CHAPTER IV
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GETTING THE REFUGEES INTO THE UNITED STATES: SUPPORT AND RESISTANCE

Every major issue of international importance must be considered today in the light of one over-riding fact: the Soviet Union controlling one-third of the population and the land mass of the globe, is at war with us, the one nation in the world that stands in its way of world domination.

- Richard Arens ¹

We must show the world the contrast between the cruelty of the Russians and the humanity of President Eisenhower.

- Tracy S. Voorhees ²

A young Hungarian refugee visited the American Consulate in Vienna in late May 1957 when the United States had already halted the emigration of refugees from Hungary into the United States. The young refugee, like many others, wanted to go to the Promised Land. The interpreter at the Consulate informed him that the emigration to the United States had been stopped.

"I understand", replied the young Hungarian, "of course, I understand, but that doesn't apply to me."


² New York World Telegram, 30 November 1956.
"Why not?" asked the interpreter.

"Because they made me a promise."  

To every Hungarian refugee who crossed the marshes at nights under long and continuous strain, the United States "the land of the free", was the obvious final destination. The Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America had done too good a job of making them believe that a promise was made to give them succour and "freedom". These men and women had not heard of American immigration laws. They had no idea of who or what McCarran and Walter were. They had little awareness of nativist and anti-Communist sentiments in the United States. Their problem was enmeshed with many other unresolved problems within the United States. It was not a purely humanitarian issue to be overcome with dollars. A serious soul-searching had to be done in the United States regarding attitude toward Soviet Union and Communism, and earlier clarion calls to the wretched of the world needed reclarification and redefinition. The fears and emotions that went into the making of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act in 1952 still persisted. The Hungarian uprising and the consequent exodus of thousands of Hungarians into Austria were viewed with concern by several persons in the United States and the problem held different facets to all of them.

The widespread anti-Communist mood in the country and in Congress itself was reflected in the immigration law and

procedures that were restrictive. They contained no promise of a haven in America for all those who flee Communist rule in Eastern Europe. There was a contradiction too between the public posture and rhetoric of the Administration and its realistic appraisal of pressures.

There were contradictions in the way Americans reacted to the emergence of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Sometimes they spoke of them suspiciously and angrily as Communist enemies. On other occasions, they regarded the people of these countries as being held in bondage by a relatively small Communist Party apparatus controlled by Moscow. If only they had a chance, it was believed, they would throw off the overlordship of the Kremlin and eliminate its local tools. But Americans were not prepared to take chances with those people if it were a question of letting them into the United States itself. Every restrictive bill that was introduced claimed to keep the Communist subversives out of the United States. Any activity that encouraged defection from Eastern Europe was considered to be one striking at the root of international Communism. A confident Congressman by name Patrick J. Hillings wrote to the President's Special Assistant in 1954 about his proposed bill that would encourage Communist Government and military officials to defect. He said that this could be done if "they received more encouragement and were given the opportunity of obtaining political asylum through a publicized procedure." He even believed that this would give the Russians
"a bad time in their own backyard" and "thus encourage the eventual breakup of the Red Empire". The Hungarian refugee situation, for the first time brought to the forefront the twin issues of foreign policy moves towards the Soviet Union and the American attitude towards international Communism.

In a White House meeting on Hungarian refugees, Tracy S. Voorhees, Chairman of the President's Committee on Hungarian Refugee Relief, created by a Presidential announcement on 12 December 1956 to co-ordinate the relief efforts of the voluntary agencies, expressed a similar view at a later date. Voorhees said that he considered his job to be much more than handling a different refugee and immigration problem. He considered it to be a vital political operation pointed directly at the Kremlin and therefore he wanted it to be effectively accomplished in order not to give the Soviets any propaganda bargains.

The problem generated by the Hungarian situation forced a situation where the immigration policy had to be studied within the framework of an overall policy towards East European countries. No one realized this more than Voorhees. In a confidential report he quoted from a letter from Lewis M. Hoskins, Executive Secretary of American Friends Service Committee. Hoskins

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5. Voorhees Papers, File HRR, Meetings Miscellaneous, Agenda, Notes etc. 1956/57, White House meeting on Hungarian refugees, 30 November 1956.
wrote that "immigration aspects may actually be a minor portion of the total policy that needs to be clarified and emunicated." He reiterated that it was essentially a foreign policy decision and not just an immigration one.  

THE LIBERALS, THE RESTRICTIONISTS AND THE PUBLIC

Even though the Hungarian refugee problem had to be solved in the wider spectrum of foreign policy considerations, as a refugee problem it involved a threat to the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act of 1952, whose inadequacies were being laid bare because of the Hungarian refugee situation, a contingency that the framers of the Act and even their critics had not anticipated. It pointed out the need to revise the basic immigration law to make provisions for future emergencies generated in Eastern European countries where, inciting disaffection through propaganda and other means, was the policy of the United States. At the annual dinner of the American Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT) on 13 January 1957, Mayor Robert Wagner Jr of New York expressed the view that the tragedy of Hungary showed the necessity for doing away with the "repugnant" national origins quota system. He remarked that the McCarran-Walter Act "institutionalized immigration procedure, substituting quotas for mercy".  

While the critics of the Act used this opportunity to demand revision of the basic immigration law, the supporters of the Act and the others, raising their voice for hundred per cent Americanism, reacted by zealously supporting the basic tenets of the McCarran-Walter Act.

In a progress report submitted to the President, Voorhees remarked that a new immigration legislation was involved with the Hungarian refugee problem. He felt that the President should be given enough power by the Congress to face on short notice similar situations involving the flight of large number of persons from East European countries. 8

The AFL-CIO Executive Council in a statement, said that "the need to humanize and liberalize American immigration policy has been dramatized by the recent events in Hungary". The statement pointed out that "America needs a basic immigration law which befits present-day America as the leader of the free world and which will permit a more generous and efficient handling of immigration and refugee problems." According to the statement, liberalizing the McCarran-Walter Act was long overdue and the Hungarian crisis made it imperative. 9

Similar views on revising the basic law were expressed by some newspapers. The Raleigh (N.C.) Times wrote that the


9. Statement by AFL-CIO Executive Council, 4 February 1957, Files of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, Miscellaneous (1), Eisenhower Library.
the entrance to the United States by the "agents of the Kremlin". He saw no need to question the Act because of the Hungarian refugee situation. 13

A few others feared that the McCarran-Walter Act, if liberalized, will open the floodgates. "Europe's problems will never be solved by our meddling", an Ohio reader wrote. "In fact", he said, "in the larger sense Europe's problems never will be solved". He was apprehensive that a little later Germans, Poles, Czechs, Finns, Russians or Chinese may enter the United States. "And what then becomes of our national origins immigration policy", he queried, "which has kept America the kind of nation that most Americans want it to be." 14 His fears were shared by another California reader who felt that if the McCarran-Walter Act were repealed, "the dregs of Asia, East Europe and Africa would pour in...." 15

