THE POLES
IN CANADA

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Distribution of the people of POLISH ORIGIN in Canada, 1971

Source: Statistics Canada
THE POLES IN CANADA

I — The Polish Background

Poland has experienced one of the most turbulent historical evolutions in Europe. Situated on a broad plain with few natural borders, the country has oscillated between periods of impressive expansion and times when the very existence of the nation was threatened. By the close of the middle ages, the Poles had created a sprawling Commonwealth which reached from the Baltic to the Black Sea and to the very gates of Moscow. At its height in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this Commonwealth was a multinational and multicultural state with a parliamentary form of government and an elective monarchy unique in Europe. The ten per cent of the population recognized as noble enjoyed extensive civil rights, but these were purchased at the expense of the rest of the population who were excluded from political life and increasingly subordinated to the economic control of the nobility. By the eighteenth century, the Polish Commonwealth had become an anachronism in Europe. Its nobility resisted the creation of a strong centralized monarchy and its parliamentary system degenerated into constitutional paralysis. Although this deadlock was broken at the end of the century and a hurried program of reforms undertaken, it was too late. Between 1772 and 1795 Poland’s neighbors, Russia, Prussia and Austria, intervened to prevent its revival and partitioned its lands.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Poles struggled to reunify the shattered fragments of their state. Uprisings in one or more of the partitioned regions punctuated the century, but with the defeat of each rising, the partitioning powers tightened their control with repressive legislation and concerted policies designed to suppress any further manifestations of Polish nationalism. In the Prussian sector, Bismarck’s government waged a ‘Kulturkampf’ aimed at forcing the Polish peasantry from their ancestral lands and replacing them with German immigrants. In the Russian sector, after the collapse of the insurrection of 1863-4, the very name ‘Poland’ officially disappeared, a rigid Russian bureaucracy was installed, and the Polish language was banned from public life. The most tolerant conditions existed in the Austrian zone, called Galicia, where the Polish landowning class preserved their economic privileges and some regional autonomy in exchange for policing the Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) peasants on their lands. The three sectors evolved in radically different economic directions. The relatively small Prussian sector became an agricultural breadbasket for the newly united German Reich. Russian Poland, much larger and more populated, developed large textile centres to supply the vast Russian market. Although Russian Poland contained only about 7% of the population of the Russian Empire, its industrial output was about one quarter of the total. At the same time, the emancipation of the Polish peasantry from their landlords’ control produced an agricultural crisis as a newly landless population streamed into the cities or emigrated in search of a livelihood. Overpopulated, industrially underdeveloped and still in the grip of wealthy landowners, Galicia, midway in size between the other two sectors, was the most economically backward region of Poland.
During the nineteenth century millions of Poles left the land in search of work. This massive shift was initially seasonal in nature, but it grew to involve the crossing of partition boundaries and, after 1870, emigration to other parts of Europe or to the Americas. Between 1870 and 1914 approximately 1.2 million Poles emigrated from the Prussian zone, another 1.3 million from the Russian sector and 1.1 million from Galicia. The United States was by far the most important destination and some 2.6 million Poles moved there. The German lands absorbed about 400,000, the more remote parts of the Russian Empire another 300,000, the remaining European countries 100,000, and the other American nations 200,000, of which the largest proportion settled in Brazil and Canada.

Although Polish immigrants to the United States numbered in the millions before World War I, the absence of any large Polish communities, the limited opportunities for industrial wage labour, and delayed expansion into the West combined to inhibit large-scale Polish immigration to Canada. Only a handful of Poles arrived before 1890. Perhaps the best known was Sir Casimir Gzowski, who left Poland after the collapse of the 1830-1 insurrection against the Russians. Gzowski’s success as an engineer and contractor gave him access to Toronto’s economic elite, and he was awarded various distinctions including appointment as a colonel in the Canadian militia, membership in the Senate of the University of Toronto and ultimately service as lieutenant governor of Ontario. Although to some Polish Canadians Gzowski remains a symbol of upward social mobility within Anglo-Canadian society, to others he appears to have purchased his success at the expense of his Polish identity. Yet during his lifetime there was not much of a Polish Canadian community with which to identify. In the 1870s there were only about 600 Poles in Canada. A few had settled in the Montreal area, but most were located in Ontario. In 1858, sixteen families from the Kashub region of northern Poland had fled Prussian oppression and settled in the Barry’s Bay region of Ontario. They were quickly followed by hundreds more and by the 1880s there was a thriving community of Kashubs settled along the Opeongo line in Barry’s Bay and Wilno. By 1872 another 52 Polish families had settled in Berlin (now Kitchener) Ontario and during the 1870s a number of Polish artisans and labourers migrated from the United States to the growing city of Toronto in search of work. Between 1880 and 1885 many Poles also found jobs in the ballast crews and steel gangs which extended the Canadian Pacific Railway across the continent. Other Polish labourers were attracted by the booming mining and forest industries of northern Ontario and western Canada. But ultimately it was the vast and fertile tracts of western Canada, recently made accessible by the railways, which drew the majority of the first wave of Polish immigrants to Canada.

II — The First Wave: Polish Immigration Prior to 1914

There were, as Table 1 shows, three distinct waves of Polish immigrants to Canada. The first wave, which began in the late nineteenth century and peaked just before 1914, consisted largely of impoverished peasants, most of whom headed for the prairies where they established farms. Polish immigration to Canada was interrupted by World War I, but resumed in the 1920s. Although most of the people in this second wave also originated in rural areas, they pre-
TABLE I: POLISH IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Polish* Immigration</th>
<th>% of Total Canadian Immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>73,094</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1920</td>
<td>35,409</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1930</td>
<td>47,719</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1940</td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>36,127</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>40,848</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>17,362</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1978</td>
<td>8,017</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Arrivals as distinguished from immigrants, since many soon departed for the USA or perhaps returned to Europe. Canada has never kept emigration statistics and so it is difficult to assess the exact outflow.

