

Councillor Request for Information

☐ **Included on Agenda**
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office
by Noon Thursday)

☒ **Added Item**
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office
by Noon Monday)

Date of Council Meeting: April 22, 2003

Subject: Letter of Support - Sanja Pecelj

Request:

Please add Letter of Support - Sanja Pecelj to the Council Agenda for Tuesday, April 22, 2003.

Reason:

I would like to request that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, send a letter of support for Sanja Pecelj to the Department of Immigration.

I would like this response as:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email to Mayor and/or Councillor/Municipal Clerk's Office | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memo to Councillor | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information Report to | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Council | <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Council |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation Report to | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Council | <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Council |

Jerry Blumenthal

11

Councillor (Name)

District (Number)



Fearing deportation, woman granted sanctuary in church

by RACHEL BOOMER
The Daily News

Sanja Pecelj is hiding behind locked doors at a Halifax church, hoping a last-minute intervention can keep her from being deported to Serbia-Montenegro.

The ethnic Serbian, who's been living in Nova Scotia for more than two years, moved into St. Mark's Anglican Church on Russell Street in Halifax on Tuesday to avoid being deported at 5 p.m. yesterday.

She's hoping her desperate move will prompt Citizenship and Immigration officials to take another look at her case.

"There, I have no place to stay. I have nothing. I'm basically on the street ... I could easily be killed," Pecelj said, imagining what her life would be like if deported to the war-torn country where her parents and younger sister live.

"Here, I have a job. I can pay my bills. At least here, I've built up some kind of life."

Pecelj, 33, a former English teacher and UN translator, first came to Nova Scotia to intern at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Cornwallis.

After that contract ended, she moved to Halifax, where she worked as a waitress and hoped the political situation in Serbia-Montenegro or her native Kosovo might stabilize.

"I would go back in a second if things get better, but it's not very likely to happen," Pecelj said quietly yesterday, trying not to cry.

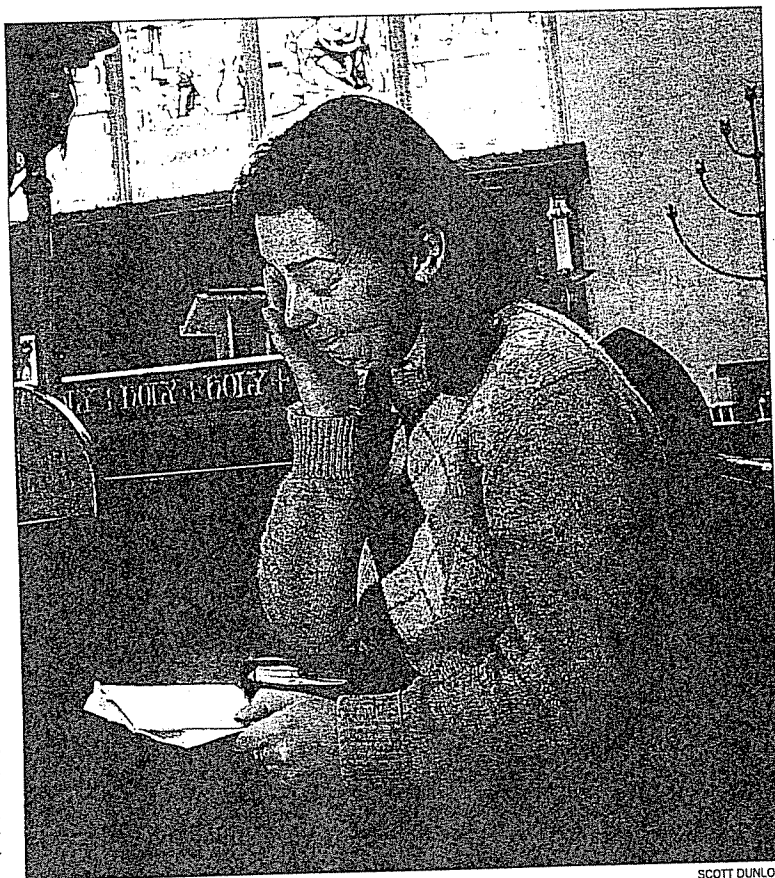
She applied for refugee status when her visa expired, but was rejected because the department doesn't believe she's in danger.

"She says her fear is based on reality. They say her fear is not based on documentary evidence," said Pecelj's lawyer, Lee Cohen.

