What's inside?

- Real life versus the new refugee system
- The tough task of training for everything - one grad's eloquent farewell
- No room for reason - the housing crunch and its racist response

Express yourself!

In a sea of English, students find they’re all in the same boat

By Ruth Farrell, Fern Henderson and John Villeneuve

In order to block progress on too great a tower, the Christian myth says, God had all of the builders speak a different language. When the builders could not understand one another, the project failed.

When new immigrants come to Canada, their progress is also hindered if they can’t speak the new language.

MOSAIC is meeting the need of immigrants to express themselves through the Settlement Language Training Program.

And as one student sums up her participation: “Can you imagine how happy I’ll be when I can say what I really think?”

The MOSAIC program, offered in the morning, afternoon and evening each weekday, is designed to develop language skills and to orient students to Canadian culture.

(continued on page 2)
Language training eases settlement

"I want to learn English to understand everything about TV programs, what's in the newspaper and the culture of Canada. If I can understand, speak, read and write English, then I will communicate more with local people."

-Chang

Classes aren’t just about reading, writing and grammar. They include a lot of problem-solving and real-life conversations: how to find the right bus, how to tell the doctor your symptoms, how to find a plumber in the yellow pages.

Classes unite groups of all ages and from every cultural background. This year, students were between 22 and 69 years old, and they came from over 25 countries.

The students are landed immigrants; some have recently arrived and some have been here for years.

"When I came to Canada for the first time, my first impression was of beautiful nature and friendly people but I felt just like I was deaf and dumb."

-Anese

Their reasons for being in Canada are as varied as their languages but the common bond is a strong desire to communicate in English. The desire and the bond get built up through communication games, peer teaching, role playing and humor.

The initial anxiety and frustration of cultural shock changes. Students often support each other in language learning, and form respectful and affectionate friendships.

"In class I get friendship. I feel warm and I love my class. And it gives me a good memory in my life."

-Ophelia

Within the immigrant community, MOSAIC is a well-known resource centre. English classes are free. Daycare is available for students with children aged 2 - 6. MOSAIC community workers support the program and refer clients to the classes.

The ESL program is growing. Its highly motivated students not only increase their English skills but develop confidence and a sense of belonging at the same time.

"If MOSAIC gives more chance to learn English to all immigrants like me, they will have a better life and settle in Canada successfully and contribute to the development of Canada."

-Myung Gyu


Did you know...?

That Citizenship Day has been held on the Friday before May 24 (Victoria Day) since 1958? It is intended to be a day for Canadians to think about their rights and duties, privileges and responsibilities.

This country’s Citizenship Act came into force on January 1, 1947, and the first official Day was May 23, 1950.

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Newsletter Editors: John Doyle and Ellen Saenger
Theatre-goers find no safe haven in ¡SANCTUARY!

By Ita Margalit

An audience member fights with a death squad. She is killed instantly.

An elderly woman hides a subversive pamphlet, and successfully eludes the watchful eyes of the death squad.

This fight against oppression occurred nightly on Vancouver stages in the month-long Headlines Theatre tour of ¡SANCTUARY?.

For its actors, this play about the refugee experience began as an intensive five-day workshop on "Theatre of the Oppressed." The techniques of Argentinian activist Augusto Boal were used to lead the actors, who were once refugees themselves, through an investigation of the relationship between controller and controlled. They used instances from their own lives and deepened these into the play that became ¡SANCTUARY?.

What makes this type of theatre so unusual is that it relies totally on audience participation. The play is first performed once through. Then it played again and during the second performance, the audience is asked to yell "stop" whenever they see a character being oppressed. The audience member then takes the actor's place and tries to end the power imbalance.

Audience members can only change places with characters they feel are oppressed. The scene continues while the actors react (in character) to the intervention.

Two facilitators, called "Jokers," explain the rules and facilitate the interventions by the audience members. And unlike other theatre, house lights stay on.

The object of these techniques, Augusto Boal says, is that "the barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed: all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society."

The audience is immediately involved as a student activist (Eduardo Aragon, a MOSAIC staff member) passes out leaflets about an upcoming protest meeting.

As soon as he leaves, two members of the death squad enter and interrogate the audience members holding leaflets.