TABLE II: PEOPLE OF POLISH ORIGIN IN CANADA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Polish Population in Canada</th>
<th>% of Canadian Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>6,285 *</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>33,652</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>53,403</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>145,503</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>167,485</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>219,845</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>323,517</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>316,430**</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Census statistics prior to 1901 do not differentiate between Russian-Polish, or Russian and Polish.

**Between 1900 and 1965, Polish was defined by ethnic origin; since 1966, the Polish category is based on the country of former residence. This change explains the decline between 1961 and 1971.
ferred to locate in the urban areas of central Canada, thereby contributing to an eastward shift in the Canadian Polish community’s centre of gravity. The Depression and the outbreak of World War II again interrupted Polish immigration, but it resumed after 1945, particularly to the urban centres of central Canada, and Toronto emerged as the city containing the largest concentration of Poles in the country. The third wave of immigrants was composed of military men, professionals and the intelligentsia; their motives for coming to Canada were primarily political and they were less inclined to assimilate completely into Canadian life because of their intense concern with Polish affairs. Each of these waves arose in historically different circumstances, and encountered quite different conditions in Canada.

Between 1896 and 1914 approximately 110,000 Poles entered Canada. The overwhelming majority were from Galicia, and were recruited by various steamship and railway companies. By 1900, thousands of agents and sub-agents circulated throughout Galicia advertising economic opportunities in the Canadian West. At ports like Danzig (Gdansk) and Hamburg, steamships received their passengers for the long transatlantic crossing. Upon arrival in Halifax or Quebec City, the immigrants boarded primitive railway coaches for their journey to Winnipeg or other regional centres where they disembarked and set out for government homesteads or railway lands scattered throughout the prairies.

Galicia was the original home of many Ukrainian as well as Polish immigrants. The two groups had a long tradition of interaction and in Canada they often settled in the same rural communities throughout the prairies and worked together at the arduous task of clearing the land, building cabins, planting crops and maintaining the rough pioneer roads. Both groups tended to be poor and they faced similar problems. A 1917 survey of Slavic settlements in rural western Canada revealed that 50% of the families interviewed had possessed no money upon arrival in Canada and another 42% had owned less than $500, at a time when the Canadian government considered $1,500 as the minimum needed for commercial farming. The Poles and Ukrainians from Galicia were also not prepared for the completely different challenges of Canadian farming: they had much to learn about soil conditions, suitable seed types, climatic peculiarities, and the use of modern farm implements. Their inability to speak English often prevented them from taking advantage of the expertise of established English-speaking farmers, who frequently viewed them with hostility and suspicion. Because of their poverty, many of them were forced to supplement their income by working for more prosperous Canadian farmers. Working as a hired hand provided the immigrant with a type of apprenticeship in the techniques of modern farming and generated capital which he could invest in his land or use to send for his family.

The loneliness caused by separation from families and friends was probably the heaviest psychological burden which the settlers had to face. It was often years before they could afford the steamship and railway fares to bring their wives and children to Canada. Crop fluctuations, irregular employment and the constant burden of remitting money to their families left little surplus capital. Even after families were reunited, husbands and wives, fathers and children had to re-establish their relationships in the arduous conditions of a
primitive farm. The prolonged absence of adult males away on the work gangs meant that the responsibility of running the farm sometimes devolved on the wife and children who often found the adjustment to Canadian life onerous, particularly if the family were isolated from Polish or Ukrainian neighbors. These immigrants from Galicia were, however, hardy people, inured to harsh physical conditions. Because they established gardens, diversified their crops and maintained cows and poultry, they were partially insured against crop failures and slumping grain markets and most of them soon realized that immigration to Canada brought a distinct improvement in their standard of living.

Although the bulk of Polish immigrants to Canada before 1914 were farmers, a significant number settled in Winnipeg where they gravitated towards the heavily ethnic 'North End'. Others left the city on a seasonal basis, seeking jobs on the railways, in the bush camps, or in the grain fields at harvest time. Between 1907 and 1914, Canada's railway companies alone required nearly 70,000 workers every year, while resource industries and urban factories also sought immigrant help on both a seasonal and full-time basis. The influx of unaccompanied Polish males peaked in 1913 when 57% of the 11,000 arrivals were classified as industrial workers rather than agriculturalists. Many of these men were recruited by private employment agencies, frequently operated by Polish Canadian businessmen located in the major urban centres. Although some of these ethnic intermediaries exploited their countrymen shamelessly, they did provide ready access to jobs and help in adjusting to a challenging new environment. They also facilitated the transatlantic movement of Polish 'sojourners' who regarded Canada merely as a temporary place of employment. The Polish industrial workers were sustained materially and psychologically by kinship ties and by the emergence of Polish neighborhoods in Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Hamilton where Polish boardinghouses, stores, restaurants and mutual aid societies reinforced the sense of Polish identity and assisted immigrants in making the transition to Canadian society.

The Roman Catholic Church dominated the cultural life of the Polish immigrants. Over centuries, as Poland struggled against its Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim neighbors, a firm identification between Polish nationality and Catholicism emerged and most Poles brought with them a deep and traditional commitment to Catholicism. In Canada, however, the deferential aspect of traditional village life underwent considerable modification and the immigrants became more assertive. This independent attitude occasionally created problems with priests arriving from Poland, who expected to receive a steady income and to exercise a dominant influence in parish affairs. Moreover, since most parishes were controlled by French Canadian, Irish or German clergy, the early Polish immigrants were required to make a number of difficult adjustments; even the most rudimentary religious observances, such as confession, were hampered because of linguistic differences or changes in ritual. Contact with German Catholics, in particular, reminded immigrants from Prussian Poland of the Kulturkampf which they had fled. In 1901 the congregation at the Winnipeg Holy Ghost parish turned against the Oblate Fathers because of their use of the German language. Affiliation with the dissident Polish National Church, centred in Chicago, offered an attractive alternative
which promised full ownership of church property by the congregation and parish democracy, but the National Church did not make much headway among Polish Canadians. Nor did the Protestant churches which made a determined effort to convert Polish immigrants as part of a more general program of Canadianization. The vast majority of the immigrants continued to support the welfare and social institutions provided by the Roman Catholic Church. The Holy Ghost Fraternal Society of Winnipeg, founded in 1902, was one of the first Polish mutual aid societies in western Canada, offering the sickness, unemployment and life insurance benefits so needed by the immigrants. The society provided a focus for the celebration of key national religious festivals, feast days and other social events which fostered a sense of ethnic cohesiveness and gave psychological support, particularly to those who had been alienated by their contacts with the rest of Canadian society.

