



## Canadian Immigration Historical Society

Annual General Meeting  
**Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

St. Anthony's Soccer Club  
523 St. Anthony Street  
Ottawa.

*RSVP: 613-241-0166*

The 2009 Annual General Meeting will be held again this year at St. Anthony's Soccer Club on Wednesday 21 October. St. Anthony's runs off of Preston Street, immediately north of the 417 overpass. The club is wheel chair accessible and there is ample parking.

The bar will be open from 6:00 PM and the meeting will come to order around 7:00.

Activities will include the presentation of a contribution and a model "small boat" to the new Indochinese Refugee Museum. Our guest speaker will be the eminent political scientist Dr Gilles Paquet, from the University of Ottawa. We will also have further news about the launch of the CIHS-International Migration Research Centre annual prize for forth-year and graduate papers on immigration history.

For budgetary reasons we have to charge for drinks and are asking members who are so inclined to make a voluntary contribution of to the cost of the excellent Italian buffet which costs the society \$25.00 per person.

We would like to extend a special invitation to Society members from outside the national capital region to join us if you happen to be in Ottawa at that time.

# Forgotten Refugees: The 1956 Palestinian Refugee Movement to Canada

By Michael Molloy

## Part 1

### PRESS RELEASE

Department of External Affairs

Ottawa, Canada

No.100

FOR RELEASE IN BEIRUT AND OTTAWA  
AT 1 A.M. EST, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1955.

The Department of External Affairs announced today that the Canadian Government has tentatively decided to admit a limited number of Palestinian refugees as immigrants to Canada. This decision has been taken in view of the requests received from Palestinian refugees for immigration to Canada and in the context of Canada's continuing desire as the fourth largest contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) to do what it can to promote the welfare of refugees.

The immigrants would be chosen from amongst English or French speaking refugee applicants in Lebanon or Jordan who have certain specified trades or skills which would enable them to find employment in Canada. Prospective immigrants and their families must also meet certain health and other requirements.

Because of the lack of Canadian immigration facilities in Lebanon and Jordan, the Canadian Government has requested UNRWA to assist with pre-selection of refugee applicants who have the necessary qualifications and UNRWA has been kind enough to agree to provide this assistance. The final choice of immigrants, however, will be made by Canadian Immigration officials who will visit Lebanon and Jordan in the near future for this purpose. Because of the limited number of applicants to be accepted, the Canadian officials will make a selection from amongst applications submitted by UNRWA.

Like most press releases, the one above contains a blend of truth and fiction. It marked the first time people in Canada and in the Middle East heard about Canada's intentions regarding what is now an almost-forgotten episode in our immigration history.

A document quoted in Bulletin 45 mentioned a movement of Palestinian Refugees in the mid-1950s<sup>1</sup>, and these immigrants are mentioned in Valerie Knowles' "Strangers at Our Gates"<sup>2</sup>. As CIHS's business is to cast light on our immigration past, I asked the National Archives for the relevant file and a few weeks later their kind staff provided access to NAC, RG 76, vol. 865, and file 555-54-607.

### **The Request from UNRWA**

The story begins with Despatch number 339 of August 10, 1955 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Canadian Legation<sup>3</sup> in Beirut to the Secretary of State for External Affairs:

"We have been informally and confidentially approached by officials of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees... with a view to ascertaining whether a way might be found of facilitating the entry into Canada of a limited number of specially selected Palestine refugees for permanent settlement."

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<sup>1</sup> "CANADA'S REFUGEE PROGRAMMES - 1945-1970", Department of Manpower and Immigration's Information Division, January 1969 quoted in CIHS Bulletin 45, January 2005

<sup>2</sup> pages 171-173

<sup>3</sup> Michael Shenstone explains: A Legation was the name of the diplomatic office which, since the Congress of Vienna, un- or less important countries established in all or most countries, and which important countries established in un- or less important countries. The main difference between Embassies and Legations was that the former were headed by Ambassadors, and the latter by Ministers... they had the same diplomatic privileges, immunities etc. and their roles were similar. In the late 50's and 60's countries started to "raise the status" of their missions reciprocally from Legation to Embassy as a cost-free gesture of goodwill.

