

intend to raise this important issue. Further, he had the benefit of consultations and briefings with many leading members of the Canadian Jewish community.

● (1800)

There are now approximately 1.8 million Jews living in Russia, some 350,000 less than in 1970. However, only 896 Jews were able to emigrate in 1984, the fewest in number since 1970. So far this year the emigration rate is almost non-existent. In 1979, 51,320 Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union. Clearly there has been a deliberate reduction in the number of Jews allowed to emigrate since 1980.

The Jewish community in Russia undergoes many forms of merciless harassment. This harassment impacts on their daily lives physically, culturally, mentally and spiritually. Many Jews have been denied family reunification. Some 20,000 "refuseniks" who have applied for exit have had their visas denied. After a "refusenik" applies to leave, it seems that he often is routinely dismissed from his job. Some have had their children expelled from college, some have been arbitrarily arrested and some have had their personal property confiscated.

What can we do about this situation as Canadians and Members of Parliament? I suggest that we can organize. Certain steps have already been taken, one being the formation of the Canadian Parliamentary Group for Soviet Jewry. I recently had the honour to be nominated to serve on the executive of that committee. There are a total of 273 Members of the House of Commons and the Senate who are a part of that group.

Some of the activities which have occurred recently include a delegation a few weeks ago to visit the Russian Embassy here in Ottawa. Not too long ago, the President of our group, the Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour), and several other Members of Parliament visited Russia to see and hear first hand some of the actions that have been taken there and to investigate this widespread harassment.

Another step that we can take is to communicate with individual "refuseniks." I have personally adopted a "refusenik". His name is Simon Shnirman. He is 28 years old and is a metallurgist. He was arrested on October 1, 1983, when he refused a call up to the army because he was intending to emigrate. I recently wrote to his wife, Leah Shnirman, to introduce myself. They have a young daughter and are very concerned that Simon's sentence of three years could be increased due to alleged "breaches of camp regulations". I do not believe that Simon has even seen their young daughter. Many concerned Canadians have also adopted "refuseniks". Representatives of 35 countries are holding a human rights conference here in Ottawa, beginning on May 7. They are planning a six or seven week conference. This meeting, which includes Russian representation, is the first meeting devoted exclusively to human rights.

These countries signed the 1975 Helsinki Accord in which it was stated, "Participating states will deal in a positive and humanitarian spirit with the applications of persons who wish

to be reunited with members of their family". The Soviets are clearly not abiding by this agreement.

● (1805)

The Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs recently said in the House of Commons that Canadian officials would pursue the issue of discrimination against Jews in Soviet bloc countries at the conference. He went on to say that there were a variety of ways in which cases could be raised, both generally and specifically, in formal sessions and in the corridors. He also stressed that he would give his commitment to find ways to raise individual cases with the Soviet Union and with others in a way which would lead to a successful conference.

We know that anti-Jewish propaganda has been increasing recently in Russia. There exists an anti-Zionist committee which uses its title to spread anti-Semitism. As well, an hour long documentary has been shown on Leningrad television which equates "refuseniks" with anti-Soviet behaviour. The anti-Zionist committee has been given widespread media coverage in its claims that Hebrew teachers and cultural activists are spies, criminals and traitors.

In closing, I stress that Canada has a unique role to play in dealing with this type of harassment and lack of basic freedoms. I applaud the Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs for his leadership in this regard. I believe many of us, both in the House and in the Senate, have a real job to do and indeed a real obligation in this respect.

Mr. Gerry Weiner (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Don Valley East (Mr. Attewell) for his concern and for his dedication to a cause which is dear to almost all of us. I had the pleasure of sitting at the same table as the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) and Mr. Gromyko when the discussion took place. All of us would have been proud of the dynamism and force with which the Secretary of State for External Affairs raised the issue of human rights, Jewish human rights, and family reunification. Even when he was told that it was a domestic matter, he continued to pursue it. He said how it would affect the perception of Canadians in terms of how they feel about the Soviets. We just kept pursuing the issue. The cases of people like Shcharansky and Sakharov were raised on three different occasions that day. The Secretary of State for External Affairs told them how much we wanted Mr. Shcharansky freed.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs went to the Soviet Union in the first week of April with a number of objectives in mind. Among them was his desire to develop lines of communication with the new Soviet leadership in order to discuss the full range of Canada's bilateral interests with the Soviet Union. High among those interests are our humanitarian concerns. In this context, the Secretary of State for External Affairs raised the issue of Soviet Jewry.

This Government views the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union in light of the commitments undertaken by the Soviet