The Roman Catholic Church also played an essential role in language maintenance through a network of Polish parochial schools. To some extent this development represented a transfer of European experiences to the Canadian environment. Attempts by the Russian and Prussian governments to restrict the use of Polish had been deeply resented by the Polish population; Austrian authorities had been more liberal in their educational policies and Polish immigrants from Galicia expected to have an opportunity to educate their children in their own language. Between 1897 and 1918, bilingual public schools existed in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and in 1905 the Oblate Fathers established a training school for bilingual teachers in Winnipeg. In 1916 there were as many as 111 Polish/Ukrainian schools in Manitoba, most of them located in rural areas. During World War I the bilingual school system became the target of Canadian nationalists who argued that it impeded the process of Canadianization. In 1916 the Manitoba government abolished the system, and Polish language teaching was restricted to part time schools held after regular school hours and on weekends. Although Manitoba’s Polish Catholics cooperated closely with both Ukrainian Catholics and French Canadians in an unsuccessful attempt to defend the bilingual school system, on other matters there were distinct differences of opinion. Many Poles resented the fact that the Ukrainians were given a bishop of their own and a national parish, while the Poles, although granted their parishes, long remained under the jurisdiction of the French Canadian hierarchy.

Polish language newspapers also helped the immigrants to maintain a sense of identity. Prior to 1920, Winnipeg was the home of the two most important Polish newspapers in Canada, the Catholic Weekly, published by the Oblate Fathers, and Czas (Time), published by Frank Dajacek, a local Czech entrepreneur. While the Catholic Weekly had a religious focus, Czas concentrated on more secular issues. However, both covered events in Poland, circulated news of Polish-American activities and transmitted information designed to assist Poles in adjusting to Canadian life. They told their readers how to secure a homestead, how to obtain naturalization papers, and how to send remittances to relatives in Poland. For those Poles who decided to bring their families to Canada, the newspaper editor often became the indispensable intermediary with Canadian immigration officials. Since many editors had contacts among the various labour agencies which supplied Polish workers to Cana-
dian industries, they also facilitated the immigrants' search for employment.

Prior to World War I, the Polish community in Canada was overwhelmingly working class. Like the Ukrainians and other immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, Poles accepted the most arduous and unstable employment in order to subsist. Exploitation in the work camps and in urban factories was not uncommon with irregular wages, dangerous working conditions, and the prospect of summary dismissal. Because of the poverty of their families, many Polish women were required to seek jobs as domestics, in the homes of affluent Anglo-Canadians. One way of dealing with this hostile environment was to return to Poland. Although Canadian immigration statistics do not record emigration, contemporary reports indicate that between 1906 and 1914 about 25% of the Polish immigrants who came to Canada ultimately chose this route. This percentage correlated with the high ratio of unaccompanied Polish workers who were attracted by the high wages in the rapidly expanding Canadian economy. Others expressed their alienation through militant trade unions and socialist organizations. The Ukrainian Social Democratic movement founded in Winnipeg in 1907 also appealed to some Polish workers, although most of these joined the pro-communist Polish Workers' and Farmers' Association after it was created in 1931. That a small number of Poles were active in socialist and labour organizations was used as an additional argument by those Canadians who advocated a restrictive immigration policy.

For many Canadians, the arrival of some 800,000 Slavic immigrants between 1896 and 1914 seemed to threaten the future of the country. Despite a general recognition of the need for immigrant labour to perform the most arduous agricultural and industrial jobs, they were apprehensive that rural settlement in ethnic blocs was 'balkanizing' Canada. These fears became more pronounced when immigrant concentrations appeared in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary. Lack of familiarity with the cultural values of the Slavic immigrants produced a hostile and condescending attitude towards the newcomers and the Poles of Manitoba were periodically the target of Anglo-Canadian chauvinists, whose outbursts were especially pronounced during elections, strikes or parliamentary debates on Canadian immigration policy. Even Anglo-Canadian reformers were inclined to blame poor sanitary conditions and the rising urban crime rate on Poles, Ukrainians and other European immigrants. In his 1909 classic, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, J.S. Woodsworth described Polish immigrants as undesirables. This negative stereotype was perpetuated in the 1909 novel, *The Foreigner* by the Reverend C.W. Gordon (Ralph Connor), in which a young Slavic immigrant bravely rejects his Galician heritage and embraces Anglo-Canadian values, even to the point of marrying a Scottish-Canadian 'beauty'.

Cultural chauvinism was by no means confined to the Anglo-Canadian community. Polish immigrants also encountered it in Quebec, particularly among French Canadian nationalists who were preoccupied with safeguarding the cultural identity of their community. The Polish population of Montreal had grown from about 400 in 1901 to almost a thousand in 1911, and economic competition reinforced linguistic differences as a source of friction. Feeling threatened by the overwhelming numbers of francophones in whose midst they lived, the Montreal Polish community established the Sons of Poland in 1904.
Lectures on Polish topics were sponsored, patriotic anniversaries celebrated, and community pressure was mobilized to secure additional Polish parishes. Although the Polish population of Toronto numbered only about 500 in 1911, it too organized branches of the Sons of Poland, as well as affiliates of the American based White Eagle Polish Society, and so did other centres which had a sizeable Polish population such as Sidney, Hamilton, St. Catherines and Regina.

