

THE UKRAINIAN CANADIAN COMMITTEE; ITS SIGNIFICANCE  
IN THE CANADIAN SOCIETY

by

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The Ukrainian Canadian Committee came into being in November, 1940, slightly more than fifty years after the first two Ukrainian immigrants settled permanently in Canada. They were followed by many thousands more in the last decade of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth.

It should be borne in mind that the Ukrainian people belong mainly to two churches—the Ukrainian Catholic and the Ukrainian Orthodox. Because of certain facts of history, dating as far back as the closing years of the sixteenth century, the relationship between the two churches was often strained. These historical differences were accentuated in Canada and this state of affairs was not conducive to close collaboration and co-operation between the two main bodies of adherents.

Yet even before the formation of the Committee there were several occasions when common action of various sorts, was undertaken. I might mention, for example, the formation in 1916 of a Central Committee in Winnipeg, whose chief task was to rally the Ukrainian community in defence of the bilingual school system in the province of Manitoba, when it was threatened with abolition, as eventually it was, later that year. The bilingual school system permitted not only the teaching of Ukrainian in Ukrainian settlements but also allowed the use of Ukrainian as a language of instruction.

In 1918, immediately after the First World War, a Ukrainian Citizenship Committee was formed and funds were raised in order to send a delegation from Canada to Paris. The purpose of the delegation was to assist the official delegation from Ukraine in pressing for an independent Ukrainian state. The delegation from Canada consisted of Ivan Petrushevich and Osyp Megas.

In 1919, the Ukrainian Red Cross was formed in order to organize relief for the needy Ukrainian war victims in the old land.

Then again in the latter part of 1938 there was common action to protest against the persecution of Ukrainians in central-eastern Europe,

and when Carpatho-Ukraine proclaimed its independence, a common relief committee was formed to raise funds in aid of the newly-proclaimed state.

Laudable as these efforts were, they were organized to meet specific needs and the special bodies that were created ceased to exist when their specific goals were either achieved or for the time being became unachievable.

Many Ukrainian leaders saw a need for a permanent central body, and the Second World War, in which Canada was engaged to the hilt, heightened this necessity. The Ukrainian-Canadian youth volunteered by thousands into the armed services of their country, and it was widely felt that the Ukrainian community should display a united front by submerging its differences and through united action contribute more effectively to Canada's war effort.

As a prelude to the formation of one common committee, two separate bodies were at first organized: The Representative Committee of Ukrainian Canadians, and the Ukrainian Central Committee.

The first named was formed by the Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood, the secular organization of the Greek Catholic Church, and the Ukrainian National Federation.

The second one, namely the Ukrainian Central Committee, consisted of the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League, oriented towards the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church, the United Hetman Organization, the United Labour Organizations, the Ukrainian National Home Association and the Ukrainian Reading Association.

After several meetings and some assistance from Professor George Simpson, Head of the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan, and Mr. Tracy Phillips, at that time with the federal Department of National War Services, Nationalities Branch, the two bodies united under the name of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee. This fusion took place in November, 1940.

The founding member-organizations, of Dominion-wide scope, were as follows:

- The Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood of Canada
- The Ukrainian Self-Reliance League of Canada
- The Ukrainian National Federation of Canada
- The United Hetman Organization, and
- The Ukrainian United Labour Organizations.

We might add that these organizations are still members of the Committee and are regarded as founding members. The United Labour Organizations subsequently assumed a less pretentious name, the Ukrainian Labour Organization. All editors of Ukrainian publications con-

nected with these organizations participated as members of the Committee.

Apart from charting the general policies of the Committee, one of the main terms of union between the Representative Committee of Ukrainian Canadians and the Ukrainian Central Committee dealt with the manner in which the presidium of the executive organ of the Committee was to be constituted. It was mutually agreed that the President of the Committee should come from the ranks of the Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood, the First Vice-President and the General Secretary from the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League, the Second Vice-President from the Ukrainian National Federation, the Treasurer from the United Hetman Organization, and the Financial Secretary from the Ukrainian Labour Organization.

This arrangement is still binding, although some additions were made after the Second World War when approximately forty thousand Ukrainians came to Canada from displaced persons' camps in western Europe and founded some new organizations.

