The evolution of multiculturalism: Achievements and setbacks of Ukrainian Canadians

Since its official implementation in 1971, multiculturalism has received both praise and criticism galore from various constituencies in Canada accordingly as it has met expectations or dashed hopes. Just as our society today differs sharply from the one that existed at the time of the policy's inception, so the policy itself has changed as well. This paper explores what multiculturalism meant to Ukrainian Canadians—as one of the established immigrant groups* in the country—during the time of the debate and how their perception of multiculturalism developed over time. Ukrainians are generally hailed as some of the most dedicated proponents of multiculturalism in Canada. Not only were they among the most active participants in the initial discussion of the 1960s, but Prime Minister Trudeau himself visited the Ukrainian Canadian Congress only a day after announcing the official multiculturalism policy in October of 1971—considered by many a sign that the contribution of the Ukrainian-Canadian community in Canada had been acknowledged by high-level Canadian officials. Such acknowledgement was significant to Ukrainian Canadians, who felt the burden of preserving a culture that was threatened in their country of origin. Ukrainian Canadians had high hopes for the future of their community under a new multiculturalism policy that promised to help them protect their language and heritage. But did Canada's multiculturalism policy live up to this immigrant group's high expectations? Can it be declared a success or failure? Does it still hold relevance in today's society?

THE ORIGINS: THE DEBATE AND THE ROLE OF UKRAINIAN CANADIANS

The 1960s were a decade of upheaval and change, and on a smaller scale these international developments were mir-rored in public discussions within Canada as well. What had initially started as a discussion about bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada quickly turned into a debate about multiculturalism, as many of the non-Anglo, non-French Canadian groups felt that they were not fairly represented during such an important time in Canadian history. Ukrainians were among the early advocates of a policy that recognized the contributions of "the other ethnic groups" to the development of Canada. Their submissions to the B&B Commission repeatedly featured three themes: the quest for participation, recognition, and equality. Ukrainian Canadians demanded political representation for the "other ethnic groups," not only through individual politicians, but also through umbrella organizations such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC). They lobbied for the acknowledgement of languages other than English and French (for example, as credited subjects in schools), for an official recognition of the contribution of "other ethnic groups" when writing and representing Canada's history, and for more representation within the media. One of the underlying arguments throughout the discussion was the Ukrainian Canadians' pioneering experience in Western Canada, which was often paralleled with that of the English and French. Other important factors were the precarious situation in the homeland, the fear of Ukraine's Russification, and the inherent urge to preserve the Ukrainian heritage abroad. This "mission" was further complicated by the fact that the community in Canada had not seen a new wave of immigrants since the early 1950s and that Ukrainian language usage and community participation were also declining within the country.

THE MULTICULTURALISM POLICY: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

The multiculturalism policy introduced in 1971 acknowledged that Canada was a multicultural country within a bilingual framework. The government pledged to support ethnic groups—through cultural encounters and language acquisition—in overcoming cultural barriers so that they would have the opportunity to "share their cultural expressions and values with other Canadians." Furthermore, the government promised to support research proposals, art displays, and projects that fought racism. Hence groups had the chance to preserve their heritage through government-sponsored programs, but they had to apply for grants, since funding was not guaranteed, and all efforts to mobilize community members had to come from within the group. The policy was initially very positively received, and many Ukrainian Canadian representatives had high hopes that it would (re)invigorate the community and its activities. So how can one judge the developments over the next three decades?