World War I brought immigration from Poland to an abrupt halt. Since most Poles in Canada came from the Austrian province of Galicia, they were officially classified as enemy aliens under the War Measures Act and their civil rights were substantially reduced. Under the War Time Elections Act of 1917, a large number of Canadian Poles were deprived of the franchise. Polish language newspapers from the United States were subjected to censorship and, as Canada was allied with the Russian Empire, many were banned because of their anti-Russian sentiments. The Catholic Weekly and Czas were both warned to refrain from any criticism of Russia, despite its repressive policies in Poland. Nonetheless, Canadian Poles did share in the Canadian war effort. Polish volunteers served in the Canadian Armed Forces, many of them claiming they had emigrated from Russian Poland rather than Galicia in order to enlist. Polish Canadians also contributed to the Victory Bond Campaign, collected food and medicine for war victims in Poland, and worked tirelessly to remind Canadian public opinion that Poland had been subjected to German and Austrian rule involuntarily. Indeed, the Canadian National Council of Poles, created during the war, met with Prime Minister Robert Borden to press the case for Polish independence.

III — The Second Wave, 1919-1939

In 1918, all three of the empires which had originally partitioned Poland disintegrated. The Russian Revolution created a power vacuum in vast areas of Poland, Byelorussia and the Ukraine. Shortly thereafter, the Habsburg monarchy collapsed as national minorities throughout the Austrian Empire seceded and established independent states. Late in 1918, Germany too was convulsed by internal disorders which brought down the Kaiser. On 11 November 1918, just as the guns on the western front fell silent, an independent Polish Republic was proclaimed in Warsaw. The revival of the Polish state after 123 years of partition was accompanied by colossal problems of reorganization and reconstruction. The country had suffered terribly from the war and its production levels of 1919 were a scant 30% of what they had been before 1914. Poland also had to reintegrate the economic structures of the three hitherto separate zones of partition in a climate of international insecurity and internal upheaval. The newly established state contained large Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Jewish minorities; its economy was still heavily agricultural; both land reform and industrialization were needed to stimulate development; and no consensus existed on the precise form which the new constitution should take. The early twenties were a period of runaway inflation, ministerial crisis, political confrontation, and even one assassination. Faced with these severe problems, the government of Poland was favourably disposed towards continuing emigration as a sort of safety valve to ease conditions at home. Delegations were sent to investigate
conditions in Canada and in 1928 the Research Institute for Emigration in Warsaw prepared a report which suggested that prospective Polish emigrants turn their attention away from the United States, which had imposed strict immigration quotas, and consider the agricultural and industrial opportunities offered by Canada.

In fact, this message had already been received by prospective immigrants, especially as the Canadian economy began to recover in the mid-1920s. By 1925 the railway companies and the labour intensive corporations were demanding cheap European labour, and the Canadian government responded by removing many immigration restrictions. A significant number of Polish immigrants responded to the prospect of high wages, guaranteed employment, and assisted passage through the auspices of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and the newly formed Canadian National Railway system. Although most of these immigrants were categorized as agriculturalists, partly to cater to the Canadian myth that industrial labour was not being imported, many of them immediately gravitated toward wage employment rather than to farming. While some of the newcomers went to the frontier mines or bush camps, more than half found work in the rapidly expanding industrial centres of central Canada. The beginnings of an eastward shift in the Polish Canadian community’s centre of gravity was reflected in the 1921 census. Of the 145,503 Poles recorded, 87,361 (60%) lived in the three prairie provinces, but Ontario already contained 42,384 (29%), the largest group in a single province. Although Polish Canadians were still heavily concentrated in agricultural and semi-skilled labour, and had not achieved the same degree of success in the world of commerce as the Germans, Jews or Ukrainians, many small artisinal workshops and grocery stores were owned by Poles.

Approximately 52,000 Poles entered Canada between 1919 and 1931, when Canada’s gates were firmly closed to further immigration because of the Great Depression. This second wave of Polish immigrants shared many characteristics with the group which had arrived prior to World War I, most notably in the preponderance of males and their tendency to seek semi-skilled employment. These newcomers did, however, have a somewhat higher level of education than their predecessors and were more aware of their Polish identity, since they had been directly involved in the struggle for Polish independence and had seen that struggle succeed. They also benefited from the material and cultural assistance of the Polish government. Reception centres were organized in Canada and Polish consuls maintained close contact with new arrivals, particularly in cases where economic difficulties were encountered. The Polish government attempted to foster a sense of belonging to a world-wide Polish community among both the pre-war and post-war immigrants by subsidizing organizations such as the World Federation of Poles Abroad and the Federation of Polish Societies and newspapers such as the Catholic Weekly, Czas and Polonia.

Polish institutions in Canada enjoyed steady growth during the 1920s and 1930s. The Catholic Church in particular grew in strength. By 1929 there were 33 Polish parishes and 157 Polish missions scattered throughout Canada and in 1933 Catholic groups across the country joined together under the aegis of the Association of Poles in Canada to coordinate their activities. Two rival groups, the Polish National Church and the Polish Friendly Alliance of Canada, also
made substantial progress during the 1930s. By 1939, the Alliance had 17 branches scattered throughout Ontario and was publishing its own weekly newspaper, the Zwiazkowiec. There were several other distinctly Polish organizations such as the Falcons and the White Eagle Association, a Polish Teachers' Association, and Polish branches of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the Canadian Legion and even the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. This list indicates the wide range of activities within the community, and suggests the extent to which Canadianization had occurred among certain members of the community. In a category all by itself was the Polish Workers' and Farmers' Association, or Polish People's Association as it was known after 1935. It was bitterly opposed by other Polish Canadian organizations because it maintained close contact with the Communist Party of Canada and took a generally pro-Soviet political stance on east European issues.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had a severe impact on Canadian Poles. Those who had settled on prairie farms experienced repeated crop failures and the collapse of grain prices. Although thousands of farmers were forced off their land, many Poles were able to survive by diversifying their crops and adopting a frugal life style. In the urban centres, Polish Canadians were not so fortunate. Highly concentrated in the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, they were faced with unemployment or a reduction of their wages to starvation levels, and they experienced difficulties in obtaining relief because of their recent arrival. Young Polish labourers were probably well represented in the army of unemployed which rode the rails in a desperate search for jobs and many Poles eventually found their way to the single men's camps located on the Canadian frontier. Others, particularly those who were not naturalized, were threatened with deportation on grounds of indigency; those involved with the Polish Workers' and Farmers' Association or with communist labour organizations were even more vulnerable. Some Poles, however, actually welcomed the opportunity to return to the mother country, driven by the hope of securing better economic opportunities there. Others were motivated by patriotism as tensions between Poland and Germany intensified during the late 1930s.