The approach originated with officials of UNRWA's Division of Placement Services, responsible for administering an "unofficial" scheme to resettle 2,000 Palestinian refugees in the USA, acting without direction from UNRWA's Commissioner.

The Despatch paints a sympathetic picture of the refugees that was subsequently quoted widely in official communications.

"Canadians newly come to this area are soon made aware of the extent to which the Arab states themselves have contributed to the rehabilitation of those Palestinian refugees who have contrived by some means or other to keep off the UNRWA relief rolls... In Beirut one meets them in every walk of life. Some are extremely fine people, well educated, efficient, hard-working, adaptable and capable of enduring stoically a great deal of hardship. Some are 'graduates' of UNRWA, having escaped from relief either by their own efforts or through training given by the Agency... The level of education among Palestinian Arabs has been relatively high, being comparable with the level of education in Lebanon. The training Palestinians received during the period of the mandate gave them a concept of administrative standards somewhat better than that which prevails here, however, and foreigners in Beirut generally find the efficiency and sense of responsibility of Palestinians to be more dependable than that of the Lebanese. One has to judge individuals on the basis of their personal records, however, since the experience of being uprooted has seriously injured many of them."

Despatch 339 provides a breakdown of the refugee population registered with UNRWA by "host territory" as of June 1955:

Country	Number of Refugees	% of host country population
Lebanon	103,600	7.7%
Syria	88,179	2.3%
Jordan	499,606	56.8%
Gaza	214,601	225%
TOTAL	905,986	14.8%

From this it can be seen that many neighbouring countries had significant refugee populations, and that in the case of Gaza, the refugees actually outnumbered the local population by more than two to one. The despatch notes the vast majority were "...former peasants and agricultural workers who speak no other language than Arabic, have a strong attachment to the particular plots of land which their forebears cultivated for centuries, and would neither wish or have the capacity to resettle in Canada". The proposed immigrants to Canada would not be recruited from this group but from the "...fraction of the refugees who have been taught the English language and who have professional training or technical skills".

The Legation also reported on problems the US program encountered arising from the fact that the refugee definition imposed by the US Congress excluded refugees who had not registered with UNRWA and who had had the skills and means to support themselves: "...people whose ability and initiative are above average, and who would therefore be particularly desirable immigrants". Present or past nationality was not a reliable guide to the identification of refugees, since many who left Palestine (e.g. Armenians) had been born elsewhere but were "...just as truly Palestinian refugees as the Arab peasants whose forebears had lived in Palestine for centuries".

The Despatch describes problems in obtaining travel documents and finding means to ensure that refugees would be returnable to the source country of residence if it was discovered that

they were for one reason or another unsuitable. It notes that few Palestinians had relatives in Canada.

It then makes reference to a document being forwarded to Ottawa titled "Classification of Occupations, Persons Registered for Employment with UNRWA Placement Services as of December 31, 1954". This remarkable document lists the occupations of some 27,335 persons, arranged according to fifty-eight "Orders" and 170 occupational groups under the "Bertillon" system of occupational classification as adapted to Palestine by the British under the Mandate.<sup>4</sup> Most of these are from the "...artisan class... plumbers, mechanics, fitters, riveters, surveyor's assistants" and includes radio and air-conditioning technicians trained by the Aramco Oil Company in Saudi Arabia "...obliged to return ...as a result of one of the periodic waves of anti-Palestinian feeling on the part of the Saudi Arabian Government".

