

The Pursuit of Nationhood

Two histories, shared dreams.



If having an awful history were a sport, Ukrainians would make the European finals. The suffering of Poland and Russia under czars, communists and Nazis is well known. But the tragic history of Ukraine remains neglected, largely because few people thought of it as a nation until its independence in 1991. Vasyl Kuchabsky's *Western Ukraine in Conflict with Poland and Bolshevism, 1918-1923* is a welcome addition to the slim body of Ukrainian history in English.

Published in German in 1934 and released by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press last year in an English translation by Gus Fagan, the book tells of the wars waged by Poland and the Bolsheviks against the short-lived Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR). Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia declared ZUNR's independence in 1918. From the start, the Polish national movement, supported by the province's large and financially dominant Polish minority, threatened the new republic. Kuchabsky's focus is on the failures of Ukrainian political leadership. It was obvious that

3.5 million Ukrainians could never win against the 17 million Poles to their west and north—obvious, that is, except to the leadership of ZUNR, who assumed that the victorious Great Powers (France, Italy, England and the US) would help them once they saw the justice of their claim to Eastern Galicia. That was only their first mistake. Faced with an unbeatable enemy, ZUNR insisted on fighting rather than on negotiating an imperfect peace. Eventually its army was forced onto the territory of Symon Petliura's left-wing but anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian People's Republic, located in the former Russian Empire. There, both Ukrainian forces fought alongside anti-Bolshevik Russian reactionaries, hoping that the Western powers would reward them with recognition of independence.

Instead, enemies defeated both fledgling republics. The Poles took Western Ukraine and proceeded to demolish Ukrainian national life. Eastern Ukraine suffered a worse fate: millions of Ukrainians were murdered under the Soviets in the years leading up to 1941. Kuchabsky himself was luckier than many; after being employed by the Nazis as a librarian in occupied Poland, he ended his days as a high school Russian teacher in communist East Germany. One wishes he'd had the opportunity to pursue a career as a historian—this volume serves as an authoritative (though admittedly biased) introduction to a little-known part of 20th century European history.

It should come as no surprise to Albertans that Central and Eastern Europeans aren't the only people who oppressed their neighbours. Most of us are only a short drive away from one of

the penal colonies into which our federal government placed thousands of Aboriginals for the crime of not being Canadian enough. Keith D. Smith's *Liberalism, Surveillance and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877-1927* (Athabasca University Press), examines how the Department of Indian Affairs used the reserve system to control every aspect of life in indigenous communities in Western Canada.

Smith, a history and First Nations studies professor at Vancouver Island University, takes as his test cases the reserves of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta and the Kamloops and Okanagan regions of BC. The two areas couldn't be more different. The Plains peoples of Alberta signed formal treaties established on relatively large and contiguous tracts of land and

were under the supervision and "tutelage" of Indian agents, other DIA employees, missionaries and NWMP constables. The BC natives were placed on small, scattered reserves without a treaty and were left to their own devices. Smith shows, though, that the government's overall strategy and motivation were the same in both cases: to use constant monitoring and legal restrictions to kill Aboriginal culture while keeping the West's resources for settlers.

The "liberalism" in the book's title is the classic liberalism still current in most of the Western world—a belief in private property, liberty and the rule of law. The DIA held up liberalism as the gold standard of civilization, using it as a weapon against societies that did not conform to its dictates, even while refusing to allow indigenous people to benefit from its tenets.

While this won't be news to most readers, the monitoring and restrictions to which natives were subjected will be. The DIA conspired with police to impose an illegal "pass" system on natives. It insisted on acting as their "business agent" with off-reserve residents or companies. And most seriously, given its mandate to protect Indians, it sold reserve lands without band members' agreement. Like the Ukrainians, native leaders in BC put their trust in the powerful—attempting to gain redress through the courts and DIA's Ottawa headquarters. Ukrainian national rights weren't recognized until the Soviet Union collapsed. Let's hope Canada can do a little better than that. ■

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