IV — The Third Wave: Polish Immigration Since 1939

Hitler attacked Poland on 1 September 1939, thereby unleashing World War II. Six million Polish citizens, half of them Jews, died during the war. More than one out of every five citizens of pre-war Poland did not survive to see the war's end, 38% of the country's wealth was destroyed, its major cities were levelled, and its economy was brought to a standstill. The end of the war brought not liberation but a subservient communist regime imposed upon the exhausted Polish state by Soviet troops.

During the war, Canadian immigration officials were favourably disposed towards an influx of Polish refugees, although reluctant to sanction any large scale immigration because of the possible economic consequences. Many of the Poles who came between 1939 and 1945 were channelled into Canada through the joint efforts of the Canadian and British authorities and the Polish government-in-exile. In 1941-2, 400 Polish technicians and 265 scientists came to Canada from Great Britain with the cost of their passage assumed by the Polish Consul General in Canada and their employment assured by Canadian in-
dustries. This highly trained group immigrated to Canada precisely because of their expertise; they did not come to settle on farms or perform semi-skilled work in industry. They were the precursors of a new wave of Polish immigrants to Canada, a wave entirely unlike the first two in its motivation and background.

Poland’s large Jewish community was a particular target of Nazi brutality, but it was difficult for Jews to immigrate to Canada since anti-Semitism was still strong in certain areas of the country. Fortunately, the Polish Consul General, Victor Podoski, gave those Jews able to escape Poland the full financial assistance of his office and worked closely with various Canadian Jewish refugee organizations. After 1943, news of Nazi and Soviet atrocities in Poland resuscitated the somewhat dormant humanitarian dimension of Canadian immigration policy. At the same time a rapidly expanding industrial and agricultural economy, and a manpower shortage created by Canada’s military effort, created a climate more favourably disposed to the entry of more refugees from Poland, regardless of religious background.

Canada’s involvement with the refugee agencies of the United Nations, such as the International Refugee Organization and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Organization, and a continuation of the economic boom combined to facilitate the entry of large numbers of Polish immigrants in the post-war years. In May 1946 the Canadian authorities agreed to accept 2,800 demobilized members of the Polish army who had served with the British Eighth Army in Italy. Another 2,500 Polish army veterans arrived from England in 1947 as part of the demobilization process. These immigrants represented an elite in Polish society and they possessed higher educational levels and more diverse skills than the earlier Polish immigrants. They were largely motivated by political concerns in deciding to emigrate to Canada. Having fought six years to secure an independent Poland, they preferred political exile to foreign domination in Poland. Between 1946 and 1952, Canada admitted some 166,000 displaced persons, approximately 39,000 of whom were Polish. Most of the men were required to sign contracts which guaranteed employment with a particular Canadian company, usually at unskilled or semi-skilled labour in frontier extractive industries or in agriculture. After an apprenticeship of two years, they were allowed to change jobs and bring their families to Canada.

After the war, the communist regime in Poland virtually sealed the country’s borders to prevent the loss of manpower desperately needed at home for the awesome task of reconstruction. In 1956, however, it eased restrictions on emigration in the interest of reuniting families separated by the war and its aftermath and a modest trickle of Poles entered Canada directly from Poland. The numbers would undoubtedly have been greater, but the Polish government did not accord the right to emigrate to its most ‘productive’ citizens and the majority of the 31,320 Poles who immigrated to Canada between 1957 and 1971 were people who had left Poland during the war and settled elsewhere, before relocating in Canada for economic reasons. In the early 1970s, the number of Polish immigrants entering Canada continued at a relatively low level, ranging from several hundred to about 2,000 per annum. Recently, because of the profound economic difficulties and political tensions in Poland, the number of emigrants has risen sharply.
The third wave of Polish immigrants were to some extent motivated by economic considerations, but their overriding impulse was a rejection of the communist system and a search for political liberty. This was particularly true of the veterans and displaced persons who arrived immediately after the war. They had experienced severe physical and psychological traumas during the war and many had endured the uncertainties and regimentation of the European relief camps. Not surprisingly, they found it difficult to adjust to the Canadian environment. Many of them considered life in Canada as a form of political exile, while those who had professional training and qualifications resented the two years of unskilled labour which they were required to perform in the more remote regions of the country. Particularly frustrating was the attitude of those Canadians who underestimated their abilities because of their unfamiliarity with the English language. Many Canadians had a negative stereotype of the displaced persons and the term ‘DP’ assumed a perjorative character. This prejudice was to some extent reflected among Canadian professional associations, which were reluctant to certify Polish trained doctors, dentists, lawyers and teachers.

The immediate concern of most Polish displaced persons was to bring to Canada any of their dependents still in European refugee camps. Since they were generally employed in steady jobs at relatively decent wages and maintained a frugal life style, many of them quickly accumulated the funds to pay for the passage of the other members of their families. The formal arrangements could be very complex, but the Canadian Immigration Branch, Polish Canadian organizations and the International Refugee Organization all cooperated to facilitate the process. Of course, the newly arriving wives and children experienced their own problems of adjusting to Canadian life. But children tend to be more flexible and the ‘hard knock’ world of the school room and the playground forced them to adjust relatively quickly, while the wives were assisted by already established Polish Canadian organizations, especially in the urban centres of Ontario and Quebec.

