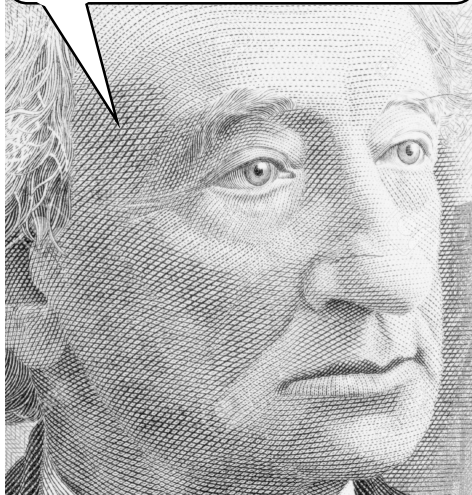


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"Look at the mass of foreign ignorance and vice which has flooded that country [the US] with communism, socialism, atheism and all other isms."



Sir John A. MacDonald, quoted in the *Lawrence [Kansas] Daily Journal*, Oct. 23, 1890.

## From Frying Pan to Prairie Fire: One Captivation after Another

By Richard Sanders

Captivated by the hype of ads churned out by Canada's government and profit-seeking shipping firms, many Ukrainians left the political and economic confines of their homeland, only to have their dreams of freedom dashed on the prairies. As historian Orest Martynowych noted, Ukrainians were "economically exploited, socially oppressed, culturally neglected, colonized people, preyed upon by foreign landowners, bureaucrats and merchants, and frequently patronized and humiliated by...privileged members of their own nationality."<sup>1</sup>

But, "for many of these Ukrainian peasants, immigration to Canada did not prove to be a liberating experience." In fact, "isolated from modern sectors of Canadian society and left without basic social services," said Martynowych, "life continued to be no less hazardous and insecure than...in the Old World."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, Canada's political system was anything but liberating. As Ukrainian researcher Wasyl Swystun wrote in J.S.Woodsworth's government report, *Ukrainian Rural Communities* (1917): "Ukrainians in Canada...are disgusted with the political corruption, which is worse

than anything they have known in the Old Country," and "see no great difference between platforms of the two parties [Liberal and Conservative]."<sup>3</sup>

In December 1917, a former Manitoba Liberal MP, Robert L.Richardson—while campaigning for the Conservative's Unionist Party—called for the outright enslavement of "enemy aliens." "[W]e won't need many guards," he said. "It will be easy enough when a few foreigners are shot; the others will work eagerly."<sup>4</sup> Ukrainian socialists replied to this by writing that the "Ukrainian immigrant did not flee from the Kaiser's knout [whip] in order to fall under another knout in Canada. He refuses to tolerate Kaiserism regardless of who tries to impose it."

In post-Czarist Ukraine, they asserted, "liberty and democracy are held in higher esteem than here in Canada."<sup>5</sup>

Despite, or likely aided by, his hyped-up xenophobia, Richardson—the novelist, journalist and owner/editor of the *Winnipeg Tribune*—was easily re-elected to Parliament in 1917. Like "many other businessmen," he was "swept up in the hysteria of the 'Red Scare.'" In 1919, Richardson warned Borden that a "'Bolshevik' uprising" was brewing in Manitoba. Later, his paper's hate-filled, phobic rants blamed

Winnipeg's 1919 General Strike on violent "reds" and "irresponsible, lawless, anarchistic agitators"<sup>6</sup> who were riling up Canada's "undesirable" east Europeans.

After fleeing the tyrannies of eastern Europe, many radicalised newcomers to Canada were thrown headlong into challenging new struggles for freedom, and—in thousands of cases—they were thrown straight into Canada's slave labour camps.

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