Official letters and reports were carefully worded and emphasized the fact that the refugee situation had nothing to do with the basic immigration law. A telegram sent to the Secretary of State from Europe by Scott McLeod, Administrator of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, and Pierce J. Gerety, Deputy Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act, urged that the emergency situation should not be confused with the

revision of the basic law. Part of the telegram read:

Desirability of immediate legislative action to support US prestige Europe clearly apparent from here. Reporting from viewpoint US policy in Europe urge Administration do whatever possible secure Congressional action for Hungarian program to date as well as admission of additional Hungarians and other escapees. Further urge this emergency situation not to be confused with revision of basic law. 16

There was widespread apprehension mainly about American labourers being deprived of their jobs to accommodate refugees from Hungary. One point raised by many was that too much was being done for the refugees while Americans had to struggle to get what they wanted. The whole issue brought in its wake "the charity begins at home" syndrome. Some of them, as for instance, the writer of a letter to the editor of a leading newspaper in Missouri, complained that while the refugees get jobs, there were many Americans who were jobless. 17 Though there were no specific instances of a Hungarian refugee taking away the job of an American, the American public felt that the refugee was having it too easy. Cases of Americans who were jobless for long and instances where certain charitable organizations within the United States were unable to find financial support were continuously mentioned in the papers. 18 A mother


17. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2 January 1957.

18. Jackson Citizen Patriot, 1 January 1957.
in Michigan ended her letter saying: "I think we, the people of the United States had better start helping ourselves." 19

It was argued that before whipping up enthusiasm to help the refugees the plight of the poor in America itself should be taken into account. "Look around the streets at our own poor class," a citizen wrote in an Illinois newspaper. "Their fathers cannot find work, they go to plants and they are told "not hiring". But along come the refugees, they will place them". The citizen ended the letter wishing that after four years, "they put a man in the President's chair who has a heart for the poor class...." 20 Another cynical citizen wrote to the New York Daily News: "I am glad to see the Hungarian refugees being bedded down in warm, comfortable lodgings around town. This is more humane treatment than the city's homeless men get at the Municipal Lodging House, where there are not even mattresses to sleep on, or sheets". 21 The lower income groups feared that more people in the "labour market" would mean joblessness and depressed wages. A civic leader in a West Coast city voiced the feelings of many others when he said, "There's likely to be a reaction on these Hungarian refugees. 'Course, I'm all for helping them. But...I do think we should take care of our own." 22

19. Ibid.
Some could not understand why the refugees should be let into the United States. This feeling was caused by several reasons. Some felt that United States alone should not play Santa Claus every time something happened in Europe. Others were doubtful about more alien notions entering into the United States with the refugees.

"Will they refrain from promoting socialism and other foreign theories under which they grow up in the old country? Do they understand that the prosperity of America grew not out of government regulations but from freedom to exploit the riches of a continent?" asked a South Carolina newspaper. 23

"Why should we be responsible for every Tom, Dick and Harry in Europe? It is their native country, let them take it as it is", commented a writer in a letter to a Minnesota newspaper. 24

It was difficult for many Americans to become emotionally worked up over the Hungarians because the latter did not look like refugees that they had seen or read about. They were used to penniless, tear-stained, worn out, absolutely abandoned refugees of the Second World War. Also they felt that the Hungarian who were true "freedom fighters" were still sticking it out there. No sympathy could be evoked for those who appeared well-fed, healthy and unperturbed in T.V.

programmes. They did not look like the "revolutionaries" people imagined them to be. They did not look sad, withdrawn and quiet. Those who went to see them in Austrian camps expected them to be either "a somewhat wild and unruly bunch, highly explosive in action and emotional in mind" or "as docile and sad, swept along by a tide of events about which they could do nothing". "The Hungarians sharply upset both of these mental pictures." 25

Letters appeared in the papers accusing the refugees of being cowards who ran away. "Our forefathers paid for our freedom with the blood, sweat, tears and their lives. They didn't run off to another country for protection," wrote an Indiana reader. "There is no more patriotism in most of them than there is to be found in the French Foreign Legion or any soldiers of fortune. Most of these people would free-load to the North Pole if they could find someone else to grubstake them. These escapees are not concerned with anything, not even democracy, having spent much of their time only in waiting and watching to get out", wrote another critic in a Virginia newspaper. 27

Some Southern Negroes commented ironically on the generosity sought to be shown to the refugees. Many others


27. Richmond (Va.) News Leader, 29 December 1956.
felt that offering jobs to a group of refugees would be a hollow gesture while America's own Negroes were discriminated against and jobs were refused to people in America because of their colour. In interviews conducted by a newspaper, some Negroes expressed the view that efforts to help Hungarians gain freedom were not consistent with the Negro's lack of freedom in his own land. Referring to Vice-President Nixon's trip to Austria to see the refugees in December 1956, a negro said: "Nixon made a fine trip to Austria last year - why hasn't he gone to Montgomery, Ala?" 28

Some wondered why preference should be given to Hungarian refugees while other refugees were ignored. There were Second World War refugees still languishing in the camps of Europe. There were 922,000 Palestinian Arab refugees, 39 per cent of whom in camps of tents and huts. Why had the United States forgotten them?, pertinently asked a reader in Washington, D.C. 29 A bitter explanation was offered for this by another who wrote to the Chicago Tribune. He said that this was being done because it was politically expedient to do so. It would be a slap in the face of Soviet Union. "Human misery is tolerated and even created in one case, and pitied in another", he wrote, "whatever becomes more expedient politically. The big and clamorous slogans of high ideals and voice of conscience

are simply disregarded if political opportunism makes it more profitable to do so.  

Added to all this was the fear of 'Red' Spies entering into the United States. The comment of an old soldier puts in a nutshell, the anxieties of many others. "The 'Red Plague' is in the sky", he wrote to a Tulsa (Oklahoma) newspaper. "In the sun and is soon going to overspread the whole earth; and the light of liberty is growing dim over America. Soon stygian darkness will be upon us. What then, America?" Many believed that "in the sluice-gates where the Hungarian refugees pour through" there would come sneaks "wearing [convicted atomic spy] Dr. Klaus Fuchs' old clothes, readying themselves to betray the hand that is now outstretched to feed them". These fears were fed by reports from Army spokesmen from Camp Kilmer where the refugees were housed, who admitted the possibility of "spies" among the refugees. Other reports alleged that there was a Hungarian secret policeman in Camp Kilmer and many more in the camps of Austria.