The arrival of large numbers of post-war immigrants dramatically altered the residential and occupational character of Canada’s Polish population. In 1971, 144,115 (46%) of the 316,430 Poles in Canada were located in Ontario, while only 113,940 (36%) lived in the prairie provinces, which a generation before had contained a large majority of Canada’s Poles. The only other provinces with substantial Polish populations in 1971 were Quebec with 23,970 (7%) and British Columbia with 29,595 (9%). The community had also become increasingly urban in character. In 1941 only 49% of Canada’s Poles were located in cities, but by 1971 that proportion had grown to 76%, with 63% concentrated in Canada’s seventeen census metropolitan areas. The Polish population of Toronto increased from 13,094 in 1941 to 51,180 in 1971, and the city replaced Winnipeg as the headquarters for most major Polish organizations.

The organizational character of the Polish community also underwent profound modification as a result of World War II. In 1944, as it became clear that the return of peace would be accompanied by an influx of refugees, the major Polish Canadian groups created an umbrella organization known as the Canadian Polish Congress to coordinate their efforts to assist Polish immigrants. The flood of veterans and displaced persons after 1945 not only rein-
### TABLE III

**DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE OF POLISH ORIGIN IN CANADA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Atlantic* Provinces</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Prairies</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Northern Territories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>18 (-)</td>
<td>274 (0.02)</td>
<td>2,918 (0.13)</td>
<td>2,813 (0.68)</td>
<td>136 (0.08)</td>
<td>none recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>604 (0.07)</td>
<td>3,233 (0.16)</td>
<td>10,631 (0.42)</td>
<td>18,540 (1.36)</td>
<td>610 (0.16)</td>
<td>none recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1045 (0.07)</td>
<td>3,264 (0.14)</td>
<td>15,787 (0.54)</td>
<td>31,927 (1.53)</td>
<td>1,361 (0.26)</td>
<td>12 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1609 (0.11)</td>
<td>9,534 (0.33)</td>
<td>42,384 (1.24)</td>
<td>87,361 (3.82)</td>
<td>4,599 (0.66)</td>
<td>16 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>2440 (0.14)</td>
<td>10,036 (0.30)</td>
<td>54,893 (1.45)</td>
<td>91,297 (3.83)</td>
<td>8,744 (1.07)</td>
<td>75 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2837 (0.19)</td>
<td>16,998 (0.42)</td>
<td>89,825 (1.95)</td>
<td>93,628 (3.72)</td>
<td>16,301 (1.40)</td>
<td>361 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>4064 (0.18)</td>
<td>30,790 (0.59)</td>
<td>149,524 (2.40)</td>
<td>113,861 (3.66)</td>
<td>24,870 (1.53)</td>
<td>408 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4340 (0.21)</td>
<td>23,970 (0.39)</td>
<td>144,115 (1.8)</td>
<td>113,940 (3.2)</td>
<td>29,585 (1.3)</td>
<td>1280 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Newfoundland statistics are not included until 1951.
vigorated Polish Canadian organizational life, but also gave it a markedly different character. Clubs and societies, like the Association of Polish Engineers, the Federation of Polish Women, the Polish ex-Political Prisoners Association, the Polish Teachers' Association, the Polish Research Institute in Toronto and the Polish Library and Polish Institute of Learning in Montreal, reflected the different needs and interests of these newer immigrants. Because of their numbers, their higher levels of skills and education and their intense Polish consciousness, they assumed a leading role in Polish Canadian life. Occasionally there was friction between the newer immigrants and the members of the earlier waves, since those who had settled in Canada prior to World War II or were born here naturally felt a closer identification with Canadian life than the more recent immigrants. Indeed, many of the latter considered themselves political exiles, awaiting the overthrow of the communist government in Poland after which they expected to return to their homeland. Their primary allegiance was to the Polish government-in-exile in London, England, and they strongly supported the anti-communist measures adopted by the Canadian government after 1946. One of the most active of the newer Polish Canadian organizations was the Polish Combatants' Association whose 1,500 members established some 23 branches across the country. As veterans who had served in the Polish Army, they lobbied the Canadian government for the same pension and disability rights as Canadian veterans and they urged the Canadian government to speak out on matters of concern to east European emigres. Many Polish Canadians had also served in the Canadian Armed Forces but they tended to organize themselves in branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, which often conduct meetings in Polish although they deal with other Legion branches in English. Generally the two veterans' organizations reflect the different attitudes of the pre-war and post-war immigrants. The Polish Combatants form part of a world-wide structure whose primary objective is to restore independence and democracy to Poland, while the Polish branches of the Legion are more concerned with Canadian issues.

Most Polish organizations in Canada regard the present regime in Warsaw with disapproval. The only exception is the pro-communist Polish Democratic Association which strongly opposed the entry of Polish refugees into Canada in the post-war years on the grounds that all 'legitimate' Polish migrants had a duty to return to Poland and assist in its reconstruction. Significantly, they did not take this advice themselves. Because of the intensification of the Cold War, the growing unpopularity of communism in Poland and the intense hostility of the Polish veterans and displaced persons, the Polish Canadian Left found itself with a membership of only about 1000, and largely isolated from the Polish Canadian mainstream. The Polish Democratic Association has maintained close ties with the Polish regime, but for the rest of the Polish Canadian community the extent of contact with the Warsaw government has been a serious problem. The post-war generation which dominated the Polish Canadian Congress was opposed to the recognition of the present regime, since it had not been democratically elected, and was concerned that even most innocent contacts might be interpreted as de facto recognition. The Polish Alliance of Canada, whose membership was drawn from those who had arrived in Canada before the war, argued for a more flexible approach which would allow for some
official contacts and exchanges. The issue was so controversial that in 1972 the 
Polish Alliance withdrew its 30 branches from the Polish Canadian Congress. 
Recent events in Poland, however, have clearly demonstrated the unpopular 
nature of the Polish regime and have re-united the various Polish Canadian 
orGANizations.

