

# Sanctuary

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 and generous" immigration reform bill as well as the Rodino Bill, which would grant permanent legal status to Haitians who have been in the U.S. longer than five years.

Witnesses who supported the government's current immigration policy included a professor of history and representatives of the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. They urged concerned church congregations to work within the immigration system by assisting refugees to file for asylum rather than by harboring illegal aliens.

The vast majority of Central Americans fleeing to this country are "economic migrants," according to Laura J. Dietrich, deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

"There is no such thing as a self-appointed refugee," Dietrich stated. "Under our law, generalized conditions of poverty and civil unrest do not entitle people who leave their homelands to settle here."

"If this were so," she added, "we might simply invite every citizen of El Salvador to move to the United States."

Dietrich also disputed claims that refugees are persecuted once they are returned to El Salvador.

"Obviously, we do not believe these claims. If we did, we would not deport people," she said.

Others pointed to the relatively small base of public support the sanctuary movement



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

State Department representative Laura Jordan Dietrich and other witnesses listen to U.S. Rep. John LaFalce's opening remarks.

has gained in its four-year history and to differences within the movement. In the United States, 250 churches have declared sanctuary.

"Proponents (of sanctuary) include those who sincerely wish to help families caught up in Central America's turbulence," admitted Dr. Albert L. Michaels, professor of history at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "Unfortunately, its participants also include those who are using the plight of

a few Central American refugees to embarrass the American government and put an end to its policy of promoting democracy and investment."

In questioning the speakers after their testimony, La Falce indicated that he is "sympathetic" to sanctuary workers whose motives are humanitarian, but not to those acting for political reasons.

He also asked how many Salvadoran refugees had requested asylum and how

many requests had been granted.

Winston Barrus, a federal immigration official, replied that of 13,000 requests, 300 were granted in 1984.

Speakers on both sides of the sanctuary issue defined refugees as those people who cannot return to their own country because of "persecution or well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" as stated by the Refugee Act of 1980 and the United Nations Convention and Protocol on Refugees.

But the government officials said that applicants must prove that persecution would be clearly directed toward them as individuals. Pro-sanctuary speakers pointed to reports of inhumane conditions and human rights violations in El Salvador and Guatemala as sufficient justification for "fear of persecution."

John Garlock, convener of the Rochester Committee on Latin America, contrasted government response to Central American refugees with the recent case of a Ukrainian seaman who apparently tried to defect in New Orleans.

"Last week, we saw the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the State Department, the Justice Department, the president and Congress itself going to the most extraordinary lengths to ascertain whether or not this Soviet seaman desired political asylum in the United States," Garlock said. "No one defects from El Salvador; people only defect from communist countries."

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