

War Mania, Mass Hysteria and Moral Panic: Rendered Captive by Barbed Wire and Maple Leaves



WWI veterans who protested against the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919, were held hostage by all the key narratives of Canada's rampant mass hysteria:

Xenophobia,
British Imperialism,
Muscular Christianity,
Law and Order, and
antiCommunism.



By Richard Sanders

A century ago, in 1915, a youthful Canada was already waging its second imperialist war overseas.¹ The colony's political and economic elites—ably represented in Parliament by Sir Robert Borden and his pious Anglo-Protestant cabinet—had rallied mainstream Canada behind the imperial hubris of a phoney “war to end all wars.”

Subjected to every propaganda trick imaginable—from patriotic political speeches, popular novels, classroom tripe and religious sermons, to flag-waving parades and church picnics—Canadians were propelled into a mass hysteria that justified not only the imperial war abroad but harsh repression on the homefront.

Exploiting the endemic classism, racism and xenophobia that riddled mainstream Canadian society, opinion leaders demonised their foreign enemies, and rationalised the domestic persecution of a very specific demographic of newcomers. Armed with the wartime pretext that Canada was under siege by diabolical aliens who had infiltrated the gates of our “Peaceable Kingdom,” the Conservative government crafted draconian new security legislation. Passed in 1914—with the loyal support of all Liberal MPs, and the lone Labour Party politician in Parliament—the War Measures Act gave authorities a new arsenal of repressive powers for exerting control over Canadian society. Among these powers were tools to monitor and detain anyone even suspected of becoming a potential enemy of the state.

History has been repeating itself ever since. When Harper's Conservative government used Bill C-51 to revamp Canada's institutions of repression, the so-called Anti-Terrorism law was approved with overwhelming Liberal Party support. Armed with these new weapons, Canada's

secret police and spy agencies can now target and pre-emptively jail anyone they believe might possibly threaten the established order of business.

The legal boundaries of the word “terrorist” have been redrawn. Expanded to capture activists said to cause “interference with the economic or financial stability of Canada,” the term “terrorism” now encloses those “unduly influencing a government” by “unlawful means.”² This makes terrorists out of unionists who use illegal strikes, or even pacifists devoted to using Gandhian acts of nonviolence.

After 100 years, Canadian business elites, driven by the same endless pursuit of profits, still wrap themselves in the Maple Leaf and use simple narratives to instil a fear of fiendish, foreign enemies. And, Canada's security-fixated, state institutions are still the gravest threat to our civil rights.

While the foreign enemies *du jour* are now said to be radicalised Muslims, Canadians of a century ago were caught in an epidemic of fear that was stirred up by dire warnings that east Europeans—mostly Ukrainians—were being radicalised by militantly socialist labour activists.

Between 1914 and 1920, Canada was held captive not just by jingoism, but by a virtual dictatorship. When MPs unanimously passed the War Measures Act, they gave extraordinary powers to Borden's clutch of Tories. His Cabinet—working with the Governor General, a son of Queen Victoria—used the “emergency” of war to bypass Parliament and issue laws they saw as “necessary...for the security, defence, peace, order and welfare of Canada.”³

By dictating the legal definitions captured by these vague grab-all terms, the Governor in Council also became Canada's semantic gatekeeper. But besides being the despotic guardian and ward of the word of law, this official cabal helped har-

ness prevailing national narratives to capture the hearts, minds and loyalties of mainstream society. This public support was required not only to wage the imperial war abroad, but the one at home as well.

The War Measures Act of 1914 was a reaction to what its framers called “the existence of real or apprehended war, invasion or insurrection.”⁴ Gripped by fear of revolts, rebellions and resistance to authority, global elites were in crisis. Canada was not immune to the political anxiety disorder that plagued imperialists around the world. Canadian elites were preoccupied and obsessed with phobic worries about seditious uprisings by radicalised socialists and labour activists. By 1917, the angst among Conservative/Liberal elites went viral. Canada was under siege by mass, public hysteria. This moral panic attack is known as the “First Red Scare.”

But the foreboding that afflicted European capitalists began decades before the Russian revolutions of 1917. Their fear was sparked by popular mutinies that upset imperial and monarchic control on five continents. Popular insurrections and revolutions included: Ghana, 1900; Angola, 1902; Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, 1903-1908; Armenia, 1904; Namibia, 1904; Paraguay, 1904; Argentina, 1905; German East Africa, 1905-1906; Russia, Poland, Finland, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, 1905-1907; Persia, 1905-1909; Romania, 1907; Turkey, 1908; Bali, 1908; Syria, 1909; Morocco, 1909-1910; Monaco, 1910; Portugal, 1910; Mexico, 1910-1920; China, 1911-1913; Mongolia, 1911-1921; Balkans, 1912-1913; Ireland, 1912-1923; Albania, 1912-1914; and South Africa, 1914.

So, for decades prior to WWI, Europe's colonial powers were increasingly terrified by growing social movements for democracy, justice and labour rights that were organising mass protests and huge

general strikes. The nearly successful Russian revolution of 1905-1907, pushed many capitalist power brokers to conclude that they needed to take even more desperate measures to contain the spread of socialism, if not to crush it completely.

During WWI, Canadian authorities rallied loyal citizens around the Union Jack to support Britain's imperial interests abroad. But the War Measures Act not only consolidated state power to wage a foreign war, it provided special tools to quell a feared socialist revolt within Canada's borders. The war thus furnished a convenient pretext for targeting domestic enemies of the state. Authorities imagined that foreign radicals who had infiltrated Canada's

gated community, were an infection that had to be stopped from spreading throughout the body politic. Cabinet used its new powers of preventative, mass detention to capture and enslave thousands of single, recently-laid off labourers mostly from eastern Europe. These young men—then amassing in Canada's cities—were feared not only as a source of anticapitalist ideas, but as the group at highest risk of being agitated into action by radical socialists.

Capturing History

The WWI-era repression of Canada's radical left has been all but erased from mainstream narratives about the period. Instead, the war's centenary has created an on-

slaught of spellbinding stories that pull at our collective heart strings and build nationalist feelings that support the armed forces. The government, corporate media and mainstream civil-society groups have memorialised Canada with poignant tales of soldiers who lost their lives in WWI.