Because of the deep and close attachment which many Poles feel for their 
mother country, much of their communal and political activity has been directed 
not towards Canada, but towards Poland. Perhaps because of this continuing 
concern with Poland's fate, Canadian Poles have been notably absent from 
Canadian political life until very recently. Indeed, those Poles who viewed 
Canada only as a temporary workplace or in the later period as a haven for 
political exile took a long time to integrate. Greater involvement in Canadian 
affairs frequently did not occur for several decades during which economic and 
professional roots were developed, children were born, and the prospect of 
returning to Poland became little more than a pious intention. Polish political 
activity has also been inhibited by the relatively small size of the Polish popula-
tion and its wide dispersal across Canada. In many rural areas of western 
Canada, the Polish group was overshadowed by the more numerous and politi-
cally active Ukrainian community. By the turn of this century, Chicago, 
Detroit, Pittsburg and New York all contained extensive Polish neighbour-
hoods, but with the exception of Winnipeg's North End, no Canadian city had a 
Polish population large enough to engage in concerted political activity before 
1941. With the growth of a concentrated urban population since World War II 
several Polish neighbourhoods such as Toronto's Parkdale have emerged with 
their own distinctive political voice. Nonetheless, unlike their counterparts in the 
United States, Polish organizations in Canada rarely act as a political lobby or 
pressure group and most Poles show a tendency to avoid affiliation with any 
political party. In federal elections Poles have tended to vote for Liberal 
candidates, if only because, as the party most frequently in power, the Liberals 
have advantages when it comes to dispensing patronage to Polish cultural 
groups through the programs of the Citizenship Branch and the department of 
the Secretary of State. Indeed, the most prominent Polish Canadian political 
figure during the 1970s was Stanley Haidasz, for many years the Liberal MP for 
Parkdale, who during his term in the federal Cabinet was given responsibility 
over the government's multicultural program. At the provincial level, the large 
concentration of Poles in Ontario has made the Conservative party receptive to 
Polish cultural goals, while in some industrial centres, such as Oshawa, Hamil-
ton and Windsor, the New Democratic Party has occasionally been able to 
attract Polish voters. The latter trend has been even more pronounced in both 
the rural and urban areas of Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

Polish Canadians have also not been as involved in trade union activity as 
British, Finnish, Scandinavian and Ukrainian immigrants. The first wave of 
Polish immigrants in Canada were overwhelmingly agriculturists and even 
when they did move into rail gangs and bush camps, they did so merely to 
supplement their farm income and thus treated wage labour as a temporary 
involvement. Polish immigrants in the 1920s settled in industrial areas, but as 
unskilled labourers in mass production enterprises, such as meat packing, steel 
mills and automobile factories, which were not unionized until the mid-1940s.
Since Polish industrial workers did not settle in exclusively Polish working class districts, union activity was rarely directed specifically at them. The Catholic Church, which opposed labour militancy and socialism, also inhibited the emergence of a strong working class consciousness among Canadian Polish wage earners. The third wave of Polish immigrants gravitated towards white collar jobs and many of them established their own businesses. Moreover, by 1961 there was a significant occupational change on the part of both pre-war and post-war Polish immigrants and their descendants. The percentage engaged in agriculture and semi-skilled work decreased from 62% in 1941 to 25%, while the percentage involved in manufacturing advanced from 19% to 35%. Even more notable was the increase in the percentage of professionals and managers from 0.2% in 1941 to 15.8% during these twenty years.

Although the majority of the Polish Canadian population continue to adhere to the Roman Catholic Church, the number of parishes and missions has shrunk and the percentage of Poles adhering to the Church has declined from 81% in 1941 to 71% in 1971. Moreover, the ethnic composition of formerly Polish parishes has changed with the influx of Catholic immigrants of other ethnic backgrounds. In the small and more isolated parishes, English has often become the common medium of communication within the local church organization. In the larger urban centres, particularly in Toronto and Winnipeg, Polish churches remain centres of social, cultural and educational activity but the urban environment offers a wide variety of associational alternatives which weaken ties to the church. Indeed, the number of Canadian Poles adhering to Protestant churches seems to be on the rise, reflecting to some extent the forces of assimilation and a weakening of the traditional identification of Polish national identity with Catholicism.

Although the family remains a central feature of Polish life, it too has undergone considerable modification in recent years. For the earliest immigrants, traditional family patterns were simply transferred to the Canadian environment and reinforced by the Catholic clergy. The husband was considered the breadwinner and head of the household; the wife was viewed primarily as a mother; and the children were expected to be obedient and respectful towards their elders. The family acted not only as a social but also as an economic unit. Older children went to work to add to the family’s income, or assisted in the care and education of younger family members. The purchase of a house was important as a symbol of financial and social achievement. The house acted as a gathering place for members of the extended family and three generations frequently resided under the same roof. It was also common to take in boarders or to rent parts of the house to more recent arrivals from Poland. Renting supplemented the income of the householder, while facilitating the adjustment process for the newcomer who would have a Polish atmosphere around him to cushion his initial contact with Canadian society.

Economic necessity, especially in the urban environment, occasionally forced Polish wives into the labour force, but this was seen as a departure from the community’s traditional norms which emphasized mothering and housekeeping. Polish women did have some opportunities for participating in community affairs since both religious and secular organizations developed women’s auxiliaries which assumed significant roles in charitable and cultural activities,
particularly in supervising and teaching in part-time Polish language schools. Unfortunately, in many cases these auxiliaries were simply considered as domestic service for banquets and festivals; while the male members of the organization enjoyed themselves in the hall, the women auxiliaries were to be found in the kitchen preparing the food. Post-war immigration and upward mobility by Canadian-born Poles have altered traditional female roles within the community in several important ways. During the 1950s the Polish Women’s Federation of Canada was created as a women’s group acting quite independently of any religious or secular organization dominated by males. Although it espoused traditional values based on the family, Christian ethics and Polish culture, the Federation moved into areas of activity hitherto uncharted by Polish Canadian women. Through its bulletin, the Informator, it keeps its membership informed on issues crucial to women. A more recent women’s organization, the Marie-Curie Women’s Club of Toronto, provides a similar service for middle-class Polish women holding university degrees or married to professional men.