The anxieties of the public were exploited successfully by the supporters of the McCarran-Walter Act. The story that Communists were against the immigration system and that the pressures to revise the immigration laws came from Communists

30. Chicago Tribune, 10 January 1957.
was vigorously propagated. The House Un-American Activities Committee drew the attention of the public to its proud handiwork—a sort of "Who is Who" in the field of subversion in America. The study covered all the states of the Union and listed numerous organizations that had allegedly been created by the Communist Party for the purpose of subverting US legislation. It was reported by the Committee that in the preceding three years alone, the Communist Party had created and controlled, in fifteen key states, one hundred eighty "front" organizations "dedicated exclusively to the purpose of creating "grass roots" pressure on the Congress to destroy the McCarran-Walter Act."33

The image of a Trojan Horse from which alien "Reds" would emerge to link with native traitors, was created in the minds of many. Those who subscribed to such a view hailed Walter as the man the "Reds" hated most and as an outstanding upholder of American traditions that formed the soul of America.

Walter was called "Mr. Immigration" in Congressional circle. He came to Congress in 1933 on the tidal wave that swept Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats into power. Although voting "yes" to most of the New Deal emergency legislation, he was opposed to the underlying philosophy of the New Deal, especially the trend toward centralization. He

was known to be one who had a deep respect for what he considered to be the traditional structure of American Government. A Congressman once described Walter as being "animated by a belief in the American system of government". He looked upon it as "an inspired design which, while not perfect, nevertheless affords free men the best way known of coordinating their individual desires and obligations". 34

Walter's popularity in the Congress which was by itself for a restrictive immigration, left the liberals in favour of revision of the law with little to do. The immigration proposals of the President were always defeated by the Congress even before the Hungarian refugee situation. In his State of the Union Messages of 1953 and 1955 the President asked Congress to review the McCarran-Walter Act to remove the unjust features and decide a proper basis for determining quotas. On 8 February 1956, in a special message to the Congress on immigration, the President once again requested Congress to re-examine the national origins basis for determining immigration quotas. He also proposed specific "interim" measures to correct some of the injustices of the McCarran-Walter Act and to provide a first step toward a new quota system. The President's proposal languished in the Senate Judiciary Committee and never moved. Senator Arthur Watkins (Republican, Utah) tried to reintroduce the President's programme in the form of amendments to the "sheepherders bill" (H.R. 6888) that authorized the entry of 350

Basque shepherders. Walter was quick to recognize this attempt to liberalize the immigration law and the shepherders bill was not called up in the Senate until the very last day Congress was in session. The Democratic majority leader (Senator Lyndon Johnson, Texas) permitted only a modified amendment to the shepherders bill for consideration. The reason why the Administration's immigration proposals were stalled was known only too well by those around the President. Max Raab, Special Assistant to the President, wrote in a memorandum to Governor Adams: "At the present time the Administration's immigration proposals are almost completely stalled in the Congress because we have not done anything to counteract activities of the singular most influential figure in this field---Congressman Francis E. Walter."36

All other proposals put forward by the President till October 1956, had met with defeat in the Congress. So far only the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was passed by the Congress. Walter had allowed the passage of the Refugee Relief Act, but was still vehemently opposed to it. As early as 30 May 1956, Walter had opposed refugees coming into the United States. In an address delivered at the 66th National Congress of the "Patriotic" organization called Sons of the American Revolution,

35. The Eisenhower Immigration Programs, R.N.C. (Additional Files of) Immigration, October 1956, Eisenhower Library.

36. Memorandum from Max Raab to Governor Adams, 19 March 1957, Gerald Morgan Papers, Immigration and Naturalization, Eisenhower Library.
Walter remarked that America had taken its fair share of refugees. In fact, his speech was titled "Immigration or Invasion?" In his address he called the Refugee Relief Act "a fraudulent gesture of brazen political hypocrisy". He remarked that it was passed by a new Administration seeking popularity which it lacked and that it was "a crudely concocted piece of old-fashioned pork-barrelining on the international and national level." He accused that the numerical visa allocations of 1953 Act were simply "in direct proportion to the strength of the political minority lobbies on Capitol Hill, and at the White House."37

How Walter and the rest of the Congress would react to any attempt to liberalize the immigration laws as a consequence of the Hungarian crisis was only too obvious.

Pitted against these odds was Eisenhower, a President who took a somewhat narrower view of his position as compared with men like F.D.R. or Truman. He was a traditionalist and endeavoured to remain within the bounds of what he believed to be the constitutional powers of the Presidency. The traditionalist concepts of the Presidency held by President Eisenhower precluded his sponsorship of any proposal constituting a major departure from previous practice. Eisenhower's conception of himself as a non-partisan politician ruled out the possibility of excessive influence of Republican Party

37. USA, Congressional Record, vol. 102, 4 June 1956, p. 9463.
members on him. He placed a great deal of reliance on his cabinet, especially his Secretary of State. He leaned heavily on his staff to furnish him with information which meant that he was supplied with information that they thought was important. He had a deep religious conviction and felt that the Government of the United States was founded on strong moral values and based on resolute faith.  

Even though Eisenhower made half-hearted attempts to revise the immigration laws, he did not have the push and drive to overcome his adversaries in the Congress, led by Walter. The liberal Congressmen who favoured revision of the immigration laws found this attitude quite irksome. Senator Harley M. Kilgore (Democrat, West Virginia) of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Senate Judiciary Committee, complained in a letter to the President, that to date no Administration recommendations for changes in the basic Immigration and Nationality Act were received. "To date, we have been unable to get", the Senator wrote, "qualified, authorized spokesmen for the Administration to come before our Committee and tell us exactly what changes the Administration will support....Now, obviously, the Congress of the United States does not need to wait for Executive suggestions before it legislates. But with regard to immigration legislation..."

there is confusion over precisely what the immigration position of the present Administration is...." 39 It was a year later that the desperate attempt to add the kite’s tail to the sheepherders bill was made.

It is against this background that one should study the performance of the United States with regard to the Hungarian refugees, and the use made of this situation by the protagonists of liberalization and the counter-measures launched by the adherents of the McCarran-Walter philosophy. The situation was one in which only a dynamic President who could muster support from various quarters could act.

Keeping in view the rigid attitude of the Congress, the dynamism of Walter, the national apathy to admit alien elements into the United States, the cries for better justice for the exploited elements in the United States itself and the ever present bogey of Communism and a passive President, let us examine the treatment given to the Hungarian refugees, the first large group of escapees from a Communist country to seek entry into the United States.

REFUGEES IN CAMP KILMER - VOORHEES AND CO-ORDINATION

The refugee situation caught the United States unawares and the voluntary agencies in Europe engaged in efforts to clear the Second World War refugee camps moved into Austria

immediately pending the government decision to take in refugees. Initial help from the United States was in the form of monetary assistance. The President authorized the use of $20 million from the funds appropriated by the Congress for emergency use for relief activities.\textsuperscript{40} The United States sent 2,000 tons of food stuffs for the relief of distress in Hungary and among Hungarian refugees in Austria.