There have been some critical observations that the manner of filling executive posts in the Committee is not in keeping with democratic principles. Although these observations may have some merit, it should be emphasized that the Committee is not an organization in the popular sense of the word, and hence has no direct individual membership. It is rather a coalition of democratically-minded organizations and draws its strength from the strength of the member-organizations upon which it rests. By designating to the Executive its leading members from the respective member-organizations, the Committee as a whole can count upon the support of the entire Ukrainian community.

This method of forming the Executive eliminates the possibility of grouping or forming blocks in order to secure some imaginary advantage.

While this established practice has worked very well up to the present, there might be some danger in the future if it remains rigidly inflexible. Since the headquarters of the Committee are in Winnipeg, it naturally follows that the members of the Executive, at least a substantial majority, should reside in that city in order that the Committee may function properly. The Committee has been very fortunate in having for its President Rev. Dr. Basil Kushnir since 1940, with the exception of one brief interval. But there is no guarantee that the organization which delegates the President will at all times be able to provide a commanding personality with the necessary qualities of leadership, since this person has to be someone from Winnipeg.

We have singled out the Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood, because the office of the President is a very important one. But the same would

apply in some measure to the other organizations which delegate members to important executive posts. It might, therefore, become necessary in the future to modify this rigid system, while at the same time retaining intact the organizational structure of the Committee.

We should review now very briefly the principles and objectives which the Committee set for itself at the time it was formed. To do this we will quote relevant excerpts from an address delivered at the First Ukrainian Canadian Congress in Winnipeg, June, 1943, by Mr. J. W. Arsenych, K.C., later a judge in Manitoba.

He said:

1. First of all, we, all combined, stand for democratic principles and the maintenance and the development of British institutions, and we are opposed to any and all totalitarian philosophies in whatever form they may ever appear.
2. We believe that, through the representatives of the Dominion-wide organizations of Canadians of Ukrainian descent which form this Committee, the Committee does and shall serve for the exchange of opinions, for the clarification and the consolidation of public opinion, and for the action of Ukrainian Canadians towards the following objectives:
  - a) Co-ordination and intensification of the participation of Canadian Ukrainians in Canada's war effort with its concomitant principles of democracy, Christian civilization, social justice and freedom to all nations. This, in short, is the immediate purpose of the Committee.
  - b) But we have a further purpose, namely, to maintain this body for the purpose of devising ways and means of solving problems in Canada common to all of us.
  - c) We hope, also, to be of some assistance to the aspirations of the 45,000,000 Ukrainians in Europe so that they, too, may receive equal treatment and equal rights in the family of free nations.

From the foregoing quotation it is evident that the primary objective of the Committee was to encourage and promote a more effective contribution of Canadian Ukrainians to Canada's participation in the Second World War.

We might add that this primary objective met with a greater than ordinary success. The voluntary enlistment of Ukrainian youth was higher than the national average. Some forty thousand of them served in the armed forces and participated in battles on various battlefields, including Hong Kong. Quite understandably, the Committee does not claim for itself any special credit. However, it did encourage enlistments; the Ukrainian press connected with the Committee gave wide coverage

in this area. The Committee encouraged the Ukrainian community to support and participate in Victory Loan drives, Red Cross campaigns and participation in War Service Clubs.

When the First Ukrainian Canadian Congress was held in June, 1943, the war was still in progress, and the statistical data was far from complete. However, I would like to quote a few figures, gleaned from an address by Rev. S. W. Sawchuk, the First Vice-President of the Committee, and one of four Ukrainian army chaplains.

Mr. Sawchuk stated that in fifteen districts in Alberta, where Ukrainians constituted 50 per cent or more of the population, they purchased 129 per cent of their quota of Victory Loan Bonds. In the Ethelbert district of Manitoba, which is 95 per cent Ukrainian, the quota was oversubscribed by 14 per cent. In one Saskatchewan locality 2,350 persons of Ukrainian origin purchased \$227,000 worth of bonds during one drive. The Radway district in Alberta oversubscribed by 98.6 per cent.

The participation of the Ukrainian-Canadian community in Canada's war effort was generally recognized by other Canadians. In its June 2nd issue, 1943, the *Winnipeg Free Press* commented editorially as follows:

When the war came, the best leadership among our Ukrainians sought to unite our Ukrainians behind the war effort. At the time when the Communist Ukrainians were trying to sabotage our war effort at every turn, the Ukrainian Canadian Committee was formed of the other elements. It is no secret that getting this organization functioning was extremely difficult.... But the organization was formed. It has done real service to Canada while the way that 30 to 40 thousands of young Ukrainians joined the Canadian armed forces, most of them long before Russia entered the war, is proof of the extent to which Canadianization has gone.

