

# When Ukraine Became Free: Ukrainian Independence through the Perspective of Ukrainian Canadian Lobbying Associations

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## Introduction

During the Cold War, in its dealings with the Soviet Union, Canada had to be especially cautious. In one sense, this was of course because of the nation's increasing complex economic relationship with the United States in the post-World War II period; from another, this was due to the fact that a large number of its citizens had their geo-ethnic origins within the boundaries of the Eastern Bloc.<sup>1</sup> Of all the Canadians from this region, however, the Ukrainians were the most representative.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Germany reunified and it was suspected that the Soviet Union was to disintegrate, Canada had a continual obligation to be mindful of this population living within its borders.

The year 1991 was a tremendously joyous time for the majority of Ukrainian-Canadians. Hundreds of conferences were held by various lobbying group in honour of the centennial of the arrival of their ancestors to the country – a wave of immigration that began, at least in an official sense, in 1891. There was, however, another occasion that year that demanded perhaps even greater celebration. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1991, Canada became the second nation in the world to acknowledge a liberated Kiev.<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was the first leader of a Western G7 nation to recognize the sovereignty of Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> This was a very significant diplomatic maneuver, displaying Canada's deep connection to this part of the world.

The question that directs this research is: What role did Ukrainian Canadian lobbying groups have in influencing Canada's domestic and foreign policies at the end of the Cold War? There is clear evidence to indicate that

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<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Petryshyn, "The Ethnic Question' Personified: Ukrainian Canadians and Canadian-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991," in *Reimagining Ukrainian Canadians*, ed. Rhonda Hinter and Jim Mochoruk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 223.

<sup>2</sup> In 1981 there were 529 615 individuals of Ukrainian origin in Canada. Numerically this constituted a group larger than the combined total of all other Canadian ethnic groups whose original homelands were within the U.S.S.R. Figures cited from Statistics Canada: 1981 Census of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Sheppard and Natalie Fedaschuak, "Dire Warnings Follow Ukraine's Vote to Quit the Union," *Winnipeg Free Press* (3 December 1991): A4.

<sup>4</sup> Extracts from Brian Mulroney's speech in "When Ukraine Became Free," *National Post* (26 April 2007).

Canada's involvement in constructing the post-Soviet world was incredibly important to the majority of Ukrainian Canadians and they were concerned not only for their own social standing within Canadian society, but with the welfare of fellow Ukrainians all over the world. The government, however, was not always interested in listening to all them equally as the Ukrainian community in Canada was engaged in a Cold War of its own. More nationalist right wing groups vehemently opposed their more left wing, and at times Communist, counterparts.

This inability of the community to represent itself on a united front, due to internal and external difficulties, posed many challenges for Ukrainian-Canadian lobbying associations and I think overall weakened their efforts. I conclude that the most effective route Ukrainian-Canadians had of rallying sympathy was through their pure numbers and voting power. Therefore right wing groups, who typically supported Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's conservative government, were favoured by the government and hailed as the only Ukrainians who had long been advocating for the country's independence and although more left-wing Ukrainian Canadians had a longer history in this country, they were alienated from the processes. I will argue throughout this paper, moreover, that both left and right wing lobbying groups had far more that united them than divided them and that the right wing or nationalist groups were not the only force in Canada advocating for independence in Ukraine.

This study takes its perspective from the prairies, where the largest concentrations of Ukrainian-Canadians are located and where I myself also reside, through the eyes of two local chapters of Ukrainian organizations: the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC) and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC). An oral history interview with lifelong AUUC member Myron Shutulsky and transcripts from a conference from 1998 held at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Winnipeg entitled "Changing Perspectives: Relationship Between Progressive Ukrainian- Canadian Organizations and the Soviet Ukraine, 1950-1990" will be used to show the perspective of the AUUC.

What is possibly reflective of the diminished role of Ukrainian lobbying groups in Canadian society following independence is that no one from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, who was involved in leadership during the '85 to '95 period, was able to be reached to speak about their memories from the time. This project was an incredibly difficult task to take on, as even in 1995, the median age of the leadership of the nationalist lobbying groups was 68 years of age.<sup>5</sup> Today many are no longer living, and of those who are still alive, many who were active could not be located or were not interested in speaking about their experiences. To analyze the UCC's impressions of the time, chapters from the

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<sup>5</sup> Anrji Kudala Wynnyckym, "Prognosis for the future," in *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: The Ukrainian Community in Canada* (Winnipeg: The Ukrainian Council of Arts and Science, 2004), 88.

book “Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow,” reflecting a conference by the same name held in Winnipeg in 2004, will be reviewed. The minutes of the Sixteenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians from 1989 and the Seventeenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians from 1992 will be my other sources.