On April 1, she got a deportation order that would prevent her from coming back to Canada, which prompted her flight to the church.

"People who have always lived in Serbia do not welcome the Kosovar Serbs, who are basically there as refugees. (They) end up in these refugee camps," St. Mark's Anglican priest Sue Moxley said.

"She's going back into basically a war area, and she's a young woman and she's



SCOTT DUNLOP

Sanja Pecelj reads a card from her former employer in St. Mark's Anglican Church yesterday.

pretty. It's not a safe place."

Pecelj is hoping Citizenship and Immigration Minister Denis Coderre will meet with her when he arrives in Halifax for a conference tomorrow.

Her regular customers have donated money to help her cause, and co-workers such as 23-year-old waitress Rebecca Adams

are planning fund-raisers to help with her legal bills.

"I see the way she is with people, and I know how hard she works. It's a wrong decision," Adams said.

"We should have more people in the country like her."

rboomer@hfxnews.ca

Doors locked to officials in an ancient tradition

By RACHEL BOOMER
The Daily News

The doors at St. Mark's Church are locked to keep immigration officials out.

But the federal department says it's not likely to break them down in the hope of putting Sanja Pecelj on a plane to Serbia-Montenegro.

"I don't think we're going to have people camped outside the door," Citizenship and Immigration spokesman Ron Heisler said yesterday.

You won't find the concept of church sanctuary in any Canadian law, but immigration lawyer Lee Cohen said governments generally don't pursue those who choose to duck their deportation orders by hiding in a church.

"I think it would be a public-relations nightmare if police were to go around raiding churches," Cohen said.

"We're talking about an immigrant who has violated an immigration provision, not a criminal law."

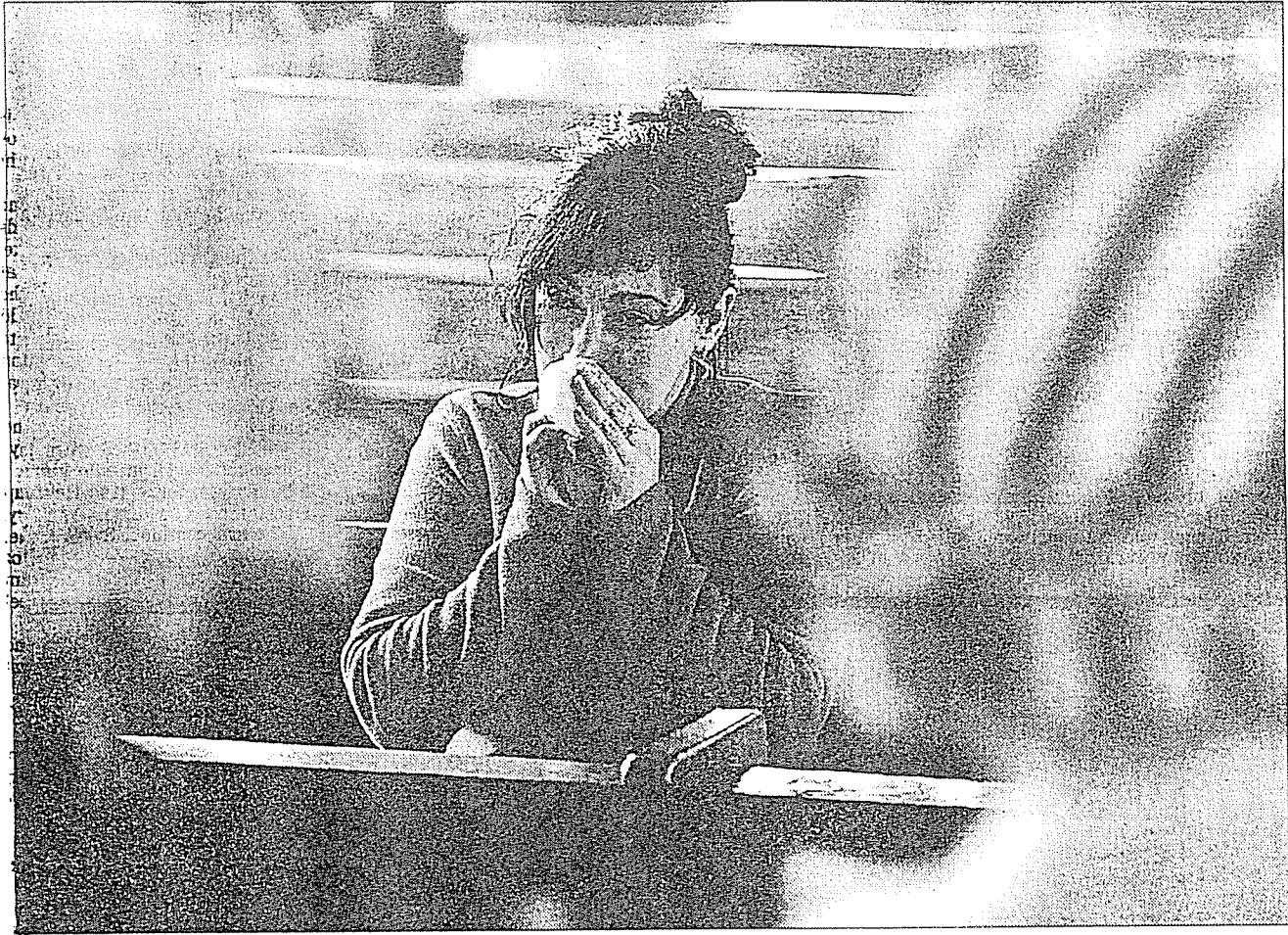
St. Mark's Anglican priest Sue Moxley said the idea of offering sanctuary to refugees is an ancient one that has survived over the centuries, and the board of her church decided unanimously to extend it to Pecelj.