UNRWA was reported willing to advertise for persons in occupations of interest to Canada, to carry out pre-selection to Canadian

<sup>4</sup> The work represented by this report is an example of the professionalism and diligence that remains the hallmark of UNRWA officials. Occupations run from unskilled labourers (3132), to circumcisers (2), lawyers (23), judge - Bedouin Courts (1), clerks (364), detectives (25), army cooks (212), ice and water sellers (4), postal clerks (85), furniture carpenters (42) and a single salt works overseer. A review underscores the perception that most professionals and people of means avoided registering with UNRWA, a phenomenon that 60 years later continues to complicate the task of estimating the total number displaced.

specifications and to forward applications. It would pay the passage of refugees who were in receipt of UNRWA rations and provide departing heads of family with \$28.00, plus \$14.00 for each accompanying dependant. It would provide free medical examinations and certify refugee status and qualifications.

The despatch, signed by Trade Commissioner C.F.C. Hughes, acknowledges the "considerable preparatory work" of Mr. Shenstone, Second Secretary, and notes the contents were approved by Chargé d'Affaires Elizabeth MacCallum (Canada's first female Head of Mission).

### **The Decision to Respond and Framing the Program**

The story continues in the minutes of a meeting held on October 26, 1955 (at 10:00 a.m.) "To discuss the proposal that a limited number of specially selected Palestinian refugees be admitted to Canada for permanent resettlement." The minutes make clear that the matter had already been discussed in Cabinet.

In attendance were:

Mr. C.E.S. Smith, Director of Immigration  
Mr. Paul T. Baldwin, Chief, Admissions Division  
Mr. G.R. Benoit, Chief of Operations  
Mr. Lloyd M. Hunter, Chief, Settlement Division  
Mr. H. L. Voisey  
Mr. T.P. Malone, Consular Division,  
Department of External Affairs  
Mr. W.W. Dawson, Department of Labour  
Mr. J.W. Temple, Unemployment Insurance  
Commission, and  
Inspector G.H. Ashley, RCMP

Director Smith began by reading a memorandum (not in the file) from Immigration Minister Jack Pickersgill setting forth Cabinet's views. Those views were not terribly clear, since it then took the meeting some time to decide whether the Cabinet communication was a "...dictum that a certain number of these

refugees be admitted or whether the meeting should merely return a report on the advisability of doing so." The consensus was that refugees were to be admitted and the committee should make recommendations on numbers and selection criteria.

Mr. Malone outlined the reasons for the Cabinet's interest in having some refugees admitted to Canada as follows:

1. Canada is the fourth largest contributor to Palestine relief and it was obviously in Canada's best interests that refugees be resettled as soon as possible. By accepting a certain number of these refugees it was felt that it might interest other Countries in doing likewise.
2. The large number of Arab refugees represented a dangerous threat to the already delicate political situation in the Middle East and because that area is becoming of increasing strategic importance, any step to relieve the refugee problem would be a useful piece of strategy.

Uncertainty about the Palestinians' trade qualifications worried the committee, which agreed this first movement should "...be in the nature of an experiment, the admission of other groups to be considered in the light of our experience..." Mr. Dawson suggested 100 workers together with dependants for a total of between 300 to 400 "souls". That suggestion carried the day.

Malone suggested the decision be conveyed to the Chargé d'Affaires in Beirut, and asked that Immigration prepare a list of occupations as a selection guide. Director Smith agreed on the understanding that the list be "used as a guide only" and stressed the importance of having selection completed to facilitate a spring arrival. Mr. Benoit emphasized the importance of English or French competency and adaptability, and asked for a report on the size

of the average refugee family. Beirut would be tasked with ensuring that refugees could be returned to Lebanon if the need arose. (Refugees from Jordan were expected to travel on Jordanian passports so the issue did not arise for this group.) Re-entry permission, described by Director Smith as "not a vital issue," was later put on hold.

A suggestion from Inspector Ashley that the Palestinian refugees be defined as "any Arab displaced as a result of the Israeli-Arab war" was accepted. Medical examinations were discussed - three hundred cases might have to be screened to yield 100 immigrants plus dependants! Malone agreed to draft instructions to Beirut to be reviewed by the Director of Immigration.

