

The majority of this activity came from the tiny south east Asian enclave of Hong Kong. In fact, says Neil Reeder, Programme Manager of Public Affairs at the Commission for Canada in Hong Kong, 80 per cent of the applications from the business investor programme are from Hong Kong.

Throughout the 1980s, applications from the territory continued to flow in at a steady pace. In the ensuing panic that followed the disturbing pro-democracy crackdown in June, 1989, the numbers peaked, sustained themselves for nearly two years, and then at the end of 1991 began to fall off sharply. (The official number of visas processed each year, however, grew gradually during this time.)

Different people attribute different causes to the drop-off in numbers of applications. One theory is purely economic - as yet another boom in Hong Kong took place and the memory of Tianamen faded, not as many people were willing to leave behind the money-making mecca of Hong Kong for Canada where the economy sagged.

Others feel it was the way the programme was administered that was to blame.

"The Canadian government shot themselves in the foot," claims one Hong Kong immigration consultant who specializes in Canadian applications. "They had 50 to 70 per cent of the market cornered and they got greedy and decided to demand more. They also took inordinately long periods of time to process applications, became bogged down in technicalities and began rejecting Hong Kong millionaires that for one reason or another hadn't paid the equivalent of Canadian tax on all of their income, which is a well-known fact of life here."

Ottawa-based Jim Hentschel, Director General, Business Immigration Branch acknowledges that the recent increase in required levels of investment and the length of the lock-in period from three to five years may have turned some investors away. "There is no question that the numbers have gone down, particularly in

the investor category," he says. "And some of this decline may have been because of the revisions."

Hentschel stresses that, in his opinion however, other influences impacted more heavily on the programme. "One only has to look at Canada's economic woes over the last few years and hold them up against the phenomenal growth rate here in Hong Kong," he notes, "It's pretty clear why Canada is seeing less Asian money these days."

"As for the delays, there is no doubt that in the past there has been some frustra-

Ottawa's Hentschel defends his department's screening and selection process and is unapologetic about being so careful. "Our job is to insure that the applicant is a genuine business person and that he has the financial means to qualify under the programme," he explains. "We'll do whatever investigation and ask for any documentation that may be required to accomplish that. We have the responsibility to defend our decisions and we must feel comfortable with them."

"I would add that there is no special treatment or consideration, for or against, given to any applicant and the selection system has universal application."

Questionable fund investment activity was also responsible for some of the negative press the investor programme received. The Canadian government downplayed the incidents, claiming they were isolated cases, but they drew attention and led to at least two formal investigations comprising a government task force and a House of Commons' report, both initiated within the last three years.

"Each made substantial recommendations," says Hentschel, "The principle one of which was the establishment of an administrative group within the department, which would be responsible for managing all aspects of the business programme and implementing changes deemed to be in the interest of the investors."

"There are now substantial penalties for such misconduct in the form of a C\$500,000 fine and a five year prison term," he adds.

The Province of Manitoba in particular is concerned that there be more controls on the investor programme. It has established a moratorium on the investor category while the federal government investigates selected cases in the province. No charges have been laid.

"The province felt it was time to step back and look at the overall investor programme, look at the areas of weaknesses and try to address those weaknesses," says Richard Walker, Agent for Manitoba



Interviews are part of the application process for the Business Immigration Programme.

tion on the part of those who have a vested interest in the application," he adds. "The workload was so heavy for a long while that it led to unavoidable delays. It was strictly a question of numbers. That situation has much improved since the demand has lessened."

Charles Godfrey, Counsellor for the Commission for Canada Immigration Section in Hong Kong assures that his office is doing its utmost to improve the efficiency and accessibility of the department. "For example, one of the new policies we are enforcing at our reception desk is that anyone who wishes to discuss their application is immediately seen or given an appointment at the earliest possible date," says Godfrey.

The Commission reports that they are currently up-to-date on the application process and that in some cases, where documentation seems sufficient, interviews are being waived to speed up the process.