Official WWI narratives have also been used to justify Canada's military and foreign policies. "Nothing has changed," said then-Prime Minister Harper at a 2014 ceremony marking WWI. Continuing with what the Canadian Press called a "veiled reference to Canada's tough stands in support of Ukraine and Israel," he went on to say that "Canada is still loyal to our friends, unyielding to our foes," and stands "once

Empire and Sons: From Sir William Otter, to the NDP...

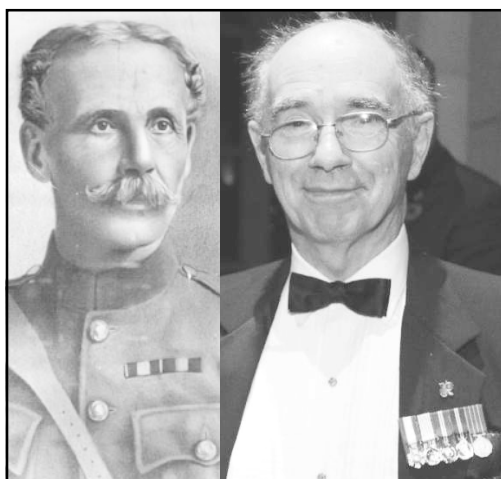
By Richard Sanders

Canada's Major General Sir William Otter is revered as the "father" of Canada's Army. His family tree is laden with archdeacons, bankers, barons, a British Governor of Bermuda, a chief justice of Nova Scotia, and his grandfather was the Anglican Lord Bishop of Chichester, England.¹

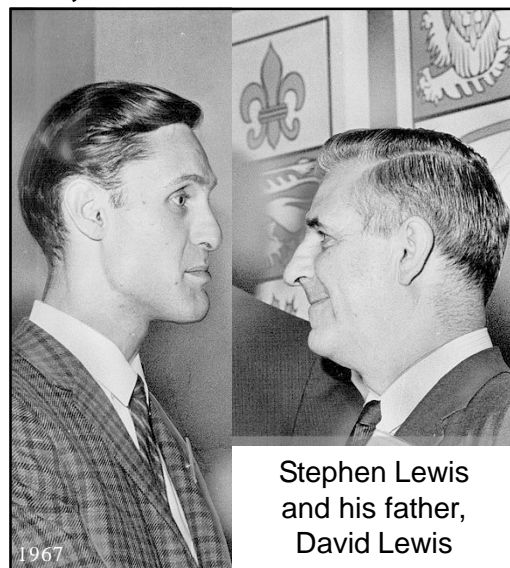
With the war's outbreak in 1914, Otter was brought out of retirement to be appointed Director of Internment Operations. His qualifications included collaboration in two imperial conflicts that involved the mass internment of civilians.

In 1913, Otter was made a Companion of the Most Honourable Military Order of the Bath.² For what service to Empire did he receive this title? Was it his role in the North West Rebellion of 1885 when he led a battalion of British troops against a Cree and Métis uprising led by Poundmaker and Big Bear?³ His role in crushing that revolt led the *Montreal Daily Star* to urge that "Otterism" be used "as a synonym for merciless repression."⁴ Otter had dutifully served as an imperial weapon to smash resistance to Canadian land plunder and the genocidal herding of Indians into mass captivity on reserves. (See pp.15-21.) But this crime was only one step on Otter's journey to knighthood.

Otter's next major opportunity to serve imperial conquest came when he led 1,000 troops of the Royal Canadian Infantry Regiment, during the Boer War (1899-1902).⁵ This war was fought to secure the British elite's access to diamonds and gold controlled by the Boer (Dutch/African) regime in South Africa. During this



Sir William Otter and his grandson, Desmond Morton



Stephen Lewis and his father, David Lewis

contest of empires, British troops forced 116,000 Blacks into concentration camps.⁶ They also herded 118,000 Boer women, children and elderly men into deadly prison camps. Of these civilians, more than 42,000 died from preventable diseases in the camps, including 28,000 Boers⁷ and over 14,000 Blacks.⁸ In addition, 26,000 Boer men were shipped to British prison camps in India and Caribbean colonies.⁹

In 2014, to honour the Canadian troops who died while assisting Britain's imperial conquest of South Africa, Canada's government added the Boer War, and Afghanistan, to the conflicts that are now officially commemorated at the National War Memorial in Ottawa.¹⁰

Considering his commanding role in squashing the Northwest Rebellion and in leading troops during the Boer War (in which more than a 250,000 civilians were interned), it is no small wonder that Otter was knighted and then appointed to lead Canada's internment camps during WWI.

Otter was immortalised in a gentle biography by his grandson, Desmond Morton, one of Canada's leading military historians. Morton's narrative on Otter in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, presents him in as favourable a light as possible. Morton's narrative on the Boer War, while noting that the soldiers under his grandfather's command "became the ideal symbols of a great victory for the British empire,"¹¹ makes no mention of war's great success in killing tens of thousands of civilians trapped in internment camps.

Morton, whose father was a Brigadier General in WWII, is perhaps best remembered for his rendition of WWI as *the* defining moment in Canada's long struggle for freedom from its imperial masters. "The Great War," he said, "gave [Prime Minister] King and the Liberals arguments and support enough to take Canada to full and unquestioned independence."¹²

During his tenth year in Canada's army, Captain Morton "was anxious to

again beside allies whose sovereignty, whose territorial integrity—indeed, whose very freedoms and existence—are still at risk.”⁵ (Canada’s “tough” support for the Ukrainian and Israeli governments continues apace under the Trudeau Liberals.)

The October 22, 2014, murder of an army reservist at Ottawa’s National War Memorial (built to commemorate our WWI military losses), was used to justify the deployment of troops and warplanes to Iraq. On the next day, Harper told Parliament that “laws and police powers...in the area of surveillance, detention, and arrest...need to be much strengthened.”⁶ On October 24, then-Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney said the government was “eyeing the thresholds established in Canadian law for the *preventive arrests* of people *thought* to be *contemplating*

attacks that *may* be *linked* to terrorism.”⁷ (Emphasis added.)

The pre-emptive jailing of those *thought* to be *thinking* about actions that *might* be “*linked* to terrorism,” requires extreme paranoia. Ironically, Canada’s current war against IS—framed as a humanitarian attack on ultraconservative religious fanatics—was begun by evangelical neocons keen on restraining domestic civil liberties.