On November 4, 1955, Malone advised Beirut (telegram C-71) of the decision to admit 100 Palestinian refugees plus dependants, from Lebanon and Jordan. They would need to speak English or French and possess "skills and training which would enable them to obtain employment in Canada". An immigration team would proceed to Lebanon and Jordan in late January or early February. The Legation was asked whether UNRWA could pre-select 300 cases by that time and whether it could carry out the pre-selection process without encouraging the expectation that this represented the number to be selected thereby exposing Canada to criticism. The telegram expressed concern about UNRWA advertising the movement and suggested that candidates be selected directly from UNRWA's records. Instructions were on the way by diplomatic bag.

### Instructions to the Legation

The instructions took the form of Numbered Letter C-373 of November 2, 1955 signed by Jules Leger, Under Secretary of State. They reiterated the selection criteria and drew attention to a list of occupations in demand in Canada that had been extracted from the UNRWA list. The list was reclassified according

to the ILO's International Classification of Occupations.<sup>5</sup> The letter asked whether UNRWA could pay the passage of Palestinians not in receipt of rations. If not, the Canadian immigration team would give preference to those able to pay their own passage. The question of approaching Lebanon and Jordan regarding re-entry guarantees was to be left in abeyance and Canada would accept refugees travelling on "UNRWA documents".

Letter C-373 proposed an even broader refugee definition than that suggested at the 26 October meeting: "Any applicant pre-selected by UNRWA who formerly resided in Palestine and who left his or her place of residence as a result of the Palestine war would qualify". The Legation was asked for information on average family size and was told to remind UNRWA that care should be taken in pre-selecting and medically screening candidates. Difficulty was anticipated in placing the refugees in employment. If selection could not take place in late January or early February, the exercise would be postponed to the spring of 1957.

### Fine Tuning

A number of wrinkles soon appeared. In response to Malone's telegram, MacCallum replied<sup>6</sup> that while UNRWA was willing to pre-select the refugees for Canada,

"... its status would suffer if it appeared to be taking the initiative in encouraging refugees to resettle outside Arab world... UNRWA hopes you will authorize us to issue a press release here indicating that in view of the large number

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<sup>5</sup> The occupations identified for selection on the Canadian list included: electrical and mechanical engineers, draughtsmen, professional and non professional nurses, typists, stenographers, tailors, shoe repairmen, cabinet makers, carpenters and joiners, diesel and automotive mechanics, radio and TV repairmen, plumbers, pipe fitters, welders, stone masons, plasterers, painters and paperhangers, bakers, housekeeping service workers and cooks both institutional and domestic... a list of occupations that would not be out of place today.

<sup>6</sup> November 9/55 (Telegram number C-73)

of requests received by Canadian government from refugees for immigration to Canada the government has tentatively decided to admit a very limited number of applicants resident in Lebanon and Jordan who speak English or French and who have special technical skills which would enable them to support themselves in Canada... Canada has requested UNRWA to assist in pre-selection..."

In MacCallum's view a press release might be problematic, but as publicity was deemed inevitable she suggested that it might be better to control it from the outset and offered to draft a text for Ottawa's approval.

The Chargé also expressed the hope that the immigration teams could come a little later than originally planned, and sketched out the pre-screening procedure.

The points made in MacCallum's telegram are elaborated further in Beirut's Numbered Letter 448 of November 17, 1955, which addresses a number of technical issues. Interviews should take place in Beirut, Amman and Jerusalem. UNRWA would not be able to pay the passage of refugees who were not on its rations list, so would it be possible for Canada to issue assisted passage loans to people in that category? It notes that there was no such thing as an UNRWA travel document but *laissez-passeurs* from the Lebanese government would be available.

The average refugee family had 4.5 members, but families with many children were plentiful. In a typical family the head of family might be 50 to 55, but the real bread winner was often a son in the 20-25 age group. In such cases the son would be the eligible immigrant, but might be unwilling to go to Canada unless he could take his parents and siblings or call for them once established in Canada.

