

# Raised in the Spirit of the Class Struggle: Children, Youth, and the Interwar Ukrainian Left in Canada

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## Article abstract

This paper focuses on the experiences of children and youth who were born into the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ulfta) during the 1920s and 1930s. It examines the priorities of the movement's parents and male leaders and their efforts to implement activities that would serve to politicize and impart a strong sense of Ukrainianness in youngsters. It also considers the ways in which young people themselves contributed to the shape of the movement. Children and youth, because of their particular positions at specific intersections of class, ethnicity, age, and gender, experienced the ulfta in ways that were distinct from their parents. Because of the ulfta's emphasis on Ukrainian culture, their childhoods were also significantly different from other socialist children. The movement's emphasis on Marxist-Leninism and the class struggle also divided these children from their non-socialist Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian peers. By applying an intersectional perspective to the interwar Ukrainian left, this paper also seeks to broaden our understanding of the movement's connection with the Communist Party of Canada (cpc). The ulfta and the cpc enjoyed a consistently difficult relationship through much of this period, particularly where Ukrainian cultural expression was concerned. An examination of youngsters' activities illustrates some of the many ways in which the ulfta leaders and rank-and-file members (including the young people themselves) resisted the cpc's attempts to control the ulfta and its resources.

## ARTICLE

# Raised in the Spirit of the Class Struggle: Children, Youth, and the Interwar Ukrainian Left in Canada

**Rhonda L. Hinthier**

NADYA NIECHODA WAS BORN in Canada to a Ukrainian leftist family. Her parents were members of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) in Winnipeg during the 1920s and 1930s. They often took her to events at “the hall,” where she witnessed speeches by leaders like Matthew Popovich and Matthew Shatulsky or performances of dancers, choirs, and mandolin orchestras. By the age of three, influenced by what she saw, Niechoda was ready to do her part for Ukrainian culture and the class struggle at home. “I used to sit on the bottom stair and play a make-believe mandolin on a broom, and sing *The International*,” she explained.

Twice a week after school, she would also go to the Ukrainian Labour Temple for Ukrainian school. There, she learned to read and write in Ukrainian, and she and her fellow students honed their language skills by studying the poetic works of nineteenth-century Ukrainian literary greats Ivan Franko and Taras Shevchenko. The children also learned about local and world affairs and history, particularly that of Ukraine and the Soviet Union, and learned where they, as youngsters, fit in the class struggle. “Left or right – these terms were known to me from childhood,” she recalled, “Left to me was good; right was the authorities sending my dad to work in a relief camp; left was the hall... right was a deportation order for our family.” Members of the ULFTA came through for Niechoda and her family: “it was the people from this organization, supported by similar organizations, who launched a campaign so that the deportation order be rescinded.” That same year, Niechoda’s father bought her a real mandolin. Soon, thanks to Saturday lessons at the hall, she remembered, “I was able to play *The International*..., though that did not stop me from playing *Rock of Ages* or *Swanee River*, and Ukrainian folk songs. How for-

tunate it was for me and the others that we were able to learn and study music at a time when it was so difficult for us to even survive.”<sup>1</sup>

Niechoda’s experiences represent those of many children during the interwar era who were born into or introduced to the ULFTA at an early age. They viewed and participated in Ukrainian-language concerts and plays, organized protests, read ULFTA newspapers, discussed political issues, and raised money to support a variety of causes. Though they would have been very young, the offspring of the first two waves of Ukrainian immigration to Canada (1891–1914, 1925–30) contributed in significant ways to the shape of the ULFTA community during the interwar years of the movement’s history.

To expand our understanding of Canadian Leftist children’s history, this article considers how class, ethnicity, age, and gender intersected in the lives of ULFTA youngsters. It combines a top-down and bottom-up approach to explore how youngsters, parents, ULFTA leaders, and Communist Party of Canada (CPC) officials all acted – together and apart, united and in opposition to one another – to build a vibrant radical Ukrainian young people’s movement during Canada’s interwar years. The structure of activities for youngsters reflected the priorities of parents and leaders. At the same time, however, children and youth (and their desires and interests – or, in some cases, lack of interest) were crucial in shaping their own work and influencing the movement’s broader policies. As well, external factors – most notably the Canadian public school system and North American popular culture – also influenced patterns of youngsters’ activities. So, too, did the CPC, a long-time ally yet oftentimes concurrent adversary, of the ULFTA.

The location of these youngsters at specific intersections of these power relationships meant that their experiences differed – at times significantly – from those of their parents, their public school classmates, other Ukrainian children (particularly those tied to one of the developing Ukrainian churches), and other leftist children. This article examines how discourses of gender, class, ethnicity, and age intertwined – unevenly and unequally – to shape the activities and experiences of these children and youth. The unevenness is key to our understanding; among the very young, gender, for example, typically mattered less in defining their experiences than did age, class, and ethnicity. As a child aged, however, they would become more aware of the gendered divisions that existed among adults (predicated on male dominance and female subordination). As youths, they would begin to be more formally trained and informally socialized (both explicitly and implicitly) – through their ongoing involvement with the movement – to take on (or challenge) similar roles as they entered young adult activities.

A rich literature exists on the value of an intersectional methodology. By

1. Nadya Niechoda, “Autobiography,” *Canadian Society for Ukrainian Labour Research (CSULR) Symposium: ‘Forgotten Legacy’: Contributions of Socialist Ukrainians to Canada* (Winnipeg 1996), 4–7.

considering class, ethnicity, and gender, Frances Swyripa has fruitfully interrogated the similarities and differences that emerged among nationalist and progressive Ukrainian women divided by politics.<sup>2</sup> Through her work on Jewish garment workers, Ruth Frager has illustrated how ethnicity, gender, and class converged, again, unevenly with external social, economic and political forces to shape and eventually undermine the attempts of Jewish garment workers to “bring about a fundamental socialist transformation.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Katrina Srigley has aptly shown how gender could matter less than class, race, or ethnicity for women seeking employment in Depression-era Toronto. She underscores the strength of an intersectional methodology by reminding us “we need to make critical judgements about which identities emerge as more or less influential in shaping women’s working lives in a given time and place, and at a particular phase of their life cycle.”<sup>4</sup> The collected articles in *Sisters or Strangers: Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, with their attention to categories such as race, ethnicity, class (and how and to what degree each was gendered) challenge and enrich our understanding of the complexities of women’s experiences and immigration, nation-building, and citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

Certain scholars who have taken an analytical approach rooted in intersectionality have examined the lives of children as well, though at times not directly. For example, children’s experiences receive some attention in works on radical Euro-Canadian immigrant women, their daughters, and in studies of the wider international diaspora of revolutionary movements. These works often attempt to locate children and parents within an intersectional analysis. Though these considerations tend to focus more on the adults than the children, we can nonetheless learn something about children through their mother’s activism and childrearing methods. In tracing the radical bonds that developed between daughters and mothers, these historians have documented the importance of kitchens and neighbourhoods as radicalizing sites of female activism. They have shed light on how immigrant mothers passed on a radical heritage and a repertoire of strategies to their daughters (by, for instance, helping children read radical children’s texts, perform in radical plays, or act as bodyguards). They explain how daughters learned their politics not only in the garment or tobacco shop but also at the kitchen table, in animated

2. Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891–1991* (Toronto 1993).

3. Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900–1939* (Toronto 1992), 216.

4. Katrina Srigley, “‘In Case You Hadn’t Noticed!’: Race, Ethnicity, And Women’s Wage-Earning In A Depression-Era City,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 55 (Spring 2005), 69–105.

5. Marlene Epp, et al., eds., *Sisters Or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto 2004).

debate in the company of female elders.<sup>6</sup> Particularly relevant examples – that describe circumstances parallel to those of Ukrainian leftist children – are the works by Ester Reiter and Mona Ayukawa in *Sisters or Strangers*. These articles analyse how the intersection of gender with class and ethnicity affected the lives and activism of Jewish and Japanese mothers respectively. Reiter explores the central role women, particularly mothers, played in creating the radical Camp Navelt and examines the experiences of its young campers from the 1920s to the 1950s. She illustrates that by establishing and maintaining camping activities, these women “were nurturing both ethnic and political loyalties amongst their children, while resisting a class and ethnically based paternalism that would have seen their children’s lives and values shaped by Anglo-Saxon charitable institutions.”<sup>7</sup> Ayukawa explains how Japanese immigrants “countered oppressive situations with efforts to retain their cultural identity.” Mothers were the primary custodians of these efforts, the focus of which involved an instillation of “pride and self-image” within their children while encouraging them to “outperform their peers both in public school and in the workplace.” Thanks to this critical reproductive labour, Ayukawa argues, “Japanese Canadians were able to resist and subvert a history of exclusion and the resultant obstacles to adaptation.”<sup>8</sup>

This study also builds on the more general canon of children’s history, particularly as it relates to working-class children. With few exceptions,<sup>9</sup> the bulk of the history of children in Canada tends to focus largely on state institutions and reformers, particularly as these relate to social welfare programs, education, work, and juvenile delinquency.<sup>10</sup> These tell us much about the

6. The relevant publications include: Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, eds., *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto 2002), especially essays by Guglielmo, Merithew and Moya; Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1890–1912* (Urbana and Chicago 1993); Varpu Lindstrom, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto 1992); Mercedes Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890–1940* (Toronto 1997); Ester Reiter, “First-Class Workers Don’t Want Second-Class Wages: The Lanark Strike in Dunnville,” in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto 1995).

7. Ester Reiter, “Secular Yiddishkai: Left Politics, Culture, and Community,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002): 121–146, and “Camp Navelt and the Daughters of the Jewish Left,” Marlene Epp, et al., eds., *Sisters Or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto 2004), 365–380.

8. Mona Ayukawa, “Japanese Pioneer Women: Fighting Racism and Rearing the Next Generation,” Epp, et al., eds., *Sisters Or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto 2004), 233–247.