At once the audience's mood changes. From the harassment, stirrings of fear arise.

From this point the story unfolds simply, but powerfully. The student activist is followed by the death squad, and captured in the home of a friend and his pregnant wife. The student is taken away but suspicion now falls on the couple and they are threatened by the death squad.

The couple flees their country, and via Mexico and the U.S.A., end up at the Canadian border where they are interviewed under the new immigration laws.

In Canada they must deal with the overwhelming procedures and steps to receive permanent sanctuary.

The strength of this play lies in the audiences' direct and concrete experience of it, and in the fact that interventions are not accepted unless the spectator becomes player. As a player, the former spectator must face the consequences of the intervention and feels directly the enforced control.

The play is full of examples of domination strategically placed to provide information to the audience. A most obvious one occurs when the pregnant woman is seemingly ignored by her husband and the student activist; while the two discuss a secret meeting, she is sent to make coffee.

"This scene has never failed to get an intervention by a woman in the audience," Eduardo Aragon says. "We put it there on purpose to explain a reality most Canadians don't understand. They immediately see it as sexism, where in El Salvador it is done for safety.

Husbands and wives working for the revolution are separated and do not share information. If one is caught they cannot reveal the other's contacts and activities because they don't know them. We are trying to get across to the audiences the daily dangers of fighting violently repressive regimes."

Occasionally an audience member makes an intervention that the Jokers deem "magic". One woman replaced one of the death squad and then refused to harass people. She made speeches to her partner about brotherhood and peace. This intervention was magic because it was totally out of character and reality.

Most of the interventions inadvertently act as vehicles to reveal the hard facts of refugees' lives outside and inside Canada.

Yet one often feels powerless to end oppression, especially acts of violence in foreign countries. Interventions at best seemed to provide immediate safety, but did little to change the grinding realities. Only when the couple arrive in Canada do we feel that there is something we can do to end the beleagueredness and provide sanctuary in a humane way.

This may be due to the fact that Boal's Forum Theatre is meant as a tool for oppressed people to come up with ways that they can overcome their own oppression, thus liberating themselves.

This piece was played to Vancouver audiences who are not restrained in the same ways and therefore it is still a mediated experience.

While ¡SANCTUARY? is an excellent educational tool with strong opportunities for a deep empathetic response, it remains always a very difficult thing to assume someone else's reality.

* Ita Margalit is MOSAIC Financial Development Officer
Living with the new refugee laws:
When Canada turns up the heat on refugee claimants, who gets burned?

In advance of its passage into law three months ago, Canada's new refugee legislation had already become the subject of intense conjecture and debate.

Roger Barany recounts firsthand how it has worked so far in the community he serves.

By Roger Barany

Canada's long-awaited and long-debated new refugee legislation was finally ushered in with the new year. But the law's birth hasn't silenced the emotion-charged debate.

The questions remain: is the new system allowing Canada to deal justly with asylum seekers brought here by poverty and global conflict? Does it remain true to the country's humanitarian tradition while at the same time protecting this course from abuse?

If you ask members of one Salvadoran family who arrived at the border recently, their sense of relief and delight is almost palpable. They were whisked through the new two-stage process in a record-breaking 14 days.

They met with success. The system worked for them, as it should have because their claim to refugee status was convincing. Their testimony was clear and unambiguous, and based on specific life-threatening events.

To make things easier, these people were also well-educated and likeable. Had they been applying as independent immigrants from abroad, any visa officer would surely have given them full points for "personal suitability."

Yet despite being "ideal" refugees to test the new Immigration and Refugee Board, the family found the proceedings complex and confusing, and reported feeling extremely anxious throughout the whole ordeal.

The claimants went through two hearings of approximately five hours each with two different lawyers in two weeks. In B.C., new refugees are assigned lawyers

Their sense of relief and delight is almost palpable. They were whisked through the new two-stage process in a record-breaking 14 days.
only for the initial hearing, but not for the full hearing. So the family had the choice of either paying the first lawyer $500 or finding another one. Having no funds, the family head approached MOSAIC and was referred to Legal Services Society who immediately assigned an experienced refugee lawyer to the case.

Yet despite the short-term confusion caused by the new process, these refugees, and many others like them, will be grateful for the new opportunity life in Canada has given them.