The letter raised questions about medical processing: Would a Canadian medical officer accompany the teams, were X-rays required,

or just a radiologist's report? Speed was of the essence in resolving these issues. And speed was what they got.

The draft press release forwarded by Beirut in telegram No.75 of November 25 was reviewed, amended and authorized by way of return telegram C-76 the very same day, with a suggestion that the legation notify the Lebanese authorities and request re-entry guarantees before the press release was issued.

### Advising Host Governments

On November 30, MacCallum and Shenstone called on the Secretary-General of the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fouad Ammoun, to inform him of the press release scheduled for December 2, and to ask whether the Lebanese would be willing to issue re-entry permits to those selected by Canada. The reply was that the refugees would be issued *laissez-passeurs* valid for re-entry for the life of the document. The Secretary-General expressed his personal appreciation for what Canada was planning, but mentioned that the Arab League favoured repatriation of the refugees in line with the UNGA resolution (194) of December 11, 1948. MacCallum stressed that the program would involve a limited number wishing to make a fresh start to which the Secretary-General once more expressed his appreciation.

The next day MacCallum called on the Jordanian Chargé d'Affaires Abdulhamid Siraj, giving him English and Arabic versions of the press release. Siraj reacted favourably, promising to send the documents by special courier to his Prime Minister's office the same day. He also affirmed that refugees from Jordan could be provided with either Jordanian passports valid for re-entry for five years or, if the refugees wished, *laissez-passeurs* with one-year re-entry visas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Beirut numbered letter 460 to U/SSEA December 1, 1955

The questions in Beirut's Letter 448 were answered on December 9, 1955, in telegram C-82. The Immigration Department had decided it did not want applicants subjected to formal trade-testing. While selection should be restricted to occupations on the list, the main criteria "...should be over-all suitability and adaptability to life in Canada". The Immigration team would be guided by the Legation's advice in terms of where processing should take place, but assisted passage loans would not be available. Only "...normal family units - i.e. - wage-earner, his wife and children can be considered eligible". A medical officer would accompany the team and the medical requirements were spelled out in full: "Blood Wasserman, examination of faeces for parasites, X-Ray examination of the chest and radiologist's report."

The team doctor would perform the physical examination, but it would facilitate things if UNRWA arranged pre-screening and had completed medical forms (IMS 1027) available for review. A 14" by 17" X-ray was preferred.

### Instructions to Immigration

On December 15, 1955, Immigration's Chief of Operations sent a message to Mr. Paul Fortin, Officer in Charge, Athens, advising him of the Cabinet's decision. For reasons that are unclear the message instructed Fortin to proceed to Lebanon on January 6, several weeks before the Legation and UNRWA had been told to expect a team.

Fortin was to proceed with his Stage B officer (background clearances) and a Canadian medical officer. The refugee definition ("an Arab displaced as a result of the Israeli-Arab war") and the size of the group to be selected were spelled out. Selections were to be based on the occupational list previously sent to Beirut. A new element, an age limit of 45 for workers, was added. The main selection

criterion was "the applicants' suitability and adaptability to the Canadian way of life". Any future movement would depend on the success of this initial group. The refugees were to be counselled on sponsorship of relatives coming under the "waiver classes", and that they would have to pay their own passage if they did not qualify for UNRWA support. Fortin was to destine them to IMOP<sup>8</sup> as follows, to arrive after March 1, 1956.

Montreal	25	London	5
Quebec	10	Ottawa	5
Hull	5	Windsor	5
Three Rivers	5	Toronto	25
Hamilton	5	Port Arthur	10

Both the early start date of January 6, later changed to January 13, and the age 45 cut-off would have unfortunate consequences for the success of the operation.