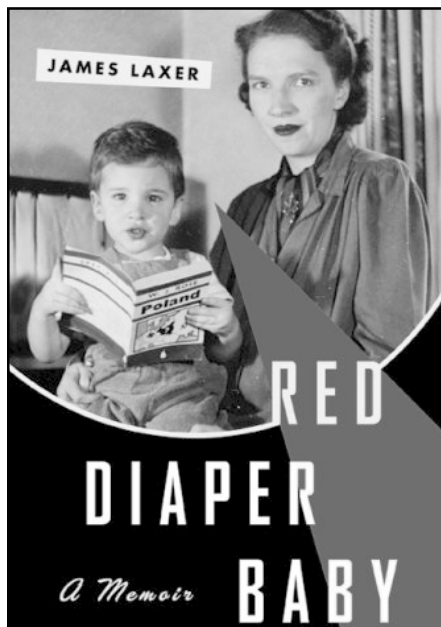
Missing from the militarised human-interest stories of WWI are historical narratives about Canada’s harsh attacks on domestic civil rights. In 1914, when Tories and Liberals passed the War Measures Act, Cabinet was given unlimited powers to restrict and control communications, travel, manufacturing, property and trade. The Act also gave them absolute powers

to arrest, detain and deport anyone, without trial. Cabinet was soon using this power to wage war against a specific set of immigrants. Many of them—not coincidentally—were sympathetic to anticapitalist ideas and radical, labour actions.

While official stories of Canada’s WWI internment now critique the ethnic profiling of Ukrainians, they usually ignore the role of economics, class and politics in targeting them. Such renditions of history are common among Canada’s nationalist Ukrainians. For example, on Remembrance Day 2010, the ultraright Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) said that:

“Thousands of Ukrainian Canadians were jailed in Canadian internment camps....not because of anything they had done, but only because of where they had come from.”⁸

...and the Waffle



serve as [the NDP’s] assistant provincial secretary.” So, the party’s executive agreed to “negotiate” Morton’s “release from the armed forces.”¹³ He was soon working for the Ontario NDP. In the early 1970s, as a close advisor to NDP leaders, David and Stephen Lewis, Morton was instrumental in helping this father and son team to oust a youthful reform group from the party. In 1971, the “Waffle Movement for an Independent Socialist Canada,” was seen as a threat that the NDP leadership and the Mounties both wanted to contain. A secret RCMP report said the Waffle was hoping “to change the NDP from within and radicalise the NDP socialist policies.... In its present relatively infant form, the Waffle Group is rapidly becoming a melting pot for radicals of all ‘Left’ groups....”¹⁴

The “Waffle Manifesto” set out a socialist policy of independence from US wars and hegemony. Its platform included nationalising “the essential resources industries, finance and credit, and industries strategic to planning our economy.”¹⁵

Morton’s 1972 success in ousting the Waffle from the NDP, is similar to when Rev.J.S.Woodsworth led the purge of radicals from the party’s forerunner, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in the 1930s and ‘40s. Ousting the Waffle kept radical economic, antiwar and anti-imperialist ideas from infecting the NDP. The Royal Commission into RCMP crimes, said that because of their concern “that Trotskyists and Communists were joining the Waffle,” the Mounties “volunteered information to one leader of a provincial New Democratic Party” to make him “aware of subversives within his Party.”¹⁶

Besides being spied on by the RCMP and expelled from the NDP, Waffle organisers were also targeted for internment during the Cold War. This top secret Canadian program was called Operation Profunc. (See pp.35, 49.) From 1950 until the 1980s, the RCMP created annual lists of thousands of radical leftists who—in case of a war, or some vaguely-defined emergency—were to be interned. In the 1950s, the first generation of this program targeted communists like Edna and Robert Mendel Laxer. The latter was a WWII veteran who became a paid organiser for the Communist Party, and later a clinical psychologist. Under Profunc, their children, Jim and Gord, were also to be rounded up. Jim, now a York University political science prof, was a leader of the Waffle, which he and his father helped to found.

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Concentration Camps

Between 1914 and 1920, 8,579 men “of enemy nationality” were interned in what authorities originally called “Concentration Camps.” Of these, 7,762 (90%) were civilian residents of Canada. Also imprisoned were 81 women and 156 children. While 2,009 of the men were German, 5,954 were listed as “Austro-Hungarians, covering Croats, Ruthenians, Slovaks and Chzecks.”⁹ (Serbs were also among those interned.) About 5,000 of these “Austro-Hungarians” were actually Ukrainian.

Canada’s 24 internment facilities were commanded by Maj.Gen. Sir William Otter, who is still fondly heralded as the “father” of Canada’s Army. His official report, *Internment Operations, 1914-1920*, says he “suspected that the tendency of municipalities to ‘unload’ their indigent was the cause of the confinement of not a few.”¹⁰ By mid-1915, 4,000 of the aliens forced into these prison camps, were being described as “indigent.”¹¹

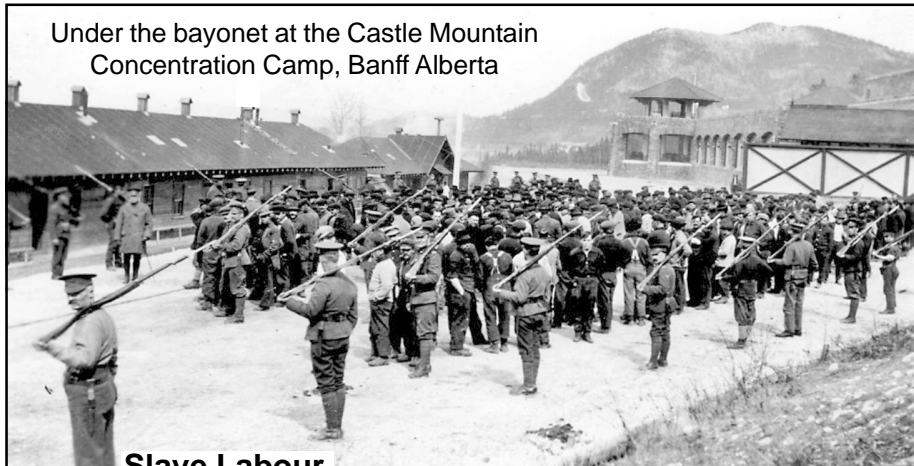
To abide by the Hague Convention on POWs, Otter had two classes of internees. Only a few were among what he called the military “officer class or its [civilian] equivalent.” Mostly German, these “first class” prisoners—held largely in cities—received “better quartering and subsistence.”¹² And, they were not forced to work. “Second class” internees were mostly Ukrainian civilians. Banished to rural camps, they laboured under the gun, endured hunger, disease, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding and dangerous work environments. Some were beaten, prodded with bayonets, or viciously tortured. Ten were shot dead trying to flee the camps.