9. A rare exception is Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto 1997).

10. See for examples Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto 1982); Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *Studies in Childhood History: A Canadian Perspective* (Calgary 1982); Russell Smandych, Gordon Dodds, and Alvin Esau, *Dimensions of Childhood: Essays on*

ways in which the state and adults have shaped children's lives in general. Unfortunately, such a focus often precludes any meaningful sense of childhood agency. As historian Robert McIntosh argues, in these types of works "children tend to be portrayed as passive beings who are the objects of welfare and educational strategies," and, as a result, "the history of childhood becomes the history of the efforts of others on children's behalf."<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, there are some studies that do offer important insight into working-class children's lives. McIntosh's own study, *Boys in the Pits*, illustrates the critical occupational and familial roles of boys in early twentieth-century coal mining, paying particular attention to their agency as workers. John Bullen's work highlights the significance of children's labour – both paid and unpaid – to Ontario's working-class families during the latter half of the nineteenth century while Bettina Bradbury's *Working Families* does likewise for late nineteenth century Montreal. In the US context, David Nasaw's groundbreaking, *Children of the City: At Work and Play*, dynamically illustrates how working-class children made use of the streets and neighbourhoods as both workplace and sites of leisure.<sup>12</sup> A particularly relevant study is Paul C. Mishler's, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States*. In it, he examines how the American communist movement attempted to politicize children. Mishler argues, "in the programs that they organized to give their children an alternative oppositional culture, American Communists constructed a political culture of their own ... which provided a space in which the Communists could confront the tensions of their relationship with American society and with history." While the book certainly describes the children's activities in a detailed and engaging manner, Mishler's concern is not with the children themselves for, as he states, "I want to look at these activities for what they illustrate about the culture of the adults who created them."<sup>13</sup>

This project also builds on existing work on the ULFTA and its relationship with the CPC. Viewing these studies from an intersectional perspective is especially useful, particularly where class and ethnicity are concerned. Historians

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*the History of Children and Youth in Canada* (Winnipeg 1990); Craig Heron, "The High School and the Household Economy in Working-class Hamilton, 1890–1940," in *Historical Studies in Education [Canada]* 7 (Fall 1995), 217–59.

11. Robert McIntosh, "Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada," *Acadiensis*, 28 (Spring 1999), 126–40.

12. Robert McIntosh, *Boys in the Pits: Child Labour in Coal Mines* (Montreal and Kingston 2000); John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Household Economy in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario," in Bettina Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History – Selected Readings* (Toronto 1992), 199–220; Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal, 1876–1914* (Toronto 1993); David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play* (Garden City 1985).

13. Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York 1999).

and others have often labelled (and, at time, written off) the ULFTA as simply “pro-communist,” often because they consider in their analysis only the activities of the organization’s male leaders.<sup>14</sup> Many of the ULFTA’s members and supporters certainly enthusiastically embraced the international and domestic proletarian struggle. Many – particularly the male leaders – were also Party members and leaders. However, this did not mean they lent whole-sale, unquestioning, or unified support to the CPC and Comintern directives. In fact, for much of its history (especially during the interwar years), while attempting to work with the CPC, the ULFTA actively resisted and challenged the Party’s repeated attempts to control or abolish activities, particularly those of a cultural nature, that the ULFTA members and supporters held especially dear. The type of “communism” these Ukrainian leftists embraced was inseparably cultural-political, combining priorities of Ukrainian cultural preservation and expression with a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy. This is not surprising. About Jewish socialists in Toronto, Ruth Frager has shown that “class consciousness and ethnic identity reinforced each other and intensified the commitment to radical social change.” This is because, as she argues, “most had been radicalized not only in response to class oppression but also in response to the oppression they faced as Jews.”<sup>15</sup> ULFTA members and supporters were not simply members of the working classes in Canada. They were *Ukrainian* members of the working classes and therefore experienced a dual oppression. Expression and defence of this Canadian-grown ethnic identity created a distinct brand of class-consciousness and socio-political resistance. Wherever possible, the ULFTA threw its wholehearted support behind Party initiatives. They would quickly withdraw or temper this support, however, whenever the Party began making demands that they cease or limit activities of a cultural nature, a frequent occurrence during the interwar years. Youngsters’ activities are an important lens through which to understand the significant role of cultural-political activism and the movement’s overall efforts to challenge and resist Party efforts to control and dictate the shape of the ULFTA. Ukrainian youngsters, in fact, were among the most loyal, often

14. The Communist question is evident in Jaroslav Petryshyn, *Peasants in the Promised Land: Canada and the Ukrainians, 1891–1914* (Toronto 1985); John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto 1979); Kolasky, *Prophets and Proletarians: Documents on the History of the Rise and Decline of Ukrainian Communism in Canada* (Edmonton 1990); Marco Carynnyk, “Swallowing Stalinism: Pro-Communist Ukrainian Canadians and Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s,” in Lubomyr Luciuk, et al., eds., *Canada’s Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (Toronto 1991), 187–205; Orest Martynowych, *The Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891–1924* (Edmonton 1991); Donald Avery, “Divided Loyalties: The Ukrainian Left and the Canadian State,” in Luciuk, et al., eds., *Canada’s Ukrainians*, 271–287; and Paul Yuzuk, “The Ukrainian Communist Delusion,” in *The Ukrainians in Manitoba: A Social History* (Toronto 1953), 96–112.

15. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 212.



voting with their feet when the CPC came calling attempting to take over or redefine their activities.

## Building the Interwar Ukrainian Left

Leftist Ukrainians created one of the most dynamic working-class movements in twentieth-century Canada. Radicalized by unfulfilled expectations of Canada, exploitation, and discrimination and often harbouring socialist and anti-clerical attitudes nurtured in the Old Country, many Ukrainian immigrants became labour activists, often through Ukrainian language-based socialist organizations. Their activism was manifest from the earliest years of Ukrainian immigration to Canada and would eventually centre in institutions known as Ukrainian Labour Temples, found across the country from Nova Scotia to British Columbia. Planning for the first Ukrainian Labour Temple—situated in Winnipeg’s vibrant multi-ethnic working-class North End—began in 1918, and the hall opened in time to serve as an important organizing space during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Soon after, under the auspices of the national Ukrainian Labour Temple Association (ULTA), which, by 1924 became the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association, Ukrainian workers erected or developed additional halls across the country.

Members and supporters accommodated themselves and mounted resistance to their experiences and circumstances as ‘ethnic’ immigrants and workers. They developed an array of activities to address the experiences and realities of Ukrainian working-class life in Canada and to offer radical social, cultural, and political alternatives to the fledgling Ukrainian churches and developing right-wing Ukrainian nationalist organizations. Studies of leftist Jews, Finns, Hungarians, and others have noted the rich tapestry of social and cultural activities that were such a central part of defining these groups’ left politics and “ethnic hall” socialism.<sup>16</sup> The Ukrainian leftists embraced similar patterns of activism, expressing their commitment to social justice in numerous ways. They employed traditional modes of activism including strike support, the publication of newspapers, and endorsing candidates for political office, particularly those from the CPC. At the same time – and perhaps most significantly – members and supporters of the Ukrainian Labour Temple also expressed their activism through a diverse array of other activities. To improve the lives of Ukrainian workers and address immediate issues of concern not attended to by the government the movement established institutions throughout the 1920s, such as the Workers Benevolent Association

16. For some examples, see Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montreal 1994) and Patrias “Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario, 1930–35,” Franca Iacovetta, *et al.*, eds, *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History* (Toronto 1998), 322–358. See also Mishler, *Raising Reds* and Reiter, “Secular Yiddishkai” and “Camp Navelt and the Daughters of the Jewish Left.”



(WBA – a mutual benefit society that provided insurance and other financial services), and an assortment of newspapers, and literacy and language classes. During the Depression, the Ukrainian Labour Temple even acted as a make-shift soup kitchen and gathering space for displaced and unemployed workers. Cultural activities, such as Ukrainian embroidery, dance, theatre, cuisine, orchestras (especially mandolin orchestras), and choir, were also commonplace in the halls. Concerts and other gatherings featuring these activities routinely attracted sell-out crowds. Organizers used these events to illustrate complex political situations, encourage working-class solidarity, promote resistance, and further the struggle against economic and social injustice in Canada and abroad. Enormously successful, these activities served to establish the Ukrainian Labour Temple as one of the most popular and important interwar working-class institutions in Canada. The movement grew in the interwar era to encompass extensive numbers of members and supporters, female and male, children and adult. By the end of the interwar decades (before the federal government banned the ULFTA on 4 June 1940, severely circumscribing its activities), it counted some 15,000 members working in 87 Ukrainian Labour Temples. Its two Ukrainian language newspapers reached over 20,000 subscribers, and in its halls across the country, its Ukrainian language dramas and concerts routinely played to full houses.<sup>17</sup> The interwar years were truly a golden age for Ukrainian cultural-political radicalism in Canada.

Like other contemporary radical groups, Ukrainian leftists developed a gendered discourse predicated on male domination and female subordination. Peasant village values brought from the “Old Country” influenced these models. Evident in a system of unequal power relations, these were further reinforced by Canadian manifestations of male gender privilege and female subordination, particularly within the CPC and other leftist organizations like unions, which were also deeply sexist and patriarchal.<sup>18</sup> From this grew a structured hierarchy that privileged men and their experiences, defining class and activism through a male lens of experience and opportunity. During the ULFTA’s interwar years, men held virtually all leadership positions and were among its most visible supporters. Like other radical women, these Ukrainian women performed seemingly invisible but critical roles that ensured the movement’s financial, organizational, cultural, and political survival. Despite

17. For more information on the ULFTA’s general history, see Peter Krawchuk, *Our History: The Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Movement in Canada, 1907–1991* (Toronto 1996) and my doctoral thesis, “‘Sincerest Revolutionary Greetings’: Progressive Ukrainians in Twentieth Century Canada,” PhD Thesis, McMaster University, 2005.

