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Bearpit opens hunger strike

By Maxine Kopel
Chants of "Let Shransky Go!" and "Am Yisrael Chai" (The People of Israel must live) rang throughout Central Square last Wednesday as nearly 100 dancing and singing students marked the opening of a hunger strike in behalf of Russian prisoner Anatoly Shransky and against Russian transgressions of the Helsinki Agreement on human rights.

Renowned folk singer Shlomo Carlbach led the group as almost 400 spectators stood by.

Victor Fradkin, 20, a 3rd year science student, spoke with Radio York's John Thompson, of the years he spent in Russia before emigrating to Canada two years ago.

"I've spent 18 years of life in Russia. I wish I spent it here. People are oppressed. They are afraid for themselves, and for their relatives. When people leave, their relatives may have problems."

Fradkin maintains the Helsinki agreement guaranteeing human rights, which was signed by the Soviet Union was not publicized in Russia.

The Canadian emigrant also spoke of emigration obstacles. "My father was an engineer and was dismissed when he applied for a visa. I was let go from university."

"It took us four months to get a visa. This is a relatively short time. The average is seven to 10 months." Fradkin and other Russian emigrants claim that visas can sometimes take years to secure.

"I'd like to go back and see my friends and my mother's grave. Unless the system changes, I'll never go back permanently."

Barb Albert, a first year student, set a somber tone for the vigil. "Go home and think about freedom as Canadians. If we were speaking like this in Russia, we would be arrested as parasites of the land. We're very lucky. Come support us for human rights and human dignity."

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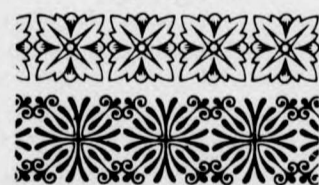
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