On 8 November 1956, the President made an announcement that the United States must play its own part in the humanitarian effort of opening doors to refugees. The statement explained that the concern of the Free World must be for the escapees who were "suffering wounds inflicted by the guns of imperialist Communism". Tributes were paid to the escapees:

Few events of recent times have so stirred the American people as the tragic effort of Hungarian men and women to gain freedom for themselves and for their children. The brutal purge of liberty which followed their heroic struggle will be long and sorrowfully remembered, not only by those directly suffering from the brutality, but also by all humans who believe in the dignity of man.

The statement cleared the air of tension by adding that 5,000 Hungarian refugees would be brought into the United States under the Refugee Relief Act.\textsuperscript{41}

The task of receiving the first batch of refugees and making them comfortable was given over to the Army. Camp Kilmer,

\textsuperscript{40} Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol. 35, 12 November 1956, p. 764.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., vol. 35, 19 November 1956, p. 808.
later to be known as Joyce Kilmer, New Jersey, was prepared for the reception. General Sidney C. Wooten, Chief of the New Jersey Military District, was placed in command of the reception center. The first chartered plane carrying 60 refugees arrived from Vienna on 21 November. They were received with a welcoming address by the Secretary of the Army Wilber N. Brucker. From 23 November onwards the number of refugees reaching the United States increased daily. 42

The Army was new to such activities involving care of refugees and ran into much criticism. The New York Times wrote a critical editorial on Camp Kilmer titling it "The Blunder of Camp Kilmer". "If ever there has been a case of bungling and bad judgment in handling this relatively small group of people", the editorial read, "...Camp Kilmer takes the prize." The editorial was critical about the fact that the refugees had to get the first taste of American life in the midst of uniforms and regimentation. It likened Camp Kilmer to a D.P. camp in Europe. 43

Such criticisms were also carried by the Scripps-Howard Papers. The need for handing over the operations at Kilmer to a civilian who had a good record in this field, became

42. Army operations at Joyce Kilmer Reception Center, Files of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, Kilmer - Manual of Policies and Procedures, n.d., Eisenhower Library.

apparent to the President and his right-hand man, Sherman Adams. The person they picked for the job was Tracy Stebbins Voorhees.

Voorhees had the reputation of being a troubleshooter extraordinary. After resigning as Under Secretary of the Army in 1950, he had time and again worked as consultant to the Government in solving several problems. He had been active in Red Cross fund-raising drives in Brooklyn and in 1953-54, he had worked as defense adviser to the United States Mission to the NATO in the rank of minister. He had also been consultant to Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson on off-shore procurement of military supplies. Voorhees had taken an active part in the 1956 Presidential campaign at Headquarters of the Republican National Committee. After the President's landslide re-election, he met Governor Adams and told him that he had not gone the campaign work with any idea of a Government job; that he "did not seek one and was not available for one". However, if he was needed for any chores, he was willing to help.

On a Saturday morning in late November 1956, Sherman Adams phoned Voorhees. Voorhees met Adams on Monday and was asked to be the President's representative and deal with the Hungarian refugees. Voorhees readily agreed. In Voorhees'

44. Ibid., 30 December 1956.

words it was certainly a more difficult "chore" than anything he had anticipated. 46

The appointment of Voorhees satisfied the critics of Camp Kilmer. Those who realized that this was not just a refugee problem to be solved by relief efforts, were still doubtful. The Hungarian refugee problem was one in which the policy of the United States towards struggles in Communist countries had to be spelled out. The idea of appointing Voorhees as the co-ordinator was received with mixed emotions. "Coordinators were great favourites of the New Dealers", wrote a paper, "when, as often happened, they found their pet programs running to alarms and confusions. They have never been quite the same here since the eminently practical Al Smith finally asked doubtfully: "Who will coordinate the co-ordinators?" 47 What was needed, the paper felt, was to keep the Hungarians and similar fighters against Communism alive in their countries, if the United States was serious about its attitude towards Communism. 48 The refugee situation instead of being treated as an emergency problem could have been made a starting point for drawing out future policy moves toward similar uprisings in other Communist countries. However, although it was realized that it was part of a foreign policy

46. Personal Account, p. 4.
48. Ibid.
decision, under the circumstances it could be approached only as a refugee problem.

Voorhees anticipated more refugees and it occurred to him that he might just be running a sort of friendly concentration camp at Kilmer if he did not have an efficient group of men to work with. The first order of business was to find the best possible PR man! Voorhees felt that the important job was "to get the Americans to love the Hungarian Freedom Fighters for the next four or five months." The Communications Counselors, Inc. (CCI) was approached for this job. He requested the Ford Foundation to loan him a good man to represent him at Camp Kilmer. The Foundation chose a man from its staff and sent him over. He was Leo Beebe, the Assistant Chief of Public Relations at the organization.49

Others recruited by Voorhees were: (1) General Joe Collins, who had earned his famous sobriquet from World War II of "Lightning Joe"; (2) Hallam Tuck, who after the World War II had been UN High Commissioner for Refugees; (3) Major General Carl A. Hardigg (Retired), who had been Tuck's Chief of Supply when Tuck was the High Commissioner for Refugees. Voorhees sent Tuck and Hardigg to Austria since "coordination" had to begin in Austria where the refugees were located.

The machinery for co-ordination was to be a President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief. General Collins was

designated as Vice-Chairman and Director of the Committee's operations in Washington. Beebe was Vice-Chairman for Camp Kilmer. Tuck was also Vice-Chairman. George Meany was invited to be a member, to ensure labour support and he accepted. Heads of various voluntary agencies who might have some interest in sponsoring refugees were also brought in. The education field was covered by the Provost of Columbia University. Charles Taft, head of the Advisory Commission on Voluntary Agencies was also a member. Lewis W. Douglas became the Honorary Chairman. The machinery was all set and it became an operating agency from 12 December 1956 onwards.\(^5\) Former President Herbert Hoover helped Voorhees in choosing Tuck and Hardigg and advised him constantly. He had earlier praised the Hungarian refugees calling them "the traditional sort of people who make Americans."\(^5\) Hoover, however, felt that the US Government was not dealing with the refugee situation in Austria adequately to meet the scale of the problem and he declined to serve as Honorary Chairman of the President's Committee when Voorhees approached him.\(^5\)

While Voorhees was organizing relief and co-ordination efforts, the flow of refugees into Austria increased five-fold.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 12-16.

\(^{51}\) 19. Times, 3 December 1956.

