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Hijackers Find Work-- In Cuban Sugar Fields

MONTREAL (AP) — The Montreal Star says the Cuban government is sending aircraft hijackers to prison for five years at hard labor if they are not political refugees.

Quoting a high source in international aviation, the Star said Cuban authorities cooperate with the Swiss Embassy, which handles U.S. affairs in Havana, in checking the credentials and stories given by hijackers.

As a result, the Star said, more than half of the hijackers of American aircraft have been sentenced to the maximum penalty provided in Cuba for illegal entry into the country.

When Cubans or Americans seeking to avoid the draft hijack an airliner, the Star added, they have been toasted

and honored in Havana.

As a result of checks with the Swiss Embassy, Cuban authorities found at least 18 persons had criminal backgrounds or domestic problems. These have been put to work at long hours at menial jobs or in the sugar cane fields with other political and criminal prisoners, the Star reported.

The Star said Cuba had not made its policy public because it would like the world to think that all hijackers are fleeing the United States because they are dissatisfied with the system.