## **The History of Ukrainians in Canada**

The history of the Ukrainian community in Canada began quite early in the nation’s post- Confederation period. Following the signing of treaties in the West with First Nations in the 1870s, Ottawa was free to populate this region formerly owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company. Due to both push and pull factors in 1891, Ukrainians began to leave their hereditary homes and seek opportunities in the new world. The official record shows that Ukrainian settlement in Canada began that year, and initiated a massive wave of immigration that continued until the First World War. Between 1891 and 1914 approximately 170 000 Ukrainians arrived, first by boat and then by train, to places quite unfamiliar to them.<sup>6</sup>

An ethnic consciousness emerged quite early within this important population on the Canadian prairies. It was expressed both individually and through community organizations on the right and left of the political spectrum.<sup>7</sup> Along with the churches, Ukrainian-lobbying organizations became a hotbed of political and cultural expression. These groups were influenced by the social, political, cultural, and economic realities of both Ukraine and Canada.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, nationalist sentiments were heightened and Ukrainian Canadians rallied to leverage Canada’s foreign policy towards the new communist state. This initiated a domestic Cold War, with a variety of opinions and perspectives divided along ideological and political lines. Canadian officials who were aware of this nationalism were wary for a number of reasons and attempted, according to Jaroslav Petrysyn to, “mute or manipulate the demands and pressures being brought to bear from a host of Ukrainian-Canadian interest groups.”<sup>8</sup>

At the conclusion of the First World War, various nationalist movements emerged throughout eastern and central Europe – Ukrainians were no exception. They were especially hopeful in 1918 as their people resided primarily along the dividing line of two former giants: the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Tsarist Russia. People of Ukrainian heritage in Britain, Canada, and the United States, rallied their governments to support the concept of independence.<sup>9</sup> As early as

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<sup>6</sup> Roman Petryshyn, “Introduction” in *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: The Ukrainian Community in Canada* (Winnipeg: The Ukrainian Council of Arts and Science, 2004), 17.

<sup>7</sup> J . Petryshyn, 223.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

October 1918, East Edmonton MP H.A Mackie wrote to Prime Minister Robert Borden advocating that he support the creation of a sovereign Ukraine. To the dismay of Ukrainian all around the world, however, the results in Paris did not turn out in their favour, and their dreams would be put off for decades to come.<sup>10</sup> Between 1920 and 1929 a second wave of immigration from Ukraine to Canada occurred, and about 68 000 arrived.<sup>11</sup>

The declaration of the Second World War twenty years later changed the realities of Ukrainian Canadians for a variety of reasons. The first was that as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, many Ukrainian Canadians were interned in Canada in quasi-internment camps and labeled as enemies of the state. These policies were atrocious and are one of the largest violations of human rights enacted on behalf of the Canadian state throughout the history of the country. The Canadian government furthermore criminalized Ukrainian labour and farmer associations during this period of Soviet-Nazi friendship. Both examples of state suppression weakened the relationship between Ukrainian Canadians and the Canadian government and remain today contentious issues.

A second cause of great changes to the community was the effect of a third wave of Ukrainian immigration. One and a half million immigrants – displaced persons and refugees from the war and its upheavals and multiples seeking a better life with more opportunities – poured into Canada between 1947 and 1958. Unlike the earlier prewar waves of immigrants, they did not tend to bring with them traditions of Old World radicalism. On the contrary, the post-war immigration brought new forms of conservatism. Many of the immigrants were from Eastern Europe and brought with them a bitter-anti Communist stance and a fiery hatred of Soviet imperialism. They added their voices to those of others holding extreme right wing beliefs and tended to support Canadian foreign policies that maintained the Cold War with the USSR.<sup>12</sup>

The Association of United Ukrainian Canadians evolved originally from the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association (ULTA). The ULTA was founded in Winnipeg on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1918<sup>13</sup> and transformed into the Ukrainian Labour and Farmer Trade Association in 1924.<sup>14</sup> The contemporary website of the organization describes the history of the Association as having “always sought to establish and maintain creative contacts and living ties with the ancestral homeland and the mother root of Ukrainian culture.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the 1950s the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>11</sup> R. Petryshyn, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Marcuse and Reginald Whitaker, *Cold War Canada: the Making of a National Insecurity State, 1947-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>13</sup> “About AUUC,” (2013), <http://www.auuc.ca/about.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> R. Petryshyn, 35.

<sup>15</sup> “About AUUC,” (2013), <http://www.auuc.ca/about.htm>.

AUUC held active membership in the Canadian Peace Congress and emerged throughout the decade as “one of the strongest and most consistent supporters of the peace movement.” Three students during this decade were sent to study Ukrainian song, music, dance and language on behalf of the organization during this period.<sup>16</sup> One of these students was Myron Shutulsky.