Unfortunately for him, his life didn't fit into the well-planned and sophisticated legal procedure.

But it's too late to ask Eduardo Rodriguez-Jimenez for his opinion of the new system. He is a 16-year-old Salvadoran who has the unfortunate status of being the first refugee claimant in Canada to be deported to El Salvador under the new legislation. Ironically, this breaks a longstanding Canadian policy of not deporting Salvadorans to El Salvador.

It is also ironic that the impartial Documentation Centre, which provides information to refugee board members, lawyers, and to the public, reported in its country profile of El Salvador that many observers feel the level of killings in 1988 represents a return to the levels of 1980. Our Salvadoran clients, who are in direct contact with family back home, have confirmed that the situation has deteriorated dramatically in recent months.

Cases like those of Rodriguez were predicted by refugee advocates who argue that refugee claimants who are not articulate, who fear and distrust authority figures, or who lack political savvy could be spun around and back to a dangerous situation.

Before the new laws were in place, refugee advocates and lawyers often referred to El Salvador when they expressed fear of deportations to unsafe countries under the new legislation.

Rodriguez repeatedly claimed he feared both the army and the guerrillas if sent back to El Salvador. His claims fell on skeptical, if not deaf, ears.

He was screened out at the initial hearing stage of the process after he was found to have an unfounded claim based on his subjective fear of being killed if recruited by either the military or the guerrillas. This despite the well-known fact that youth in El Salvador are routinely scooped up off the street by the army and forced to fight the guerrillas, or pressured into joining the guerilla movement recruiting members for their cause.

People like Rodriguez-Jimenez do not have the luxury of remaining politically neutral in El Salvador. If you do not support one side, you are perceived by the other side as dangerous. And if young Rodriguez were to bow to the pressure and support the guerrilla cause, he might find his efforts frustrated by a paramilitary death squad and his head impaled on a stake for public scrutiny.

Rodriguez admitted that he made mistakes. But he is a real-life story of what happens when a young man's life and actions cannot be buttonholed into a well-planned and sophisticated legal procedure.

His main mistake was arriving at the U.S./Canada border one day late for his December inquiry date, and deciding to sneak into Canada rather than wait another two weeks south of the line.

When he did report to the Vancouver Immigration Office in January he was put under the new legislation, missing the opportunity to be included under the softer backlog provisions. He was detained because he had no passport or other identification documents.

Because he entered Canada illegally, he lost the right to a free lawyer at the initial hearing. When he was told of his right to counsel at his own expense, he simply assumed that meant he had no choice because he had no money. Despite three adjournments for this purpose, he returned empty-handed.

Had he been one year younger, he would have been given a lawyer since a 17-year-old is assumed to be too young to understand the proceedings.

When both the adjudicator and refugee board member agreed that his claim had no credible basis, Rodriguez was taken directly to Oakalla to await deportation, without any possibility of making "other plans."

It is unlikely that Rodriguez understood how crucial those initial proceedings were.

He is the type of person who was used to fending for himself. He had lived the underground life of an illegal in the U.S. and crossed many international boundaries "mojado." Since leaving his war-torn country some two years ago, he had learned a new set of survival tactics accompanied by a new set of fears, those of being caught and deported.

In adapting to these new circumstances, the old fears and experiences from his country had become confused memories, painfully difficult to recall accurately.

Detailed recollection is precisely what was required of him, on very short notice, upon arriving in Canada.

Perhaps if he had been more mature and less "macho," he would have appealed to an individual or organization for help, while there was still time. With expert guidance, it seems unlikely anybody from El Salvador would be screened out by the initial hearing's "low-threshold" credibility test.

The exact nature of the proceedings at that hearing -- the cross examination, Rodriguez-Jimenez' responses as translated through an interpreter -- are not known.

Despite repeated requests by his lawyers, neither the tape nor a transcript of the proceedings have been released by the authorities for scrutiny.

By the time Legal Service stepped in to try to stop the deportation, it was already too late. Now, only if the Federal Court allowed an appeal could Rodriguez be brought back to Canada, and at government expense.

This teenager, undisciplined and unfamiliar with legal formalities, suddenly found himself face to face with a hurdle he hadn't counted on: an incredibly sophisticated, multi-million dollar piece of legislation much harder to get past than any border he might have encountered on his way here.