On January 10, 1956 Immigration's Chief of Operations wrote to the department's District Superintendents outlining the reasons for the movement, explaining selection criteria and identifying the communities of destination. Benoit's message notes that

"Considerable publicity has been given to this movement and assurance given that immigrants will receive assistance in locating accommodation and employment as well as emergency assistance, if required. Every effort is to be made, therefore, to ensure that these

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<sup>8</sup> IMOP stands for 'Immigration Open Placement' and was introduced in 1951. It indicates an immigrant who would expect assistance from Immigration's placement service, and who might require food and shelter on, or shortly after, arrival. SE identified immigrants who did not require assistance, either because of their own resources, or because of other arrangements (family, friends, employer) to cover their initial costs)

refugees and their families are satisfactorily established with the least possible delay.<sup>9</sup>

As 1955 wound down, Immigration Director Smith wrote to Malone advising that the immigration team's visit was postponed to January 15. The letter indicates that he would not object if, given time pressure, the Chargé in Beirut communicated directly with Immigration HQ. The letter concludes with an interesting description of how "settlement" was done before Immigration merged with Manpower.

"Upon arrival at destination these immigrants will report to the Immigration Office where they will receive assistance in locating accommodation and employment. Should the need arise, emergency assistance in the form of food and shelter is available either in Immigration Halls at such places as Montreal and Quebec or in private dwellings elsewhere. In this connection the Chargé d'Affaires may give whatever assurances are necessary that these people will not want pending initial establishment in this country. As for placement techniques, Immigration Officers, strategically located throughout Canada, are engaged in a continuous placement survey, seeking out and recording job opportunities for newcomers. These men have an intimate knowledge of the area under their jurisdiction and are able to give a great deal of help and guidance in the matter of obtaining suitable employment and offering counselling services<sup>10</sup>."

***To be continued (and concluded) in Bulletin 57***

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<sup>9</sup> Memo to All District Superintendents from Director of Operations, January 10, 1956, immigration file 555-54-607

<sup>10</sup> Letter, December 29, 1955 from CES Smith, Director of Immigration to U/SSEA Attention Mr. Paul Malone, Immigration file 555-54-607

## **In Memoriam**

### **John Wilfred Dobson**

Members of the society will be saddened to learn of the death of John Dobson, a veteran member of the Immigration service who spent his entire career at headquarters working in the policy and correspondence fields. John had a long association with the service, and his father, Charles Dobson, was Chief of Records in the 1950s, in the old Woods Building. John ended his career working in the Secretariat, along with a small group of officers who were selected for their knowledge of immigration and their ability to write well. A few of those who worked alongside John in the Secretariat were: Jessie Faulkner, Don Bandy, Bill Costello, Wally Dickman and Don Sloan. John was a regular member of the breakfast gathering of retired officers that meet twice a year in Ottawa. John had a strong work ethic and his advice and the benefit of his experience was always appreciated by his supervisors. He belonged to that generation of officers who joined the department after the war, and whose dedication and loyalty built an immigration service that was second to none. John was 78 years of age when he died suddenly in hospital on February 27, 2009. He is survived by two daughters and grandchildren.

### **Brian Clinton Danby**

We have also learned of the death of Brian Danby on May 25, 2009, in Sorrento, Australia. Brian died peacefully in his sleep at home, in his 92nd year. He was the son of Vice Admiral Sir Clinton Samuel Danby, who commanded the first aircraft carrier in the British Navy. After service in the Second World War, Brian served in Malaya in the British Colonial Service, and experienced firsthand the struggle between the Government and the communists in their attempt to seize power. He later moved to Canada, where he became the Chief Financial Officer of the BC Power Corporation. He was serving in this position in the mid-1960s when he applied in an open competition for immigration Foreign Service Officers. He accepted a position, and despite a serious drop in annual income, became a member of the immigration service. Brian served in a number of foreign postings as well as at headquarters. He quickly earned a reputation as a first-rate manager, with strong leadership qualities. Those serving under him found him to be fair, but demanding. He insisted on high standards, and as might be expected from his background, "ran a tight ship." Brian's wife, Betty, died before him but he is survived by a son and two daughters. Appropriately, his obituary notice ended with the words, "Virtutis Praemium Honor."