### **Witness and Myron and Olga Schutulsky and the Ukrainian Farmers and Workers Movement**

Myron Shutulsky was born in 1930 and he’s been a member of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians from a young age. He is now 83 years old. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013 my research partner, Chris Clements, and I had the opportunity to sit down with Myron and discuss his life experiences.<sup>17</sup> Myron speaks of living in Winnipeg’s North End, a neighbourhood highly populated by Ukrainians, growing up in a left wing Ukrainian Canadian family, studying in Ukraine during the Stalinist period, teaching music at the Ukrainian Labour Temple and his break with the Communist Party of Canada. Myron is a musical man and to him the cultural aspects of this lobbying group were a way of life, completely inseparable from its political dimensions.<sup>18</sup>

His parents came to Canada from different parts of Ukraine prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917. They were a part of the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants who came to Canada between the 1890s and the First World War. His mother came from the Western region of Ukraine that was formerly part of the Austro Hungarian Empire and his father came from Eastern Ukraine ruled by Tsarist Russia.<sup>19</sup> Shutulsky’s parents met in Edmonton at an English educational facility for young Ukrainians. According to Shutulsky in 1920 his father was asked to move to Winnipeg to work for the labour newspaper *Ukrainian Labour News*, where he later became its editor. Winnipeg was a central location for this nature of discourse as it was here that the Winnipeg General Strike had taken place just the previous year. Shutulsky therefore grew up in a home where union activity and political dissent was fostered along with the encouragement of Ukrainian cultural practices.<sup>20</sup> Shutulsky remembers his family suffering persecution by the federal government:

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Myron Shutulsky, interview by Hayley Caldwell and Chris Clements, Winnipeg, 28 August 2013.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

My father, well, he came out, they already, that's when as a I don't want to forget this, that's when the laws in Canada regarding citizenship – because my father was unable being ultra-left. Ultra left? Well he was a member of the Communist Party and my mother also joined, they weren't able to get citizenship even though they had come earlier, they didn't get it until after the war when my father came out of a concentration camp, he finally got his citizenship as did my mother.<sup>21</sup>

At the Ukrainian Labour Temple, the historic building which still houses the national office of the AUUC, Shutulsky was able to advance his Ukrainian language skills and learn how to perform traditional Ukrainian arts such as folk dance, choral singing, and playing violin in the hall's orchestra.

Myron Shutulsky, after working a short while in his trained field of mechanical drafting, left for Ukraine in 1950 to study at the Conservatory of Music in Kiev. His experiences can be best described in his own words:

I'm not going to tell you all the stories, but it it the – somebody that paints a very bad picture I can't substantiate that. I'm telling you what I went through. And I lived through, I walked and I went into stores, you could get- you could get food, you could buy this, buy that. There were certain uh things that were hard to come by, shoes, leather. They were beginning to import shoes from Czechoslovakia and from other countries, you know? From the East- they called it the Eastern Bloc. We travelled, I saw quite a bit of the Soviet Union, in St. Petersburg I was there for three times, and in the middle of 1950 – the winter of '53 I was there for 2 weeks! It was Leninberg, but in St. Petersburg, in the Conservatory, they took me there and they showed me the actual compositions in Tchaikovsky's handwriting and everything, you know? So I had that. I was in the school of choreography where Nijinsky and Vaslav studied and everything, you know? They showed me how high Nijinsky could leap, there's this mark on the wall, you know? It was great! These kind of thing interested me. It interested me because I was studying dance, music, and saw these things.<sup>22</sup>

Myron Shutulsky remembers the day March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1953 in particular indicating that it was an event of supreme importance to this Canadian socialist of Ukrainian heritage. This was the day that leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin died. Shutulsky describes in the interview that along the main street of Kiev there were speakers that would normally play classical folk music or sound the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Kremlin bells, but on that day they closed everything down. "His influence was eminence, the day of his funeral everything was closed down in Kiev," says Shutulsky of Stalin.<sup>23</sup> Later that year he returned to Canada and from 1953 to 1967 he taught Ukrainian music at the Labour Temple.<sup>24</sup>

According to Roman Petryshyn, particularly after the 1970s, the leadership position of the labour-farmer movement within the greater Ukrainian-Canadian community declined. This was due in part to the third wave of immigrants to Canada who brought with them very anti-Soviet mentalities but also due to the internal conflicts within the Soviet party across the ocean back in Europe. The Ukrainian communist party was very troubled over Stalinism, the Holdomor, the Soviet invasions of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the repression of Ukrainian intellectuals during this decade.<sup>25</sup>

It was also during the 1970s Shutulsky and his wife Olga made a break with the Canadian Communist Party because, as Shutulsky reiterated,

I left in 1970 because of that continued uh how should I say, uh that ideology, the implementation of the ideology where they saw that what we were doing was useless. That to retain whatever heritage that that was useless. It all has to do with overcoming capitalism and it's the class struggle. They never saw that this- that the class struggle is maybe part in parcel as to what you are trying to do (HC: right) as a singer or whatever. You're also a worker, and working in somebody's factory and this and that and there's a connection! But don't try and make one, and make it all like you know? All under one? We said "no." That's one of the reasons I left the party in 1970. And my buddy Eugene Dolny too!