Otter’s narrative claimed that “very little friction occurred between troops and prisoners.” His report also said he had “little complaint” about guards. Otter *did* admit that Canada’s prison camp conditions may have led to “insanity.” Noting that “Insanity was by no means uncommon among the prisoners,” Otter said that in some cases, “the disease possibly developed from a nervous condition brought about by the confinement and restrictions entailed.” In “many other cases,” Otter said he “suspected” that the “insane” were “interned ...to relieve municipalities of their care.”¹³

The psychotic brutality of Canadian camp guards was described by US Consul Samuel Reat. He said in 1915 that some prisoners in the Lethbridge Alberta camp were put in “dark cells and given a diet of bread and water from 1 to 4 days.” Others, he reported, were “handcuffed and drawn

up so that their toes just touch the floor.” Another US Consul, G. Willrich, said “petty officers” inflicted punishments to “gratify their brutal instincts,” “as is so often the case when men of inferior intelligence are invested with autocratic powers.”¹⁴

plenty of labour. Anybody who asked us to do anything, we provided the slaves.”¹⁷ Enslaved by federal and provincial governments and private firms, they hewed trees, built structures, fences, railways, roads and parks, and sweated on farms or



Slave Labour

Although “first class” internees, mostly German officers, were not forced to work, “second class” prisoners, mostly Ukrainian civilians, were used as slaves. Even upon release, their slavery did not end. In 1916 and 1917, when the British Empire’s increased demands for Canadian cannon fodder in Europe led to a shortage of workers, the government’s corporate friends asked for welfare assistance. Borden’s government was only too happy to oblige by providing thousands of foreign slaves from Canada’s labour camps. In the official narratives however, these historic realities were rendered in more euphemistic terms. Otter’s narrative captures the official history with these words:

“[W]hen the most strenuous call for reinforcements was made by the Allies, the depletion of men in many of the large corporations of the country was so keenly felt that application [was] made for the services of our prisoners to supply the want.... This system proved a great advantage to the organizations short of labour.”¹⁵

Otter also reported that 6,000 “Austrians,” mainly Ukrainians, were “released from confinement on signing a ‘parole.’” For example, over 1,300 mostly Slavic inmates were released from a northern Ontario camp in Kapuskasing when it was “decided to parole them to work for the Dominion Steel Corporation and other big manufacturers.”¹⁶ Paroled prisoners were kept on a tight leash. They could be returned to captivity if they failed to report regularly to the police, or lost their jobs.

Col. Anderson-Whyte, a former guard from the Castle Mountain internment camp in Banff, was more blunt: “We had

in factories, steel mills and coal mines.

Getting a pittance for their 10-hour work days, many got only 25 cents a day for hard labour, when a standard wage was 20 cents an hour. Although not paid until after the war, some were not paid even then. By mid-1929, the government still owed \$23,000 to prisoners for their work,¹⁸ i.e., 92,000 hours of labour. In contrast, on top of his pension, for his part in running Canada’s slave labour camps, Otter got \$30,000, i.e., \$5,000 per year from 1914 to 1920. (In 1914, \$5,000 was the equivalent of \$103,000 in 2015.)

Some internment-camp labourers were denied any allowance. As the Consul of Switzerland wrote in 1917, after visiting the camp near Fernie, BC:

“They complain that the allowance of One dollar per month has been withdrawn in consequence of which some of the men are absolutely destitute.”¹⁹ (\$1 in 1914 was equal to \$21 in 2015.)

Mark Workman, president of the Dominion Iron and Steel Corp., was so enthused with the government’s forced labour program that he requested “troublesome” internees. As he put it, “there is no better way of handling aliens than to keep them employed in productive labour.” In 1917, Workman asked Borden to request that Britain transfer their internees to Canada for work in his Cape Breton mines.²⁰

Even after November 11, 1918, with WWI over, Canada continued its repressive internment program. The government reported that as of December 19, 1918, there were still 2,222 prisoners being held in four camps: Munson, AB (63), Vernon, BC (388), Kapuskasing, ON (1,007) and Amherst, NS (764).²¹

Conflicting Narratives

To explain why some Canadian prison camps stayed in operation until 1920, BC lawyer Diana Breti argued that the

“forced labour program was such a benefit to Canadian corporations that internment was continued for two years after the end of the War.”²²

In 2005, Liberal MP Borys Wrzesniewski gave Parliament the same narrative when he lauded efforts by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC). He said:

“This infrastructure development program benefited Canadian corporations to such a degree that even after the end of World War I, for two more years the Canadian government carried on the internment.”²³

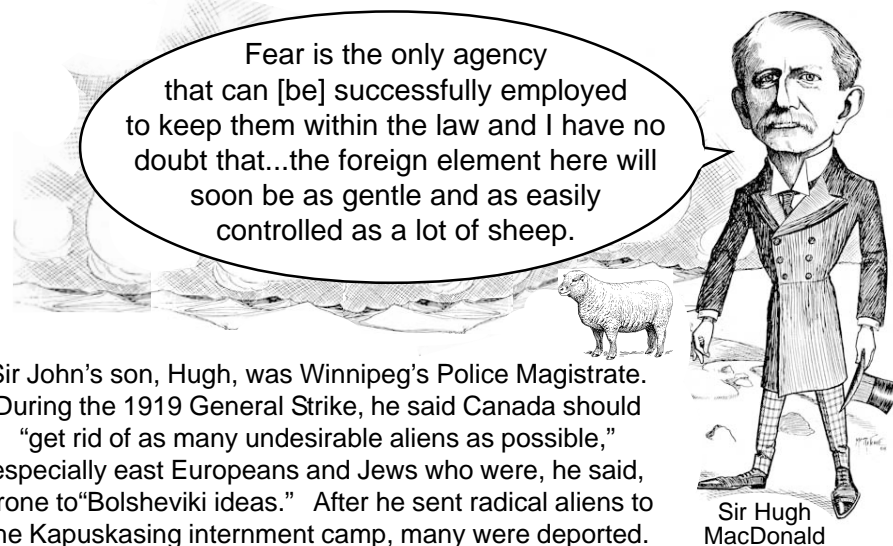
This official story is still found on the UCC website. “This infrastructure development program,” says the UCC, “was so beneficial to Canadian corporations that the internment program lasted for two years after the end of the war.”²⁴

