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Ukrainian Canadians, 100 Years Later

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Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, ed., *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991).
Orest Subtelny, *Ukrainians in North America: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991).

THE YEAR 1991 was certainly an historic one for Ukrainian Canadians. The centennial year of the arrival in Canada of the first two Ukrainian settlers was also marked by momentous political changes in Ukraine. These historic events contributed to various festivities and commemorations, often celebrated at the same time. A number of academic conferences and seminars were held and these two publications were part of this commemoration.

Ukrainian Canadian identity is still influenced by interpretation of events in Ukraine as well as one hundred years of historical experience in Canada. It is now possible to examine this experience in a historical perspective and raise fundamental questions about the role of Ukrainians in Canadian society. At the same time, it is an opportunity to study the larger question of Canadian identity. The history of an ethnocultural group is often the result of negotiations conducted in the community and also at the personal level among the competing and often contradictory demands between North American society and one's ethnocultural experience.

Negotiating and Identity is an appropriate title and a suitable framework for the various themes in Ukrainian Canadian history. In the introduction, the editors, Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, claim that, "This volume was not intended to be a definitive or even exhaustive treatment of the Ukrainian-Canadian experience over the past hundred years." Instead the editors solicited essays which explored Ukrainian Canadian history and geography and sought to provide new insights into the experiences of Ukrainian Canadians. They claim that several of the present studies are "at the cutting edge" of research in the field. The volume is a collection of essays organized into three sections that deal with immigration and settlement, internal community politics, and the relations of the community with

'the Canadian state.' Although the three sections certainly represent central themes in Ukrainian Canadian history, it would have been more appropriate to present the essays according to a chronological approach based on the three main waves of immigration to Canada: pre-World War I, the inter-war period and the post-World War II period.[1] As indicated in several of the essays, each wave of immigration brought with it particular political and cultural baggage which had a profound influence on internal community relations as well as the larger Canadian society. The various essays, organized by chronological periods, would have reinforced and complemented each other.

Orest Subtelny selected this chronological approach in *Ukrainians in North America*, which is an illustrated history of Ukrainians in Canada and the United States. He has presented the information according to the three main waves of Ukrainian immigration and concludes with a description of the North American 'Diaspora.' This method is useful in explaining gradual assimilation of the older waves of immigrants and also the continuing dynamism among the new arrivals. Each new wave of immigration reinforced the established and Canadian-born generations, providing a sense of continuity and growth.

One of the main concerns in Ukrainian Canadian history is the traditional image of the first wave of Ukrainian settlers as "victims of social, political, and even religious oppression, suffering from lack of economic and educational opportunities, fleeing from a stagnant, backward and impoverished society." Although Stella Hryniuk's essay in *Canadian's Ukrainians* provides examples of the dark side of Ukrainian experience in Galicia, she also quotes other author's views that a considerable proportion were 'peasants of means' and 'among the most successful of the peasants.' Yet poverty, like wealth, is relative, and to describe the Ukrainian peasants as improving their general standard of living in Galicia on the eve of their departure for Canada does not contribute substantially to our knowledge of the Ukrainian immigration experience. What is more important was the fact that the first Ukrainians arrived as immigrants in a Canadian society where their entrance status was already pre-determined regardless of their status in Galicia. The federal government always had control over the immigration process, determining the terms of admission and the entrance status of the new immigrants. Ukrainian immigrants entered a host society with already well established political, social and economic institutions. The Canadian authorities were determined to settle the agricultural frontier in western Canada and the Ukrainian settlers were expected to conform and adapt to this imperative. Since the vast majority of the 170,000 Ukrainian immigrants who arrived between 1896 and 1914 settled on farms and were agricultural workers, ethnocultural origin was identified with low economic and class status and this situation encouraged stereotypes that have endured until

[1]See V.J. Kaye, Three Phases of Ukrainian Immigration, *Slavs in Canada* (Edmonton 1966), 36-43; also, Yarema G. Kelebay, "Three Fragments of the Ukrainian Community in Montreal, 1899-1970: A Hartzian Approach," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 12 (No. 2, 1980).

the present. The status of various immigrant and ethnocultural groups in Canadian society was often determined by the perception of whether the new arrivals reinforced the existing social structure or challenged and threatened the status quo.