It should be mentioned here that the work of the Committee was not confined exclusively to Canada. With thousands of Ukrainian youth overseas, the Committee maintained a hostel in London, England, for Ukrainian servicemen, who happened to be in England on leave, undergoing special training or awaiting placement. The hostel and a canteen were great morale boosters. For many the hostel was a home away from home, if only for a brief period.

In June, 1946, the Committee convened the Second Ukrainian Canadian Congress, this time in Toronto. The President of the Committee, the Rev. Dr. Basil Kushnir, had just recently returned from a visit to western Europe. His stirring address in which among other issues, he dealt at length with the sorry plight of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees, evoked spontaneous sympathy and a firm resolve to come

to their aid. The refugees were composed of those who had been forcibly uprooted from their homeland and sent to Germany to work in munition factories. There were also war prisoners and those who in the final stages of the war had fled westward to seek freedom before the advancing Soviet armies. Many thousands of them were forcibly repatriated to their former homes before the western allies finally realized why they stubbornly resisted being sent back.

As if in anticipation of this great human tragedy resulting from the war, the Committee brought into being the Ukrainian Canadian Relief Fund and the new body commenced its operation of February 15, 1945, under a government permit. Starting with \$1,000 loaned to it by the Committee, in a short period of time it had ten thousand contributors, and by the end of 1945 had collected over \$65,000 for humanitarian work. In twenty years of operation over \$400,000 were collected, 75 per cent of which was spent on relief in western Europe. In 1962 the name of the Ukrainian Canadian Relief Fund was changed to the Ukrainian Canadian Welfare Service, as being more appropriate in the changed circumstances.

Apart from organizing shipments of food and clothing for the refugees, the most important immediate task of the Ukrainian Relief Committee was to bring to an end deportations to the Soviet Union, and to secure for the displaced persons some legal status. Relief missions were dispatched to western Europe, which were headed at various times by Bohdan Panchuk, A. J. Yaremovich, E. Wasylshyn and Miss A. Chraplywa.

The next important step of the Committee was to arrange for these displaced persons to resettle in other countries and particularly in Canada. To this end a delegation of the Committee met with the Government of Canada and as a result Canada opened its doors to those hapless people. Approximately forty thousand of them were resettled in Canada and are making valuable contributions to her growth and development. Among them was a sizeable proportion of intellectuals and highly educated people. Many of them joined professorial staffs in our universities. They also formed two learned societies: the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences and the Shevchenko Scientific Society.

The newly-arrived Ukrainians underwent a period of transition and adaptation and for a while disturbed the established pattern and tranquility of Ukrainian-Canadian community life. Some of the newcomers joined the existing Ukrainian organizations, but the vast majority of them formed their own organizations, patterned mostly on those organizations which functioned in the old land or were created in western Europe. Some of these organizations joined the Committee without much delay but the largest of them, the League for Ukraine's Liberation,

stayed aloof until 1959. On joining the Committee this organization delegated two members to the presidium.

It should be mentioned at this juncture, that in 1946 the newly formed Ukrainian Canadian Veterans Association joined the Committee and was numbered among the founding members. Its first National President was Captain John G. Karasevich and he participated in the Second Congress, which was held in Toronto.

At the present time there are some twenty-eight organizations in the Committee. Of course, not all of them are Canada-wide. A Canada-wide organization must have several branches.

On June 28, 1963, the Committee was incorporated as a body politic and the following purposes and objects were set out in the Act of Incorporation:

- a) to act as an authoritative spokesman for the Ukrainian-Canadian community before the people and Government of Canada;
- b) to strengthen and co-ordinate the participation of Ukrainian-Canadians in the Canadian social and cultural life based on Christian and democratic principles, for justice, freedom and independence;
- c) to safeguard the justifiable aspirations of the Ukrainian people in Europe for independence and sovereignty of its ethnic territories;
- d) to sponsor and maintain among the member organizations mutual respect and tolerance and to co-ordinate the work in all matters that are of common interest to them;
- e) to plan and develop among the Ukrainian-Canadians sound community life in all its aspects.

Although it is a non-political body and favours no particular political party, the Committee encourages full participation in Canadian political activities and in Canadian institutions. Its particular interest in recent years has been in the field of education, especially in the extension of teaching the Ukrainian language in the public schools and universities.