\(^{52}\) Notes of Meeting with Governor Adams, Mr. Brundage, Mr. Goodpaster, and Mr. Voorhees, afternoon of 17 January 1957, Voorhees Papers, File HRR Meetings Misc.
The United States offer to accept 5,000 was made when there were 20,000 refugees in Austria. By 30 November the number increased to 100,000. Till 30 November, except for an emergency programme US plans as regards Hungarian refugees were not known. It was difficult for the President to declare that the United States would take in more refugees, until a loophole in the McCarran-Walter Act could be discovered. This was done, strangely, by Walter. Walter, during his visit to Austria in the third week of November 1956, watched a Hungarian being shot by the border guards while entering Austria. On his return, he wrote a letter to Dulles on 27 November stating that it was his "considered opinion that the Department of Justice should adopt a more flexible policy and not rigidly adhere to the visa issuance and admission procedures" then in effect in Austria. Walter suggested admitting the Hungarian refugees making use of the parole provisions of the McCarran-Walter Act. He was convinced that his proposal was "in full accord with the best interest of both the country and the Hungarian refugees." A State Department official, Gerety, returned from a short inspection trip in Austria and recommended that an additional 1,500 refugees could be admitted as "parolees". The parole provision gave the Attorney General the discretion to admit any alien

54. Personal Account, p. 5.
during an emergency or other such conditions as a "parolee". His status would be regularized at a later stage. 55

President Eisenhower announced on 1 December 1956 that the United States would offer asylum to 21,500 refugees from Hungary. A total of 6,500 were to be admitted under the Refugee Relief Act and the remaining 15,000 were to come in as parolees. In making his announcement, the President said that providing asylum to Hungarian refugees would give practical effect to the American people's intense desire to help victims of Soviet oppression. 56

Eisenhower's announcement to increase more than four times the previously announced refugee entry quota was, as expected, warmly received in Austria. Before the announcement,

55. The Parole provision of the 1952 Act reads as follows:

"The Attorney General may in his discretion parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe for emergent reasons or for reasons strictly in public interest any alien applying for admission to the United States, but such parole of such alien shall not be regarded as an admission of alien and when the purpose of such shall, in the opinion of the Attorney General, have been served the alien shall forthwith return or be returned to the custody from which he was paroled and thereafter his case shall continue to be dealt with in the same manner as that of any other applicant for admission to the United States."


United States had been criticized because it insisted on more elaborate screening than any other nation. With the change of policy, however, the White House was hoping to dramatize the change by arranging for only minimal processing of applicants and fulfilling the requirements of the law by screening the refugees after they reached American soil. The refugees were to be air-lifted to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

Refugee Problems in Austria

While the United States was deciding how many refugees to take in and trying to find some loose door in the tightly shut immigration laws, the Hungarian refugees in Austria were impatient and Vienna newspapers gave vent to their annoyance by bringing out humorous cartoons depicting US position. On a comic page of a Vienna newspaper, an obese, smug American was shown telling a frail refugee family, "You are not healthy, no specialists, no atom scientists—you simply remain in beautiful Austria. Okay?" Another cartoon showed yards of red tape named "Best State Department Brand" entwining the Hungarian refugees in Austria.

The refugees coming to Austria were readily admitted by other countries in Western Europe. Austria itself showed

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58. Ibid., 8 December 1956.
great generosity in admitting all those who came. Canada tripled its consular staff in Vienna refusing to deal with refugees second-hand through welfare agencies. But the US Embassy was not adequately staffed and the American welfare agencies were left to deal with the refugees. There were welfare agencies of two dozen nations in Austria and Max Frankel reported from Vienna that they "created a veritable babel trying to do good." Most nations attempted to send missions to more than 70 camps throughout Austria to explain their immigration standards and procedures. But till the first week of December 1956, the United States delegated the sensitive task to American religious welfare organizations.

Such a posture tended to give the impression that American interest in the refugees was significantly less than that of other countries that established special missions in Austria. But the other countries concerned did not face the kind of internal political pressures and public sentiment as well as the restrictions posed by law as the Eisenhower Administration did. The Administration could not but move cautiously and its decision to leave the field to religious organizations had also a sound political reason. Together the religious organizations could have a significantly greater impact in influencing domestic opinion as well as members of Congress than would have been possible if appraisals of the situation

59. Ibid., 9 December 1956.
in Austria were to be available to the public and the Congress only through the State Department or other ad hoc executive agency.

George Katona, a Professor at University of Michigan who was consultant to the Vice-President on his refugee survey which will be dealt with later, urged the Government to state clearly the standards for admission of refugees to the United States. He said that such a statement setting forth admission standards would remove uncertainty and would be a big step in solving refugee "psychological problems". 60

The Administration was not exactly unaware of the problems in Austria. From 16 December onwards Hallam Tuck, sent a series of long, detailed reports of the situation in Austria and on future policy to be adopted. In his report dated 16 December, he attached a status report on Hungarian refugee situation in Austria. Most of the other countries had tried to move the refugees as fast as they could. The American record did not compare favourably with that of other countries. 61 In his second report dated 21 December 1956, he pointed the great need to resettle maximum number of refugees out of Austria with the least possible delay. The Austrian economy could not stand permanent integration of more than 20,000 refugees. But the study of the situation revealed that

60. Ibid., 27 December 1956.
61. See Appendix 3.
a large number of refugees may well be a care and maintenance problem in Austria for an indefinite period. Just such a situation was fast building up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Influx of refugees since October 23</td>
<td>145,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number moved out of Austria</td>
<td>73,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in Austria (as of 20 December)</td>
<td>71,870(^{62})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The need to evacuate the refugees as early as possible could not be overlooked. However, as late as 17 January 1957, Moses A. Leavitt, a member of the President’s Committee on Hungarian Refugee Relief and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Distributing Committee was still urging speed in moving refugees into the United States. Returning from a survey of the refugee problems overseas, he predicted that a "new and ugly displaced persons era" was in the making unless Hungarian refugees were speedily moved into the United States and other free nations. He added that all of the other manifestations of the D.P. era—emotionally disturbed cases, suicides and general hopelessness—were certain to follow.

By 6 December, the plans for evacuating Hungarian refugees from Austria to the United States were revised and changed thrice. It was earlier planned to be a civilian operation.

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62. Tuck’s report to Vice-President Nixon, 21 December 1956, Voorhees Papers.
But on 5 December the US Department of Defense took the decision to transport 16,000 refugees in military transport planes and troop ships. Military Air Transport Service (MATS) and Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS) of the United States were to do the job of evacuation. This caught the relief workers unawares and many of the transportation officials doubted if the military operation was going to be cheaper or quicker than the previously arranged commercial transportation. They believed that the setup was already too complex for a new agency to enter. Their regret was that they who had dealt with the refugee problem so far had not been consulted on this new move. 64

Urgent changes had to be made by the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) to introduce the new decision taken by the United States. 65 Two modifications were made in the plans put forward by the Department of Defense. Seven thousand refugees were to leave in three troop ships from Bremerhaven, Germany, and the take-off point for the Air Force planes to fly 9,500 refugees to the United States was to be