By the time Legal Services stepped in to try to stop the deportation, it was already too late.

But as he told his MOSAIC worker just before being deported, if he has his way, he won't be back in El Salvador for long.

*Canada earned itself the Nansen Medal at a time when it had no-deportation policy to countries badly affected by conflict. The government used this award as a selling point for the new legislation which presently gives clearance to deportation to anywhere in the world.

* Roger Barany is a MOSAIC Latin American Community Worker
Grads challenge all the job hurdles

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from a speech by Abiodun Ndukwe, graduate and valedictorian of the Women's Training Program. Ceremonies to mark her class' program's end were held in mid-February of this year.

My name is Abiodun Ndukwe. Here in Canada people call me Abby. Seven years ago, I came to Canada from Nigeria, West Africa. My main reason for coming to Canada was to join my husband.

Before I left Nigeria, I was working as a senior cashier in a Danish engineering consulting company. I couldn’t work here in Canada because, being on student visas, we were not allowed to.

After my husband’s education here, he got a job and we became landed immigrants.

I rejoiced for the fact that having landed papers was a gateway for me to practice my profession here in Canada. But my assumptions and expectations were shattered when I found out that I needed Canadian work experience to get a job here. Another problem I faced was my inability to speak English very fluently.

The MOSAIC Women’s Training program changed all these for me. It helped me acquire more secretarial skills and improved my accounting skills.

Some of the courses offered in our program are Business English, pronunciation, word processing, accounting, key-boarding, life skills and job search techni-

Anti-Asian discrimination alive and well in city’s housing market

By Nancy Knickerbocker

Our family’s modest east-side home was built in 1929, when the lot sold for $4,58. The figure seems incredible today, when Vancouver’s booming real estate market seems the single most widely and hotly debated topic in town. The causes and consequences of skyrocketing land prices are subjects for intense discussion everywhere -- over backyard fences and boardroom tables, on the airwaves and in the press.

And no wonder. Demand for housing has so far outstripped supply that this city is rapidly becoming uninhabitable for many people who have long called it home. They are quite legitimately concerned. But rather than demanding changes to economic and housing policies that have failed to ensure affordable housing, too many people are blaming immigration policy instead.

Even though they comprise only a small percentage of those moving into B.C., Asian immigrants are being scapegoated for a problem not of their making. According to The Vancouver Sun, offshore money was involved in only 17.5 per cent of the city’s 1988 real estate sales, and the vast percentage of newcomers are from other parts of Canada. Despite the facts, the racist backlash is growing. Homeowners are taking up petitions against so-called “monster houses” they say are favored by Hong Kong investors. A former mayor of Vancouver heads a lobby group to encourage European immigration. The backlash has grown so rapidly in the last year that University of B.C. Professor Graham Johnson plans to launch a formal study of it. He has said: “I want to look at if I can at racism – let’s not call it racism – let’s say the attitudes you can detect in the general population to an identifiable group.”

Whatever you call it, anti-Asian discrimination is nothing new to Vancouver. The current phenomenon is only the latest chapter in a long and ugly history: Asian Canadians were forced to pay head taxes; were denied the vote until 1947; were prohibited from entering certain professions, and from owning property in many parts of the city. When we bought our home in 1986, we were shocked to discover that a restrictive covenant on the 1929 deed insisted “no Oriental shall be allowed to rent or purchase the within described property.” Of course, we asked our lawyer to remove that clause when closing the sale. Removing the attitudes behind that kind of document will not be as easily done, however.

As Canadians, we like to think of ourselves as a tolerant, benevolent people. But we delude ourselves if we don’t acknowledge the racism in our past and confront it squarely in the present. Unless we fight back now against the bigotry in our own back yards we will never become the kind of people we thing we already are.

- Nancy Knickerbocker is a Vancouver freelance journalist. She is also a member of MOSAIC’s board of directors.

Women’s Training grad Abiodun Ndukwe poses. In other words, to me the program is more than office automation. I learned how Canadians work and think. I notice that this is a very important lesson for new Canadians and immigrants.

I hope that the government continues to sponsor these programs. It has helped us.