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ACHIEVEMENTS—1971 ONWARD

Some of the strongest gains Ukrainians in Canada made in the post-1971 period were in the area of recognition and academic profile. Due to increased funding for "ethnic" writers (many Ukrainian Canadians among them), the market saw a diversification of literature by and about Ukrainian Canadians. The 1970s and 80s also saw a surge in the numbers of (academic) conferences held by Ukrainian Canadians that dealt with multiculturalism and the preservation of heritage. These kinds of activities were made possible by the emergence of Ukrainian Canadian institutes (such as CIUS at the University of Alberta), programs, and chairs of Ukrainian Studies. Ukrainian Canadian studies blossomed during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and certainly hit a pinnacle in 1991, when the centennial of Ukrainian settlement in Canada coincided with Ukraine's declaration of independence. Topics that were formerly understudied—for example, the Ukrainian settlement of the prairies, Ukrainian internment during World War I, the group's religious life—were now not only subjects of academic publications, but also part of wider curricula and course outlines. And Ukrainian Canadians achieved recognition beyond the academic sphere. For example, in 1990 Ray Hnatyshyn became the first Governor General of Canada of Ukrainian Canadian descent, and in 2009, the Canadian government initiated the *Paul Yuzyk Award for Multiculturalism*, which commemorates the "late Senator Yuzyk's pioneering legacy in the areas of multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism" and acknowledges that he "played a key role in the development and implementation of Canada's multiculturalism policy." The first recipient of the award was John Yaremko, the first Ukrainian Canadian elected to the Ontario legislature (1951), Ontario's first Minister of Citizenship, and a prominent advocate of multiculturalism.

SETBACKS

Although Ukrainian Canadians certainly achieved milestones in regards to recog-

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nition, the multiculturalism policy did not live up to everybody's expectations. One of the major points of discontent expressed by the community was the lack of actual *funding* for community organizations and activities. In a 2003 *UCC Multiculturalism Committee Position Paper*, the umbrella organization criticized the fact that any group seeking government funding through the Multiculturalism Program had to meet one of four "program objectives"—that is, the application had to deal with a) ethno-racial minorities participating in public decision-making; b) engagement in dialogue combatting racism; c) public institutions eliminating systemic barriers; and d) programs and services responding to ethno-racial diversity. None of these objectives were in line with Ukrainian Canadian goals as expressed by the UCC, namely, the preservation of language and the fight to combat the "attrition of a distinctive culture." In their statement, the UCC criticized the fact that the government was not meeting the "spirit and the letter of the law enshrined in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*," particularly in regards to the preservation of heritage. In a nutshell, the community had hoped that the multiculturalism policy would be a reliable form of funding for groups like theirs—the established immigrant group having to fight not overt forms of racism, but rather the slow eradication of their language and culture. Alas, this was not to be. However, the overall decline of the community in the decades following the announcement of the multiculturalism policy was not only caused by a lack of funding. With Ukraine's independence in 1991, one of the major "causes" or

driving forces for the community was eliminated, and the new wave of immigrants that came in the 1990s had, for the most part, no interest in joining existing community organizations. Hence, the decline in membership continued, and it is questionable whether increased government funding could have stopped this trend.

CONCLUSION

When evaluating multiculturalism in Canada between 1971 and 2009, it becomes obvious that the policy itself and its implementation have significantly developed, responding to changes in immigration patterns in Canada. When examining the initial demands of Ukrainian Canadians involved in the multiculturalism discussion, one cannot declare the ensuing policy either a complete success or a complete failure. In regards to recognition, the multiculturalism policy certainly achieved much, particularly from a Ukrainian Canadian and a historian's perspective. From a perspective of community funding, Ukrainian Canadians and their particular cause did not fare so well. From a historian's perspective, the achievements in the area of recognition outweigh the setbacks in regards to community funding. The discussion during the 1960s and the subsequent official policy opened doors for ongoing discourse and developments, creating a forum for continuous dialogue, scholarly debate, and constant re-evaluation. By re-evaluating our goals, successes, and failures, we acknowledge that multiculturalism is not a static policy, not a "one-size-fits-all" solution, but an ongoing conversation. Multiculturalism also helped us to advance our notion of what it means to be an inclusive society, a society that recognizes the contribution of many groups to its past, present, and future, and that in itself can be judged as a success. ❦

* In this case, the term "established" refers to groups—for example, Germans or Ukrainians—that came to Canada in larger numbers as early as the 19th century.