65. A conference on migrations convened by the Belgian Government was held at Brussels from 26 November to 5 December 1951 to deal with the problem of refugees who would remain in Europe after the termination of resettlement operations by the International Refugee Organization. On the suggestion of the United States a Provisional Intergovernmental Committee on Migration (PICMME) was established to facilitate the movement of migrants from Europe. This Committee subsequently became the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration.
Frankfurt and not Munich. The ICEM had to cancel most of the 14 flights it had booked for 11 December, to take 1,000 refugees to the United States. The Committee had to make quick plans on 5 December to shuttle refugees to Air Force planes in West Germany and to ships at Bremerhaven. Just the previous day the ICEM had made arrangements with the Austrian Government for the outfitting of new staging camps near the Vienna airport. 66

Since the voluntary agencies were responsible for arranging refugee groups ready for movement, much depended on their plans. The agencies, already overburdened, lacked direction and planning and tried to get the refugees closest at hand while those in far-away camps became bitter. 67

The slowness in evacuation and the confusion in the evacuation procedures was due to the somewhat misguided idea of Voorhees to present a good image of the United States Military. It was not as if the military operation was cheaper. MATS cost $500 per passenger or double commercial cost. 68 The fact that ICEM could do the job was pointed out to Voorhees. The Defense Department also explained to Voorhees that they could not provide, from military resources alone, the lift capacity to move the required number of refugees unless aircraft capacity


67. Ibid., 9 December 1956.

68. Telegram from Congressman T. Millet Hand to Bernard M. Shanley, Secretary to the President, 14 December 1956, 0F 154-N-2, Hungarian Refugees (1), Eisenhower Library.
was diverted from essential military operations. It was also explained to Voorhees that "Defense would have to contract for airlift to move a portion of the refugees, or to replace its lift diverted from essential military operations", if they were to move the required number. Voorhees, however, emphasized that he did not want ICEM to become involved in providing transportation for other than "Visaed" refugees and that for "prestige" purposes airlift should be in military aircraft.69

Voorhees offers an explanation for this in his "Personal Account". He wanted "favourable publicity" for the operation so that the refugees could be resettled quickly. "The word 'airlift'", he writes, "had become favourably known from our 'Berlin airlift'. At a time when the Russian tanks and troops were ruthlessly shooting down the Hungarians, sending some to Siberia, or making captives of those still in their home country, a U.S. military airlift would obviously stimulate public interest in the care of the refugees and aid in the resettlement of the refugees when they got here".70

Voorhees insisted on the use of MATS which included Navy as well as Air Force transport planes. The Navy also had sea transports and therefore three trips by naval transports were also arranged. Voorhees had insisted that in the first


70. Personal Account, p. 18.
landing there be at least one Navy plane. When the refugees got to Newfoundland there was no Navy plane, and the persons in charge, probably wanting to please Voorhees, held up the refugees until the Navy could fly a plane from the United States. Voorhees agrees that it was rather a shocking incident.  

Another such effort by Voorhees for the sake of "publicity" was the arrangement to get Ambassador James B. Conant to fly to Munich in order to give a personal send-off to the refugees at the start of the airlift. Conant had a private train, but no plane. So, the General, who was in command of MATS was asked to arrange a plane to fly Conant to Munich for the ceremony.

On 12 December, the White House released a statement that Nixon would visit Austria as the President's personal representative on 18 December. The purpose was "to consult with American, Austrian and international officials as to problems relating to relief and resettlement of Hungarian refugees." The Vice-President was to report to the President and the Congress "on the full scope of what further steps should be taken by the United States for the relief of this suffering."  

72. Ibid., pp. 24-25.  
Some felt that the trip was being planned more to dramatize the problem than to do anything positive. Columnist Walter Lippman expressed such a view and added that it must not be said of the United States that "the mountain labored and brought forth a mouse".

Dramatization of the problem was, nevertheless, an aspect of preparing public opinion that could not be lightly disregarded. The Vice-President's visit too was an exercise to mobilize opinion. Although Voorhees asserted that the Vice-President's trip helped him a lot, this could not have really been so. Nixon dramatized the problem by playing Santa to some four hundred children in a refugee camp. He spent an hour and a half at the Andau Camp within sight of the Hungarian secret police towers. Nixon remarked to a reporter that watching the reedy marsh over which so many had struggled towards freedom was "the most thrilling experience of his life". A cynical editor in Madison, Wisconsin, observed that there was no need for Nixon to go all the way to Austria to get acquainted with the problems of the refugees. The editor alluded to the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act as the biggest barrier against refugees and recalled that when the bill was passed over

74. The newspaper reporting this added that Nixon was reluctant to make the journey and even discouraged the idea. Washington Star, 23 December 1956, in USA, Congressional Record, vol. 103, 20 June 1957, p. 9765.

President Truman's veto, among the two crucial votes, one was Nixon's. 76

In his report Nixon said that no ceiling should be placed on what the United States would do and that it should not be tied down to a fixed percentage or fixed number. He also suggested an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act that would regularize the status of the Hungarian refugees and provide flexible authority to grant admission to more Hungarian refugees and the others who might become refugees of Communist preoccupation in future. He suggested that this could be done through the use of non-quota visas within an annual ceiling. 77

The situation in Austria did not seem very bright. The procedures adopted to choose a refugee were also riddled with confusion. Even after the President's announcement on 1 December 1956, to admit 21,500 refugees there was no immediate speed-up of the screening of the refugees. The officials in Vienna, had not received new instructions and full screening, including medical and security checks, was being conducted in Vienna. 78

Even before the Vice-President's visit, the President's Committee had gathered these details and, at a meeting of the


78. New York Times, 2 and 3 December 1956. See also Appendix 4.
Committee, R. Norris Wilson mentioned that "the processing in Vienna was as confused as it can be". Wilson pointed out that "there had been some rioting in front of the U.S. Consulate in Vienna and that at ICEM headquarters there were also crowds of riot proportion." According to him only Camp Roeder was well organized and processing was done in twenty four hours there. 79

In the early phase, the voluntary agencies were asked to sponsor and choose their refugees. They got together and established a "quota-within-a-quota" system whereby they divided among themselves the refugees of various faiths they would accept. This system brought in the differentiation of refugees by religious sects. 80 The "quota-within-a-quota" system and the general manner of processing put some baseless fears in the hearts of the refugees. Typical of these were: (1) You have to have a formal religious affiliation to come in under the program. (2) You have to have family connections in the United States to qualify. (3) You will be put in a prison or concentration camp and kept there for several years after arrival in the United States. 81

No attempts were being made to dispel these notions. It was predicted that there may be a very bad morale drop

79. Minutes of the Meeting of President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, 14 December 1956, Voorhees Papers.


81. Minutes of the Meeting, n. 79.
unless definite plans were formulated and announced to take more persons.

What was life in the Austrian camps like? According to the minutes of a meeting of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, the refugees lived in camps at least as bad as those of the Second World War with the exception of one camp (Camp Roeder). Most of them did not have enough blankets or enough heat. There was enough food and that was about all. They lived in deserted, broken down former Russian barracks, damp and dirty with five or six families in a room 10 feet by 16 feet. Relationships between US Agencies—Government and voluntary—and Austrian agencies, were very poor—"almost to the point of non-existence".