Ideally, the new immigrants were expected to assimilate as quickly as possible into the host society. According to some scholars, Ukrainian settlement in the bush country of the northern parkland was little short of disastrous and retarded both their economic progress and their assimilation into Canadian society. The Ukrainian pioneers chose this area to settle despite advice from immigration agents because they wanted access to the tree belt and also desired to live closer to their friends and relatives. Since the early settler had to rely almost entirely on their own resources to survive, it is not surprising that they sought assistance from their own immigrant group.

The Ukrainian bloc settlements did contribute to the formation of a viable and enduring organized Ukrainian community. In these settlements a nascent Ukrainian Canadian middle class of merchants, lawyers, teachers, doctors and other professionals was given an opportunity to establish and develop their careers and these, in turn, provided leadership cadres in their internal relations and with the local and federal authorities.[2] They were able to meet with other Canadian politicians from similar backgrounds on supposedly equal terms and discuss issues of common interest. If the first pioneers had dispersed among other non-Ukrainian settlers, opportunities for a middle class to emerge would have been extremely limited. Also, the Ukrainian settlement in the northern parkland enabled the Ukrainian communities to survive the Depression of the 1930s when, further south, whole areas of settlement were blown away in the dust storms and their populations dispersed across Canada.

As the first Ukrainian settlers arrived in Canada, they were quickly enmeshed in one of the major on-going Canadian debates — the future of Canadian society. As part of their cultural baggage, the Ukrainian settlers also brought to Canada their religious attitudes and prejudices. Religious allegiances became the source of an on-going competition between the French Canadian Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Anglo-Canadian Protestant missionaries. The lack of Ukrainian clergy during the early years obliged the use of French-Canadian clergy and this led to a negative reaction among the Ukrainian Catholics. They interpreted this move as part of the centuries-old efforts to turn them into Roman Catholics in the tradition of Polish Roman Catholics in Galicia. In their struggles to preserve their identity in Galicia, the national, religious and occupational or class aspects of their identity became merged. In Canada, the traditional churches continued to form an integral part of their ethnocultural identity. For this reason, religious debates and issues acquired a special significance and vehemence in the community. This religious allegiance contributed to internal divisions and disputes but at the same time was one of the

[2]See the argument presented in Antin Hlynka, *Posol federalnoho parliamentu Kanady, 1940-1949* (Toronto 1982), 15-22.

main contributing factors in reinforcing and preserving Ukrainian identity. The epic
rivalry between the Anglo-Canadians and the French Canadians over the future of
Canada extended even into the internal organization and practices of the Roman
Catholic Church. However, the Vatican assigned the care of new immigrants to the
Anglo-Canadian branch of the Roman Catholic Church.[3] This decision was resisted
by the French Canadian branch, which sought to increase its numerical strength
and influence in western Canada. Due to this rivalry, the Ukrainian Greek Catholics
were able to survive and develop their own hierarchy. As in the case of other
'stateless' nations, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was perceived by Uk-
rainian Canadians as a form of 'Ukrainian government' that was recognized at the
national and international levels and which would supposedly defend their inter-
ests. The growth and development of Ukrainian churches and other ethnocultural
organizations was part of the on-going struggle by Ukrainian Canadians to gain
some form of control over their life and fate in Canada, a process explored more
generally in Subtelny's account of immigrant identity in North America. .
      The perceived lack of political, social and economic control of personal and
community life led to one of the more controversial experiences in Ukrainian
Canadian history. With the outbreak of World War I, the Canadian federal govern-
ment was obliged to 'do something' about the large number of enemy aliens,
including Ukrainians, from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Canada. Significant
numbers of recent Ukrainian immigrants were interned or obliged to report to local
police authorities. It should be mentioned, however, that it was mainly recent
immigrants and men of military age who were arrested and interned in fear that
they might cross the border to the neutral United States and eventually make their
way to Austria-Hungary.
      The essay by Mark Minenko in the Luciuk Hryniuk collection leaves the
impression that the entire Ukrainian community in Canada was persecuted by the
Canadian government, which was certainly not the case. The war years did provide
the opportunity for provincial authorities to abolish the various language schools,
and censorship was introduced in the ethnocultural press and loyalty from all
citizens was expected and demanded. The German-language communities were
especially hard hit by the war. Local municipal authorities did not hesitate to use
the internment operations to rid themselves of unemployed immigrants. But it
should also be remembered that the war years were a prosperous time for Ukrainian
Canadian farmers and many local religious and community institutions were
established and built during these years. For example, the Petro Mohyla Institute
was established in 1916 and the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church was founded
in 1918.[4] Nevertheless, this experience in the internment camps helped to further

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[3]The French-English rivalry in Church matters is discussed in the study by Roberto Perin,
Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age (Toronto
1990).
[4]Orest Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891-1924* (Edmonton
1991), 323-4.

radicalize the recent immigrants and convince many that the Canadian federal government was not that different from the oppressive governments they left behind in eastern Europe.