It is among the youth of the Polish Canadian community that the greatest changes have occurred. In pioneer times, it was almost inevitable that children would follow the occupation of their parents. With better schooling, increased mobility and Canadianization, many of the young have moved away from their roots, thus placing great strains on relations between generations. The children of the earlier Polish immigrants often aspired to a middle class style of life which baffled their farm oriented or blue collar parents and they acquired a geographical and occupational mobility which broke down their ties to the rural communities or urban neighbourhoods where they had originated and weakened their ethnic identity. An even more serious split developed between the first and second generations of the post-World War II Polish immigrants, as the intense political concern and Polish orientation of the veterans and displaced persons was not always understood by their children. Many Canadian born Poles, regardless of whether they are descendants of the more recent or the earlier immigrants, are disillusioned by and indifferent to the rivalries and disputes among the elders within the community’s organizations and one result of the disenchantment and frustration on the part of the community’s youth has been assimilation.

V — A Comparative Perspective

Many of Canada’s larger ethnic minorities have immigration patterns similar to those of the Poles. At the turn of the century, the Polish agriculturists who settled in western Canada were accompanied by Dutch, German, Scandinavian, Ukrainian and Hungarian settlers. Because the western European settlers were more favourably received by Anglo-Canadian society, were more eager to become part of the Canadian mainstream, and tended to learn English more quickly in order to take an active role in local affairs, they became the model of preferred immigrants. The Polish experience in Canada more closely resembles that of the Ukrainians and Hungarians. These groups met with considerable suspicion and hostility and they looked inward, developing a strong sense of group solidarity and a determination to preserve their ethnic identity. Nonetheless. Poles have assimilated more quickly than their Ukrainian neighbours, just as Scandinavians, a group comparable in size to the Poles, have assimilated
more quickly than the Dutch or Germans. In 1971 there were 356,985 Cana-
dians of Scandinavian descent and 316,425 of Polish in contrast to 1,317,200
Canadians of German descent and 580,660 Ukrainian Canadians. The very
large numbers of Germans and Ukrainians made it possible for them to settle in
communities large enough to maintain their language and traditions, particu-
larly on the prairies where the population was very scattered. In the inter-war
period, central Canada attracted more immigrants than did the prairies. While
many Germans continued to migrate to the prairies and many Dutch and Scan-
dinavian immigrants settled in Ontario’s agricultural areas, Hungarian, Polish
and Ukrainians increasingly gravitated towards the industrial centres of central
Canada. After 1945, large numbers of eastern European refugees came to
Canada, fleeing communist takeovers in their native countries. The experience
of all of these groups was similar. They shared a sense of political exile and a
strong interest in east European affairs. Unlike the unskilled and semi-skilled
Italian, Greek and Portuguese immigrants who entered Canada after 1945,
largely for economic rather than political reasons, all of the east European
groups contained a high percentage of the military and the intelligentsia. They
formed their own ethnic organizations and settled in relatively coherent ethnic
neighbourhoods.

In 1921, about 82% of the Canadian-born Poles could speak the Polish
language; by 1971 the number had declined to only 17%. Polish Canadian youth
are also more likely to intermarry with persons of other ethnic groups than most
east Europeans. In 1921 only 3% of Polish Canadian males contracted
marriages to Anglo-Canadian females, but this proportion had risen to 25% in
1961; indeed, by this time, two thirds of the marriages celebrated by Polish
Canadian males were with women outside of the Polish Canadian community.
The 1976 study, Non-Official Languages, reported that half of the Canadians
of Polish origin surveyed considered themselves to be Canadians only, with no
further ethnic qualifier. Fluency in the Polish language was shown to drop off
dramatically after the first generation. Whereas 65% of those born in Poland
considered themselves still fluent in Polish, by the third generation a scant 4%
were willing to make this claim. Significantly, only 34.1% of those surveyed
thought that the decreasing use of the Polish language was a serious problem.
The study found three different levels of familiarity with ancestral languages.
The least familiar were the Scandinavians, only 33.5% of whose descendants
claimed one of the Scandinavian languages as their mother tongue. A second
group included the Dutch (74.1%), Ukrainians (72.4%), Germans (69.1%), and
Poles (63.8%); not surprisingly, the Polish group was the least numerous in this
category. The European communities which reported the highest percentages
declaring ancestral languages as mother tongue included the Portuguese
(97.1%), the Greeks (91.2%), the Italians (87.9%) and the Hungarians (85.6%).
All four groups are relatively new in Canada, with large scale immigration
occurring only after World War II, and in the case of the Hungarians, especially
after the 1956 uprising against Soviet control.

Although the Polish community displays stronger tendencies towards
assimilation than most of Canada’s larger ethnic groups, it must be remem-
bered that general statistics can hide a fairly complex reality. The earliest wave
of Polish immigration was not numerous when compared with other groups, it
lacked significant numbers of intellectuals, and it was scattered across the prairies in a way which guaranteed that the Poles would be overshadowed by larger numbers of immigrants from other parts of Europe, most notably the Ukrainians. The prospect of upward mobility may also have dispersed the community while encouraging many of the young to abandon their identification with the Polish group because of prejudicial stereotypes which they felt might hamper success. The second wave brought a stronger sense of Polish nationalism, but the working class character of this group and the difficult economic conditions restricted institutional development. To these earlier waves, however, was added the post-1945 group which was much more committed to its Polish identity. The third wave settled in more concentrated patterns which at least offer the hope of creating self-sustaining communities in places like Toronto and Winnipeg. External events have also reawakened Polish Canadian awareness. The election of a Polish Pope has done much to alleviate malicious ethnic stereotypes while the Polish Solidarity movement has inspired Canadian Poles by its example. The community has banded together under the aegis of the Polish Canadian Congress to supply food and medicine to Poland and Solidarity's goals have been enthusiastically endorsed. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on Polish Canadian activity within Canada, but it is already obvious that Polish events have prompted Canadian Poles to greater lobbying efforts with the Canadian government and it may mean that in the future the Polish Canadian community will put this experience to use in securing for itself a stronger voice in the great issues which confront Canada.
Suggestions for Further Reading