It was also during this period that Shutulsky decided to leave the AUUC and get out of Winnipeg for a while and moved to a series of other Canadian cities where he became active in their respective Ukrainian communities. When Myron Shutulsky left the CPP in 1970, it was assumed by the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians that he had made a break with them as well. Myron remembers, "It was not healthy, opposition. Very strong opposition to me personally and so we moved. But it was vindicated later when I moved back and they welcomed me with open arms."

In 1984 Myron and Olga Shutulsky relocated back to Winnipeg and returned to the ULTA. He had no fear as he had never given up membership within the association and still believed himself to be a socialist. The AUUC welcomed the return of their family to the prairie city and he was even asked to

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> R. Petryshyn, 36.

become the president at one point. It was also around this time that he had the opportunity to return again to Ukraine on behalf of the AUUC to do research for a book on Ukrainian songs. He describes the sentiment of the time in Ukraine just following Mikhail Gorbachev's election. He was invited by a colleague to attend a gathering of Ukrainian intellectuals at a university. Most of the crowd was young and they were all speaking in Ukrainian but upon being introduced to Shutulsky the conversation switched to Ukrainian as it was what he understood better. He remembers the discussion well:

Oh, all of a sudden the Ukrainian begins. I said "it's okay, I studied here in the '50s." "Ohhh! You did?!" So anyways, "So you know about Stalin and all that, you went through it!" I said "Yeah, I lived through that era." "Oh great!" Anyways so they talked openly about what was happening and how the changes were being made and how they had to. They were raising a lot of economic questions, they were discussing not only uh philosophical, and they were being realistic because they were talking already about production, about look what's happening! This company that manufacturers shoes, "Can you imagine, look what happens, they made four or five thousand pairs of shoes and they're all for the left foot!" That, I mean, they're raising these questions and they say, that's what the problem is, these are the problems that we have to deal with, it's not just a question of ideology and how to implement new ideas but you have to deal with practical questions. Practical, you know? What are you going to do? How are you going to change things? ...And it just continues, it just continues, you have to put a stop to it. How to do that is a practical question. Not just a philosophical one, you have to deal with this. You have to get up and say no, you have to say what he's doing is wrong. How do you do that without being afraid that someone's going to come and arrest you? A lot of this is left over; people are making a transition of reality. It's, it's, it's life, and it's no longer a discussion where everything is very safe you know? You can sit and say yeah that's the way it is, and that and everything and you go home and you feel very free, you're dealing with practical questions which are very, there's a certain danger involved. I'm not talking physical, that too. But you're talking about, how to approach it. You're talking, changing society – basically.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Myron Shutulsky interview.



## Shutulsky, the AUUC, German Re-Unification and Ukrainian Independence

Shortly afterwards, Shutulsky returned to Canada. His opinion regarding of all the changes in Europe between 1985 and 1991 is difficult to assess but he states that at the time he felt German Reunification was long over-due. He says that the changing political sphere in the Soviet Union wasn't as contentious for him as it may have been for other members of the AUUC; highlighting that he still feels the region's politics are in transition and remain in a position of flux. He says the end of communism in Eastern Europe was perhaps less traumatic for him as he was no longer a party member.<sup>27</sup>

It may have affected individuals but not – I don't think it affected us as an Association. It affected the members of the Party more! That's right! Yeah, because that's their life blood. I say theirs... I still consider myself a socialist but not an NDP socialist, I mean a real socialist.

He continued to say that for some of AUUC 'old timers' and even for some of the Canadian born the end of communism in Russia and Ukraine was traumatic, and they saw Gorbachev as being a 'rat.' This, however, was not the perspective of Shultusky.<sup>28</sup>

When Shutulsky was asked whether the AUUC was able to influence Canada's foreign or domestic policies during the late 1980s and early 1990s he alluded that the federal government along with the provincial government of Manitoba didn't always take what they had to say very seriously. "Yeah, they listened very nicely; we had coffee. Somebody came and says we'll give you a tour of the parliament buildings. No, I'm not joking, it's a fact! It – it – for me it was disheartening from the point of the view as how I felt is that the way these guys see us, you know?" he remembers.<sup>29</sup>

The announcement of Ukraine's independence was, nevertheless, very positive for Shutulsky. He remembers being on a delegation that went to Ukraine in 1991:

I was there – was a day – I think it was just before the declaration, I was on a delegation that went to Ukraine and I was in the Opera Theatre when they started singing their national anthem and everything, that was just a half year prior to that to independence. But already, it was there, you could feel it everywhere and it yeah.