18. It is important that we not fall into the ethnocentric trap of viewing the Ukrainian left as a much more deeply patriarchal culture than was the Anglo-Celtic culture and hence the Anglo-Canadian left. Certain studies have emphasized the Ukrainian leftists’ male chauvinism while not sufficiently subjecting the Anglo-Canadian left to the same degree of scrutiny. See for example, Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920–1950* (Toronto 1989).

these contributions, women endured frequent criticism for being “backward” or for failing to pursue male-defined methods of activism. At the same time, those who did wish to move beyond women’s traditional sphere in the movement encountered hostility or contempt.<sup>19</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, it was the male leaders who facilitated the Ukrainian left’s ties (and hostilities) with the Communist Party of Canada. Many of these men – Matthew Popovich, John Naviziwsky, Matthew Shatulsky, Danylo Lobay – had been radicalized in the Old Country and had a long history of Ukrainian socialist activism in Canada prior to the founding of the ULFTA. On May 23, 1921, Popovich and Naviziwsky were among the 22 delegates present in Fred Farley’s Guelph, Ontario barn when the Workers Party of Canada (WPC – later renamed the Communist Party of Canada) was formed. Organized into a separate language federation within the new party, the Ukrainians, like the Finns (the other majority group), enjoyed significant autonomy within the Party and embraced its “United Front.” This was threatened when, in 1924, the Communist International (Comintern) initiated its campaign of “bolshevization” which called for, among other things, the dissolution of the language federations. The Ukrainians and the Finns opposed the change with some success (though not without a fight), thanks in large part to the tremendous financial and human resources they brought to the Party. According to Ivan Avakumovic, both groups possessed “hundreds of followers, printing presses, flourishing weeklies, and buildings, owned by pro-Communist organizations,” resources Anglo-Celtic Party leaders simply did not themselves have.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, rangling between the CPC and the ULFTA leaders continued. In the late 1920s “Third Period,” for example, the ULFTA faced increased condemnation. As Joan Sangster explains, “In 1928 the Comintern, now dominated by Stalin, argued that the capitalist West was on the verge of a ‘Third Period’ of intense economic and political crisis.” Because, the Comintern asserted, Communists had “veered dangerously toward reformism” they now “had to reinstate a revolutionary political praxis.”<sup>21</sup> In 1929, the Comintern instructed the CPC to take on an organizational structure in which all workers would be organized such that “the primacy of the English language and an organizational structure that emphasized occupational and not cultural groups” be implemented.<sup>22</sup> As Kolasky demonstrates, “It was expected...that Ukrainian workers would abandon their language groups and commit themselves to the

19. For a more detailed description of women’s experiences with the ULFTA, see Joan Sangster “Robitnytsia, Ukrainian Communists, and the ‘Porcupinism’ Debate: Reassessing Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Early Canadian Communism, 1922–1930,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 56 (Fall 2005), 51–89, and my doctoral thesis, “Sincerest Revolutionary Greetings.”

20. Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975), 11.

21. Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 55–56

22. Avery, “Divided Loyalties,” 278.

activities of the newly formed CPC industrial unions.”<sup>23</sup> When they failed to comply, the CPC leadership disparaged the ULFTA and its activities (particularly its cultural ones) for being inherently conservative and nationalist and accused the ULFTA CPC members of being “right-wing deviationists,” all the while questioning the value of its Ukrainian cultural activities (claiming it distracted the Ukrainians from ‘real’ activism).

Despite this ongoing power struggle, leaders of the ULFTA who were also Party members remained staunchly committed communists. Though they might disagree with the Party or its leaders and challenge policy, they still did what they could to integrate many of its initiatives into the programs of the ULFTA and its associated groups. Of course, they had to balance this carefully, taking into consideration what the ULFTA members and supporters would be willing to embrace or could easily implement without upset to the overall functioning of cultural and organizational work. In 1931, for example, the Ukrainians accommodated “the turn” through its cultural work. At that year’s ULFTA convention, Matthew Shatulsky explained that choirs, orchestras, and drama groups must all take part in the turn and be “real shock-troop activists in the introduction of proletarian art to our stage. There is no ‘art for art’s sake.’ To counteract this misleading bourgeois slogan we must raise the slogan: art in the service of the proletariat!”<sup>24</sup> To adhere to such a program was not difficult for many of the cultural forces of the ULFTA, given their existing tendency to fuse cultural expression with political content in plays and other performances. Easier to embrace was the mid-1930s Popular Front with its increased emphasis on social and cultural activities as a means through which to raise awareness and develop alliances in the name of fighting the rise of global fascism. The ULFTA was enthusiastic in supporting the Popular Front as the “community and neighbourhood activities”<sup>25</sup> it emphasized dovetailed easily with the work the progressive Ukrainian community had eagerly embraced throughout its history.

Scholars have offered a number of explanations for these Ukrainian leaders’ behaviour. Some have argued that men like Popowich or Shatulsky, in opposing the party, were seeking to protect their own authority and power as leaders of the ULFTA and its related organizations. Others have shown how the ULFTA’s failure to embrace the Party line – particularly in its calls for Ukrainians to take out formal membership in the Party – was related to fears of arrest and the very real possibility of deportation. Rejection of Party leaders’ Anglo-centricism and frustration with its ethnocentric attitudes has also been cited as a source of the Ukrainian left’s resentment.<sup>26</sup> Somewhat underestimated,

23. Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 278.

24. Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 278.

25. Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 126.

26. For more detailed discussion of the CPC-ULFTA connection, consult the standard sources

however, has been the pressure the Ukrainian left's leaders faced from the movement's base of members and supporters. When accepting or developing programs or policy, these leaders had to be mindful of the interests and concerns of its constituents for whom liquidation of the Ukrainian left, the dissolution of its cultural mandate, or integration of its members into the CPC were, to put it mildly, unappealing. Placing the experiences of children and youth front and centre allows us to consider this relationship from a more nuanced perspective. It helps to illuminate some of the additional pressures leaders faced when confronted with Party policy that challenged or threatened the ULFTA's cultural or social components. In this way, we gain a broader understanding of this community's political and cultural perspectives and the multifaceted ways in which members understood and carried out their activism.

### **Children of the Ukrainian Left**

Children of ULFTA members and supporters most often had their first contact with the movement as babies or young children, brought by their parents to functions at or coordinated by a Ukrainian Labour Temple. Later, once they began attending public school, their parents would have enrolled them in after-school and weekend activities at a local ULFTA hall. Depending on age and the availability of programming in their particular locality, they would, perhaps between the ages of eleven and thirteen, graduate to participation in youth activities. The period of youth functioned as a much more transitional – and ambiguous – stage of movement life. When one ceased to be defined as a youth and began to be an adult within the context of the Ukrainian Labour Temple community had very little to do with age. Instead, the move from youth to adult activities had more to do with the whims, needs, and priorities of the male leadership of the movement and was contingent on the youngsters' life circumstances. Life milestones such as public school completion, injury or death of a parent, marriage, parenthood, the move into the workforce, and socio-economic context, also determined the transition point to adulthood.

Though there are clear differences characterising the categories of children and youth, it is nonetheless appropriate to discuss them in tandem since within both age categories, activities followed a similar pattern, existed for similar reasons, enjoyed similar status within the movement, and were together often distinct from the activities of adults. When discussed together, children and youth will be referred to as “youngsters” or “young people” for the purpose of this paper. Otherwise, when specific age categories of youngsters are discussed, “children” and “youth” will be used.

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cited above authored by Sangster, Avery, and Avakumovic. See also Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Victoria 2004) and, especially, Jim Mochoruk's yet unpublished paper, “It's Not Easy Being Red: Ukrainian Canadians and the Communist Party of Canada in the 1920s.”

## Ukrainian Worker Children's Schools

The Ukrainian left began to establish formal activities for youngsters with the opening of the Winnipeg Ukrainian Labour Temple in 1918. At the time, leaders and parents ascribed a great deal of importance to children's involvement. When the governments of the three Prairie provinces declared English as the sole language of instruction in public schools during the second decade of the twentieth century,<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian families there were forced to turn to outside institutions to provide Ukrainian educational and cultural experiences to supplement those taught in the home. Many parents also wanted their children involved in activities challenging the oppression Ukrainian and other, particularly immigrant, members of the working class faced upon their arrival to Canada. They also sought supervised, non-religious activities for their children after school and on weekends when parents had their own cultural-political activities to attend at the halls or when they needed to be at work. In response to these concerns, at the first convention of the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association, leaders established Ukrainian Worker Children's Schools (UWCS). Their purpose was "to teach the children of Ukrainian workers their native language, to give them the means in their native tongue to raise the consciousness of the workers, [and] to teach them to view the world through the eyes of the working class."<sup>28</sup> As the ULFTA expanded nationally over the course of the early 1920s, halls across Canada opened their own Ukrainian Worker Children's Schools. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, schools constantly expanded, both in number and size and in terms of activities offered.<sup>29</sup> With interest in this work keen – on the part of both parents and the children themselves – the Ukrainian Worker Children's Schools enjoyed a striking degree of popularity. By the time the 1933 ULFTA convention took place, there were 45 schools functioning across Canada with some 2000 students attending.<sup>30</sup> In 1937, the number of schools had grown to 54 with the number of students remaining steady at 1945.<sup>31</sup>

27. Mary Ashworth, "Ukrainian Children," *Children of the Canadian Mosaic: A Brief History to 1950* (Toronto 1993), 77–80.

28. "Report on the State of Study and Education in the Ukrainian Worker-Children's Schools," 10th Convention ULFTA, February 4–6, 1929, translated by L. Stavroff; Peter Krawchuk, *Our History: The Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Movement in Canada, 1907–1991* (Toronto 1996), 245.

29. In 1927, for example, the ULFTA National Convention voted to include folk dancing as a new activity for Ukrainian schoolchildren. "Re AUUC – Montreal, P. Que.," 20 January 1956, Library and Archives Canada, Records of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service [hereafter LAC, CSIS], RG 146, Volume 3757: "AUUC – Case History Canada," Part 1.

30. Translation of Ukrainian Labour News, 18 March 1933, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3758: "AUUC, Women's Section, Canada," Part 1.

31. "Sixteenth Convention of ULFTA," 8 May 1937, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC: Winnipeg, Manitoba," Part 8.

