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'We Have No Choice'

The antagonistic response of some Americans in and out of Congress to the prospect of granting refuge in the United States to 150,000 Vietnamese seeking asylum here recalls the worst days of McCarranism a quarter century ago. At that time, the late Senator McCarran of Nevada became the odious symbol for all that was ungenerous in the American attitude toward the admission of political and other refugees after World War II. A recrudescence of McCarranism is the last thing Americans should want to see today.

The most immediate and obvious way for the Congress to demonstrate that Americans have not lost their moral sense as a result of the Vietnam tragedy is to grant President Ford's urgent request for sufficient funds to meet the expenses of transporting, housing and resettling those Vietnamese refugees who have managed to escape to this country. Senators Javits of New York and Pell of Rhode Island are sponsoring a bill to provide the requisite funds; the ultimate shame of American involvement in the Vietnam war would be the hesitation—or, worse yet, refusal—to accept this much responsibility.

In fact, one of the few shreds of glory that the United States has been able to retrieve from the closing days—or years—of the Vietnam war consists of the success of the tremendous air and sea lift that rescued so many thousands of Vietnamese who had been associated in one way or another with the American involvement.

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The attitude expressed by a few public officials—including Governor Brown of California—and many private citizens to the effect that the influx of Vietnamese is unwelcome because they will take needed jobs from Americans may be understandable but it is unwarranted. As Representative Morris Udall of Arizona has sensibly pointed out, the incoming Vietnamese will comprise a minuscule fraction of the labor force (certainly not more than one-tenth of 1 per cent); they total less than half the number of immigrants normally admitted to the United States annually; they are less than one-fifth the number of Cubans who came here after the Castro revolution. "We have no choice," says Mr. Udall, "except to take them in."

He is right, on the grounds of humanitarianism, of decency and of political freedom—and as much for our own self-respect as for the Vietnamese.