A few years ago the Committee acquired its own building, a three-story structure at 456 Main Street in Winnipeg, with plenty of office space, committee rooms, board-room for the Executive, club room and a big hall for larger gatherings. The maintenance and activities of the Committee are financed by regular annual contributions of member-organizations as well as by the community at large. Since its inception over one million dollars have been contributed to the upkeep and activities of this body. No one serving on the Executive receives any remuneration. There are six paid employees who work under the direction of the Executive Director. The Executive meets regularly every two weeks

and holds a special meeting whenever some special problem arises. A much larger body, known as the Advisory Council meets every month. The Executive Director from 1948 until his death in 1966 was Mr. Wolodymyr Kochan. His service to the Committee has been invaluable. The present Director is Dr. Simon Kalba. The supreme moral authority rests with the All-Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which is convened every three years. To date there have been nine such Congresses.

The perpetuation of the Committee rests on the proven truism that in unity there is strength, and on the realization that no one organization, however strong, can do singly what can be accomplished by a concerted united group.

The Committee, of course, has performed no miracles, but it has some notable achievements to its credit. We may list a few. In 1959 the Committee launched a drive for funds to erect a statue of Ukraine's greatest poet, Taras Shevchenko, on the hundredth anniversary of his death. The Manitoba government of the day graciously consented to donate for that purpose a plot of land on the Legislative grounds in Winnipeg and the succeeding government honoured that commitment. The fund drive brought \$175,000, and the monument, the work of a Ukrainian-American sculptor, was officially unveiled on July 9, 1961, by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, in the presence of some fifty thousand gathered on the Legislative grounds.

It was at this unveiling ceremony that the Honourable Duff Roblin, Premier of Manitoba, made an announcement that the teaching of the Ukrainian language would be introduced into Grade IX in the academic year, and would be progressively extended in succeeding years to Grades X, XI and XII. This has been done.

Almost immediately after the unveiling ceremony, the Committee set to work to establish a million-dollar Taras Shevchenko Foundation, the proceeds from which were to be used for cultural and educational needs of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. On the 22nd day of July, 1963, the Foundation was incorporated by an Act of Parliament. As stated in the act of incorporation, the Board of Directors, which is a separate body from the Executive of the Committee, is empowered to:

- a) use or grant to other organizations such portion of the income of the Foundation as the Board may deem proper for the preservation, fostering, promotion and advancement of the Ukrainian culture, with the stipulation, that any organization which receives such a contribution from the Foundation may not use any portion of such receipts for its administration, operational or organizational expenses; and

b) grant to individuals scholarships, fellowships and bursaries for the preservation, fostering, promotion and advancement of Ukrainian culture in Canada.

To date some \$250,000 have been donated to the Foundation. When the ultimate objective is reached, the Foundation will have at its disposal between fifty and sixty thousand dollars annually to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

Another notable achievement of the Committee was the translation and publication in English of the complete poetical works of Shevchenko. To work on the translation, the Committee engaged the services of two Canadian scholars, Prof. C. H. Andrusyshen, Head of the Slavic Department at the University of Saskatchewan, and Prof. Watson Kirkconnell, President of Acadia University, who is well versed in Ukrainian and other languages and is a poet and writer in his own right. The book was printed by the University of Toronto Press. These two gentlemen also translated and compiled for the Committee an anthology of Ukrainian poetry, which was published in 1963, containing 500 pages of selections from 112 Ukrainian poets. The *Kobzar* translation of Shevchenko's poetry, to which I have referred, was published in 1964, to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the birth of the poet. A third book in this group, printed in both languages, is entitled *Shevchenko the Artist* and contains some seventy reproductions of his paintings about half of them in colour. This is something that no single organization could have undertaken on its own.

The Committee can justly take some credit for the promotion of teaching the Ukrainian language in high schools and universities, particularly in Manitoba. This was a very long process, the beginnings of which date back to 1957, when the delegation of the Committee, consisting of the late senator William Wall, Mr. John M. Hawryluk, at that time Member of the Legislature, and Mr. John H. Symick, presented a brief to the Royal Commission on Education requesting the introduction of Ukrainian into secondary schools on an optional basis.