The Central School Board (CSB) of the ULFTA coordinated the schools at the national level and worked to ensure a standardized national curriculum. Thanks to this body, the schools tended to function in much the same manner regardless of locality (although remoteness of location could affect teacher availability and children's attendance rates). Typically, school organizers grouped children by grade or age in the Ukrainian schools, although this might also depend on a child's ability and knowledge of the language.<sup>32</sup> In most communities, the schools combined training in the Ukrainian language with musical and cultural training. "I attend the Ukrainian Workers Children's School where we learn our language, reading, writing, singing, and mandolin," explained Maria Tysmbaliuk of Kamsack, Saskatchewan in 1927, "Our teacher is *Tovarish* D. Prodaniuk.<sup>33</sup> He is now teaching us a play." She went on to explain, "we've mounted a few concerts, but the last one was cancelled because it was too cold and no one came." When organizer *Tovarish* Toma Kobzey came to inspect their school, she recalled, "He gave us a lot of questions on grammar and musical theory. He also advised us on proper behaviour and how to set a good example for others. He then asked us if we knew how to sing, so we did so."<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the interwar era, the CPC frequently criticised the UWCS for being too culturally centred, claiming that an emphasis on use of the Ukrainian language and culture distracted children from activities that the Party defined as of a more pressing political nature. Ongoing use of the Ukrainian language especially seemed to raise the ire of those working to Anglicize the Party. It is clear from their critiques, however, that the CPC understood or appreciated very little of the important ways in which the UWCS contributed to supporting the international proletarian struggle and how it integrated the Party line into its curriculum. Children attending the UWCS received, through cultural and language training, widespread exposure to Marxist-Leninism and analysis of the situation of the working class in Canada and abroad. This training, which

32. Ollie Hillman, interviewed by Rhonda L. Hinthner [hereafter RLH], August 1999.

33. Special comment should be made about the terms "*Tovarishka*," "*Tovarish*," and "*Tovarishky/Tovarishy*" the female, male, and plural versions of the title "Comrade" which was often used in interwar documents to address and describe members and supporters. This study deliberately retains the Ukrainian transliteration of these terms so as not to lose the complexity of its meaning for the Ukrainian left community. Their use is significant not only for obvious political overtones, but also because the terms can be translated as "friend." This is especially important for understanding the ways in which the Ukrainian left defined what it meant to be Ukrainian in relation to the "Ukrainianness" espoused by other Ukrainian groups in Canada. The use of "*Tovarishka*" and "*Tovarish*," in addition to linking the Ukrainian left with the international proletarian struggle, acted as a rejection of what they perceived as the elitist, imperialist overtones of the terms "*Panya*" and "*Pan*" ("*Lady*" and "*Lord*") by which other more conservative Ukrainians in Canada tended to greet each other. Thus, these terms epitomize this particular Ukrainian community's attempts to create a more egalitarian set of social relations in the Canadian context.

34. *Svit molodi*, March 1927, translated by L. Stavroff.





Port Arthur, Ontario ULFTA Handicraft School, ca. 1925-26

Courtesy of the L. Stavroff Collection

became especially intense with the onslaught of the Depression, was facilitated through a variety of means. Teachers made use of pro-working class, Ukrainian language newspapers, literature, songs, drama, and poems in their lessons. To make his classes more enjoyable, one teacher even had his students read popular “Children’s literature to study individually,” which he later interpreted for them “according to Lenin ideology.”<sup>35</sup>

The CSB also encouraged teachers to supplement classroom lessons with hands-on experiences. For example, organizers instructed teachers in the 1930s to help students understand the plight of the unemployed and impoverished by planning field trips “to soup kitchens and forced labour camps.” Many on the left used the latter term to describe the R.B. Bennett-established “relief camps” for single unemployed men, characterized by low wages and abysmal and isolated working conditions. The CSB also told teachers to encourage children to analyse their home lives in the context of the Depression in order to

35. “Report on the 1931 Convention, ULFTA,” LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” Part 12; Svit molodi, March 1927, translated by L. Stavroff; *Programa Pratsi i Navchannya v URDShkola. [Teaching Guide for Ukrainian Worker-Children’s Schools]* (Winnipeg, 1932), Stavroff Private Collection (Toronto), translated by L. Stavroff; Krawchuk, *Our History*, 191.



understand what their role must be in the class struggle.<sup>36</sup> To practise their Ukrainian and journalism skills, organizers, teachers, and newspaper editors encouraged children to write stories about working-class exploitation for their school's "wall gazette" and for the movement's newspapers.

Organizers did not structure children's activities and roles along gender lines as women and men's were. Leaders and parents expected girls and boys to participate equally and enthusiastically. Some activities, however, were geared more towards children of a specific gender, which served to socialize girls and boys into their future gender roles in the movement. When the Women's Branch members taught traditional Ukrainian handicrafts like embroidery to students, for example, it was generally only the girls who participated.

Sometimes separate orchestra groups existed as well, though not necessarily because organizers considered a particular musical activity more appropriate for girls or boys. Often, it was simply a case of numbers. In Winnipeg, Ollie Hillman recalled, when mandolin instruction began in the early 1920s, significantly more girls than boys were involved in the mandolin orchestra. Eventually, the UWCS teacher Vladislav Patek recruited the hall's boys into a separate "big band." Nor were the boys more advantaged in this case when it came to performance opportunities and status. In fact, the Winnipeg Girls Mandolin Orchestra was one of the most influential youngster's cultural groups in the ULFTA nationally – they embarked on several tours of eastern and western Canada during the interwar years, raising funds, class-consciousness, and organizational awareness.<sup>37</sup>

Like adults, the UWCS students worked under a rigorous schedule, often attending classes and rehearsals nightly and even on weekends during the September to June cultural season. While these children certainly had friends from public school and their neighbourhoods, generally speaking, few found they had the time for much play or other activity outside the parameters of the labour temples. Nick Petrachenko attended the UWCS at the Welland Ukrainian Labour Temple during the 1920s, and it was there that he spent the most time with his friends. He would hurry home after public school for a quick snack before his five o'clock Ukrainian classes. At seven o'clock, the class would end but he would often remain at the hall for drama practise. On weekends, there would also be meetings, concerts, plays, or social activities. Like Petrachenko, Hillman and her friends spent all of their spare time at the Winnipeg hall. "Every evening was filled – there would be Ukrainian school, orchestra, meetings," she explained. She, like many other children, loved attending and taking part in hall activities. The activities were so important to her and the others that they used to walk through all sorts of weather: "it was like life and death,

36. *Programa Pratsi i Navchannya v UIRDShkola*, [Teaching Guide for Ukrainian Worker-Children's Schools].

37. Hillman interview; Peter Krawchuk, ed., *Our Stage: The Amateur Performing Arts of the Ukrainian Settlers in Canada* (Toronto 1984), 71–79.

we had to attend dancing and the other events.”<sup>38</sup> Also a student in the 1920s, Nick Dubas called the Winnipeg Ukrainian Labour Temple his second home, stating that in fact, “I was at the hall more than I was at home. Sometimes I did poorly in [public] school because I was so involved with the hall.” For Dubas, the close quarters of labour temple life led to the development of his most significant childhood friendships. “I had friends at [public] school,” he explained, “but they weren’t like my pals from the Ukrainian Labour Temple.” Patterns like this continued throughout the interwar years for children like Myron Shatulsky, Olga Shatulsky, Mary Semanowich, and Clara Babiy, who had similar experiences with the UWCS schedule in the 1930s.<sup>39</sup>

The students put their education to good use in the movement by helping to raise funds and ethnic and class-consciousness with or like adult members of the Ukrainian Labour Temples. They frequently attended or took part in plays and concerts put on by the adult branches at the halls. In 1922, for example, in the last act of a play about the Bolshevik Revolution performed at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Winnipeg, children from the UWCS marched amidst downed telephone, telegraph, and light poles “with Red Flags singing the ‘International’” among “Priests and Noblemen [who were] cleaning the streets, clothed in rags.”<sup>40</sup> Sometimes the children were the main draw. In 1926, the Toronto Children’s Mandolin Orchestra embarked on a tour of nine communities in remote northern Ontario and gave what one reviewer called, “some very fine concerts.”<sup>41</sup> Their program featured a variety of songs reflecting the ULFTA’s emphasis on musical rigour, its ethno-political interests, as well as a general international influence. Alongside traditional Ukrainian folk songs like “Katerina,” “Postava,” and “Zaporozhets,” could be found the overture to “The Barber of Seville,” “O Solo Mio,” and, of course, “The International.”<sup>42</sup> Their repertoire also included the Ukrainian version of the popular “*Razom tovaryshi v nohu*” (“Together Comrades”):

All of us hail from the people,  
Children of labour and toil,  
“Fraternal union and freedom” –  
Let this be our battle call.

38. *Programa Pratsi i Navchannya v UIRDShkola [Teaching Guide for Ukrainian Worker-Children’s Schools]*; Nick Petrachenko, interviewed by RLH, December, 1999; Hillman interview.

39. Nick Dubas, interviewed by RLH, June 1998. For other examples: Pearl Milan, interviewed by RLH, August 1999 and Olga Shatulsky, interviewed by RLH, May 1998.

40. “Re Ukrainian Labor Temple Association, Winnipeg, Concert Given at the Ukrainian Labor Temple, 25 November 1922,” LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” File 1.

41. *Ukrainski robitnychi visti*, 14 September 1926 as quoted in Krawchuk, ed., *Our Stage*, 77.

42. *Ukrainski robitnychi visti*, 21 September 1926 as quoted in Krawchuk, ed., *Our Stage*, 77.

Long have they held us in bondage,  
 Starvation long did us waste,  
 Our patience has finally ended,  
 Now we'll ourselves liberate.<sup>43</sup>

In the end, according to the ULFTA newspaper *Ukrainski robotnychi visti* (*Ukrainian Labour News*), the trip was a “a great success from both a moral and financial point of view.”<sup>44</sup> Tours like this and those of the Girls Mandolin Orchestra wherever they played inspired many ULFTA groups. Often, in their wake during the 1920s, lay newly minted children’s orchestras in even the most remote communities where these youngsters had performed.

### The Higher Educational Course

The popularity and expansion of the UWCS highlighted an important deficiency in the movement. From the earliest days, it was clear that a lack of trained organizers and teachers plagued the movement. For work with youngsters to flourish, the ULFTA needed to develop a cadre of activists possessing appropriate skills and experience. To confront this serious problem, the movement’s national leadership in Winnipeg developed what came to be known as the Higher Educational Course (HEC) and recruited promising young people to take part. While the first course in 1923 had only had 13 students attending, subsequent courses tended to attract anywhere from 25 to 44 students.<sup>45</sup> Between 1923 and 1938, five HECs took place, graduating more than 100 students in total.<sup>46</sup> The course was so popular, organizers moved it to Parkdale, Manitoba on the outskirts of Winnipeg where the WBA owned a large facility that housed orphaned Ukrainian leftist children and older men, too aged or infirm to look after themselves.<sup>47</sup> Organizers were optimistic about the training program, which they viewed as key to the movement’s growth and influence among Ukrainian immigrants and their offspring.