The UCC has worked closely with government ever since Prime Minister King’s Liberals facilitating its creation in 1940. Their shared goal was to unify Ukrainian anticommunists and to marginalise their common socialist enemies. (See “Consolidating the Ukrainian Right,” p.46)

While it *is* useful to expose the confluence of government and corporate interests in exploiting WWI-era slave labour camps, this narrative ignores the political function of internment. Camps were also used to contain the spread of radical socialism. This was particularly obvious after the Russian revolution of 1917.

In 1917, Canadian censors banned many leftwing publications, making hundreds of books and periodicals illegal to print, import, distribute or even possess. By September 1918, Borden’s regime outlawed all publications in languages spoken within enemy states, including German, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Finnish, Syrian, SerboCroatian and Latvian. This ethnic profiling did not apply to religious texts or other materials that officials found unobjectionable.²⁵ Describing this crackdown, labour activist Michael Martin wrote that although

“[t]he pretext was the war; the real goal was to limit and control the effects of the Russian Revolution. At the same time, fourteen political organisations were banned, as were publications of trade unions and socialist and anarchist organisations. On October 11, 1918, exactly one month before the armistice, the government prohibited all strikes,



Sir John’s son, Hugh, was Winnipeg’s Police Magistrate. During the 1919 General Strike, he said Canada should “get rid of as many undesirable aliens as possible,” especially east Europeans and Jews who were, he said, prone to “Bolsheviki ideas.” After he sent radical aliens to the Kapuskasing internment camp, many were deported.

and made conciliation obligatory and binding in industrial disputes. [A] pattern of action was installed which was ...putatively aimed at wartime security, but actually aimed at controlling and disciplining the working class.”²⁶

Canada’s antiRed psychosis reached a frenzied peak in the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. The madness was inflamed by elites at every level, from the federal Cabinet to a local “Citizens’ Committee” of Winnipeg’s richest industrialists, lawyers, bankers and politicians. Joining the fray were media moguls whose papers branded radical labour activists with slurs like “Bolsheviks,” “Bohunks” and “alien scum,” or depicted them in cartoons as crazed, bomb-throwing anarchists.

Despite such vivid propaganda tactics, when police rounded up strike leaders at gunpoint in late-night raids, 30,000 supporters rallied on June 21, braving the city’s ban on all public gatherings. When Mounties got orders to fire into the crowd, they killed two people. They then charged in on horseback, injuring dozens. Fleeing protesters were beaten with bats and wagon spokes wielded by “special police” and about 100 “Reds” were arrested.²⁷

In summing up this “Bloody Saturday” police riot, Sir George Foster, MP, remarked that: “Some blood was shed but law and order was maintained....”²⁸

Winnipeg was an occupied city patrolled by army trucks mounted with machine guns.²⁹ When the strike was called off, radical labour activists were fired or black listed and the media continued to promote antiRed narratives. The madness soon spread as Mounties “from Victoria to Montreal raided the homes and offices of socialist and labour leaders.”³⁰ That summer, about 200 radicals were rounded up. “Many of those arrested,” reports historian Don Avery, “were moved to the in-

ternment camp at Kapuskasing, Ontario, and subsequently deported in secret.”³¹

This treatment was pushed by Sir Hugh MacDonald,³² Winnipeg’s Police Magistrate and the son of Sir John A. MacDonald. In 1919, Sir Hugh wrote to Canada’s Interior Minister Arthur Meighen about “getting rid of as many undesirable aliens as possible” because of the “large extent Bolsheviki ideas are held” by Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and especially Jews. He urged Meighen to “make an example” of these radicals, by saying that

“fear is the only agency that can [be] successfully employed to keep them within the law and I have no doubt that if the Dominion Government persists in the course that [it] is now adopting the foreign element here will soon be as gentle and as easily controlled as a lot of sheep.”³³

To see why Canadian prison camps kept operating until 1920, we must look at the global context. While Russia’s revolution inspired many poor workers around the world, it alarmed elites in Canada, the US, Europe and elsewhere. Panic stricken by Russian events, and fearful of home-grown radicals, desperate powerbrokers scared their societies into a mass psychosis of antiRed hysteria. The paranoia of this “First Red Scare” was fired up by state propagandists, media owners, church leaders, and progressive civil-society activists held captive by xenophobic narratives.

The Canadian government’s madness to contain the Red Menace at home was paralleled by a mounting frenzy to collar if not wipe out communism abroad. Following WWI, Canada joined the US, Britain, France, Greece, Italy, Japan and others, in a military invasion of Soviet Russia to turn back their revolution.

In March 1919, France’s PM Georges Clemenceau launched the Cold

War's "Containment Policy." He called for an international *cordon sanitaire* to encircle and quarantine Bolshevism, as if it were a communicable disease. Britain's War Secretary, Winston Churchill, shared this vicious pathology. His rhetoric used a graphic metaphor to demand the deadly encirclement of an infant's neck. Using the murderously psychopathic trope of throttling a newborn, Churchill said Bolshevism was a baby that "must be strangled in its cradle."

So it was that in 1919 more than 150,000 troops—including 4,200 Canadians—invaded the newborn Soviet state. "Canadian troops joined soldiers from thirteen countries," said historian Benjamin Isitt, "in a multi-front strategy of encirclement designed to isolate and defeat the Bolshevik regime."³⁴

Despite this, the prevailing view is that political profiling was not used to target aliens for internment. Even progressive political scientist Reg Whitaker said in 1986 that in WWI "many Ukrainians had been interned in Canada, but not, it would seem, with any political or ideological selectivity."³⁵

4Rs: Recession, Radicalism, Rebellion and Repression

Between 1910 and 1914 alone, about 70,000 Ukrainians—mostly single men—migrated to Canada. Most were exploited in low-salary jobs building railways and roads, or working in mines, mills or foundries. Because they dominated some of the hardest-hit job sectors, Ukrainians were disproportionately affected by the major recession that hit Canada between 1913 and 1915. For example, of the 54,000 railway workers who lost their jobs in that recession,³⁶ a large percent were Ukrainian.