Caldwell: Was it positive for you?

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Shutulsky: Yeah! The feeling was great – it depended. A lot depended on who you were, you see.

Myron always felt and still emphasizes he is first and foremost Canadian and that his Ukrainian cultural identity and his political ideology were always and remain interconnected. Shutulsky now lives in the senior's residence home attached to the Ukrainian Labour Temple. Even at 83 years old, he is still writing for their newspaper *The Ukrainian Herald*, following in a sense, in his father's footsteps.

Shutulsky's life experiences, although perhaps more colourful than those of a typical of a Ukrainian-Canadian, give researchers insight into how the Soviet Union may have been perceived from someone who grew up in an older Ukrainian-Canadian tradition who also got to experience the Stalin, Gorbachev and post-Soviet periods in Ukraine first hand. Shutulsky asserts, as is also indicated in the rest of my research, which on many matters opinion was often individual and did not always correspond with those of a lobbying organization. Subjective experiences, therefore, have an important place within this study.

### **“Official” Ukrainian Left Wing perspectives**

For a broader interpretation of the 1985-1995 period from the perspective of left-wing Ukrainians the following section will highlight speeches from the conference, “Changing Perspectives: Relationship Between Progressive Ukrainian-Canadian Organizations and the Soviet Ukraine, 1950-1990” held in 1998 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.<sup>30</sup> 1998 marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organization and the conference was held in celebration. One of the speakers was esteemed Ukrainian scholar Petro Tronko, Professor at the Academy of Science of Ukraine. He presented a historical perspective.<sup>31</sup>

Tronko begins his narrative with the arrival of Ukrainians to Canadian soil but then jumps quickly to an event of great significance illustrating the deep connection between the AUUC and Ukraine. He mentions that under the leadership of the AUUC and its American partner, the League of American Ukrainians, \$303 796 was contributed to helping Ukraine recover from Nazi aggressors which almost destroyed the entire country.<sup>32</sup> However, with the

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<sup>30</sup> Transcripts were provided courtesy of the Canadian Society for Ukrainian Labour Research.

<sup>31</sup> Petro Tronko, “Interconnection of State Institutions of Ukraine with the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians during the Post-War Period. Historical Aspect,” Lecture, Changing Perspectives: Relationship Between Progressive Ukrainian- Canadian Organizations and the Soviet Ukraine, 1950-1990: Workers Benevolent Association and AUUC, Winnipeg, Manitoba, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

conclusion of the war another goal awaited, “the agenda of the daily lives of the nation’s became the question of reinforcing the results of long awaited victory, the strengthening of peace and international cooperation,” Tronko asserts. On their way home from San Francisco in 1946 the Ukrainian delegation of the United Nations stopped in Edmonton where they met the leadership of the AUUC. This is where it is said that the roots of the connection between Ukraine and the AUUC and its regional centres were laid.<sup>33</sup> During the post war years, albeit the fact that Ukraine endured many difficult years of totalitarian rule, the AUUC retained a reciprocal relationship with Kiev and that, Tronko asserts, “gave them the inspiration to maintain their Ukrainian traditions in a multinational Canadian society.”<sup>34</sup>

In reflecting on the connection between Ukraine and Canada during the Soviet-Period Tronko notes that for “reasons well known to you” contacts with more conservative Ukrainian- Canadian lobbying groups were very much prohibited. He therefore places the AUUC and the Workers Benevolent Board as historically important as communication with them was tolerated and served as a means of communicating with the wider circle of Canadians of Ukrainian heritage. To quote him, “The progressive public organizations in Canada not in words, but in deeds, strove constantly for strengthening ties with Ukraine, and fought for peace and interests of the Canadian people.” He makes a point of specifically thanking journalists who wrote for Ukrainian Canadian labour newspapers throughout the Soviet period. What is perhaps most pertinent is that Tronko makes a distinct separation between the ideologies of communism and of Russification. He asserts that in concerns involving Russification, “representatives of progressive Ukrainian Canadians along with a better part of the national intelligentsia of Ukraine spoke up about these problems and were active defenders of the Ukrainian people. Particularly bluntly was expressed dissatisfaction with the current politics of language question.”<sup>35</sup> The AUUC was also very active in trying to influence the Communist Party of Canada to support their requests to visit their native villages many of who were denied access to the Soviet Union for being residents of a capitalist country.<sup>36</sup>

Tronko’s thesis throughout his lecture is that from very early on the AUUC, although Communist in its ideological tendencies, was always deeply concerned about the national destiny of Ukraine. He concludes by highlighting the words of former AUUC President, Peter Krawchuk from 1991:

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

When Ukraine was declared an independent sovereign nation, the National Committee of the AUUC on behalf of all its members and sympathizers greeted the people of Ukraine on accomplishing their eternal dream. I would like to live to see the day when Ukraine will stand on its own two feet, and not be a satellite of the North, nor of the West, but becomes a true independent sovereign nation.<sup>37</sup>

