A Comprehensive History of Ukrainians in Canada

Orest Martynowych has done a signal service to Canada's Ukrainian community and all Canadians with this history book. There have been many books, brochures, almanacs and articles recording the history of the Ukrainian community in Canada, but these have been restricted to telling the story from the viewpoint of solely one part of the community: the right-wing, conservative, anti-Soviet side or the left-wing, pro-socialist and pro-Soviet one.

Martynowych has sought to provide a detailed, in-depth and comprehensive account of the first 33 years of Ukrainian Canadian history. In large measure he has succeeded. No history is totally objective, and this certainly is true of what has been written to date about the Ukrainian community, but Martynowych has made a bold and refreshing effort to change that. His is the first book that sets out to encompass the history of the entire community.

The book is divided into five parts.

Part I, "The Old World and the New," deals with some of the reasons for the emigration of Ukrainians to Canada. It also describes what Canada was like at the turn of the century, including the racial, ethnic and class conflicts that existed and were the background for the government's immigration policies.

Part II, "Life in the Promised Land, 1891-1921," gives a detailed account of how the immigrants came, how they settled the land, and the working and living conditions they experienced. Specific attention is given to the life and work of the rural settlers, the frontier-labourers and the urban immigrants.

Part III, "Mobilizing Ukrainians Immigrants, 1896-1914," deals with the numerous efforts that were made by individuals and institutions — including the church, the government and various political parties and groups — to organize and influence the new immigrants. Understandably, Martynowych devotes a substantial section to the role and activities of the various churches in the community, but he does include quite a few pages to the contributions made by the radicals and socialists in this regard. And he does so quite objectively, without the labelling or name-calling found in Ukrainian publications and periodicals on both sides in the past.

Part IV, "The Impact of the First World War, 1914-1919," records how Ukrainians in Canada and in Europe reacted to that war, the registration and internment of Ukrainians, censorship of Ukrainian publications, and the resurgence of the Ukrainian socialist movement. It also deals with two aspects that have received relatively little attention in historical records: (1) the "school issue" that flared up during the war, which involved efforts by the community to train teachers who could provide Ukrainian-language instruction in public schools, and (2) the turmoil in the religious section of the community caused by the conflict between the Ukrainian Catholic immigrant clergy and the French Canadian bishops.

Part V, "The End of an Era, 1919-1924," deals with the revolution in Ukraine immediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917, attitudes of the Ukrainian community in Canada to those events, and the divisions these events and other factors caused within the community. This part includes only four pages devoted to the Ukrainian Labour (-Farmer) Temple Association, but this reviewer found these to be as objective an account as could probably be given within such a brief space.

In general, considering the positive characterization given to the role that was played by the left-wing, pro-socialist section of the community, one wishes he would have devoted more space to it. But this is not to detract from the merits of the book as a whole.

The book contains 88 illustrations, as well as several maps and tables of statistics, which will be very helpful to the reader.

While at today's prices it is well worth the cost, it may be prohibitive to some. It is, however, available in the public library system of most major cities; if not, you can ask your local library to acquire it.

As its title indicates, this book covers but one-third of the 100-year period Ukrainians have lived in Canada. This reviewer is confident that those who read it will hope Martynowych writes another volume, covering the next third, or perhaps the remaining two-thirds, of the century.

— John Boyd

The author was an activist for many years in Ukrainian labour-farmer organizations. From 1931 to 1933 was an editor of the ULFTA's "Boiwa monoi" (Militant Youth) and in the 1950s he served briefly on the staff of The Ukrainian Canadian.