

A record 22,000 immigrants in October

By HERB KEINON
and DAVID RUDGE

More than 21,000 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel in October, Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz said last week, making it the biggest single month for immigration since the current wave began last year. Another 1,000 newcomers arrived from other countries.

This brings the number of immigrants since the beginning of the year to more than 134,000, of whom 122,000 came from the Soviet Union. This figure was exceeded only in the 1949-1951 period.

Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz says the three transit points in Europe could handle 50,000 immigrants a month — more than double the current rate.

Although direct flights from Moscow to Tel Aviv could render those transit points obsolete, nothing indicated that such flights are in the offing. Dinitz told the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors in Jerusalem last week.

Dinitz firmly rejected suggestions that immigrants "dropping out" on their way to Israel could ease the difficulty of absorbing them here.

The Agency's Board of Governors decided to increase its \$740m. budget by \$23.5m. to cover additional transportation costs — adjusting its prediction of 150,000 immigrants this year to 204,000. The board also called upon Diaspora Jewry to increase its contribution from \$600m. to \$1.9b. in the coming five years.

Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz meanwhile blamed the Finance Ministry for sabotaging his plans for integrating immigrants. He suggested \$12.5m. be provided to encourage immigrants to go into private enterprise. The State Budget director objected, and Peretz retorted that if the Treasury "wants to close the Absorption Ministry, it should say so openly."

Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i, contending that Israel must build 250,000 new apartments and create 500,000 jobs in the next few years to absorb Soviet immigrants, said the economy must grow by 8 percent a year, and exports by 13 percent. Even if the economy does not grow at this pace, he added, the country will continue absorbing immigrants, but with a large drop in the standard of living.

Meanwhile, an office providing Soviet immigrants with interest-free loans to cover unexpected expenses has been set up in Jerusalem. The Israel Free Loan Association has been registered as a non-profit organization by a Hebrew University social work professor, Eliezer Jaffe. It has raised \$30,000.

The organization hopes to help the government and Jewish Agency in providing assistance to immigrants. "They deal with big issues," Jaffe said, "but where does the immigrant turn if his kid's teeth need fixing?"

In the northern development town of Ma'alot, council head Shlomo Bouhbot last week pleaded with Absorption Minister Peretz to stop sending immigrants there because there is no more room.

He said it was "causing anger and upheaval among the newcomers" that several families are being squeezed into single three-room apartments.

Rents in Ma'alot have rocketed by 80 percent since the influx, he pointed out. In the past few months the small town has absorbed nearly 1,000 immigrants.