It was not easy looking for a training placement. I am glad that I, (as well as my classmates) have grown from being afraid of the door knob of an office to being in the position where I can speak to an employer. We learned how to conduct ourselves in an interview, to find training placements, and to be accepted as employees. I gained Canadian work experience, and I’m thankful for such opportunity.

As a class, we all have contributed to the success of each other. We have worked together in difficult times, smiled together and helped one another to press onward. We have never accepted anything negative. We all made it.

Our thanks go to our instructors, guest speakers, and to MOSAIC. Without your enormous contributions and dedication we would not have made it. You have motivated us toward success. We are proud of you.

Finally, I thank God for the privilege of being exposed to Canadian work life through the MOSAIC program. I now have a full time job, and look forward to being an asset to help other new Canadians.
Tireless 78-year-old spearheads successful senior men’s group

By Ita Margallit

Pritam Singh Lidder had been headman of his village in the Punjab region of India and he had been accustomed to a lot of responsibility. But when he first came to Canada in December 1974, he says, all he could do was sit inside and watch television.

"It was so cold outside and such a strange place. I had never lived before," says the 78-year-old Lidder.

During his first months in Canada, Lidder became acutely aware of the difficulties for Indo-Canadian seniors; their frequent loneliness, fear and economic dependency on their families. He felt fortunate to have a supportive family in B.C. that sponsored him to come to Canada.

It took Lidder a year to find out about MOSAIC. By that time he had made many contacts and friends at his temple. People asked him for help and advice because of his background and because of his good English. He interpreted for people at immigration and at other appointments.

Then a friend pointed out MOSAIC to Lidder while they were walking along Commercial Drive. "It is a place," the friend said, "where there is someone who helps people with any problems they could have with documents and appointments and such things." He was referring to Hemi Dhanoa, MOSAIC’s Indo-Canadian worker.

Asked to describe the man she has since come to know well, Dhanoa says: "Mr. Lidder held a very important position in his homeland. A village headman provides advice and guidance. He is well respected and a valuable person in the community." "So when Mr. Lidder came to MOSAIC," Dhanoa says, "I knew that all he needed was to learn contacts and procedures here in B.C., and that he could continue being a valuable source of guidance and support for the Sikh community here."

For two years Lidder worked as a MOSAIC volunteer. At age 66 he began learning the social work ropes of B.C.

Now he is a seniors counsellor for his ethnic group with the Ministry of Social Services and Housing and is a member of the Farm Worker’s Union. He was vice president of Akali Singh Sikh temple, served on a Municipal Social Planning Committee for Senior Citizens and organized a Neighborhood Action Committee to fight racism.

MOSAIC and Lidder successfully applied for a grant to start a seniors’ support group in 1977. Before receiving the funding, Lidder had to prove there was a need and that he had the ability to run the program.

Within three months, a group of 45 seniors was meeting twice a week for recreation and to learn English and about the community where they lived.

Today, 11 years later, the group is an entrenched support system for hundreds of Indo-Canadian seniors.

Last year the Indo-Canadian community honoured Lidder’s tireless community work at a gathering organized by the Indo-Canadian Times Trust.

"I do all this because it keeps me healthy and active. It is part of my upbringing and culture," he says.

He continues to lead the Hindi/Punjabi Senior Men’s group. MOSAIC’s Dhanoa continues to coordinate the group.

The group’s membership has swelled to over 200 from the original 15 to 20 members, and it is now the largest group of its kind in Vancouver.

The group’s objectives include establishing a centre where senior men can meet and keep seniors informed about social, financial and political systems in Canada so the men can become participating, contributing members of Canadian society.

The Hindi/Punjabi Senior Men’s group meets twice weekly at the Sunset Community Centre, 404 East 51st Avenue. Any senior male may become a member.

* Ita Margallit is MOSAIC Financial Development Officer

Broadened Medical Plan coverage still out of reach for many

By Roger Barany

Last August, there was a little-publicized change in the Medical Services Plan eligibility requirements which affected thousands of refugee claimants in B.C.:

Refugee claimants with work authorization, ministerial permit or student visa are now eligible for medical coverage after the customary waiting period.

This means that some 4,000 refugees in the backlog, all of whom would be receiving work permits in the mail, will become eligible for medical coverage.

