and in some instances larger than the United States Government, should not be able to play a special role in the problems of American life and particularly in refugee resettlement.

Religious organizations have brought some specific strengths to the problems of domestic resettlement. Without the role that congregations have played as sponsors of refugees, one million refugees could not have been resettled in the post-1975 era. Many observers of the domestic resettlement scene have noted that volags with a religious connection have had special resources to tap in placing refugees into communities and facilitating their transition into American life. The greater ability to find sponsors and to provide desperately needed services have allowed denominationally affiliated volags to perform their functions exceedingly well.

Whether or not strengthened by an affiliation with a religious organization, a variety of voluntary associations have played roles in domestic resettlement.

In addition to the voluntary agencies, domestic refugee resettlement is blessed by the existence of other private voluntary organizations, which are available for addressing refugee needs. Among them are the mutual assistance associations created and controlled by the refugees themselves and primarily local in nature, though capable of expanding to national scope. Also important are a number of voluntary associations whose primary aim is not so much to improve the conditions of refugees as to ameliorate grave social problems of American society in general.

But, of course, it is the volags which have played, and must continue to play, the leading role among voluntary associations. The performance of volags in the eight years since the fall of Saigon has clearly demonstrated the worth of mediating structures in effectuating the ends of public policy. In fact, the roles of the volags during this period make them a leading example of the validity of the mediating structure viewpoint. The challenge is to shape the role that volags will continue to play as the numbers of refugees diminish and increased pressures are placed upon them. We must show greater, more deliberate respect for the delicacy of their role in this area of public policy and understand the conditions and imperatives that are inherent in the special

relationship that the volags have as mediating structures which stand between the U.S. Government and the individual refugee and his needs.

Another important consideration is that the multiplicity of the volag system has enhanced the resettlement process by providing a variety of approaches the better to address individual refugee needs and varying community conditions across the United States. By way of analogy, the American system of 50 states has provided a means by which the American governmental system can test new ideas, can experiment with new proposals without risking disaster. The 50 states have experimented in such areas as the death penalty, container deposit laws, the governors' line item veto, differing marital property laws, and differing laws governing commercial transactions, and the American governmental process has benefited from the experience in trying new ideas that could not have been implemented at once nationally. So, too, can the volags experiment with different approaches to resettlement in order to discover new and better methods which can be shared among themselves. Although such experiments could be attempted in governmental institutions, voluntary associations are more likely to take the risks and to produce the innovative ideas from which progress can result.

The partnership between the Federal Government and the private voluntary agencies extends to all phases of the refugee admissions and resettlement process. In many important respects the voluntary agencies continue to perform traditional functions with little Government involvement beyond the contribution of supplementary financial assistance. In other areas of our work, the agencies function essentially as contractors to perform specific services requested and funded by the Government. It is a complex relationship in both practical and philosophical terms.

The present Cooperative Agreement for the reception and placement activities represents an effort, perhaps still at a mid-evolutionary stage, to establish some of the agreed principles of the private sector-Federal Government cooperative relationship. In particular, it is a place where we have attempted to define, through mutual consultations, the goals and objectives of the initial resettlement phase, the nature of the core services which newly arriving refugees require, and the responsibilities accepted by the voluntary agencies in return for the Government's per capita grant funding.

Broadly, the purpose of the reception and placement program is to insure the provision of certain specific assistance to refugees for a minimum 90-day period after their arrival in the United States -- assistance in the general areas of

sponsorship, pre-arrival services, reception, and counseling and referral. The ultimate goal is to assist refugees in moving toward self-sufficiency and participation in the work force as soon as possible after arrival.

As the organization with responsibility for reception and placement under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Department of State has also incorporated placement policy into its Cooperative Agreements. We view the impact of refugee admissions on receiving communities and states as a joint concern and a joint responsibility of all elements of the Federal Government dealing with refugees. The Bureau, HHS, and the agencies are presently involved in constructive discussions on placement policy which will, we hope, be successfully concluded in the near future.