Stanislav Yukhymovych Lazebnyk, journalist and representative of the Society “Ukraine” (which was established as a society for cultural ties with Ukrainians abroad), adds a similar perspective to the picture in his speech “The Road to Interrelations: How did contacts with Ukrainian nationalist organizations develop? (Before and after the proclamation of Ukraine’s independence),” delivered at the same conference.<sup>38</sup> He asserts that the progressive – whereby he means Communist or left leaning – Ukrainian organizations around the world served a connection for Ukrainian nationalists living in Ukraine to connect with Ukrainians all over the world. He asserts that without the Association of United Ukrainians and a few other organizations it would have been difficult to finalize contacts and arrange meetings with Ukrainian nationalists in the US, Canada and other Western nations due to difficult political conditions in the Eastern Bloc. He asserts also the role in cultural festivals, such as Folklorama in Winnipeg in granting the “Canadian community the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the song-musical art of Ukraine in all its diversity,” giving them a common ground to meet whereby they could at times, put aside their political differences.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conservative Perspectives**

The Canadian government appears to have always favoured more right wing offshoots of the political Ukrainian-Canadian community, albeit this became clearer in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am not thereby implying that the Ukrainian Canadian Congress had to compete with the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians in its discussion with the federal and provincial governments but that this did not stop them from responding to the progressive sectors of their community. Left wing and right wing Ukrainian lobbying groups invested much time and resources in responding to one another and competing for significance within their own communities trying to justify themselves as the more legitimate

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Stanislav Yukhymovych Lazebnyk, “How did contacts with Ukrainian nationalist organizations develop,” Lecture, Changing Perspectives: Relationship Between Progressive Ukrainian-Canadian Organizations and the Soviet Ukraine, 1950-1990: Workers Benevolent Association and AUUC, Winnipeg, Manitoba, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

perspective and alienating their counterpart as an unfamiliar 'other'. I think with closer investigation, however, it is clear that more unites the AUUC and the UCC than divides them.

During the 1940s a number of Ukrainian right wing groups were founded in Canada to correspond with the new increase in population and the new ideologies that came along with the third wave of immigration. There are too many organizations to mention for the purposes here however some of the most integral ones included: the Ukrainian National Federation, the League of the Liberation of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.<sup>40</sup>

The first Ukrainian Canadian Congress was held in 1943 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was founded on the belief that it was to represent all Canadians of Ukrainian heritage and describes itself today as being responsible for representing the "community before the people and Government of Canada, promotes linkages with Ukraine and identifies and addresses the needs of the Ukrainian community in Canada to ensure its continued existence and development for the enhancement of Canada's socio-cultural fabric."<sup>41</sup> Although congresses are held, in normal circumstances, every three years between 1989 and 1992 the Congress met twice. The following section will explore the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Congresses of the UCC. Topics of importance from the four day conference held in October 1989 of the UCC included among committee formalities, panel discussions on "Current Issues with Ukrainian Immigration," "Ukrainian Canadians & Contemporary Ukraine," and a keynote presentation by Minister of Energy, Mines, and Resources the Honorable Jake Epp, MP. Most of the proceedings are however in Ukrainian and therefore will not be able to be analyzed in detail in this paper due to language barriers.

Mr. Epp began his speech by inviting all of those who were visiting from out of town to his home province of Manitoba on behalf of himself and the Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney. "My friends, these are exciting times for Ukrainian Canadians," reflected Epp. "I am a realist and I recognize that winds don't change everything but I think we would have to admit today, that there are changes in Ukraine, there are changes in East bloc countries."<sup>42</sup> He professed that in meeting with representative from the UCC on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989 the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State were clearly advocating for a partnership between their organization and the Government of Canada. He asserted that the federal government's continued support of the Ukrainian Canadian community was reflective of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. He concluded his speech by saying, "All of these attributes of the Canadian character

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<sup>40</sup> R. Petryshyn, 37.

<sup>41</sup> About UCC," (2013), <http://www.ucc.ca/about-ucc/>.

<sup>42</sup> *Sixteenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians* Proceedings. Winnipeg: Manitoba, October 1989, 211.

and moral vision are clearly present within the work and accomplishments of the Ukrainian Canadian family.<sup>43</sup>

The Seventeenth Congress, held in October 1992 opened with a very different tone. No longer were the Congress living in limbo, speculating on what and how the events in the Eastern bloc were to unfold but were transitioning their individual lives and organization towards new realities of the post-Soviet world. The Congress was blessed with greetings from the Government of Canada, this time from MP Dorothy Dobby from Manitoba South. She began by congratulating the congress on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in “this great country of ours – Canada” and she concluded by congratulating Ukraine on its first anniversary.<sup>44</sup> Dobbie’s, however, was not the only perspective present at the gathering. The Honorable Lloyd Axworthy spoke also on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada reiterating much of Dobbie’s sentiments.

