

Dreams, scars mark applicants hoping to remain in Canada. (1988, December 30). *The Globe and Nail.*



EDWARD REGAN/The Globe and Mail

Refugee claimants line up at the Canada Immigration Centre in downtown Toronto yesterday.

## Dreams, scars mark applicants hoping to remain in Canada

BY SEAN FINE  
The Globe and Mail

The Sri Lankan at the Toronto immigration centre yesterday had no identification papers, but he had a refugee's badge of honor — a dime-sized scar at his hairline.

The Trinidadian, on the other hand, was marked by his dreams of a better life — and that may not be enough to keep him in Canada.

The two men are among the 85,000 people claiming to be refugees who face a new, streamlined review procedure. They face deportation if they cannot convince federal authorities that they have fled persecution, usually racial, religious or political in nature.

"I've been through hell in the last

three or four years and I couldn't tolerate it any more," said the Sri Lankan Tamil, refusing to give his name. Tamils are a minority in Sri Lanka.

He pulled back his hair to reveal a scar he said came from the butt of a government rifle, and he said he had been in jail a half-dozen times, in part because his father is in the political opposition.

The Trinidadian, Brian Sankarsingh, 23, said that as an Indian he is not safe back home; his life has been threatened once and he has been beaten once, he said.

If deported, "I don't know if I'll actually be killed, but I'm pretty sure I'll be manhandled."

But fear of beatings is not enough to qualify one as a refugee. "I do

not believe that any of those people (from Trinidad) are being beaten up by their government or their police," said Tom Wallace, acting manager of Toronto's downtown immigration office, adding that he was expressing a personal opinion.

Mendel Green, an immigration lawyer, said he has seen 30 Trinidadians in the past two weeks and has refused to take them as clients.

"I have not yet seen one that would have a credible claim," he said.

The Sri Lankan said he had paid an agent \$5,000 for a phony passport. His father and two younger brothers were forced to stay behind because the family had only enough money to get him out, he said.

Around him, people from Somalia and Iran, among other countries, said the Canadian government would be sentencing them to death if it deports them to their home countries. (Some could be deported to a safe third country in which they stopped before coming to Canada, the government said.)

One Iranian claimant, Mohamed Reza, 27, said two of his brothers have been killed by the regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini because they did not want to fight in the war against Iraq. His six remaining siblings are spread through West Germany, England, France and Turkey.

"If they send Iranians back, they're going to be dead," he said.

Mr. Sankarsingh said he did not apply for landed immigrant status because he did not think he would get in. "I don't have any assets. . . . I'm just an average guy with a whole lot of dreams."

His dream is eventually to bring his parents to Canada and take care of them. He wants to be a pre-school teacher.

He said he hopes his chances are not tarnished by a perception that many claimants from Trinidad are so-called economic refugees.