

Soviet Jews choosing Canada first

Large numbers seeking refugee status here put off by adverse economic conditions in Israel

BY STANISLAW OZIEWICZ

Immigration Reporter

TORONTO — A growing number of Soviet Jews are rebuffing Israel's open arms and instead coming directly to Canada as visitors and applying for refugee status.

In the first eight months of this year, 1,200 Soviets arriving in Canada claimed refugee status, up about 800 from 1990. About a third of these are estimated to be Soviet Jews.

Most of the Soviet Jewish refugee claimants come to Canada rather than Israel because they have friends or family here and are put off by the adverse economic conditions in Israel, said Rabbi Yosseph Zaltzman, director of the Toronto-based Russian Jewish Centre.

Rabbi Zaltzman said in an interview that Soviet Jews hear that it is difficult to get housing and jobs in Israel, that economic conditions in general are adverse and that there is compulsory military service.

Those factors, together with the fact that some have acquaintances or relatives in Canada, leads them to come here. "It's tempting to come to Canada. How can you tell a guy where to go?" Rabbi Zaltzman said.

Their refugee claims are usually based on fear of persecution in the

compensation for damage inflicted by hydroelectric developments in northern Manitoba.

They later cancelled the planned signing with Mr. Siddons of an agreement to provide electrical service to some northern reserves.

Mr. Siddons said he saw no reason to remove Mr. Goodwin from yesterday's meeting or from the negotiations as a whole.

"We do not sit in a meeting and

lead us to conclude that there is a reasonable possibility that the claimants would suffer persecution should they return to the USSR."

In another case before a refugee immigration lawyer, argued successfully that a woman should stay in Canada because of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.

Rabbi Zaltzman said Soviet Jews started to come to Canada as refugees as it became more difficult to pass the standard immigration process.

"They couldn't come as immigrants, so they came to Canada as visitors — just to see it. When they were here, they were told, 'You have a right to stay. So, if you have a right, why not? So they made claims and they wrote their friends.'"

Les Scheininger, president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, said his organization has two principles on Soviet emigration: The Canadian Jewish community believes that the worldwide advocacy on behalf of Soviet Jewry was to enable Soviet Jews to resettle in Israel, and the community recognizes that Jews in distress and living in conditions of oppression should be helped in whatever way to help them leave countries where they are subject to anti-Semitism.

Mr. Scheininger said the vast majority of Soviet Jews do go to Israel, "but at the same time, there are a number of Soviet Jews who have a connection to Canada, particularly familial connections. . . . We recognized that, for those individuals, Canada certainly is a country to which they would like to come."

Aviad Ivri, press spokesman for the Israeli embassy in Ottawa, said Israel was formed specifically as a homeland for Jews and its government would like Soviet Jews to settle there.

"But, look, what can we do? We will never prevent anyone from going elsewhere."

Susan Davis, national director of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service, said the increase in the number of refugee claimants is directly proportionate to Soviet emigration policy.

"They've allowed larger numbers to obtain passports, to obtain visitors' visas. Jews are like anybody else: They'll take advantage of the ability to get out while they can."

Ms. Davis also said Canada has reacted very slowly in establishing an adequately staffed visa office at its embassy in Moscow. She said her organization has argued that once there is a more efficient and orderly immigration process, fewer refugee claims will be made.

Robbery suspect in over his head

Canadian Press

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. — A St. Catharines man might want to consider taking swimming lessons after he was rescued by police early yesterday.

After fleeing from a variety of stores with an armload of cigarettes, the man tried to elude police by hopping over a fence. He landed in a pool.

Police found the man splashing about in the pool, unable to swim. He was rescued, then promptly arrested. Police have charged a 21-year-old man with robbery.

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Siddons stalks from flood pact talks after chiefs seek removal of official

Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — Indian Affairs Minister Thomas Siddons angrily walked out on a meeting with Manitoba native leaders yesterday, adding another bitter chapter to drawn-out talks on flood-damage compensation.

Mr. Siddons left the hotel ballroom minutes after the meeting had begun, having refused a request to re-

The chiefs had wanted to discuss the 1977 Northern Flood Agreement, which outlines how five bands are to be compensated for damage from Manitoba Hydro dams on the Nelson and Churchill Rivers.

There has been little action on the deal and that is taking a toll on the 10,000 people affected by the flooding, said Chief Sydney Garrioch of the Cross Lake band.

"The frustration level in our com-

has accepted an offer made last year by the federal and Manitoba governments to settle the flood agreement by paying the five reserves a total of \$2.4-million.

The province, which built the dams, would provide most of the money. About \$180-million has already been handed out to the reserves since 1977, Mr. Siddons said.

The chiefs said Mr. Goodwin continues to work with Split Lake while

"Mr. Goodwin is working both sides of the fence," Mr. Garrioch said. "You have seen the divisions they have created. We can not trust that man."

The 61 reserve leaders in the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs passed a resolution two weeks ago demanding that Ottawa replace Mr. Goodwin with an independent administrator in the flood talks.

The Indians believe that the gov-