“In a word – the Higher Educational Course is our forge,” ULFTA leader Toma Kobzey explained in 1923, “which sends out hammer-wielding smiths to smash the rampant ignorance of the workers.”<sup>48</sup> That Kobzey chose to use

43. Translated from Ukrainian by L. Stavroff.

44. *Ukrainski robotnychi visti*, 21 September 1926 as quoted in Krawchuk, ed., *Our Stage*, 77.

45. LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” File 10; Krawchuk, “The Education of Leading Cadres by the ULFTA, 1920s–1930s,” *The Tenth Anniversary Publication of Conference Proceedings ...* (Toronto 1996), 32–36.

46. Kolasky, *Shattered Illusion*, 10.

47. For more detailed discussion of the Parkdale Orphanage, see Hinthner, “Sincerest Revolutionary Greetings.”

48. T. Kobzey, “What We Are Studying at the Higher Educational Course” in *Nashi Sproby [Our Endeavours]* (Winnipeg 1926), a Publication of the Students of the Higher Educational Course of the ULFTA, translated by L. Stavroff.

such a masculinist image is no coincidence. It speaks forcefully to the male-dominated left, its celebration of hammer and fist imagery, and to the sexism prevalent among Ukrainian leftists (and other contemporary radical groups). Young men were the most desirable HEC students. The resulting student bodies, then, were a physical manifestation of these views. The students of the 1923-24 HEC were all male. The 1925-26 course saw three women participants. Through the 1930s, this pattern continued. Of the 28 students who completed the course in 1936, only nine were women. Two years later, nine women and 29 men took part.<sup>49</sup> Many women were selected only once they had proven themselves exceptional and, often, only then in the absence of a suitable male candidate. Mary Skrypnyk, then of Hamilton, Ontario, was one of the few young women who attended the HEC in 1938. She became a student only after the Hamilton Ukrainian Labour Temple's first choice, a boy, had to turn down the opportunity because his father had passed away, and he needed to remain in town to support his mother. At the time of her selection, many members were displeased. "I was told the course would be wasted on me because I was a girl," Skrypnyk – who ended up making her career with the Ukrainian left – recalled.<sup>50</sup> Skrypnyk, and her cohort of young women at the course, were among those who, by challenging gender roles and seizing opportunity, would establish themselves as important leaders in the movement during World War II and into the postwar period.

To attend a ULFTA HEC demanded temporal and often financial commitment from students. Once they were selected, some students paid for the course themselves, though more often individual branches, the national office of the ULFTA, and the WBA would cover the cost of transportation, teaching materials, and room and board.<sup>51</sup> For many participants, the time they spent at an interwar HEC was worthwhile; it was likely the only opportunity they had for further education and training in Canada. The promise of a position as an organizer, journalist, or teacher in a Ukrainian labour temple somewhere in Canada – though still poorly paid – opened up alternative job possibilities beyond those typically available to young Ukrainian women and men in domestic service, resource industries, or the agricultural sector. It also gave them the opportunity to meet and mingle with a new group of like-minded young people; several even met their future spouses through the course.

A young woman or man who attended an HEC received training in a

49. "Re ULFTA – Winnipeg, Higher Educational Course," 20 January 1937 and "Re ULFTA, Winnipeg," 14 January 1938, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba," Parts 7 and 8.

50. Olga Shatulsky interview; Mary Skrypnyk, interviewed by RLH, December 1998.

51. "Re: Foreign Bolshevik-Communist Organizations," no date [c. 1938], LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba," File 8; "Re Seventh Convention of ULFT Assn., held in Winnipeg on January 25-26-27, 1926," LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3835: "ULFTA, Seventh National Convention, 1926," File 8.



**Students of the 1925–26 Higher Educational Course**

Courtesy of the L. Stavroff Collection

variety of subjects designed to develop their abilities as well-rounded teachers and organizers. Courses of a political nature were a priority. John Boyd, who studied at the 1930 HEC led by Matthew Popovich, remembered a curriculum that “included ... history and geography and ... political economy and Marxism.”<sup>52</sup> The intention of this line of teaching, as 1936 course participant Kosty Kostaniuk explained, was “designed to give them a broad understanding of what was happening around them.”<sup>53</sup> Students also learned various practical ways to organize branches and activities. At the 1926 HEC, for instance, classes engaged in role-playing exercises. One student, cast in the role of organizer, would be responsible for organizing the remaining members of the class who played the parts of unorganized workers or farmers. In other situations, students would conduct mock meetings or lectures to teach them how to set up and run WBA and ULFTA branches and Ukrainian Worker Children’s Schools. Students also learned techniques to help revive faltering branches.<sup>54</sup>

Balanced against the political and organizational aspects of the course was the other priority of the ULFTA, the maintenance of Ukrainian cultural life in Canada. In addition to political and organizational lessons, students were also educated about the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture. Courses in Ukrainian grammar, history, and literature were fixtures of the schools.

52. John Boyd, *A Noble Cause Betrayed...but Hope Lives On – Pages from a Political Life: Memoirs of a Former Canadian Communist* (Edmonton 1999), 7.

53. Kosty Kostaniuk, interviewed by RLH, July 1999.

54. T. Kobzey, “What We Are Studying at the Higher Educational Course,” in *Nashi Sproby [Our Endeavours]*.

Students also studied Ukrainian music, drama, and dance. Above all, they learned how to teach these subjects properly and how to coordinate cultural groups within the ULFTA.<sup>55</sup> When the course finished, participants would often demonstrate what they had learned to the ULFTA members and supporters in halls in the Winnipeg vicinity. After their exams in 1936, the students of the Higher Educational Course put on a revolutionary play called “Destruction of the Black Sea Squadron” at the Transcona Ukrainian Labour Temple, while the 1938 group performed “some fine singing, duets, trios, quartets and larger groups” at their farewell concert.<sup>56</sup>

Most HEC graduates would be immediately assigned to work in various branches across Canada. Others would be groomed for leadership positions in local branches or as touring organizers or journalists. Kostaniuk, for example, was assigned to the Fort William Branch. Some fortunate male students in the 1930s even had the chance, once they demonstrated their potential at the HEC, to study in Ukraine. Mike Seychuk, for example, was sent with three other students to Kharkiv, Ukraine, to attend the Red Professorship after taking part in the 1929–30 HEC.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Sektsia Molodi and Yunats’ka Sektsia**

The students selected for the HEC were nearly always drawn from the ranks of the ULFTA’s Youth Section. Often linked to the activities of the UWCS, organizers designed the Youth Section to teach youngsters how to function as formal ULFTA branch members. The first incarnation of the Youth Section, *Spilka Ukrainskoi Robitnychoi Molodi*, or *SURM* (League of Ukrainian Working Youth) came into being in February of 1924 at the ULFTA Convention. Response was immediate, and over the course of the year, 12 branches formed across Canada with a total membership of 445.

Despite – or perhaps because of – its immediate success, however, pressure from the CPC acted as a direct challenge to the *SURM*’s existence. The CPC feared that the growing strength of the Ukrainian-language *SURM* would undermine its own English-language Young Communist League. As such, by 1925 the CPC successfully demanded that leaders of the ULFTA abolish the *SURM* to pressure Ukrainian Youth to join the YCL. Ultimately, the effort was a failure as only a few of the former *SURM*’s leaders ended up participating in the YCL. Resistant to the prospect of working not within the Ukrainian cultural-

55. LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3835: “ULFTA Seventh National Convention, 1926.” Also Dubas, Kostaniuk, Skrypyuk interviews; Bill Philipovich, interviewed by RLH, May 1998.

56. “Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association – Winnipeg, Higher Educational Course,” 26 October 1938, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3787: “ULFTA – Winnipeg,” File 8; LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” File 7.

57. Mike Seychuk, interviewed by RLH, June 1998; Peter Krawchuk, “The Education of Leading Cadres,” 32–36.



political milieu of the ULFTA but through the CPC, others, according to an RCMP source, “drifted away,” choosing “to not belong to any of the organizations.”<sup>58</sup> This acute rejection forced the CPC to recognize the desire for and value of a separate Ukrainian youth organization. At the 1926 ULFTA Convention, CPC National Secretary Jack Macdonald himself urged the ULFTA to reorganize a youth branch, albeit one, which he argued, should be led by Ukrainian youth who were also members of the YCL. The ULFTA happily obliged, and the *Sektsia Molodi* (Youth Section) was born.<sup>59</sup>

With a significant degree of autonomy from the CPC restored, the *Sektsia Molodi* enjoyed another wave of phenomenal growth. Over the course of the latter half of the 1920s, it, like the Ukrainian Workers’ Children’s Schools, expanded into numerous communities across Canada. By 1927, the ULFTA boasted 32 youth branches and 1508 members in its youth division.<sup>60</sup> In 1931, the ULFTA even created a *Yunats’ka Sektsia* (Junior Section) modelled on the *Sektsia Molodi* for children aged seven to ten, too young for the *Sektsia Molodi* but eager for a branch of their own.<sup>61</sup>

Organizers deliberately structured both the *Sektsia Molodi* and *Yunats’ka Sektsia* like adult branches to teach children how to run an organization, hold meetings, and fundraise. Skypnyk, who was assigned to the *Yunats’ka Sektsia* during the late 1930s, “tried to make it a small organization for children, like a smaller model of the larger organization.”<sup>62</sup> Like many adult branches, membership meetings for the young people’s sections generally took place on Sundays. As one former member recalled, realizing there was a distinction between themselves and the religious – Ukrainian or otherwise – children, the *Yunats’ka Sektsia* children used to refer to it as their Sunday School.<sup>63</sup> Instead of the religious instruction that took place in church, however, in these groups youngsters would learn like adults, about Marxist-Leninism, the international proletarian struggle, and how to elect executives, hold meetings, pay dues, plan events, and raise money. In this way, these youngsters, who straddled two worlds – that of the Ukrainian left and that of the multi-class and multi-ethnic world outside the hall – drew on their radical culture to make sense of what they were doing vis-à-vis other children in their neighbourhoods and public schools.

Branch activities for youngsters mirrored in intensity those of women and men, reflecting a combination of organizational, political, and social activity. As one young member of the *Sektsia Molodi* branch in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario explained in 1927, their branch had held in their three months of exis-

58. LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3835: “ULFTA, 7th National Convention, 1926.”

59. “Youth, A Focal Point of Pride and Concern,” *Ukrainian Canadian*, 15 April 1968.