The key note address this year was from Professor Vsevolod Isajiw and his speech was entitled, “UKRAINIAN CANADIAN COMMUNITY AT A HISTORIC TURNING POINT: ITS GOALS REVISTED.” This speech was fortunately translated into English. “Today the Ukrainian Canadian community stands at an important turning point of history: both its adopted homeland- Canada- and it’s original homeland – Ukraine – are going through profound changes that are giving both countries a new character and a new lease on history,” Isajiw opened. Some of the changes he articulated include constitutional changes in Canada, changes in the ethnic composition of Canada, changes in the economic and cultural relations with Canada’s neighbouring countries, the independence of Ukraine and all the political and economic consequences that it implies.

Other topics of panel discussions included, “the needs of children & aid to Ukraine”, “Will they give 160 acres to each and every one of the fifth wave? The next century of immigration,” “Canada-Ukraine Relations,” “Canada- Ukraine, State to State Relations”, “Ukraine’s Need in Technical Assistance”, “New Perspective for Canadian Assistance,” “Canadian Federal/Provincial Co-operation in Assistance to Ukraine,” and “Ukrainian Canadian Presence in Ukraine.” Unfortunately, the majority of the UCC’s minutes from this year’s congress were recorded solely in Ukrainian, but also carried a much more immediate sense of urgency in their tone.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Sixteenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians* Proceedings. Winnipeg: Manitoba, October 1989, 218.

<sup>44</sup> *Seventeenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians*. Proceedings. Winnipeg: Manitoba, October 1992, 26.

<sup>45</sup> *Seventeenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians*. Proceedings. Winnipeg: Manitoba, October 1992, 14-18.

One of the topics included in the inaugural minutes of the congress was the “Centennial of Ukrainian Settlement in Canada.” The Centennial year was designed from September 1991 to October 1992. The Congress asserted that this event, especially for those of third and fourth generation, rebirthed within many Ukrainian Canadians a sense of identity and reminder of their origins. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress appointed the Ukrainian Canadian Centennial Commission to coordinate projects of a national scope and commemorate this historic milestone.<sup>46</sup>

### **Views of Canadian Diplomats and Politicians**

The efforts of a Ukrainian community so engaged in a Cold War of its own were therefore weakened. It is, however, my suspicions that in reflecting upon Ukrainian Canada, diplomats that were interviewed regarding this project felt that most of their connection lay with those whom they perceived as the “good guys” and the genuine nationalists – the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and its associated groups. In the other interviews conducted as part of this publication John Noble, Gaetan Lavertu, Bill Blaikie, and Lloyd Axworthy all reflected on the Ukrainian question.

Noble’s statement is a good characterization of the sentiment echoed by all parties:

So we have a fair number of émigrés from those three states (the Baltics) in Canada, so it was a political imperative as so many of our foreign policy often is driven by the influence of domestic politics, émigrés- immigrants. Von Plato: You mean there was an influence on your government, to support the uh Lithuanians?  
Noble: I think so, that was a factor. Canada was the first country to recognize the Ukraine because we have over a million Canadians of Ukrainian origin. So that's a big domestic issue, a million votes. It's not the only factor, but it's a factor.<sup>47</sup>

Lloyd Axworthy’s statements are similar but he does not mention Eastern-European’s in regards to votes but places a more hefty emphasis on human rights concerns.

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<sup>46</sup> *Seventeenth Congress of Ukrainian Canadians*. Proceedings. Winnipeg: Manitoba, October 1992, 47.

<sup>47</sup> John Noble, interview by Alexander Von Plato assisted by Hayley Caldwell and Chris Clements, Ottawa, 26 January 2013.

Axworthy: All the years of the Cold War, the ambition and motivation was to protect freedoms and rights in Eastern Europe from the Soviet oppressions. When there are the revolutions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, we already had the base of the population. In this city for example, there is a very strong Ukrainian population, Polish population, and it was very anti-Soviet, very anti-communist, and so the domestic politics of Canada were certainly on the side of a fairly tough line and it was hard again to change that position. There was strong feelings that this was the chance that we had been waiting for, for three decades to promote democracy in Eastern Europe, and as a result, NATO was seen as one of the vehicles that could promote that.<sup>48</sup>

Bill Blaikie does not specifically mention Ukrainians, but he does make reference to the immigrants of Eastern Europe in Canada and their opinion regarding the extension of NATO. Blaikie recalls:

Blaikie: Yes, and I mean yes but he gave us a good reason and that's part of my question now. He said he couldn't convince Chretien but he couldn't convince or couldn't see, um, a changing in the mind of the immigrants of Eastern Europe in Canada. They were against Russia, all of them, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian Romanian, all of them wanted the Soviet Union go down and therefore the inner, the inner the internal mood, or what can I say? The internal mood, was pro extension of NATO and not against it.<sup>49</sup>

Paul Heinbecker too, feels very similarly regarding Ukrainian-Canadians. He expresses the following:

Heinbecker: There could be a cool and a smaller Cold War. But there were no possibilities to get the Canadians to adopt softer politics against the Soviet Union and Russia because so many of Eastern Europeans, especially from the Ukraine.

