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Refugees

Continued from page 1

although their lives may be endangered, may not qualify as refugees because of their government's respectable human rights record and the fact that they are not being personally targetted for persecution.

At one time Canadian refugee law accomodated such cases under what was known as the "B1" list, which granted refugee status to persons fleeing conditions of war and unrest in particular countries. (Countries on the list included Iran, Lebanon and ElSalvador, to name a few). Since the B1 list was discontinued three years ago most claimants in this position are eventually granted permission to say in Canada, but not as refugees. The status determination procedure now takes so long that by the time a decision is reached the individual has established a new life in Toronto or Vancouver and is allowed to remain on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, Poroz said. Under the new system these people would be turned away before they could enter Canada.

Refugee claimants currently wait two or three years after entering Canada before learning whether they will be allowed to remain in the country, during which time they are forbidden to work and are frequently separated from their families. After January most claims will be resolved within six to eight months, Poroz said, adding that at least under the new legislation those filing a claim will be fully informed of factors influencing the decision. (At present refugee status determination cases are decided in camera by the Refugee Advisory Board in Ottawa, and neither claimants nor their lawyers are given access to transcripts of the hearings.

Poroz added however that it takes time for a counsellor working with a refugee to thoroughly understand their client's situation, as "these people often don't know what details are relevant to their case."

Under Bill C55, there may not be time for the five or ten interviews that are often required to bring an individual's story to light.

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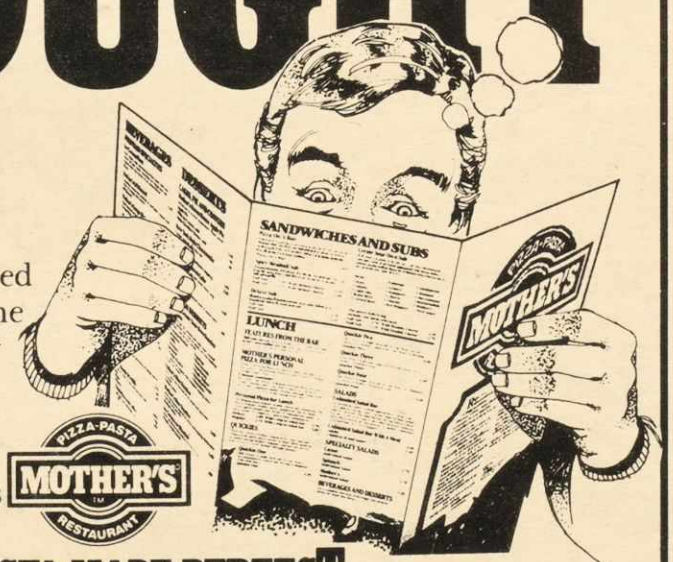

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