After the Liberal government imposed its severe "head-tax" on Asian immigrants in 1907, Chinese railway "coolies" were replaced largely by Italians and Ukrainians. Most immigrant men entering Canada in the decade before WWI were forced into brute manual labour. Many endured oppressive and dangerous conditions in remote, company-run work camps. During the early decades of the 20th century, these bunkhouse camps were home and workplace to hundreds of thousands of immigrant men. These poorly-paid loggers, miners and railway workers did much of Canada's most backbreaking work.

Railway workers were among the worst off. Official records conservatively show that between 1901 and 1918, 12,816



'The Lord Provides' by Jacob Burck

In May 1914, 2,000 unemployed, mostly Ukrainians, rallied in Winnipeg to demand "Work or Bread!" They were met by club-wielding police.

"navvies" were killed in job-related accidents, while 99,668 were injured. "A great many of these," said University of Manitoba historian Orest Martynowych, "were Ukrainian immigrants." He went on to say that in 1912,

"a foreign consul familiar with conditions in Europe and South American stated that he knew of 'no other country where the rights of workmen have been so flagrantly abused as on railway construction in Canada."³⁷

Even convicts doing railway work had better housing, and shorter hours, than Canada's alien "navvies," said an observer who likened their conditions to "lesser forms of serfdom" and "peonage."³⁸

Despite being the backbone of Canada's economy, mainstream unions turned a blind eye to the workers in these camps. Two main factors affected large unions' disinterest in organising them, said Erica Martin, "the racism which beset early Canadian labour activism" and "the fact that most manual workers on the frontier were immigrants." Only in the early 1920s did big unions begin to take an interest in Canada's work camps because they "felt threatened by 'radical' groups like the International Workers of the World (IWW) which were attempting to organize camp men."³⁹

By 1911, the anarcho-socialist IWW had about 10,000 Canadian mem-

bers, mainly in mining, logging and railway construction camps. They gained strength by uniting thousands in strikes and walkouts to achieve better wages and safer work conditions in the camps.

By the summer of 1913, thousands of Ukrainians, many laid off from death-defying railway work where they were radicalised by the IWW, moved into western Canadian cities. The police used vagrancy laws to arrest them for loitering, and some were deported.⁴⁰

Speaking of indigent labourers in western Canada at that time, Ukrainian Canadian academics, Bohdan Kordan and Peter Melnycky, wrote that:

"these people...were interned when urban municipal councils, concerned about this additional burden on the tax rolls and unwilling or unable to provide relief for them, insisted they were 'a threat to civil order.' The policy of internment offered local authorities the means with which to deal with the thousands of destitute who were milling about the streets of urban centres."⁴¹ (Emphasis added.)

But radicalised Ukrainians were not merely "milling about the streets," they were protesting in the streets. In May 1914, 2,000 unemployed, mostly Ukrainians, rallied in Winnipeg. Carrying shovels, they called for "work or bread!" When police tried to arrest one of their speakers, an officer was beaten. The crowd was driven back by 20 club-wielding constables.

Business leaders supported Canada's roundup of indigent aliens. In August 1914, CPR president Sir Thomas Shaughnessy urged friends in government to create detention camps for laid-off Germans and "Austrians."⁴² Later that month, the War Measures Act was passed and internment stations opened in Montreal and Kingston. Six prison camps opened that September, with five in western Canada.⁴³

To solve the growing crisis, Borden's government considered conscripting foreigners into the military. Another idea was to encourage unemployed aliens to leave Canada for the US. When Borden cabled Canada's colonial masters in Britain for advice, he noted that the

"[s]ituation with regard to Germans and Austrians, particularly Austrians [is] very difficult. From fifty to one hundred thousand will be out of employment during coming winter as employers are dismissing them everywhere under compulsion of public opinion."⁴⁴ (Emphasis added.)

It was essential, Borden said, to either "let them go, provide them with work or feed

them, otherwise they will become desperate and resort to crime.” The “crime” that scared Canadian elites was not loitering, it was insurrection. The colonial office in London suggested that Canada enslave these troublesome, unemployed aliens. Imperial authorities couched this in euphemisms saying that if Canada provided enemy aliens with food and shelter, “it would be quite proper under war conditions to make them labour at public works.”⁴⁵

Even after the War Measures Act was enacted and internment had begun, protests by unemployed foreigners continued to grow. In April 1915, 5,000 “unemployed non-unionized ‘foreigners’” hit Winnipeg’s streets demanding “bread and work.” Police met them with clubs. Another Winnipeg protest of 15,000, took place three days later. In mid-May, hundreds of aliens, many Ukrainian, left Winnipeg. In search of work, they walked to the US border. Once there, 200 were arrested and sent to internment camps.⁴⁶

The government and its friends in business, shared a growing fear that radical immigrants, ravished by poverty and with nothing to lose, posed a threat to what the War Measures Act called the “peace, order and welfare of Canada.” Destitute east Europeans, roused by hunger and socialist ideals, were menacing. With the economic crisis at home and war abroad, authorities had a convenient excuse to round up and thus contain those unemployed aliens who were seen as radicals prone to disruptive street protests and labour unrest.

Meanwhile, the official story was that indigent aliens were interned for their own good. In 1918, then-Minister of Justice, Charles Doherty, an army veteran of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, told Parliament that poor aliens were interned out of Anglo-Canadian kind-heartedness. Because “thousands of these aliens were starving,” he said, they were interned “under the inspiration of the sentiment of compassion.” Justifying the mass layoffs of nonAnglos, he said “the labour market was glutted and there was a natural disposition to give the preference in the matter of employment to our own people.”⁴⁷

AngloProtestant authorities were certainly concerned about poverty among unemployed “aliens.” However, their concern was not for the poor’s welfare. Their goal was to protect capitalism from a feared socialist upheaval led by radicalised foreign workers. Slave labour camps also helped shelter corporations from the economic hardships of Canada’s recession.

