



Winnipeg hospitality overflowed when this first group of Hungarian refugees arrived in December. But 800 refugees have arrived in the last eight weeks and only two offers of free accommodation have been made. — Photo by Hugh Allan.

We have forgotten Hungary's refugees

By PETER DESBARATS

The hand stretched out to help Hungarians in Winnipeg has curled into a closed fist.

During the past eight weeks more than 800 refugees arrived in the city. In the same period offers of free accommodation from local families reached a total of two.

One of the offers came from a woman who happened to meet an English-speaking Hungarian couple at a bus stop recently. She struck up a conversation, expecting to hear them say how lucky they were to be in Canada.

Instead the Hungarian woman began to cry. Her husband apologized. Life wasn't very easy in Winnipeg, he explained. They had no friends. Their jobs were menial and badly paid and their living quarters were inadequate.

But the real shock came when the Hungarians admitted they were saving every penny of their meagre salaries to buy passage back to Hungary.

Unfortunately, most Canadians have never heard refugees speak that way. Hungarians are an exceedingly polite people. In many cases they'll lie in their teeth rather than insult our country. But the closed fist is reality. Our generosity shrivelled when headlines stopped shouting about Hungarians.

It's Indifference

From our point of view it's nothing, more than indifference.

From their point of view, especially after they've had three weeks in Immigration Hall to think about it, the fist must appear almost hostile.

It was a different story four months ago when the first refugees arrived here. Winnipeg put out the red carpet and covered it with welcoming committees.

After the speeches everybody used to choke up when the refugees sang their national anthem. Through it one could almost hear sounds of the battle of Budapest.

There was even a certain amount of competition for them. Donors of free accommodation had to put their names on waiting lists. Second-hand clothing overflowed storerooms at Immigration Hall.

Some of this enthusiasm was misguided. When the first refugees arrived here, for instance, the mayor of a certain Manitoba town visited Winnipeg and carried a group in a glare of publicity.

It turned out the town could provide them with everything but a living. Many of the refugees were in debt by the time they returned to immigration officials here for help.

But no one belittles this original effort. There are roughly 1,000 refugees in Winnipeg at the moment and hundreds are settled in good jobs and living quarters.

Manitoba has received more refugees per capita than any other Canadian province. To date 1,800 Hungarians have arrived in Winnipeg, a distribution centre for Manitoba, western Ontario and Alberta. About 800 of these have been sent to points outside the city.

The Key to the Problem

The keystone of the whole process is free, temporary accommodation. Everything runs smoothly if refugees arriving here can be placed quickly in homes.

It's the most effective way of introducing them to Canadian life. Friendships spring up between the refugees and their hosts and often the Canadians will use their own influence to find jobs and permanent quarters for their guests.

Without temporary accommodation the process begins to back up. At one point last week there were more than 200 Hungarians at Immigration Hall and some of them had been there for more than three weeks.

Without homes to receive them, the refugees have to live at the hall until they find employment. So far the warmer weather hasn't meant any increase in the limited number of jobs available. What of the future?

About 17,000 refugees have arrived in Canada to date and

another 12,000 are expected. Officials here estimate that Winnipeg can expect to double the number of refugees in the city by next fall.

Unless Winnipeg undergoes a radical change of heart, the task of settling 1,000 more Hungarians will be nothing but a headache for everyone concerned.

The helping hand must reach out again.

Even one young couple planning to return to Hungary is a terrible reproach to a city that prides itself on being friendly.

After 4 months red tape is out

Four months of Hungarians have changed both officials and voluntary workers at Immigration Hall here.

During that time they've organized what Immigration Minister Pickersgill has called the most efficient refugee service in the country. But in the process most of the starch has gone out of their official, red-tape approach to life.

Their conversation is more relaxed. When they run into a problem they don't temporize. They improvise.

Last week, for instance, one of the voluntary workers at the Hall suddenly looked up from her desk to see two strikingly handsome young men standing before her. They were brothers, sons of a former Hungarian prime minister.

At the moment they were simply two more refugees looking for jobs. By profession they were both expert glass-blowers.

Four months ago the worker would have thrown up her hands in despair. A glass-blower in Winnipeg is about as necessary as a deep-sea diver. But last week her mind made an automatic, intuitive jump. In a short time she'd found them jobs washing the winter grime from the glass tubing of outdoor neon signs.

The brothers were delighted, as much with the irony of the job as with the money it brought them.

From the moment the first Hungarians walked into the Hall here it was evident these people weren't like ordinary immigrants.

The story of the second-hand clothes graphically illustrated this.

Early in December the city prepared for the refugees by collecting stores of donated clothing. When the Hungarians arrived scenes in the clothing room were nothing short of hilarious.

Hungarian men, for instance, are thicker in the neck and shorter in the arms than Canadian men. If the collar of a shirt fitted them, the arms hung down to their knees.

