



# CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES **REFUGEE**

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS IN THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION**

### **Russia: Only Two Alternatives?**

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On June 22, 1998, the anniversary of the beginning of World War II, Russian President Boris Yeltsin made a radio announcement dedicating a day to the memory of the War. This special attention of the President to this anniversary was precipitated by the growing popularity of neo-Nazi ideas among the population, especially the youth. Teenagers, impressed by military symbols, try on the black uniforms. Appeals to impose strong discipline upon society are gaining popularity. Imposition of a dictatorial regime, for many, seems to be the best way out of the present situation. This rhetoric is often accompanied by fantasies about the revival of the old Russia, its national spirit along with the search for an "enemy" to be blamed for the recent crisis and punished accordingly.

The situation gives rise to a number of questions. Why are neo-Nazi ideas so popular in a country where millions of people were killed during World War II? Why are neo-Nazi ideas so popular in a country where the memory of relatives

who died during the war is so fresh? Why are neo-Nazi ideas so popular in a country where for many years the ruling Communist party tried to demonstrate a huge difference between Soviet Communism and Nazi Fascism and to discredit the latter?

In the past, communist leaders told their populations that they must build socialism or else suffer from fascism, or foreign occupation and a slow decay, at the very least. Now, many new leaders—not to mention their supporters and opponents abroad—insist that all

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