60. *Svit molodi*, March 1927, translated by L. Stavroff.

61. Krawchuk, *Our History*, 389; *Boyova molod*, September 1932, translated by L. Stavroff.

62. Skypnyk interview.

63. Joyce Pawlyk, interviewed by RLH, August 1999.



tence, “five administrative meetings, seven group readings, [and] two concerts independently. They had also coordinated “seven concerts with their Finnish comrades, one annual meeting with the election of the new executive, [while at the same time] collecting money for a library.”<sup>64</sup> The *Sektsia Molodi* and *Yunats’ka Sektsia*, like adult groups, were also encouraged to assist other ULFTA branches in fund-raising for the press, the organizational fund, and other labour-related projects. Many youngsters enjoyed the pace of organizational activity, but stuck around as well because of the important social elements inherent to these young people’s branches. Mike Seychuk, a *Yunats’ka Sektsia* member in Winnipeg during the late 1920s and early 1930s, recalled his hectic schedule: “On weekends, we would spend time at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in a group meeting or on an outing; we would have socials in the evening with kids from the Transcona or East Kildonan Ukrainian Labour Temples.” A favourite wintertime activity for Seychuk’s group involved making a twelve kilometre “trek” east from their North End Winnipeg hall to meet their cohort at the Transcona hall.<sup>65</sup>

There were differences between youngsters’ branches and adult branches, however. Most significantly, the young people’s branch activities were not organized along gender lines. While organizers might, in some instances, develop activities with more appeal for girls or boys, overall youngsters were not forced to adhere to rigid definitions of femininity or masculinity, nor were they confined, like their parents, to branches and activities based on whether they were male or female. Both girls and boys were encouraged within their groups to play executive and committee roles, and girls often held key leadership positions such as president.<sup>66</sup>

Like the UWSC and the HEC, the *Yunats’ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* seemed to enjoy a strong following and a great deal of popularity. Growth in the 1920s continued into the 1930s. By the time the 1933 ULFTA convention rolled around, the membership of the *Yunats’ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* totalled 1528 and 1050 respectively. At the 1937 ULFTA Convention, the *Yunats’ka Sektsia* reported having more than 2000 members,<sup>67</sup> while the *Sektsia Molodi* was shown to have grown to 1800 members nationwide.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the sections’ prolific expansion, their existence continued in some ways to be precarious. Struggles with the CPC cropped up sporadically throughout the 1930s, threatening to alienate Ukrainian youngsters from ULFTA branch work. Clearly, the role the CPC wanted the YCL to play

64. *Svit molodi*, March 1927, translated by L. Stavroff.

65. Seychuk interview. See also Pawlyk and Skrypyk interviews.

66. *Svit molodi*, October 1927; *Ukrainian Canadian*, 15 May 1952.

67. Krawchuk, *Our History*, 394, 399.

68. “Report on 1937 Convention, ULFTA,” LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC: Winnipeg, Manitoba,” Part 8.

in relation to the *Sektsia Molodi* continued to be contentious, and leaders of both the ULFTA and the CPC had to tread carefully. In a 1935 ULFTA-published Ukrainian language article entitled "What the Relationship Should Be Between the YCL and the Youth Section, ULFTA," Seychuk outlined these existing tensions and attempted to find common ground for the two organizations. He explained that a lack of understanding of the differing purposes of the YCL and the *Sektsia Molodi* led to "misunderstandings and antagonism between the two groups." Attempting to clear this up, Seychuk argued that the task of the *Sektsia Molodi* was "to nurture culture-educational activity amongst the Ukrainian youth preparing it for the class struggle," while the YCL, particularly through its Ukrainian members, was meant "to show leadership to all revolutionary (labour) mass organizations of youth, including the Youth Section of the ULFTA." While clearly supporting the idea of a close and hierarchical connection between the YCL and the *Sektsia Molodi*, Seychuk went on to warn both groups, but especially the YCL, to act carefully and respectfully, asserting much antagonism had been generated by the views of YCLers that the *Sektsia Molodi* was "an unnecessary organization."<sup>69</sup>

Clearly Comintern and Party policy around the early 1930s "turn" and the mid-to-late 1930s Popular Front period intensified the pressure the Party placed on youngster's groups like the *Sektsia Molodi*. While many in the ULFTA leadership sought to follow Party directives as closely as possible, most realized that this would be impossible, given the continued contempt the Party held for the ULFTA's cultural mandate and interests and the importance ULFTA members and supporters placed on these ideals. Understanding the pressures they faced, many ULFTA leaders sought compromise between both sides. These efforts took on several forms when it came to the *Sektsia Molodi* and, in reality, few real shifts took place in the youth group despite the dramatic rhetoric the Party and ULFTA leaders were then employing. Throughout the 1930s, ULFTA leaders continued to encourage youngsters to join not only the *Yunats'ka Sektsia* or *Sektsia Molodi* but also the Young Pioneers or the YCL. At the same time, in the same direction the women's and men's branches were being pushed by the Party, the ULFTA and CPC tried to encourage youngsters in the *Yunats'ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* to collaborate with other young people's organizations in order to gain new contacts and recruits for the class struggle.<sup>70</sup> By the mid-1930s Popular Front period little had changed as members of the *Yunats'ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* continued to be encouraged by both the Communist Party of Canada and the

69. Mike Seychuk, "What the Relationship Should Be Between the YCL and the YS ULFTA," *Nasha Pratsia [Our Work]*, 5 February 1935, Organizational Bulletin of the Central Committee of the Youth Section, ULFTA, Stavroff Private Collection (Toronto), translated by L. Stavroff.

70. "Extracts from the 'Reports and Resolutions of the Twelfth Convention of Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association in Canada' held 15–20 July 1931, in the Ukrainian Labour Temple at Winnipeg," LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC: Winnipeg, Manitoba," Part 11.

ULFTA leadership, in the name of a “United Front Against War and Fascism,” to form alliances with other young people’s organizations. In a gesture to the Party, to conform to this newest agenda, delegates to the Sixteenth National Convention of the ULFTA in 1937 voted to change name of the *Sektsia Molodi* to the *Federatsia Kanadsko-Ukrainskoi Molodi* (Canadian Ukrainian Youth Federation) in an effort to appeal to a wider constituency of Ukrainian youth.<sup>71</sup> Despite the name change, however, many of the day-to-day activities of young people remained the same – centered in the ULFTA – as they had in the 1920s and early 1930s. This sloganeering, therefore, seemed to represent more of an effort by Ukrainian leaders to placate the Party without making any fundamental – and potentially unpopular – shifts with regard to the work of the Ukrainian children and youth. Moreover, while evidence to indicate the success of this initiative is scant, given other Ukrainian groups’ hostility to the Ukrainian left, it is unlikely that their children were drawn en masse to the CUYF.

Many young people did become more politically active and aware during the 1930s, likely from a combination of Party pressure, ULFTA training, and their own real life experiences growing up in working-class, immigrant neighbourhoods. Some, like *Sektsia Molodi* member Fred Zwarch, actively advocated the program set out by the Party. In 1936, Zwarch, supporting the Party’s calls for a Popular Front, wrote to *Unite the Youth*, a bilingual (Ukrainian and English) magazine published in 1936 in honour of the tenth anniversary of the *Sektsia Molodi*. He exhorted young people to use drama, sporting events, social activities, and educationals to build up “a genuine mass non-party youth organization” made up “of not only young Communists, but also of young Socialists, Cooperative Commonwealth [Federation] youth, students and all other progressive-minded youth...who are willing fighters against war and fascism and for the general welfare of the young generation.”<sup>72</sup>

Most young people, unlike Zwarch, continued to centre their political expression and cultural activity with the ULFTA. Moreover, though politicization and activism throughout the 1930s took on a greater urgency in all facets of the ULFTA, the methods the movement used to carry out these activities remained largely unchanged, as did the popularity of activities for children and youth. Throughout the 1930s, in addition to conducting their activism through Ukrainian school, orchestras, and plays, children and youth increasingly supported strikes, joined protests against war and fascism, marched in May Day parades, and raised funds for various causes related both to the ULFTA and the Party.<sup>73</sup> The *Sektsia Molodi* in Broad Valley, Manitoba, for example, explained

71. “Report re: ULFTA Convention 1937,” LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC: Winnipeg, Manitoba,” Part 7.

72. Fred Zwarch, “Towards a United Front of Youth Against War and Fascism” in *Unite the Youth*, c. 1936, Stavroff Private Collection (Toronto).

73. See for example Niechoda, 4–7.

that they took part “in the struggle against the tax sales, relief grievances, [and] bailiff sales.”<sup>74</sup> Concerns for conditions in Western Ukraine, peace, and protests against the rising clouds of imperialist war were also added to the list of issues with which the ULFTA was preoccupied during the Depression. With adults, children and youth shared these concerns and were central to protests and actions taken in support of these causes.

While the CPC/YCL connection hung over the movement bullying the *Sektsia Molodi*, so, too, were ULFTA leaders challenged in the field of work with youngsters in other ways. One of the reasons ULFTA organizers feared aggressively insisting that children and youth toe the Party line was because they were well-aware that many youngsters were fully prepared to leave when the *Yunats'ka Sektsia* or *Sektsia Molodi* failed to adequately address their interests. While still ensuring that the ULFTA's political-cultural objectives were being met, organizers had to work hard to hold young people's attention and keep them coming to meetings and functions. Nowhere was this more evident than where the “Educational” was concerned.