Foundation garments had been so expensive in Hungary that few women could afford to wear them. As a result the narrow-waisted dresses donated by Canadian women did nothing but turn their Hungarian sisters green with envy.

So much of the clothing was unsuitable that refugee workers soon stopped asking Winnipeggers for donations. Now the federal government pays for necessary articles.

The clothes were only a surface indication of more basic differences. Officials soon discovered it would take a long time for Hungarians to forget habits and attitudes acquired during 19 years of life in a Communist country.

Police, for instance, were shunned like the plague. Refugee workers have actually seen new Hungarian arrivals zig-zagging from one sidewalk to the other along Main St. in an effort to avoid Winnipeg's finest.

Communist rule also gave Hungarians a deep-rooted distrust of all government officials. One false move on the part of Canadian officials was enough to arouse their suspicion.

"The one thing you must never do is lie to them," said a worker in Winnipeg. "If you say you're going to do something for them, you've got to do it even if it kills you."

This is why refugee workers consider it all-important to get Hungarians out of Immigration Hall surroundings as soon as possible. Only when living in Canadian homes can they begin to relax and take a balanced look at Canadian life.



Jenó Kosari, now a self-supporting Winnipegger, relaxes with daughter Susan, three.

Photo by Ernie Einarsson.

A little help put a family on its feet

A visit with the Kosari family makes one wonder what people mean when they talk about the refugee "problem".

The only problem is finding Canadians willing to help Hungarians. Because a Winnipeg family took an interest in Jenó Kosari, his wife and two children, their story has a happy ending.

Five months ago the Kosaris were living in a small three-room apartment on Rakoczi St., in central Budapest. Generally discontented with their way of life, they saw no immediate prospect of changing it.

At 39 years of age, Jenó was earning as much money as he ever would. His job as a dental technician paid him 1,500 forints a month.

Inadequate Salary

It is difficult to equate this to a Canadian salary. Rent for their apartment, on one hand, was only 45 forints a month. On the other hand, Jenó's whole monthly salary was little more than half the price of a new tweed suit.

It's safe to say the salary was inadequate. After working eight hours a day at the factory, Jenó was forced to do eight hours of "illegal" work at home to make ends meet. His extra-curricular earnings were double his official salary.

At the factory Jenó's non-party status made it impossible for him to rise to higher positions.

Once again it's difficult for Canadians to understand why people like Jenó, living under Communist rule for 12 years, consistently refused to join the Communist party.

It seems to have been a matter of honor for many of them. Self-respect

wouldn't allow them to associate with a group they believed was ruining the country. So many honest, freedom-loving Hungarians had been imprisoned by the Communists that many men felt there was something almost shameful in remaining on good terms with the government.

Never to Return

Several days before the October revolution broke out, Jenó's employer sent him on business to the town of Esztergom, about 62 miles north of Budapest. He took his wife and children with him, little knowing they would never return to the apartment on Rakoczi St.

On Oct. 23 Jenó returned to the city on business. On the way to the factory he encountered a procession of university students marching through downtown Budapest. He didn't pay much attention to the parade or to the placards demanding government reform displayed on buildings all over the city.

At the factory Jenó discovered the workers had left their jobs and were gathering in groups to discuss political issues in a surprisingly open manner. The groups formed into ranks and soon Jenó was marching with other workers and students towards the radio station in central Budapest.

First Shots Fired

He stayed in front of the station from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. as the first shots of the revolution were fired into the crowd by secret police.

That night he returned to Esztergom to look after his family but on Nov. 3 he risked another trip into Budapest. On Nov.

4 the Russians returned and Jenó realized that the short reign of freedom had ended.

He stayed in Hungary until Nov. 28, hoping with most other Hungarians for American intervention. When it became evident the United States had no intention of sending help, he took his wife and children and fled to the Austrian border. That night they walked the last few miles to freedom.

After three weeks in Austria they were put on a boat for Canada, arriving at Halifax Jan. 5 and in Winnipeg Jan. 9.

Among Friends

The Kosari family's life in Canada began four days later when a Winnipeg doctor took them into his home. Immediately they felt they were among friends, a feeling that means more to a refugee than any amount of free food and clothing.

Within a week the doctor had helped Jenó get a job in a dental laboratory. Last month the family moved into their own flat on Aubrey St. While Jenó's salary as an apprentice, a temporary classification, is only \$40 a week, he claims it buys twice as much as the wage he received in Hungary.

Their son Eugene, 13, attends Laura Secord School in the neighborhood. And four nights a week Eugene takes care of three-year-old Susan while his father and mother attend English classes.

In three short months, thanks to a Winnipeg doctor and his family, the Kosaris have become happy and useful new Canadians. They are no longer a part of the refugee "problem".