Opposing Capitalist, Religious and Military Slavery

Why did Canadian power brokers see east Europeans as such a threat to the established order? The anticapitalist, liberation movements that swept through central and eastern Europe between 1905 and 1907, captured the imagination of many Ukrainians in Canada. This community was then bolstered by politicised émigrés fleeing Czarist repression. (See pp.38-39.) By 1906, socialist Ukrainians were printing anticapitalist tracts and building radical, multi-ethnic organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC).

The SPC’s largely Anglo-Saxon leadership rigidly rejected all efforts to gradually reform capitalism. Instead, they had an “impossibilist” ideology that demanded total and immediate revolution. Underlying this struggle, the SPC saw “one issue...as the basis for all political organization,” namely, the “abolition of the present system of wage slavery.”⁴⁸

Slavery tropes were also central to the rhetoric of Ukrainian socialists. In 1907, the first issue of *Chevron Prapor* (“*The Red Flag*”)—a Winnipeg-based newspaper for Ukrainians within the SPC—described its purpose as leading a struggle against “injustice, exploitation and slavery.”⁴⁹ By 1914, Ukrainian socialists in Winnipeg, although by then freed from the confining ideology of the SPC, were still bound by antislavery rhetoric, saying “only he who works for the emancipation of the enslaved masses is a true patriot.”⁵⁰

Socialist Ukrainians saw their ethnic group as an enslaved segment of Canada’s working class, held in place by the inherently exploitative capitalist system. As Martynowych has noted, by 1913 radical Ukrainian socialists were saying that “Ukrainian immigrant labourers, especially those who worked on railway construction, in the forests and in the mines, were little more than ‘free white slaves’ and ‘white niggers’...in the capitalist system.”⁵¹

These references to “free white slaves” and “white niggers” are from *Robotchy Narod* (*Working People*), the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party’s paper in Winnipeg. So, even before east Europeans were literally enslaved in Canadian internment camps, radical Ukrainians were using *metaphoric* links that tied corporate-run work camps to slavery.

Many socialist Ukrainian Canadians, swayed by Ukraine’s Radical Party,

saw religion as a powerful form of captivity. These activists, Martynowych said “were free of the cultural fetters imposed on the individual in traditional peasant societies.” They “articulated a social and political orientation based on anticlerical, socialist and populist principles” because “the higher clergy in Galicia (Catholic) and in Bukovyna (Orthodox) acted as the instrument of foreign ruling classes, while most members of the lower clergy remained indifferent to the plight of the peasantry.”⁵²

In 1911, Ukrainian socialists in Winnipeg held a “Free School” with talks on “female emancipation, the Inquisition, the relation of churches to the institution of slavery, [and] the theories of Darwin...”⁵³

These Ukrainians were no doubt inspired by Marxist metaphors that decried religion as “the opium of the people,” as well as by slavery tropes in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, which infamously said that “proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.” Marx and Engels also mixed metaphors and similes about workers, soldiers and slaves, saying

“Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers.... Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine.”⁵⁴

Ukrainian Canadian radicals took these tropes to heart. In 1917, *Robotchy Narod* asked: “Do you realize that Ukrainian workers occupy the lowest position in this capitalist prison?”⁵⁵ While “prison” captures the idea of a structure for inmates, it also encloses, metaphorically, the idea of “wage slaves” trapped by class structures. The Czar’s empire was also described in terms of captivity. After the events of February 1917, Ukrainian socialists held a mass meeting at the Winnipeg Opera House and sent their “fraternal greetings” to “Russian worker-revolutionaries” to celebrate “world victory... over autocratic tsarism and the break-up of the prison-house of nations.”⁵⁶

But Ukrainian Canadian socialists were not content to merely use rhetorical devices about prisons and slavery as an escape valve to express liberating, anti-capitalist ideas. They took action by pushing for specific changes to Canadian government policies. For instance, radical Ukrainian leftists called for such enlightened goals as an eight-hour work day, a minimum daily wage, voting rights for all men and women over 21, social insurance for seniors and the disabled, and the abo-

lition of child labour.⁵⁷ These demands were shocking to Canada's capitalist elites, who framed such socialist ideals as unthinkably dangerous, if not criminally insane.

Ahead of their time, Ukrainian social democrats strove for a more equitable society. They wanted a world where manufacturing would meet everyone's needs, not just amass huge profits for the privileged few. It was, and still is, a revolutionary ideal. But, as Martynowych points out, although "their ultimate goal...was revolutionary, their methods were moderate."

The reforms that they demanded were meant to further "the evolution of capitalism" and create "pre-conditions for a smooth and orderly transition to socialism."⁵⁸ They pursued gradual social change through education, peaceful protest, labour actions and electoral politics, *not* by any kind of violent overthrow of the Canadian government.

During WWI, Ukrainian radicals joined other socialists in opposing the forced labour that was imposed by military conscription. They did not do this to support the imperial Austro-Hungarian regime that controlled Ukraine. They opposed the draft because WWI—which was being pushed by governments, churches and other captive civil-society organisations—was killing working class people around the world. Seeing that competing imperialist powers were using workers as pawns in a "Great Game" to profit elites, Ukrainian socialists rejected conscription.

They paid sorely for such views. Even after internees were released on parole from prison camps, they could be arrested again just for attending events to talk about military conscription. For example, in June 1917, when the Ukrainian branch of the Social Democratic Party in Toronto met to discuss the draft, police stormed in and arrested 80 of them for violating their parole conditions. Just a week earlier, an angry mob of several hundred WWI veterans had attacked a similar event, beating organisers and then marching off in military formation. Toronto police stood by and did nothing to stop the violence.⁵⁹ This was typical. Canadian authorities exerted control not only by rendering dissidents captive in forced labour camps, but by turning a blind eye when vigilante thugs assaulted peaceful, antiwar activists.



Alberta-bound Ukrainians

Quebec City 1897

"A stalwart peasant in a sheep-skincoat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality."

Sir Clifford Sifton, Liberal Interior Minister (1896-1905)

"The Galician [Ukrainian] on the land is a good citizen, and his children will grow up good Canadians; the Galician in the city is a dangerous element ... [and] many ... become a menace to our country."

(at Canada's Missionary Congress, 1909)

Rev. Charles Gordon (aka Ralph Connor) Missionary, Imperialist, Novelist, Social Gospeller

Caged by the Fear of Captivity

While Canada's elite used mass internment to extract cheap labour and to contain the spread of radicalism, whole communities were effectively held in place by fear.