The political changes in eastern Europe in the post-World War I period did have an influence on the type of Ukrainian immigrants that arrived in Canada. An estimated 70,000 new immigrants arrived during the period 1922 to 1939, forming the second wave of Ukrainian immigration. The existing Ukrainian bloc settlements served as magnets to draw the new Ukrainian immigrants. A Ukrainian religious and community structure already existed to receive and assist these people. The second wave assimilated into the existing Ukrainian community as an integral part of the process of adapting to the larger Canadian society.

During these years, the railway companies in cooperation with the federal government, continued the role of 'gate-keepers' in determining the entry of preferred and non-preferred immigrants. They were primarily interested in agricultural labourers who could contribute to the building of the agricultural frontier in western Canada. These policies may be interpreted as attempts at social engineering and a planned society which also reinforced the important and fundamental distinction between the host society of Anglo-Canadians and the immigrant Ukrainians. This relationship is important to the understanding of the evolution of Ukrainian Canadian and Canadian history.

Although some of the most drastic actions relating to controlling the ethnocultural groups took place in time of war, there was continued opposition from the French Canadians to the centralizing trends from Ottawa and it was this opposition and on-going rivalry with the Anglo-Canadians that allowed the other ethnocultural groups to survive and continue their existence. Perhaps the most bureaucratically efficient method to develop a 'Canadian national identity' at that time was to stop the immigration movement. However, the demands of the economy for 'low entry status' labour overrode attempts at social engineering.

The large majority of Ukrainians reacted to their political, social and economic situation either through the affirmation of their ethnocultural pride and identity or through the struggle for social action and reform. The two forces would eventually clash and fracture the Ukrainian Canadian community. These movements in Canada were shaped, influenced and defined by political events in Ukraine. In the Ukrainian community, the determining factor in the ideological orientation for individuals and organizations was the question of support for or opposition to Soviet Ukraine and the Soviet Union. This issue became the dominating theme in Ukrainian Canadian life, and remained so well into present times.

Oleh W. Gerus's essay in *Canadians Ukrainians*, "Consolidating the Community: the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League," documents the growth of a national organization that sought to develop and maintain Ukrainian pride and identity in Canada. The USRL was established in 1927 partly in reaction to the development of the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association, a pro-Soviet organization. It was a nationalist association, but drew its leadership and support from the small

but influential middle class and the general membership of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church. Political differences arose with the newcomers who survived World War I, the Wars for the Liberation of Ukraine (1918-22) and the Polish occupation of Galicia. They preferred to join the more militant Ukrainian War Veterans Association, which supported a new form of integral nationalism in contrast to the old-fashioned liberal variety of the USRL. There were plans to form national umbrella organizations to better represent the interests of the Ukrainian community before the Canadian federal government on national and international issues. The USRL attempted to influence the development of the Ukrainian Canadian community according to its own perception of community interests.

With the outbreak of World War II, negotiations were initiated among the non-communist organizations to form the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC). The establishment of the UCC in 1940 received the cooperation of the Canadian federal government, which sought to enlist the full support of the Canadian ethnocultural groups in the national war effort. The USRL was instrumental in the founding of the UCC and, as a result, the UCC bore the imprint of the USRL for several decades.

Many Ukrainians became radicalized as a result of their experiences on the agricultural and industrial frontiers of Canada and sought to improve their situation through social action and political reform. The Ukrainian left-wing organizations actively sought to recruit the new immigrants through various social and cultural organizations. Once they were introduced to the left-wing movement, it was only a matter of time before they were encouraged to become members of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). The CPC demanded loyalty and allegiance from its members that rivalled that of a fundamentalist religious sect. This discipline was the Party's great strength and weakness. The Party could always rely on a core of faithful workers to perform the most difficult tasks; but at the same time, the Party followed a political line that led to Stalinism.