This request was partially met in July, 1961, when Premier Roblin announced that Ukrainian would be introduced into Grade IX in the 1962-63 academic year and extended to higher grades in succeeding years. However, a student selecting the Ukrainian language was still required to have either French, German or Latin in order to satisfy university language requirements.

The Committee pursued the matter further and in June 1966 met again with Premier Roblin and the Minister of Education, Dr. George Johnson, both of whom adopted a sympathetic attitude and promised

to use their good offices to secure equal treatment for the Ukrainian language. An immediate result of that meeting was the authorization by the Department of Education to proceed with the preparation of a Ukrainian correspondence course for Grade IX. That course has now been completed by Mr. W. J. Sarchuk, a deputy director of the Correspondence Branch of the Department of Education.

The final success of these efforts came on February 21, 1967, with the announcement that the Senate of the University has accorded the Ukrainian language equal status with French, German and Latin, with the sole exception of the School of Music. Shortly after, the same recognition was given by the new Brandon University.

In its efforts to have Ukrainian fully recognized, the Committee had support from the Legislature of Manitoba, the Winnipeg School Board, the Manitoba Teachers' Federation and some educationists; and here I would like to mention particularly Dr. Cornelius Jaenen, Professor of History at United College in Winnipeg, who through his articles and public pronouncements expressed disapproval of the existing inequalities.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism also afforded the Committee the opportunity to present its views on the matter of language and culture by briefs and appearances at the hearings.

I should also mention the meeting of the Committee's representatives with Quebec Premier Jean Lesage in Winnipeg, upon his return from speaking engagements in other western provinces. The meeting took place in early October, 1965. Mr. Lesage was very sympathetic to the stand taken by the Committee in respect to language and culture. He emphasized that any group desirous of preserving its culture, must preserve its language and it should be done through the school system, beginning with the elementary grades. The daily papers carried extensive reports of this meeting and some reporters called it sensational a great "break-through". This stemmed from some previous slanted reporting, which had created the impression that the Ukrainian community was steadfastly opposed or inimical to the cultural aspirations of the French Canadians. This was not so. While the French in Manitoba demanded that their language should be used as a language of instruction, the Ukrainians on the other hand requested that theirs be a subject of study, with equal treatment at the university. There was no clash of interest here. There never was any objection to French being used as a language of instruction in French communities. I might say that this matter has now been satisfactorily resolved for both groups.

In its main brief to the Royal Commission on B and B, the Committee set forth its views as to the direction in which Canada should move in order to preserve the precious heritage brought to this country

and for its enrichment, by many citizens of diverse origins, and to safeguard the equality of all its citizens. The Committee endorsed the widely accepted concept of unity in diversity, as a fundamental basis of Canadian society. In the matter of language and culture, the Committee took the stand that every Canadian should have a mastery of one official language in order to communicate with other Canadians, but not necessarily both official languages. It maintained that each ethnic group of citizens that so desires, should have an opportunity to study its own language, as a second language, through our public school system and through the universities, since both are supported by public funds. The same, on a regional basis, should apply to other governmental or semi-governmental institutions that rely upon the public purse.

... In closing I want to say that the Ukrainian Canadian Committee has become an institution and an integral part of the Ukrainian-Canadian society. If for any reason the Committee should ever cease to exist, and I personally don't think that will happen, it will not take long before a similar representative and co-ordinating body will again be formed.

The Committee has given the Ukrainian community a third dimension, a broader realization that it is far better to speak with one united voice, than with many varied voices. It has given the Canadian citizens of Ukrainian origin a feeling of greater security, as well as a sense of greater interdependence, so vital in this modern age. It has given them a sense of greater worth and usefulness not only as regards its own group, but also in the wider area of Canadian citizenship and in communication with other groups of citizens.

All this does not mean that there are no differences among the organizations that constitute the Committee. That would indeed be undesirable. But in the Committee we have learned to respect the opinions of others and to resolve differences that are capable of being resolved in an amicable manner.

At the present moment the Committee with its counterpart in the United States of America, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, (with which and along with similar bodies in South America it forms the Pan-American Ukrainian Conference) is engaged in preparation for convening the World Congress of Ukrainians in the Free World, which will take place in New York in November, 1967. We hope that this World Congress will bring closer together the Ukrainian democratically-minded organizations in the free world.

Born in time of war, the Committee has found new responsibilities and challenges in times of peace, as it is only when the blessings of peace and tranquility are with us that humanity can hope to build a better world and safeguard the sanctity and dignity of the individual.