The “Educational” was one of the most important components of the *Yunats'ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* mandate. *Yunats'ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi* “Educationals” were similar to those that took place in adult branches, usually consisting of a lecture by a ULFTA leader or a group reading of a ULFTA newspaper. Speakers would try to teach youngsters how to be good, class-conscious, Ukrainian young people. They would do so by discussing the history of the Soviet Union, Ukraine, and other issues relevant to working-class Ukrainian children and youth. Like some adults, some youngsters enjoyed and were profoundly influenced and politicized by these lessons. “The Youth Section has given me a correct outlook on the world so that now I can understand the reasons for the present hardships and sufferings of the working class and the working class youth in particular,” explained *Sektsia Molodi* member Nick Hrynchyshyn in 1936. “But more than that,” he asserted, “it has shown me the way out of these present miserable conditions and the way to a happy new world.”<sup>75</sup>

Not all youngsters were as moved by the “Educationals” as Hrynchyshyn, however. Many youngsters found the “Educationals” – and even many branch activities – dull. They demonstrated their ennui in a number of ways: by offering suggestions to improve branch life or, if this proved too difficult, leaving the organization. Membership loss was clearly a constant problem, as a letter from *Sektsia Molodi* member M. Dembitski illustrates. In 1931, he wrote to an organizational newspaper on the topic of “Why are Some Members Leaving the Youth Section” in an effort to produce change. He argued that members stayed away because the meetings were simply not interesting. He suggested

74. J.O., “Five Years,” in *Unite the Youth*.

75. Nick Hrynchyshyn, “What the Youth Section ULFTA Has Given to Me and What It Can Give to You” in *Unite the Youth*.

that, in order to keep members engaged, the *Sektsia Molodi* needed to spend less time holding meetings, paying dues, and emphasizing “slogans” in terms of educational work.<sup>76</sup>

Others argued that, given the competition the movement faced from popular culture when it came to retaining children’s interest, the labour temples needed to make use of new technology and present the class struggle in more novel and engaging ways. This seemed a particularly important tactic during the Popular Front period, as the movement tried to attract a greater variety of Ukrainian children to its activities. In 1936, for example, Anna Gnit suggested following the lead of a church that used lantern shows to engage its child congregants. “Instead of showing scenes of Jesus,” she proposed, “we can show them scenes from the life of the workers’ and farmers’ children in Canada and other countries, contrasting this with the life of the people in the USSR.”<sup>77</sup> Nor did she feel it necessary that all such spectacles be imbued with class content, suggesting Mickey Mouse cartoons could also be shown. Similar ideas were implemented in many locales. Myron Shatulsky recalled going to the Winnipeg Ukrainian labour temple to see popular films. The movies, featuring Hollywood actors like Gene Autry or Jean Harlow, were shown on the hall’s 35 mm projector Wednesday to Friday, and sometimes Saturdays if there was no ULFTA play scheduled.<sup>78</sup>

## Physical Activity and Sports

The ULFTA leadership also turned to other means to keep children and youth engaged and active. The most important of these were sports. As sports historian Bruce Kidd has illustrated, Ukrainians did not bring to Canada “a strong sports tradition.” Nonetheless, thanks to participation in sports at school or in their working-class neighbourhoods, and encouraged by the formation of the CPC/YCL-led Workers’ Sports Association (WSA), many young Ukrainians eagerly embraced a variety of hall-led sports as their favoured form of leisure and activist activity. As a result, according to Kidd, Ukrainians eventually “made up the second most numerous ethnic group within the workers’ sports movement.”<sup>79</sup>

Ukrainian Labour Temples organizers viewed the presence of physical activity groups as crucial to recruiting and retaining a strong membership base of working-class-minded children and youth. Moreover, like the Ukrainian Worker Children’s Schools, sports at the Ukrainian Labour Temples offered an important, labour-centred, radical alternative to those provided by reli-

76. Letter written by M. Dembitski, *Svit molodi*, February 1930, translation by L. Stavroff.

77. Anna Gnit, “For a Progressive Children’s Movement” in *Unite the Youth*.

78. Myron Shatulsky, interviewed by RLH, June 1998.

79. Bruce Kidd, “Workers’ Sport, Worker’ Culture,” in *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto 1996), 164.

gious and quasi-religious groups like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Girl Guides, or Boy Scouts. "These are bourgeoisie clubs, the youths there are being cultivated in the bourgeoisie way," an organizer, speaking critically of the YMCA, explained in 1933, "They are absolutely kept in ignorance of the class struggle in the economic life of the people. Therefore we must support and build up our own Sports Club."<sup>80</sup> Sports were an important strategy local branches were especially encouraged to employ during the summer months, when the ULFTA cultural season and public school year ended. Organizers feared young people might drift away from the halls for good if they pursued activities (and made new non-ULFTA friends) outside the movement during their summer vacations.<sup>81</sup> Endeavouring to build the Comintern-mandated Popular Front during the 1930s, organizers held out great hope that sports might attract to the ULFTA young people from other Ukrainian, non-Ukrainian, and even non-leftist groups.<sup>82</sup> Most sports activities took place under the auspices of the *Sektsia Molodi*, and all halls eventually came to have some form of physical activity, though it varied according to locality and resources.

There is some indication that some sporting activities were organized along gender lines. Organizers especially believed that sports were an important way to attract and retain boys for the movement. At certain times, they believed that boys needed specific diversions because of extenuating social or economic circumstances. During the Depression in Welland, for example, Nick Petrachenko recalled, "all the young guys were unemployed at the time." Members of the Ukrainian labour temple suggested that a sports club be created for them so they would have something to do. Since there was no money to buy mats, the young men made some out of canvass and used them to perform "various exercises [and] gymnastics," and anyone in the area, "whether a member or not, could participate."<sup>83</sup> It is not clear whether the needs of unemployed girls were viewed in the same light. Even if they were playing the same sport, games or teams would sometimes be structured so as to separate the girls and boys. As Ollie Hillman recalled, this did not always necessarily reflect attitudes that certain sports were inappropriate for girls (either because they were deemed unfeminine or too rough) or that boys needed extra attention or resources. Rather, she explained, "the boys had their own sports because they were

80. Report "re Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Ass'n, Winnipeg-Sports Club Performance, Feb 2," February 3, 1933, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC - Winnipeg, Manitoba," File 6.

81. *Svit molodi*, March 1927; May 1929, translated by L. Stavroff.

82. *Resolutions of the Provincial Conference of ulfta Youth Section, September 1-2, 1934* (Toronto 1934), Stavroff Private Collection (Toronto), translated by L. Stavroff; "Report re Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Ass'n Schools and Instructional Methods," 2 Oct 1934, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: "AUUC - Winnipeg, Manitoba," File 7.

83. Petrachenko interview.



heavier.”<sup>84</sup> In many instances, though, gender divisions were not guaranteed; girls and boys often could and did play together.

A variety of sports were popular with these Ukrainian children. In the summer, children commonly played baseball, hiked, or took organized nature walks. At ULFTA picnics, track and field events were also popular.<sup>85</sup> In the winter, youngsters often tobogganed or skated. In Winnipeg, Mike Seychuk and the *Sektsia Molodi* formed a skating club: “We got a boxcar from the CPR for a vacant lot, put a heater in there, and this was our club room. We got old boards from people and built a rink. The city flooded it for us and we had a skating rink for the whole winter.”<sup>86</sup> Year round, by far the most popular and widely practised sporting activity was gymnastics (also called “acrobatics”). This is because they were relatively easy to organize, and many children – from the youngest to the oldest – could take part at a single time (as opposed to team sports where participant numbers were more limited), and the activity could easily accommodate girls and boys together.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, gymnastics could be politicized more easily and more overtly than other sports, which might only offer organizers the chance to teach youngsters the value of collective activity. Children often, for example, performed their routines at concerts and festivals, events that helped to raise money and generate new members for the ULFTA. At the same time, it was easy to incorporate – as many groups often did – Soviet or communist symbols into these acts.<sup>88</sup> These performances were often as well received and impressive as regular concerts or plays, apparently even to those who were not ULFTA boosters. “It was really marvellous and the place was packed, many went home without seeing it due to a lack of space,” recounted an anonymous RCMP eyewitness informant of a February 1933 Winnipeg Sports Club gymnastics performance. “They had young children performing acrobatics wonderfully, boys and girls and grown-up boys and girls, together,” he enthused, “The performances were astonishing and must have had careful preparation. Many membership forms were being filled out all over the audience.”<sup>89</sup>

84. Hillman interview.

85. Vera Woremiuk, interviewed by RLH, June 1998. Also Seychuk, Hillman, and Petrachenko interviews.

86. Seychuk interview.

87. John Boyd, email to author, 19 July 2007.

88. See *Album of the Workers Trading Cooperative Limited* (Toronto 1933).

89. Report “re Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Ass’n, Winnipeg–Sports Club Performance, Feb 2,” February 3, 1933, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3792: “AUUC – Winnipeg, Manitoba,” File 6.



### ***Svit molodi* and *Boyova molod***

While all halls across Canada attempted to integrate some degree of activity for young people into their local programming, such activities did tend to vary in both consistency and size according to the nature of the Ukrainian community in its vicinity. Halls in urban centres like Winnipeg, Edmonton, or Toronto typically possessed a larger membership base than did more-isolated farming communities or smaller resource towns, from which to draw children and youth to activities. Generally, these communities were better able to support the cost of a teacher to coordinate classes and groups. Smaller halls, especially those in rural areas, tended to have a more difficult time organizing and maintaining young people's activities. Distance between farm families, inadequate financial resources (which became magnified for many halls during the Depression), and a lack of teachers qualified to carry out the ULFTA educational mandate meant functions for children and youth in many areas were, at best, sporadic, if they existed at all.<sup>90</sup> One of the ways the ULFTA attempted to alleviate this problem was through the publication of a variety of Ukrainian language newspapers to serve its various membership constituencies. Just as it did for adults, so, too, did the movement print a special newspaper for youngsters. *Svit molodi*, or *The Youth's World*, was created in 1927 to serve the needs of the *Sektsia Molodi*. Prior to the founding of *Svit molodi*, special pages in the women's paper, *Robitnytsia (Working Woman)*, had been devoted to serving young people, particularly children. *Svit molodi* seemed to fill a void; by 1929, it boasted over 3700 subscribers across the country.

Like the adult papers, *Svit molodi* was, at heart, a teaching and recruitment tool geared to the politicization of youngsters. From it, young people learned about Marxist-Leninism, the fight for workers' rights (both locally and around the world), and the ULFTA's interpretation of current events. Its articles, poems, letters, and features supplemented and reinforced lessons children and youth learned at hall schools (and, leaders hoped, undid bourgeois lessons learned in public schools), in cultural activities, and in *Yunats'ka Sektsia* and *Sektsia Molodi*. Articles like "First of May – A Day to Fight," which appeared in the April 1932 issue, explored labour history, contemporary conditions for workers, and government oppression, encouraging youngsters to take part in the international proletarian struggle.<sup>91</sup> Because it was in Ukrainian, *Svit molodi* provided young people with literature to practise and hone their Ukrainian language skills, opportunities not afforded them in public school. This was especially critical for children and youth living in remote rural communities where access to Ukrainian school might be nearly impossible. *Svit molodi* was also interactive. Youngsters could both read features and write their own letters and articles for publication.

90. LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3835: "ULFTA, Seventh National Convention, 1926."

91. *Svit molodi*, April 1932, translation by L. Stavroff.

*Svit molodi* also worked as an essential tool for inter-branch communication and building the movement, much in the same way the adult papers functioned. To carry out their responsibilities in corresponding with the paper, youth branches were expected to elect a press correspondent, called a *Yunkor* or *Yunkorka* – as both boys and girls were encouraged to hold the position – to write to the paper detailing their activities. Organizers hoped that, by reading what other groups were doing, young people would be similarly inspired to be active in their localities. “I’m in the third grade of the Ukrainian Workers Children’s School,” wrote eleven year old *Yunkor* Wasył Ravliuk of Coleman, Alberta, in 1927, “There aren’t many of us, but we’re doing a lot of work. We’ve already performed the play ‘The Little Blacksmiths’ and are preparing for a concert.” Ravliuk went on to thank the Women’s Branch for the post-play supper they prepared for the children which helped to raise funds for a branch library. He closed with commendations for the group’s instructor: “Our teacher A. Zablotsky works very hard to turn us into intelligent children who don’t hang out on the streets.”<sup>92</sup>

*Svit molodi* represented a further and significant attempt at autonomy from the CPC on the part of the ULFTA. It was another effort to resist Party control and attempts at Anglicization of the Communist left. The Party, of course, expected all young people, including the Ukrainians, to read its English-language organ, *The Young Worker*. As we know, however, Ukrainian leaders and parents wanted their children to be fluent in Ukrainian language and culture as well as proletarian politics. Creating a paper to facilitate this seemed a natural step. It is not surprising that, like other areas of activity, the CPC tried to dictate the shape and content of *Svit molodi*. Again, like ULFTA leaders in other circumstances, the editors of *Svit molodi* attempted to find common ground with the Party without compromising the paper’s Ukrainian cultural and political integrity. For example, the paper routinely carried advertisements for *The Young Worker*, and encouraged members of the *Sektsia Molodi* to subscribe to and read it and take part in its fundraising campaigns.<sup>93</sup> The paper also featured advertisements reminding youngsters to “Join the Ranks of the YCL!” and articles instructing them to “Step Up to the Ranks of the Young Communist League and Young Pioneers!”<sup>94</sup> As part of the early 1930s “turn,” the name of *Svit molodi* was even changed to *Boyova molod*, or *Militant Youth* to better address the “revolutionary movement...sweeping the world.”<sup>95</sup> During the 1930s the paper increasingly took on a more radical tone, partly because of Depression conditions and partly because many of those young leaders who wrote for the paper held membership in both the *Sektsia Molodi* and YCL.

92. *Svit molodi*, March 1927, translation by L. Stavroff.

93. *Nasha Pratsia [Our Work]*.

94. *Svit molodi*, June 1930, translated by L. Stavroff.

95. *Boyova molod*, June 1932, translated by Orysia Zaporazan.

## Language: Ukrainian or English?

Despite its best efforts to train youngsters in the Ukrainian language, however, the ULFTA saw signs early on that it was losing the linguistic battle. The UWCS, cultural activities, and even *Svit Molodi* were no match for North American popular culture, the public school system, and the youngsters' multi-ethnic neighbourhoods where the common language of communication among Jewish, German, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, and other working-class young people was English.<sup>96</sup> Even those youth whom leaders hoped would move to the forefront of the movement often had a great degree of difficulty functioning in Ukrainian. Young Bill Philipovich, for example, struggled to compose his autobiography and application for the 1936 Higher Educational Course because it had to be in Ukrainian.<sup>97</sup> For many young people born to Ukrainian immigrant parents, then, a language-based generation gap of sorts was created at home and at the hall.

In the interwar period, the language problem was less pronounced than it would become for the movement during the postwar era. Nonetheless, during the 1930s it was becoming noticeable that there was an issue with communication in the Ukrainian language as far as many children and youth were concerned. The ULFTA recognized this problem and attempted to moderate the effects of the process of assimilation in several ways. In doing so, it continued to reassert its autonomy from the Party. Though it could have simply directed young people to read the English language CPC papers or join the YCL, little to no positive Ukrainian content could be found there. The ULFTA thus refused to accept that as a solution, hoping to keep children and youth within a Ukrainian milieu. Sometimes leaders continued to demand that youngsters try to communicate and carry out their organizational work in the Ukrainian language regardless of their comfort level or ability. This was little more than an awkward and ultimately ineffective solution, however. "While this forced the young people to learn to express themselves in Ukrainian," former *Sektsia Molodi* member Misha Korol recalled, "it also held back many who found the language a big obstacle."<sup>98</sup>

In other instances, particularly as the 1930s wore on, the ULFTA encouraged compromise between the use of English and Ukrainian to ensure that children and youth would join and remain with Ukrainian Labour Temple activities. Leaders urged halls to create libraries that incorporated both English and Ukrainian materials. They also instructed youth organizers to conduct meetings and other activities in the language in which young members were most comfortable. The organizational newspaper *Ukrainski robotnychi visty*

96. Myron Shatulsky interview.

97. Philipovich interview.

98. Michael Korol, "AUUC Youth Discussion: 28 Years' Experience of Youth Movement," *Ukrainian Canadian*, 1 May 1953.



**ULFTA Dancers, West Toronto, ca. 1930s**

Courtesy of the L. Stavroff Collection

(*Ukrainian Labour News*) even incorporated a section for youth during the mid-1930s that made use of both English and Ukrainian in articles and correspondence.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, to command and hold the attention of youngsters the ULFTA encouraged the proliferation of Ukrainian cultural activities for which language skills were unnecessary. One of the most important was Ukrainian folk dance. Nineteen twenty-six saw the first performances of Ukrainian folk dancing in the halls. That same year in Winnipeg, the ULFTA held Ukrainian folk dance courses. The following year, the ULFTA National Convention voted to include folk dancing as a new activity for Ukrainian school students.<sup>100</sup> Within a year, folk dance groups and classes sprang up among ULFTA groups across Canada, including Ottawa, South Porcupine, Edmonton, Fort Frances, to name but a few.<sup>101</sup> Folk dancing offered another means through which to politicize children and youth while at the same time imparting in them a strong sense of Ukrainianness. The folk dances, modelled on traditional regional Ukrainian dance styles, were not in and of themselves political. However, that children and youth danced them in a country overtly hostile to Ukrainians and that these performances were used to raise money to fund the ULFTA's (and some-

99. *Resolutions of the Provincial Conference of ulfta Youth Section, September 1-2, 1934; Nasha Pratsia [Our Work].*

100. "Re AUUC – Montreal, P. Que.," 20 January 1956, LAC, CSIS RG 146, Volume 3757: "AUUC – Case History Canada," Part 1.

101. Krawchuk, ed., *Our Stage*, 86–88.

times the Party's) activities imbued them with a radical political purpose. Folk dancing developed as and remained one of the most consistently popular pursuits for youngsters. It lingers as one of the sole activities attracting children and youth to the Ukrainian Labour Temples today.

## Conclusion

The interwar era was, in many ways, a period of cultural and organizational prosperity for the ULFTA, particularly where its activities for children and youth were concerned. A youngster growing up in the Ukrainian left during the 1920s and 1930s experienced a distinct type of radical childhood thanks to the particular ways in which definitions of class, ethnicity, age and, to a lesser extent, gender converged to shape their identities. Their sense of Ukrainianness distinguished them from other radical children, while the class consciousness their parents, leaders, and teachers tried to instil set them apart from other Ukrainian children (especially those from nationalist or religious families). At the same time, age differentiated them from their adult counterparts and, for girls in particular, offered some advantages over their mothers in terms of equal access with boys to organizational opportunities. Childhood – to a certain age – gave girls some freedom to pursue positions and activities in the movement unavailable to women. As a child reached adulthood, however, gender roles became more rigidly defined and enforced. Young men were expected to put their skills to work for the main ULFTA branch or its related organizations. Most young women – unless they had the opportunity to teach thanks to HEC attendance – would find their labours directed towards the women's branch.

Leaders and parents worked to impart in young people a strong sense of Ukrainianness and understanding of the proletarian situation. Reflected in these efforts was the adult hope and expectation that children would grow up with an intense and ongoing commitment to the Ukrainian left, the class struggle, and Ukrainian culture and history, becoming enlightened and active Ukrainian leftist adults. Young people, too, made important contributions to the shape of the movement, particularly where their own activities and experiences were concerned. Leaders had to work hard to accommodate youngsters' interests and needs—particularly their demands that activities be fun and, increasing later, in English—while still maintaining integral movement values. As a result, organizers often reworked activities to keep them attractive to children and youth while trying to remain true to the cultural and political milieu of the radical Ukrainian community during the interwar years.

To maintain the movement's Ukrainian integrity, leaders also continually and successfully fended off CPC efforts to Anglicize and control the Ukrainian left's organizations and activities. Though the Party did influence the shape of youngsters' activities to some degree, rarely did this rework these activities in any sort of dramatic or fundamental fashion. In the end, the Party was fighting

a battle it could not win. Communist officialdom neglected to appreciate that for a group fighting not only economic but also ethnic and social oppression, the Party line (as manifest or proscribed) could not fully satisfy the needs of the Ukrainian leftist, be they female or male, child or adult. This is because it failed to address their oppression as both Ukrainians and members of the working class. Heaping ethnocentric criticism on these Ukrainians – calling them backward, conservative, “right-wing deviationists” – for what were radical cultural-political pursuits only served to reinforce the need for a separate sphere of work.

Overall, the efforts of leaders and the encouragement young people received from parents to attend events at the hall paid off during the interwar era. From the time of their official inception with the advent of the ULTA at the end of the Great War to the early months of World War II, groups for leftist Ukrainian children and youth thrived across the country. Many who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s continued to support the movement in which they had grown up, opting to become members of adult branches at the halls or, most often in the case of young men, leaders at the national level of the movement.

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