It is not clear whether Nixon noticed the conditions in the camps as he played Santa to refugee children. It is possible that he might have felt that the local US personnel were doing as good a job as was feasible under the circumstances. In a confidential meeting with the President's Committee, Nixon remarked that a very good job was being done by the Government and voluntary agencies. He remarked that the work of the United States should be kept in proper context. "The humanitarian task of relieving Hungarian refugees", he said, "is a wonderful one, but in undertaking this we are only doing our

82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
small part in the greater problem of our time." He said that he regarded "the Hungarian uprising not as a great tragedy (although it was a personal tragedy for those directly involved) but as the first great break in the wave of Soviet conquest and domination." "As such, it held a great promise." 84

For the refugees, however, the "promise" in their opinions was a haven in the United States or some other country, if the United States would not take them. As far as the voluntary agencies were concerned, the motivation was to clear the camps as speedily as possible. Tuck's letters and reports continuously urged positive plans and policies on the part of the United States. In a letter to Voorhees dated 29 December 1956 he quoted from the report of American Friends Service Committee:

If our plans provide the leadership that will see the refugees successfully settled in the free world, we will have gained much. If, on the other hand, our plans through lack of generosity and competence leave thousands of refugees in Austria to suffer the deterioration we have seen among the thousands of refugees still in Austria from the period immediately following the Second World War, and if the strain of the refugee problem brings the Austrian Government to the point of crisis and perhaps even collapse, then we of the free world will have neglected our God-given opportunity and will suffer consequences likely to be far more grave than the costs of the generosity. 85

In his 15 January 1957 Report, Tuck urged financial support to the ICEM. Whether there would be direct Government

84. Minutes of the Meeting of President's Committee with the Vice-President, 27 December 1956, Voorhees Papers.

85. From Tuck to Voorhees, 29 December 1956, File HRR, Report from Mr. Tuck etc., Voorhees Papers.
aid to the voluntary agencies, to cover important and unusual expenditure incurred during the height of the Hungarian refugee influx, presented a new problem. A fair and equitable basis of payment to the voluntary agencies had not yet been conceived.

In his concluding remarks, Tuck wrote: "It is impossible to read the stirring words of the President, of Mr. Hoover, of Vice-President Nixon, and the American Friends, without asking whether we have done our full duty in aid to the Hungarian refugees." He reported that Austria was unable to deal with this additional refugee problem. It was of a weight that might even cause her collapse, according to Tuck's report. "The time has come", Tuck wrote, "for a new and broader approach to our responsibility, in cooperation with those nations still able to help. To do this, a Hungarian refugee policy must be formulated."

The report touched upon the potential problem of refugee movement into Yugoslavia. It said that there was a possibility of a large number of refugees choosing a safer route to Austria via Yugoslavia. This was considered to represent "a potentially serious addition to the total Hungarian refugees in Austria."

The only apparently positive action taken by the end of January was to end the "quota-within-a quota" system. At

86. See Appendix 5.

the time the religious quotas were ended Washington ordered a radical change in the procedure for issuing entry permits. Beginning from 1 February the Government was to be the sole arbitor on who was to be admitted. The only difference was that the priority now shifted to those cases in which Congressmen or other influential men took special interest, to refugees with close relatives in the United States and to skilled workers and technicians. The voluntary and religious agencies began turning over their files to the Immigration and the Naturalization Service. 28

The movement of the refugees from Austria was made more difficult by an administrative ruling that the US Immigration and Naturalization Service had imposed. According to the ruling, Hungarians could enter the United States only from Austria. Hungarians already transported to other European countries began coming back to Austria in order to qualify for emigration to the United States. For the same reason, the majority of Hungarians still in Austria, were reluctant to leave. 39

While the problems that it faced were real and complex, the Administration might have gone about its work with more sensitivity and imagination. Congress too was still reluctant to extend much help. The United States contribution towards

ICEM could not be increased above forty five per cent which was its commitment, without Congressional action. Congress was reluctant to authorize more and even the authorization to contribute $74,90 to every immigrant moved, had to be renewed each year. United States Escapee Programme (USEP) meant for political refugees, was completely dependent on the Congress for its funds, which were authorized on a year to year basis. By 28 January, the Congress had not extended appropriation either to ICEM or USEP. ICEM's evacuation machinery almost collapsed.

It was this Congressional delay that perhaps provoked the Austrian Minister of the Interior, Oskar Helmer, to remark before the UN Office of Refugees that Austria was "fed up with having to beg every penny for refugee aid."90 It was only in the end of February that more funds were finally approved.

Voorhees was not happy about the situation in Austria and from January onwards in Yugoslavia. Sherman Adams had suggested to him to keep out of any co-ordination of Government department action overseas. Voorhees felt that the United States was not dealing with the problem adequately in the Austrian quarter. Voorhees realized that the Austrian Government was weak because it had been a Government under occupation for many years. It was also "split almost equally between two contending parties, so that in the coalition government, one ministry would be held by one party and another by the opposite

90. Ibid., p. 23.
party with the result that there was no co-ordination between the ministries and no effective direction by the Austrian Government. The Austrian Government, Voorhees felt, had also grossly underestimated the problem.

The only way to face the oncoming flow of refugees into Austria would have been to let the League of Red Cross Societies take over all except the smallest camps, according to Voorhees. Voorhees felt that the problem would last at least through the year 1957 and that plans had to be made on that basis. Regarding funds, however, he was of the opinion that the estimate of a total cost of $50,000,000 to the President's Fund for the balance of 1957 was high. Voorhees felt that food surplus could be utilized to a considerable extent and money costs could be reduced.

In a report to the President, dated 27 January 1957, Voorhees hinted that the emergency phase, as far as Kilmer was concerned, was over. He, however, emphasized the need for a basic policy that would "meet adequately and affirmatively the needs of the Hungarian refugees to the extent that these cannot reasonably be met by other countries; that to this end the United States act to assure proper care on a reasonable and equal basis in the camps of Austria, and a vigorous program for permanent settlement." He added: "Such a policy does not now exist. We so far have dealt only with parts of the problem,

91. Notes on the Meeting with Governor Adams, Mr Brundage, Mr Goodpaster and Mr Voorhees, 17 January 1957, File HRR, Meetings Misc., Voorhees Papers.
and have not acted adequately to meet the needs of these homeless exiled veterans of a new and inspiring fight for freedom."

In his meetings with Government officials Voorhees continued to express his concern for refugees in Yugoslavia and revealed his dissatisfaction at the inadequacy of US action in Austria. He said that "an immediate solution was needed". General Cutler with whom he had a talk could only say that he would further press the State Department for some policy "but that until they acted--no policy would be approved by the President". Voorhees tried to convince him that Red Cross Societies were trying to get out by 30 June and that steps like supplying adequate food and treating all refugees in the camps alike did not require Congressional sanction. But General Cutler could not promise anything in way of positive action.