### **The Decline of Ukrainian-Canadian Immigrant Groups after Ukrainian Independency**

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<sup>48</sup> Lloyd Axworthy, interview by Alexander Von Plato assisted by Karen Brglez, Winnipeg, 2 November 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Bill Blaikie, interview by Alexander Von Plato assisted by Chrisopher Kshyk and Suzanne Zaleski, Winnipeg, 25 March 2013.



My second thesis regarding the research I conducted is that in the period following Ukrainian independence Ukrainian-Canadian lobbying groups were weakened politically and the majority of these organizations' efforts were hereafter directed towards more cultural pursuits. Roman Petryshyn argues that the pursuit of hegemonic identities be they political or religious have been the foundation for the majority of Ukrainian Canadian lobbying associations. This has led, as has been shown throughout this paper, led to a fragmented community. Ukrainian-Canadian identity is dynamic and always changing to reflect the historic circumstances of both Ukraine and Canada. He concludes that, "The questions of state and nation building have been central to Ukrainians in the past century. However, while continuing, it is likely to be different in kind in the future now that Ukraine is an independent country and the communist movement has lost much of its appeal (to different degrees) both in Canada and Ukraine."<sup>50</sup>

In 2007, Brian Mulroney was recognized for his contributions to Ukrainian independence by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and awarded the Order of King Yaroslav, the highest honour to non-Ukrainians that can be granted. The *National Post* on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007 commented on Mr. Mulroney's relationship with Ukrainian Canadians and published excerpts from his acceptance speech. "For the generations who came here in boats, there were always two countries in their hearts, the one they left behind and the land they adopted," articulates the former Prime Minister.<sup>51</sup>

When reflecting on the year 1991 and the independence of Ukraine, Mulroney remembers that Canada's official visit to Ukraine in 1989 really laid the groundwork for Canada's relation to the upcoming events.<sup>52</sup> It was significant because this was the first time since the beginning of the Cold War that a Canadian Prime Minister was speaking with the Ukrainian, and not Russian, leadership in their native language with a translator. In 1991, President Bush Sr. met with Mulroney to discuss the potential of the two nations recognizing Ukrainian independence if it were to occur within the next few months; Canada decided to go ahead with the plan whereas America said it would wait.

Mulroney continued that in this nation of immigrants, no story is more inspirational than that of Ukrainian-Canadians. He highlights that these people founded "the bread basket of Canada" through mixing Ukrainian and Canadian strains of wheat turning Canada into one of the greatest wheat exporters in the globe!<sup>53</sup>

Upon analyzing the perspectives of the prairie branches of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress I conclude

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<sup>50</sup> R. Petryshyn, 40.

<sup>51</sup> "When Ukraine became free," *National Post*, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

that Canada's recognition of Ukrainian independence was an important moment in the conclusion of the Cold War on a global scale. Canada houses the third largest Ukrainian population per capita outside of Ukraine itself and Ukraine is the largest nation in the Soviet Union outside of Russia.

The Canadian government was from the beginning more hostile toward the Ukrainian farmer and worker unions than it was to more conservative offshoots of the community. These lobbying groups, however, were not ideologically divided on all matters. One dimension on which nearly all Ukrainian-Canadian lobbying associations were able to see eye-to-eye was the issue of involving Ukrainian independence. This was a movement that began long before the 1980s. What is crucial, according to Petryshyn, is that the majority of Ukrainians living in Canada had insisted since 1918 that their nationalism was genuine needed the protection of a nation state in their hereditary territory.<sup>54</sup>

An inability of the community to represent itself on a united front, however, posed many challenges for Ukrainian-Canadian lobbying associations. Although both the AUUC and the UCC were rallying support in their new country for their counterparts living back home Ukraine, in 1991 it was Brian Mulroney and the UCC that were praised for their persistent efforts towards this goal and left-wing Ukrainian Canadians, who had a longer history in this country, were alienated from the processes.

My second thesis pertains to these lobbying groups and their future significance following the collapse of the USSR. I argue that fighting for the rights of citizens of Ukraine prior to its independence was the "raison d'être" of many of these groups, both right wing and left wing, and the conclusion of the Cold War rendered many groups irrelevant, or further distanced from the broader Ukrainian community and from pursuing concrete actions and goals.

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<sup>54</sup> J. Petryshyn, 224.