In Ukraine, the 1930s were characterized by growing Stalinism in the form of collectivization and the resulting famine, purges of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, and the reinforcement of absolute discipline within the Soviet Communist Party. In Canada, the stress on Party discipline was extended to all aspects of the organizational life of Party members and supporters. When news of the famine of 1933 reached the Ukrainian community in Canada, Party members who were familiar with the conditions in Ukraine were obliged to make a fundamental choice. Some chose to denounce the actions of Stalin and the Soviet Union and leave the Party. However, the large majority continued to support the Party on the principle of absolute loyalty to Stalin and the Soviet leadership in order to further the ultimate goals of the Soviet Revolution. In the case of the Ukrainian Canadian leadership of the Communist Party of Canada, this loyalty endured until the collapse of the Soviet Union. A scholarly and objective history of this important aspect of the Ukrainian and larger Canadian labour movement still remains to be written.

The dominating political question of 'the Ukrainian Cause' in the life of the community obliged individual community members, especially women, to subordinate their own development for the benefit of the larger community. The goal of 'Ukrainianess' had been the primary concern of the various non-communist Ukrainian women's organizations. Ukrainian women organized not so much to promote their own interests as women but to promote the idea of an independent Ukraine and influence Canadian public opinion in this regard. The emancipation of women was linked to the liberation of the Ukrainian nation. The pro-Communist movement also created women's organizations to promote their views and interests among the larger Canadian community. In their organizations, the emancipation of women was linked to the larger class struggle and goals of the Soviet revolution.

From 1947 to 1952, over 33,000 Ukrainians, mostly Displaced Persons (DP), arrived in Canada forming the third wave of Ukrainian immigration. The Ukrainian DP's were survivors of the Soviet occupation of 1939-41 and the Nazi rule of 1941-45. Many became militant nationalists as a result of the war. They felt that their personal and group situation as exiles was due to the lack of a strong Ukrainian state to protect their interests. The DP Camps in western Europe served to raise the level of national consciousness of the Ukrainian refugees and they brought these attitudes to Canada as part of their cultural and political baggage.

Although Canada's Ukrainians attempted to play a role as 'gatekeepers' through the UCC, most immigrants settled in eastern Canada and not in the prairie provinces where the majority of Ukrainian Canadians lived. The Canadian immigration authorities had their own standards for the admission of Ukrainian immigrants, who were again allowed into Canada at the lowest entry level. The post-war federal government was primarily interested in bulk labour schemes for the farms, mines and forestry industries for the men and domestic work for the women. Some professionally trained individuals had to hide their education credentials to enter Canada under these bulk labour schemes. Only a few dozen professionals were allowed to enter Canada as 'cultural workers' in the various community centers.

In Canada, the Ukrainian communities had not received any substantial new immigration since 1931, and this no doubt quickened the pace of assimilation. The Depression and Canadian political events during World War II also helped to 'Canadianize' the community. Efforts by the UCC before the Senate Committee on Immigration and Labour in May 1946 assisted in persuading the federal government to allow the entry of Ukrainian immigrants on bulk labour schemes, but only the young and able were allowed to enter the country. The elderly, the sick and infirm were refused immigration access. Consequently, the third wave of Ukrainian immigration was composed of relatively young, fit and able workers who were unencumbered with the responsibilities of caring for aging parents. They also came at the beginning of the post-war economic boom and rode this boom into the late 1950s.

This arrival in Canada also coincided with the beginnings of the Cold War. To be an anti-communist was now to be a good Canadian, a development that deepened in intensity as the Korean War made the threat of global confrontation a real possibility. Despite their employment in manufacturing and mining, the new arrivals generally avoided any involvement in the labour and union movements because of their alleged contacts with the Communist Party of Canada. The new immigrants however, did become involved in Canadian politics in their attempts to influence the Canadian federal government in its policies towards the Soviet Union.