Voorhees' apprehension about the situation in Austria was not baseless. There were nearly 60,000 Hungarians still in Austrian refugee camps. Correspondent Charles Lucey reported in the New York World Telegram that "any real solution of what is to happen to them seems likely to be delayed until the United States decides on a long range policy in regard to these homeless people." According to Lucey, the refugee was having it hard in Austria. The Austrian families that welcomed refugees thinking


it would be... for a couple of weeks, were tired of permanent guests. And there was irritation about Hungarians taking jobs. Some Western countries were apparently waiting for the United States to take the moves.

The refugee situation in Yugoslavia was none too encouraging either. A special report submitted to the Board of Directors and the CARE National Advisory Committee mentioned that the morale was sagging among the refugees in Yugoslavia because no one was leaving the place. They did not know what would happen to them.

The flow of refugees into Yugoslavia had begun in the first few days of January. It increased to a considerable amount at a rate of 100 per day. By the first week of January there were 2,075 Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia. Faced with the problem of getting the "parolees" regularized by an antagonistic Congress, the United States did not show any concern for refugees of second asylum. In camp Gerovo in Croatia, 239 Hungarians applied for admission into the United States but the US Embassy had not sent any representative to this camp.


95. Special Report to the Board of Directors and the CARE National Advisory Committee, 27 February 1957, James M. Lambie Jr., Papers, Eisenhower Library.

In the last days of January, more Hungarian guards were stationed at the border and refugees found it easier to flee to Yugoslavia which had a 220 mile long border which was twice as long as Hungary's border with Austria. For the first time, the number coming into Austria fell below 100. There were 11,018 Hungarians in Yugoslavia in the last lap of the month of January.97

When no response was coming forth from the United States or other Western nations many Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia (the number by now had gone up to 18,000) sought repatriation. The Yugoslav Minister of the Interior, Svetislav Stefanovic's bitter rebuke of the western nations applied more to the United States for out of 12,074 who had requested emigration 4,593 had opted for the United States. The Minister remarked that some countries adhered to the principle of free determination for refugees more in words than in deeds. He could find no other explanation for their lack of understanding or their failure to accept refugees who wanted to emigrate, the Minister said.98

The refugees were housed in private houses in Yugoslavia and if they continued to be there, camps had to be made ready. This was what bothered Yugoslavia.

97. Ibid., 25 and 26 January 1957.
98. Ibid., 19 February 1957.
A slow-down in US programme was noticeable in April. Robert S. McCollum, Deputy Administrator in charge of the State Department's office of Escapees and Migration Affairs, after a three-week study in Europe of the Hungarian refugee problem recommended to the White House a new three-month programme. He also pointed out that no decision had been so far taken to end the "parole" program. But McCollum's suggestion did not carry much weight in the State Department. According to an announcement on 13 April 1957, the United States Government was continuing to assist the people of Hungary who fled from Communist oppression in their homeland and under the policy would continue to bring a limited number of refugees into the United States within the following few months. The number admitted was to be on a diminishing scale. The State Department made it plain that "those to be brought to the United States both from Austria and countries of second asylum will be refugees selected on the basis of hardship cases such as those involving broken families and special interest cases such as scientists, engineers etc., whose skills will enable them to be integrated readily into the American economy."  

The Hungarian refugees in the camps of Austria felt let down when the United States began to take in only refugees in the special categories. Many of them accused United States

99. Ibid., 9 April 1957.
of having led them on to think that help was forthcoming if they revolted, and not having helped them later on. Bitterness, gloom and disillusionment invaded the camps of Austria. Nixon's visit and his promise for action had lit hopes in their hearts and now they could only complain that the "Americans did not keep their promises". The refugees had reasons to feel unhappy for they got only 30 schillings ($1.20) a day for farm work, a rate considerably below that paid to Austrian farm help. It was obvious that they looked towards America to take them all in and they asked time and again about American inability to take them. 101

In the United States, the restrictionists in the Congress repeatedly sought clarifications regarding the method of screening. Stories of spies in the camps spread and the fear that this situation may be the most opportune for Communist subversives to enter the United States took firmer root in the minds of many. The slow-down in the US programme was because of the more careful screening that was being done. It was discovered that most of the refugees were not freedom fighters but only opportunists who got away at the most opportune moment hearing that things were good in America for Hungarian refugees. 102

It was necessary to present the refugee problem as a humanitarian one. Although it was obvious right from the


102. Discussion with General Swing as to rate of arrival of Hungarian refugees, File HRR, Memoranda for Record, 1956-57, Voorhees Papers.
beginning that most of the refugees fleeing from Hungary had not been in the forefront of the fight, in order to enlist some public support for a fairly decent relief effort it was important to glorify the refugees as "freedom fighters". Hence the discovery that they were opportunists was not a new one. It was mentioned now to ensure more careful screening.

The refugees in Austrian camps could not fathom this and they protested against such restrictions. On 7 May, in Austria, at Camp Siezenheim near Salzburg, 2,000 refugees rioted. Austrian policemen had to be called to quell the riot. Realizing perhaps that they had no other option but to demand the attention of the American Government the refugees later went on a hunger strike. Leaders of the strike said that the "fast would go on until the United States had lifted restrictions on the emigration of refugees to the United States." Two days later, yet another refugee group at Camp Roeder called on other refugees throughout the world to join a three-day hunger strike against US immigration policy. In a statement issued the refugees accused the United States, "their greatest trust", of dealing with them "only superficially". They declared that they would sooner die than continue to live in the uncertain conditions forced on them by the Americans. The refugees ended their hunger strike on 10 May.

The New York Times in an editorial, drew attention to the plight of the refugees. It said that the hunger strike

should touch the conscience of the people of the United States. The situation was dark for those still in Austria and Yugoslavia, it declared.  

The hunger strike apparently did not have much of an impact on the American Government or public opinion. The present writer interviewed some Americans associated with the voluntary agencies that had engaged in relief activities in Vienna and in the United States in 1956. Although they personally had not taken part in the relief activities of 1956, they could explain in detail the situation in 1956 and the role played by their voluntary agencies in that period. However, when questioned about the hunger strike, most did not even remember such an incident. One of them, Donald Anderson of the Lutheran Immigration Service, was positive that the US Government took no notice of the hunger strike.


105. (A) Interview with Donald E. Anderson, Director, Lutheran Immigration Service, 7 October 1970.

Do you remember the hunger strike that the Hungarian refugees staged to press the U.S. to speed up the process and take more? - I don't. Even if there was a hunger strike it had no effect on our Government's policy.

(B) Interview with Charles Sternberg of the International Rescue Committee, 12 October 1970.

Do you remember the hunger strike of the refugees? - I don't. But now that you mention it, it strikes a bell somewhere.