

U.S. Embassy: 80% of Visa Requests Approved

In response to "The U.S. Visa Lottery," by Boris Altshuler, Oct. 28.

Editor:

There is a great deal of confusion about U.S. visa law and procedures; therefore, I'd like to take this opportunity to explain the U.S. system. It is important to begin with U.S. immigration law since that is what guides a consul's decision-making.

Although the law states that every visa applicant shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes that he is entitled to non-immigrant status, a consul does not consider each applicant "a priori to be dishonest unless he or she can prove otherwise," as Altshuler suggests. The law is merely a reflection of America's status as a nation that receives over a million immigrants/refugees a year while coping with large problems in illegal immigration as well. We do not have a "rejection" stamp, and we do not verbally ask applicants about arrest records, drug use and the like.

We approve over 80 percent of the applications we receive and deliver the visas on the same day. What about the other 20 percent who do not receive a visa? Since no rejection is final, every applicant has the right to produce further evidence to demonstrate his ties to Russia thus overcoming the presumption of immigrant intent. Many, in fact, do.

It is important to point out, however, that we operate under great pressure, as anyone who has seen the long lines outside our consular section can verify, and we have to make decisions quickly.

Altshuler argues that the American system is broken and suggests that we move toward the former Soviet, and now the Russian, system of making everyone have a "sponsor" who would

then be responsible for his guest's actions. Adoption of such a system would have to be done on a world-wide basis and not just for Russia. In my opinion, such a system would be unworkable for the United States which welcomes some 22 million visitors annually. We do not need a costly new bureaucracy to keep track of all our international visitors as they move freely about the United States.

Our country is based on faith in the individual and personal responsibility. We expect travelers to comply with U.S. law. The very openness of America means her consuls must do a careful job in the fulfillment of their duties abroad. I want to emphasize that we do not have a special visa regime for

Russia. Russian applicants have to meet the same requirements for visitor visas that everyone else in the world does.

The continuing misunderstandings over our visa process are regrettable. It is important to emphasize that we hope to give as many Russians as possible the opportunity to experience America firsthand, within the bounds of American law.

It is also important to realize that both we and our Russian applicants are in the middle of a learning process. Russians are learning about our visa system; we are continuing to learn about Russian society.

In closing, let me note that over 100,000 Russians traveled to the United

States this past year. I am sure we will see many more in the years to come.

Nancy H. Sambaiew
Consul General
U.S. Embassy, Moscow

Give the Queen a Break

In response to a letter from Robert Jones, Oct. 22.

Editor:

I was saddened to read Jones' bitter and misleading letter. If anything, it served only to illustrate that the greatest problem facing the United Kingdom is the nihilistic tendency of an overly vocal minority to drag anything of value down to the lowest common denominator — a

tendency exacerbated by a howling tabloid press with the morals and ethics of a pack of hyenas which caters to a segment of the population barely capable of entering a "join the dots" competition. Unfortunately, it seems that Jones has garnered his eccentric views from the lunatic fringe of this gutter press.

As a constitutional monarch, the queen is determinedly apolitical. Her visit to Russia, as any state visit, is as a cultural and economic ambassador for our country, a job she does superlatively for little thanks. If she ever dares to express an opinion, her words are immediately twisted beyond recognition by that sad minority of our population with a chip on its collective shoulder.

This same minority loves to carp impertinently about the cost of upkeep of the Royal Family, yet contributions to the Exchequer last year by tourism and business, thanks to the efforts of the queen, reached billions of pounds sterling — far more than the few paltry millions she received from the Civil List. Put bluntly, the queen offers a superb return on investment and I, like the vast majority of British citizens, am a buyer.

Even if Jones were to live to be 100, I doubt that he would see a republic of Great Britain. If the queen were to stand for re-election every four years, like our government, she would be returned with an overwhelming majority every time. Let's just hope that she doesn't get tired of hearing the same boring, vicious propaganda from the same boring, vicious minority and decide to give it all up as a bad job, leaving us in the hands of self-serving hucksters, grubbing for re-election to a position that our own special breed of politicians could only pollute by their mere presence. Perhaps Jones is looking for a job?

Sharon Ballantine
Moscow

W H A T T H E P A P E R S S A Y

Stumping for Votes

On Oct. 30, there will be a special election to fill the vacant Duma seat of Andrei Aizderdzis, who was murdered in April. Among the candidates, MMM mastermind Sergei Mavrodi, extreme nationalist Alexander Fyodorov and the moderate Olga Volkov.

"I am the first Russian nationalist to be allowed to speak on the campaign trail since we were banned in October 1993," Fyodorov's speech began. The audience burst into applause and began whistling until finally Fyodorov was forced to ask for quiet. Fyodorov thanked the audience for their support and said that he hoped he could continue to count on it when he begins to bring "order" to the Russian scene by creating a united Slavic state, repairing the

economy and chasing out the American/Masonic mafia. The people in the first rows began giving the fascist salute and started forcing everyone else to stand.

Later, when Olga Volkova tried to take the stage, it was like waving a red flag before a bull. Everytime she tried to speak, people would shout, "Who is financing your campaign?" Seeing that she would not be able to speak, Volkova turned to Fyodorov and asked, "Is this what you call 'order'?"

The next candidate to speak was the Communist Party representative, Alexander Golovashchenko. He began his presentation by reading a note that had just been passed to him. "Hey, old man! You heard what happened to Aizderdzis? Withdraw your candidacy!"

When it came time for candidate Georgy Semin to speak, it turned out

that he had disappeared.

Moskovskiy Novosti, Oct. 26

What the Army Thinks

The Moscow office of the German-based Ebert Fund conducted an opinion poll of 615 officers of the Russian Army.

In response to the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Boris Yeltsin is handling his job?" 59 percent of respondents said "no" and 17 percent said "yes."

However, the following political figures received negative ratings even higher than Yeltsin's: Mikhail Gorbachev, 79 percent; Vladimir Zhirinovsky, 69 percent; Russian Khasbulatov, 64 percent; and Yegor Gaidar, 60 percent.

Argumenti i Fakti, Oct. 27