While Heisler wouldn't speak specifically about Pecelj's case, he did say the department won't go to extraordinary measures to carry out a deportation order for someone who's not a risk. The department usually issues a warrant, and either deports the person when they leave the church, or makes other arrangements with them.

But anyone facing criminal charges might be a different story.

"If we were looking for someone who had committed a crime, the fact that they were in a church wouldn't keep us from doing our duty," Halifax Regional Police Sgt. Don Spicer said.

rboomer@hfxnews.ca



Peter Parsons / Herald Photo

Sanja Pecelj wipes away tears Monday while listening to the singing of the activist group, the Raging Grannies, at St. Mark's Anglican Church in Halifax. The Kosovar refugee took up sanctuary at the church last Wednesday to avoid deportation.

Flood of support for refugee

People stream to visit woman given sanctuary in Halifax church

By Bill Power
Staff Reporter

Efforts to get Ottawa to allow Kosovar refugee Sanja Pecelj to stay in Canada showed little sign of diminishing Monday.

"More people are getting involved. Word is spreading," Rev. Sue Moxley said.

With a flood of church activity leading up to Easter weekend, more people than usual are visiting St. Mark's Anglican Church on Russell Street, where the refugee was given sanctuary Wednesday to avoid deportation.

"More people are learning about the situation and understanding the injustice of it," said

Ms. Moxley.

There was a steady stream of visitors to the church on the weekend as interest in the case increased. Unfortunately, little appears to be happening officially in Ottawa.

The 33-year-old woman has lived in Nova Scotia for about two years and wants to remain in Canada.

"There has been no indication anything has changed," a spokeswoman with Citizenship and Immigration Canada said.

The Raging Grannies appeared at the church Monday to sing a song composed to raise public awareness about Ms. Pecelj's plight.

"Canada has a really poor track record when it comes to refugees," said Maureen Vine, one of the Raging Grannies, a group of seniors interested in social activism.

A collection of people, including students on their way home from school, gathered outside the Russell Street church for a colourful performance.

The Grannies then went inside to sing for Ms. Pecelj, who has vowed to remain at the church rather than leave for Serbia-Montenegro as ordered.

NDP MLA Kevin Deveau (Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage) has stayed in Kosovo on three occasions while working on democratic reforms there, and said the deportation order neglects the grave personal risk facing the refugee in the politically and socially unstable region.

"Given her personal circum-

stances, she would be taking a very big risk if she did (return)," the MLA said in an interview.

Ms. Pecelj is an ethnic Serb from Kosovo whose family joined the refugee exodus of about 500,000 people into what is now Serbia-Montenegro.

She worked as a translator with U.N. peacekeepers before coming to this province to study at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in the Annapolis Valley.

A fundraiser to help cover some expected legal costs is set for April 26 at C'est Si Bon cafe at 1717 Barrington Street.

bpower@herald.ns.ca