During WWI, Canada had 88,000 registered "enemy aliens," mostly Ukrainians. If caught without their official, identity papers, they could be interned immediately. "Police conducted regular round-ups in immigrant neighbourhoods," said Ian Angus, founder of Canada's Socialist History Project, "arresting every man who could not produce a registration card."⁶⁰

But, not all "enemy aliens" had to register with authorities. There were more than 393,000 Germans and at least 129,000 Austro-Hungarians in Canada.⁶¹ This was six times more than all of those who were forced to register, which included Turks, Bulgarians and others. When registration centres were set up under RCMP supervision in Canada's largest cities, only those enemy aliens living within 20 miles had to register. After all, the state only wanted to control *urban* "aliens," especially single, jobless, working-class Ukrainian men.

Even before WWI, it was a well-established myth that *urban* Ukrainians were a grave threat to Christian Canadian values. This meme in the paranoid folklore of Protestant elites was, for instance, spread at the five-day "National Missionary Congress" which drew 4,000 to Toronto's Massey Hall in 1909.⁶² Addressing the threat of nonAnglo-Saxon "foreigners," that he said "really constitute our problem," was militant Social Gospeller Rev. Charles Gordon, Canada's most popular novelist. Referring to Ukrainians as Galicians (for Galicia was held captive by Austria-Hungary), he said that while "the Galician on the land is a good citizen, and his children

will grow up good Canadians; the Galician in the city is a dangerous element."⁶³

After warning that "many of the settlers who drift into the cities become a menace to our country," Gordon asked, "What are we as Christian Canadians and as Christian Churches to do?"⁶⁴ The problem, he said, was that

"we need them for our work. They do work for us that Canadians will not do ...and were it not for the Galicians and... [other] foreign peoples...we could not push our enterprises in railroad building and in lumbering and manufacturing to a finish."⁶⁵

Historian Adam Crerar noted that the "threat of internment—and the sense of rejection by Canadian society...—was felt by all who were at risk."⁶⁶ This was recognised in a 1916 BC police report on the reduced labour militancy among miners. "From a police point of view, there has been less trouble amongst them since the beginning of the war than previously," said a chief constable. "[T]he fact that several of them were sent to internment camps at the beginning of the war seemed to have a good effect on the remainder."⁶⁷

Despite its targeted approach, internment had a chilling effect on whole communities. The registry of "enemy aliens" was also a turning point in Canada's surveillance of radicals. Once registered, aliens had to report to authorities at least once a month. As Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, reported in March 1919, the government's Dominion-wide register "increased in completeness...until we...had practically a record of all the alien enemies in the country. A close watch was kept, and is kept, of their occupations, and activities, and they are all pretty well followed."⁶⁸

Within two weeks of this chilling statement, Toronto police rounded up three socialists—two Germans and a Russian—who authorities publicly claimed were “the nucleus of a Communist Party” in Canada. After holding them incommunicado for a whole month, one was sent to an internment camp, and another was held in jail. Both were later deported to the US. In discussing this case with the *Toronto Times*, the city’s Inspector of Detectives, George Guthrie, stated that police had obtained “a list of possibly 1000 men and women, the majority...of foreign birth, who were actively participating in this Bolshevik agitation. We know also their names and where they are employed. At any moment they can be picked up, and from now on they will be closely watched.”⁶⁹

Publicising this blacklist’s existence, with the threat of arrest, sent a “Red Chill” through activist communities. The fear of being listed must have scared activists and nonactivists away from radicals, their literature and events. Knowing that police had data on jobs, worsened the intimidation. Livelihoods could be taken away, not just freedoms of movement, association, assembly and expression.

The biggest threat hanging over people’s heads was that they could be “picked up” “at any moment” and caged at a remote slave labour camp. By wielding this blunt instrument of terror, the government created fear not only among radical foreign activists, and their political groups, but throughout their ethnic communities. As one RCMP constable of Ukrainian origins informed his Ottawa bosses in 1941, the community had long lived “in fear of the barbed wire fence.”⁷⁰

But the threat of captivity went far beyond the boundaries of ethnicity. People across Canada got the message that authorities would not tolerate those who dared to entertain radical socialist ideas. Internment was therefore part of a cost-effective social-control program to render Canadians captive by fear. Threatened the loss of jobs, civil rights and/or physical freedoms was an effective weapon for scaring people away from even exploring ideas that elites considered a potential threat to “peace, order and welfare” of Canada.

Crazed by the fear of a threat to the status quo and the loss of their privileged position within the established order, Canada’s political, economic and religious leaders developed a phobic response to radical socialism. They reacted by using WWI as a pretext for wars of containment both

at home and abroad. Domestically, internment was used to contain supposed enemies of Canada, largely from eastern Europe. On the foreign front, Canada joined the 1919-1921 war to stop the Russian revolution, contain its spread and threaten similar uprisings around the world.

In spreading their anti-Red paranoia, Canadian elites built upon existing social narratives of racist superiority and cultural narcissism that had long captured the prevailing Eurocentric mindset of the Peaceable Kingdom. As a result, mainstream society remained entranced by a mass delusion that perceived Canada’s imperial brand of warmongering xenophobia as if it were a liberating effort to promote progressive Christian values.

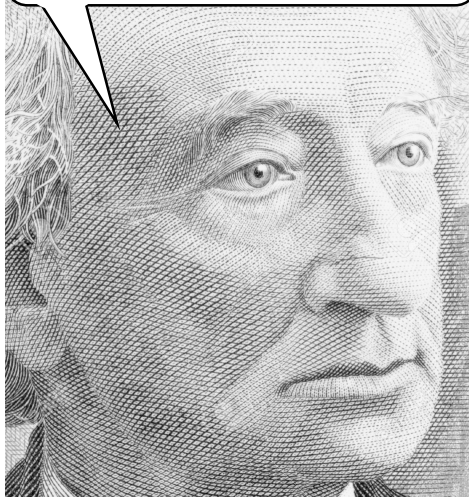
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"Look at the mass of foreign ignorance and vice which has flooded that country [the US] with communism, socialism, atheism and all other isms."



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."¹

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."²

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]."³

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."⁴ 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."⁵

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"⁶ 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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