

If Everyone is a Refugee, Then No One is a Refugee Editorial

New and novel bases for claiming refugee status keep cropping up. Just in from Australia is a report of a Norwegian sailor who has claimed refuge in that land because his home country has not banned whaling! His backup claim: that he was entitled to refugee status because his country has on occasion jailed males who refused compulsory military service. That could of course qualify the majority of males in the world for refugee status.

Combined with Bruce Fein's proposal for making most of the world's women *as a class* candidates for refugee status (see p.297), it is beginning to look as if nearly everyone can qualify on some basis as a refugee. If everyone is a refugee, than no one is a refugee — the classification has lost its meaning.

The U.S. Department of Justice has recently added to this confusion by proposing to make sexual orientation a basis for claiming refugee status. This raises interesting questions about how the claim

would be substantiated, whether one's orientation could be changed once refugee status was granted, or whether the grant would be temporary (as all refugees should be) so that the individual would return home when the condition complained of is rectified. It is rather like the marriage fraud question: how do we avoid marriages of convenience which are for the purpose of getting one's papers?

Perhaps it is time to start over. Perhaps the United States should abrogate its signing of the UN Convention on Refugees as no longer being workable, repeal the laws concerning refugees which were passed in its wake, and try to put together a new system that will distinguish between the few deserving cases and all the rest that use refugee law as just one more route to getting immigrant status.

To provide some idea of the categories of persons now becoming eligible for refugee and asylee status, we present these tables, with our guesses on numbers.

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New and novel bases for claiming refugee status,
together with an approximation of the potential numbers.

I.	CATEGORY	POTENTIAL NUMBERS
1.	Chinese students, post Tiananmen Square	? 50,000,000
2.	Chinese Objectors to 1-child policy (both parents)	? 300,000,000
3.	Seventh Day Adventists and Jews in Russia	? 3,000,000
4.	Athletes and Musicians	A few
5.	Homosexual orientation (? 5% of world population?)	? 250,000,000
6.	Those subject to ethnic, tribal, and racial unrest	? 500,000,000
7.	Women fearing genital mutilation	? 300,000,000
8.	Those seeking to avoid military service — pacifists	? 5,000,000
9.	Those protesting right-wing gov'ts (sanctuary movement)	? 20,000,000
10.	Gender: Women in Islamic or other countries which do not offer "equal rights" (now being attempted in Canada)	? 1,000,000,000
TOTAL		2,428,000,000

II.	NEW CATEGORIES THAT COULD BE TRIED	POTENTIAL NUMBERS
1.	People in Islamic countries who want to use alcohol	? 50,000,000
2.	Protestants in Catholic countries having concordats with the Vatican	? 100,000,000
3.	Catholics in Protestant countries with an official Protestant state church	? 100,000,000

4.	Christians and Jews in fundamentalist Muslim countries (Copts in Egypt for instance)	?	5,000,000
5.	Smokers in countries with laws restricting this practice and discriminating against tobacco users	?	100,000,000
6.	Users of hallucinogenic drugs as a religious practice	?	10,000,000
7.	What else?		
TOTAL			365,000,000

This second table is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, although one should not underestimate the ingenuity of immigration lawyers.

The message, of course, is that these problems — real problems in most cases — could never be solved just by moving people away from them. The numbers are just too great! The problems must be confronted on their home ground, most likely by those who feel most strongly about them. These are the very people who are moving away. With the potential "change agents" gone, how will change come? What if Lech Walesa had emigrated to escape bad conditions? In this vein, see the excerpt from A.O. Hirschman's book beginning on page 272.

We're entering the season in which politicians again contest for the hearts and minds — and votes — of their fellow Americans. Roy Beck, our Washington editor, reports on congressional positions about population growth, and we hear from a variety of other politicians: Governor Wilson, former mayor Koch, and Representative Santorum.

With these, along with articles from Europe, Australia, and across the U.S., we wish you some good summer reading.

John H. Tanton
Editor and Publisher