The increasing Ukrainian involvement in the Canadian political system paralleled the immigrants' gradual rise in the Canadian social and occupational, structure especially in the years after World War II. Bohdan Harasymiw's essay in the Luciuk-Hryniuk collection, "Looking for the Ukrainian Vote," discusses the controversial question of the existence of a 'Ukrainian bloc vote.' What is important is not the fact that there is no substantial proof of Ukrainian bloc voting in Canadian politics, but that the potential was there. In certain prairie ridings, Ukrainian voters did make a difference and politicians and bureaucrats in Ottawa were aware of this possibility. In federal government records, there is evidence of long-term interest in the internal affairs of the larger Canadian ethnocultural groups, but only a passing interest in the numerically smaller groups. With the support of the Ukrainian independence movement by John Diefenbaker during his term as Prime Minister, many of the second and third waves of Ukrainian immigrants actively supported the Progressive Conservative Party. In particular ridings, the existing ethnocultural organizations threw their support behind a candidate, often making the difference between winning and losing an election.

The appointment of the Deschenes Commission in 1985 to investigate charges of Nazi war criminals hiding in Canada tested the alleged political influence of the Ukrainian organized community. This experience affected both the Ukrainian and Jewish Canadian communities to their very cores. From the Ukrainian nationalist perspective, this entire episode was viewed in terms of the ongoing anti-communist struggle against the Soviet Union. Charges of anti-semitism, both past and present, among Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians, was interpreted as part of the Soviet campaign to victimize the Ukrainian nationalists in Canada. To some observers, it was a case of the victims of Hitler confronting the victims of Stalin. It was also an example of how the organized Ukrainian Canadian community had evolved and was able to rapidly mount an effective campaign to counter the charges made at that time.[5]

The stereotype of agricultural labourers and unskilled workers has remained, and the prestige of Ukrainian Canadians, as a group, is perceived to be low in some

[5]Perhaps the best analyses of this episode in Canadian inter-group relations is the study by Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld, *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Markham 1988).

parts of Canada. According to some academic studies, they are still working their way up the Canadian occupational hierarchy. Despite the fact that 92 per cent of Ukrainians are Canadian born,[6] it seems that to be truly 'Canadian,' Ukrainian Canadians have to be represented at all levels of the Canadian social structure. This can be interpreted as part of the middle class tendency to be preoccupied with 'images' which, in turn, has influenced the writing of Ukrainian Canadian history in the direction of filio-pietism. However, it must be admitted that the official federal government policy of multiculturalism has made a significant difference in attitudes towards the ethnocultural groups, including the Ukrainian Canadian community, one of the more fervent supporters of this policy. Today, all the human and financial resources of an urban and middle class community are required to maintain and develop the Ukrainian identity in Canada. Producing historian studies such as these two publications is an essential part of this process. With the declaration of Ukrainian independence in August 1991, Ukrainian Canadians now have a better opportunity to visit Ukraine and discover their roots and also confirm their Canadian identity.

Canadian multiculturalism policy is perhaps the most important difference between the Canadian and American Ukrainian communities. In Canada, the large geographical distances, the lack of a critical population mass, the various and often competing levels of government and the Québecois 'fact' have all limited attempts at assimilation. Because of the bloc settlement patterns of the early Ukrainian Canadians and parliamentary form of government, the Ukrainian community in Canada had a much better opportunity to elect politicians from their own communities. In the United States, a significantly larger population, the wider geographical dispersement of the Ukrainian community in largely urban centers, and the policy of 'Americanization' including military conscription in the decades after World War II has influenced the development of the community in a different direction. These differences, outlined in Subtelny's book, require further study.

Unfortunately, *Canada's Ukrainians* suffers from some of the problems that are common in collections of essays. Some essays are necessarily better than others. Also, earlier versions of some essays were published elsewhere. There is also the problem of repetition of historical information. The historically significant role of the organized Ukrainian Canadian community in promoting the concept of multiculturalism as an official policy of the federal government is not included among the essays. In the Ukrainian Canadian historiographical tradition, several of the essays in this book can be included in the nationalist-patriotic school of historical writing. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union it is hoped that is may now be possible to write an objective and narrative history of the Ukrainian Canadian community.

[6]Ravi Pendakur, *Speaking in Tongues: Heritage Language Maintenance and Transfer in Canada* (Ottawa 1990).

In conclusion, these two publications are significant additions to the study of the Ukrainian Canadians and are indicative of the progress in this field. The use of various research tools, including documents and photographs from various archival institutions, will oblige researchers to consult both of these publications in preparing future studies on the Ukrainian communities in Canada.