As you know, the effective date of the new agreement for FY 1984 was postponed until the first of December to take into account possible Congressional amendments to the Refugee Act, and the date for the submission of proposals was extended to November 12. The review panel met, as scheduled, November 21-22, and I anticipate that the new Cooperative Agreement will be sent to you in the first week of December.

A second important element of our work together lies in the area of field monitoring, for it is only through on-site review that we can properly assess the effectiveness of our program

and service delivery systems. Since the establishment within the Bureau in mid-1982 of an Office of Reception and Placement, we have conducted eight monitoring reviews (Arlington, Boston, Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, Idaho, Iowa, and Houston). These reviews are intended: first, to highlight agency strengths which may serve as useful models to others; second, to identify agency deficiencies and suggest specific improvements to the local affiliate, national agency, or both; and third, to review continually whether the provisions of the Cooperative Agreement are appropriate.

The recent proposal process for the Cooperative Agreement reflects several specific areas of voluntary agency activity identified through our monitoring process as needing clarification or modification. Some of these areas are:

- o the monitoring of local affiliates by national agencies;
- o welfare office and voluntary agency communications;
- o agency local presence where refugees are resettled;
- o minimum 90-day active agency involvement with newly resettled refugees; and
- o emphasis on the goal of refugee self-sufficiency at the earliest possible time.

The teams have found that recommendations for improvements at individual agencies are consistently received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered. Implementation of recommendations regarding agency policies and procedures

have been noted during follow-up visits as well as during subsequent reviews of other local affiliates of the same national agency.

In depth, on-site monitoring of local areas, particularly where large numbers of refugees have been resettled or have migrated, will continue on roughly a bi-monthly schedule in 1984. In addition, the Bureau will begin a program of more indirect oversight of refugee resettlement, by reviewing the results of national agencies' own monitoring programs -- now required under the Cooperative Agreement.

A final operational matter which I would like to mention this morning is the subject of sponsorship assurances. Certainly, in the European context, one of the strengths of our program has always been the comprehensiveness of the initial interview and counseling process conducted by the voluntary agency offices in Europe and the resultant high quality of the sponsorships that are developed by the U.S. network.

It is ACVA and RP policy that the volags must provide assurances within two months after reception of the biodata or return the cases to the Refugee Data Center for reallocation. This became an important issue not only because of limited capacity at some of our processing centers, such as Bad Soden for the Polish detainees or, in the Indochinese program, the RPCs, but also because of the deleterious effect which extended waiting periods can have on the refugees themselves.

It is also important for each agency to adhere to the principle that only when a final destination has been determined should a refugee case be assured. Assurances to reception or transit sites through which a refugee might only pass through briefly or not at all are not acceptable.

The topics that I have just mentioned -- the Cooperative Agreement, the core services of refugee resettlement, monitoring the sites of resettlement, placement policy, and sponsorship assurances -- are not always topics on which everyone agrees. I am reminded of the maxim of Sam Rayburn: "When two people agree on everything, one of them is doing the thinking." It is only natural that persons in government will sometimes disagree with those in voluntary associations and vice versa. It is important that we continue to communicate as often as possible and to share facts, ideas, and opinions. We in the State Department strongly support the volag system and the role of the volags. We support it in theory and in practice. We are committed to making it work, and we will endeavor, as best we can, to combat and to defeat any initiatives that would diminish or weaken that role. The volag system of resettlement is a good system, and we want to work with you to make it work. The volag system is in the best American tradition of "neighbor helping neighbor," for it is really "neighbor helping new neighbor."

We hope that you and we can profit from the discussions in today's sessions. As we proceed through today's events, let us consider how the mediating structures of American life can better be utilized to enhance the processes of domestic resettlement. We can look back at many years of impressive accomplishments as a solid foundation for the achievements of tomorrow.