

McDougall is protecting real refugees. (1988, December 30). *The Toronto Star*.

THE TORONTO STAR
Friday, December 30, 1988



Frank Jones

McDougall is protecting real refugees

My woman of the year? That's easy: Barbara McDougall.

With her announcement this week that there will be no amnesty for an estimated 85,000 refugee claimants, the immigration minister restored the faith of millions of Canadians — many of them immigrants themselves — in the integrity of political leadership.

McDougall let herself in for two years of buffeting and abuse from those representing the would-be refugees, who must now submit to hearings before two-member panels that will decide whether they can stay or must be deported.

Make no mistake, there are 85,000 gut-wrenching stories out there in the big country. And we won't be spared any of them.

It's going to be a rough couple of years for McDougall.

But by her tough-minded response she has cheered Canadians who simply did not like the idea they were being taken advantage of.

Finally, someone is saying that the law means what it says. Finally, someone is saying enough already of the plane-loads of illegals arriving here with their patently false claims. Enough already of the slimy "immigration consultants" who counsel these people on how to evade the laws and take advantage of this country's generosity.

Future abuses

If McDougall, like some of her predecessors, had waved a weary arm and said, "Let them all stay," make no mistake, it would have given the official blessing to illegality, as well as setting the stage for future abuses when "consultants" find new ways around the stricter refugee regulations going into effect Sunday.

If that sounds callous, it's not.

The real beneficiaries of McDougall's firmness are the waves of genuine refugees who will always be knocking at Canada's door.

In its lead editorial yesterday *The Star* attacked McDougall and asked: "Is this the same Canada that

demonstrated its compassion to the world in 1979 when Joe Clark's Tory government accepted more than 75,000 Vietnamese boat people, 29,000 of them privately sponsored?"

Of course it's the same Canada — a country that stands ready to welcome hundreds of thousands of people in genuine trouble at a second's notice.

What I'm afraid of is that when the next great world crisis arrives — whether it's in South Africa, the Middle East or some new trouble spot — Canadians will be so fed up with seeing bogus refugees beat the system that there simply won't be that outpouring of generosity we've seen in the past.

And if we'd offered the welcome mat to all 85,000 refugee claimants this week, what would we have said to the people who have patiently taken the legal route in gaining admission to this country, sometimes waiting years? The moral would have been: Deceit pays.

There is such a thing as misplaced compassion, and we've been seeing plenty of it this week. It's easy to feel sorry for the refugee claimants we see on our television screens telling their stories. What we don't see are the thousands of others, many of them the relations of people already here, who have to wait endlessly for admission while the queue-jumpers gum up the immigration system.

Daily tragedies

But before getting too overwrought, let's look at the real situation.

Toronto immigration lawyer Mendel Green estimates 60,000 claimants will be deported. I don't believe it for a minute. A cabinet document estimates the ineligible total is 28,000. I don't think anything like that number will be deported either.

The reason is that both the immigration department and the minister are allowed to intervene in refugee claimants' cases, taking humanitarian and compassionate factors into account.

What that tells me is that only the most blatant cheats are going to be kicked out. My bet would be we won't see more than 5,000 deported, if that.

As McDougall said, "We are dealing with human lives here." To start with, genuine refugees from countries such as Sri Lanka and parts of Central America, where death and torture are daily tragedies, have little to worry about. No one should, and I'm sure no one will, be sent back to face danger and death.

Many of those from less dangerous spots have been here for years, have put down roots, perhaps have Canadian-born children attending school here. That, I'm certain, will weigh in their favor.

Louise Brown on
Toronto-bashing/F8