For those fortunate enough to find a job, the protection and independence MSP coverage provides will far outweigh the cost of premiums: $31 per month for a single person; $62 for a family of 3 or more. For individuals or families surviving on MSSH hardship assistance, however, there is a dilemma. Since MSSH won’t pay their premiums under any circumstances, they must choose between paying for them out of their welfare food money or foregoing coverage.

In the latter case, one visit to the doctor can become a paper chase for claimants as they must first obtain evidence they are on welfare and then request a form from Canada Immigration (valid for one week) entitling them to see their doctor for that particular ailment, which must be urgent.

Many claimants in need of health care are opting to repeatedly request authorization letters from Immigration because they simply cannot pay the MSP premiums. Last year the costs to Health and Welfare Canada for medical services to indigent refugee claimants out of the Alberni Street immigration office was one million dollars, according to one immigration source.

One bout of surgery or the delivery of one baby can run up hospital bills of thousands of dollars. In such cases, it neither makes economic sense nor is it at all an effective use of time for Immigration or Health and Welfare to be footing the bills on a case-by-case basis. Where a refugee is eligible for MSP coverage and on welfare, the ministries really ought to pay for full coverage.

* Roger Barany is a Latin American Community Worker with MOSAIC
What is a Canadian?

A Canadian is a fellow wearing English tweeds, a Hong Kong skirt and Spanish shoes, who sips Brazilian coffee sweetened with Philippine sugar from a Bavarian cup while nibbling on Swiss cheese, sitting at a Danish desk over a Persian rug, after coming home in a German car from an Italian movie . . . and writes his Member of Parliament with a Japanese ballpoint pen on French paper, demanding that he do something about foreigners taking away our Canadian jobs.

And Now for a Word from Our Sponsors...

The "ordinary folk" who came in the series of television commercials introducing us to gas station managers across the country should seem vaguely familiar to veterans at MOSAIC - and with good reason. They're the mass of MOSAIC volunteers and friends who very generously agreed to show up very, very early one still-quite-brisk February morning for the local filming of the ads. Their extras' salaries were all contributed to MOSAIC. Next time they roll by on the tube, see if you can catch the flicker of familiar faces. Above, clockwise from left: Clara Halber, G. Aponowicz and Fell; Betty Wong and family; Marie-Paule Lefebvre, Nat Hersh (foreground) and Max Halber.

TAKE NOTICE!

- "Behind Closed Doors," a 30-minute video production by the Inland Refugee Society is available. The video shows the lives of refugee claimants who fled their country and arrived in Vancouver without proper documentation. Please order by phone or write Inland Refugee Society, P.O. Box 46552, Vancouver, V6R 4G8. Tel. 251-3360.
- MOSAIC has a FAX - 254-2321
- Family and Changing Roles and Between Two Cultures, produced by Hemi Dhanoa, MOSAIC Indo-Canadian worker, will be aired throughout the Lower Mainland in April and May on Channel Four, the community channel. Please consult TV listings for times.
- MOSAIC, the Legal Services Soc. and Canada Immigration will be giving a talk to Spanish speaking refugee claimants on the backlog procedures. The Government has indicated that with luck processing of the backlog will be underway by July or August. Workshops will be held at MOSAIC on Friday, May 5 at 2 pm and on Friday, May 19 at 2 pm. Pre-registration is necessary. There will be a $1.00 fee.
- Latin American community presentations take place at the Vancouver Health Department, 1651 Commercial Drive, 2nd fl. from 1-3 pm, on May 11 (topic-AIDS) and May 18 (topic-Family Law).
- Program for Spanish-speaking young mothers and their children to help to more fully integrate into Canadian society. Discussion, recreation, educational programs on topics such as nutrition, parenting, yoga, etc. Group meets Mondays, 10 am to noon at Britannia (Commercial & Venables) and Thursdays from 1 to 3 pm at MOSAIC. Free childcare and transportation. New participants welcome. Call Miriam Maurer at 254-9626.
- Canadian Council for Refugees, 1989 national conference June 1-3 at U.B.C. in Vancouver, hosted by the Vancouver Refugee Council. Anyone interested in CCR or the conference, please contact Philip Jung at 433-8864.