

months the Armenian consulate in Moscow housed 300 refugees in their mansion. They had to sleep on the floor in one room. Then they were moved to recreation centres and summer camps.

Once again voluntary aid was remarkably generous, much more so than the official help. Refugees were housed in private apartments, people offered donations. In Leningrad the refugee committee, created after the earthquake, obtained a room where refugees could come for information, comfort and financial aid.

But emergency aid is not everlasting. Recreation centres are required by other people for their holidays; summer camps are needed by children. Hence the decree issued by the Council of Ministries on

"For the Soviet government to recognize that there are refugees in the country, and not just internal migrants, took some courage and much pressure from people like Grigorii Akopyan, the leader of the Refugee Aid Committee..."

April 7 forcing refugees to vacate their shelters by May 15. Hospitality of those who offered space to Armenians in their tiny apartment is not boundless either. Refugees require permanent housing. Yet there are 9.5 million people in the Russian Federation in need of housing, who do not appreciate being pushed down the waiting list.

The government found what seemed to them a reasonable solution. They encouraged refugees to move to agricultural areas in the North. Seven thousand accepted the offer. Others tried but they did not stay. What was wrong? First, local authorities were not prepared to receive large numbers of newcomers: there were no houses and no jobs for them. Second, most Armenians from Leningrad are professionals and technicians. They had no skills for agricultural work.

Third, in some cases only men were offered jobs; women and children had to stay behind.

Even when refugees find themselves private accommodation in Leningrad and Moscow, they cannot get a job, even though there is much demand for their labour. In order to get a job in a particular city a Soviet citizen needs to have this city's permanent residence stamp in the passport. But without a job one does not get such stamp. What is left? Either to work in cooperatives or other casual jobs where no residence stamp is required, or to live off whatever savings they managed to get out of Azerbaijan, if any.

Without the permanent residence stamp in their passport, refugees are deprived of many services, such as free medical aid and daycare centres. Even to buy food or other goods one needs to show a passport indicating one's residency in the city. Similar to wartime, the present day economic crisis imposed strict control over scarce food.

New Pompeii

Refugees are placing much hope on the refugee bill proposed by the State Labour Committee to the government. This bill will be tabled no sooner than November. For the Soviet government to recognize that there are refugees in the country, and not just internal migrants, took some courage and much pressure from people like Grigorii Akopyan, the leader of the Refugee Aid Committee assisted by some newly elected democratic deputies to the Leningrad City Council. It was important to take this step. But will the proposed refugee status bill be the panacea? Will the government be able to settle refugees under the present housing crisis? Can it solve the housing crisis without drastic economic reforms? Can employment be offered to refugees without solving their housing problems? What will be the response of the Russian population? Whether or not the new government is able to solve the growing refugee problem will be a test of power of the new political actors. □

(Tanya Basok, a Soviet Jewish emigre, recently returned from a field trip to the USSR)

REFUGEES IN THE GULF

J. A. Versteegh

*Director, Refugee Programs
Employment and Immigration Canada*

It was estimated that by 1990 Kuwait would have had a non-national workforce of at least one-half million people while Saudi Arabia would have had something on the order of three million. *La Presse*, in August, reported that this could include some 500 Canadians, 900 West Germans, 530 French, 160 Swedes, 10,000 Soviets, 4,000 Poles, 10,000 Yugoslavs, a thousand or so South Koreans, 65,000 Filipinos, as well as 170,000 Indians. Recently the media guessed that there were some 1.72 million Egyptians working in Iraq and Kuwait.

In 1985, the most recent year for which there are reliable figures available, 46% of the Kuwait migrant-worker population were Arabs from other Gulf countries, 45% were south Asian, 6% were Southeast Asians and 3% were from other regions of the world. Saudi Arabia's non-national workforce, with a foreign worker population of 3.5 million, was comprised of 33% foreign Arabs, 32% South Asians, 27% Southeast Asians, and 8% from other areas. South Asians, mainly Indians (22%) and Pakistanis (14%), made up some 43% of the migrant labour force in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The Southeast Asians came primarily from the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand.

Throughout the GCC area, almost 30% of foreign workers are employed in services (financial, personal and community), almost 29% are employed in construction while 14% work in wholesale and retail trades. In Kuwait itself, in 1985, 39% were involved in production and related occupations, 27.5% in service occupations, and 15% in professional and technical occupations.

It is known, though exact figures are not available, that the non-national populations of the Gulf States include many people from the horn of Africa: Ethiopians/Eritreans, Somalis and Sudanese. They may form a residual population of individuals who cannot, due to a well-founded fear of persecution, return to their home countries. □