

CONFIDENTIAL



PRIME MINISTER

Following our discussion this morning about Vietnamese refugees, I have reviewed where we stand now and what would be involved in taking more. It is difficult at very short notice to give a complete and accurate account but the following are the facts that I have. We have taken, or are in the process of taking, about 2,000 who have been picked up at sea by British captains, some 1,300 since the election, most of them from the Sibonga and the Roach Bank. We are committed by a decision of the previous Government, at the request of the UNHCR, to taking 1,500 from camps, allocated as follows:-

1,000 from Hong Kong

250 from Malaysia

250 from Thailand

Of these, about 300 have arrived so far.

There are no insuperable practical reception problems in taking larger numbers - e.g. the overall total of 10,000 suggested by UNHCR - provided we can control the rate of arrivals, as I have no doubt we could do with the co-operation of the Governor of Hong Kong. Of the refugees who arrived around October, about half have since been resettled in long-term housing. On their experience so far, the voluntary refugee organisations think that, on average, the refugees ought not to have to spend longer than six months in a reception centre before being rehoused. On this basis, it would be possible to receive about 3,000-4,000 refugees a year in the accommodation now available.

CONFIDENTIAL

It would be difficult to say how easy it would be to get larger numbers out of the camps and settled into housing and work, but there have been many offers of local authority housing for the refugees. Most recently the GLC has offered 400 housing units (enough for about 2,000 people). Other offers total about 250 units. The language difficulty means that it is likely to take up to a year or so before most of them are employable. Those who have come here so far, however, appear to be mostly young, skilled and professional people. The morale of the refugees in the centres is reported to be high and they have a strong will to make a success of their life in this country. From all we know these people are more than eager to stand on their own feet.

Of course a decision to accept more Vietnamese refugees has to be seen against the background of immigration policy generally. But as I said at our meeting, I do not believe it is in the interests of the Government to encourage a link between the two subjects. Each stands in its own right. It is necessary to tighten our immigration controls: it is also necessary that we should have a positive and defensible policy towards refugees from a brutal Communist tyranny. To make the one dependent on the other weakens the force of our case for each.

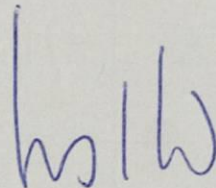
Of course if we are to take more Vietnamese refugees we must be especially vigorous in controlling immigration generally, and it may be helpful to you and to our colleagues to know what progress I have made on this front.

It is now clear to me that there is a good deal more scope for tightening the Rules than we could have known about when we wrote the Manifesto. Instead of making amendments to the Rules confined to our Manifesto commitments, I intend to lay a completely new set after the recess. They will cover our Manifesto commitments and other matters besides. I intend to announce before the Party Conference what the changes will be.

3.

If we rush this we are likely to get it wrong, especially on the very important matter of male fiances and husbands. I am in no doubt that the acceptance of male fiances and husbands from India and Pakistan (it has hardly caught on yet in Bangladesh but will do so if we leave things as they are) is being used as a means of primary immigration. But it would be unfortunate, to say the least, if a general ban meant that a British girl who married, for example, an American or an Australian man had to leave the country in order to live with her husband. So I am looking for ways of drafting rules that would enable us to make a distinction between a marriage entered into for the purpose of achieving settlement here for the man and one which was a genuine match - and a distinction which would also have the best chance of standing up to a challenge in the European Court.

I am sending copies of this minute to our colleagues on the OD Committee, and to Sir John Hunt.



---

9 July 1979