

Winston Gereluk

Interviewer Alvin Finkel Camera: Don Bouzek

WG: I was born of Ukrainian parents. They were immigrants that came to Western Canada before the First World War and settled in the Myrnam area. Myrnam is where I was born in 1944, so don't let my youthful good looks fool you. I was raised for the first part of my life in Duncan, B.C., where my dad owned a dairy farm. They moved there as part of his dream to settle in a place he really liked, but they were forced to return to Alberta because my mom developed a sickness due to the humidity on the coast.

We came to Vegreville and settled amongst the Germans and the French south of Vegreville. The Ukrainians and the Ukrainian block settlement began just north of Vegreville, and that's where probably about 170,000 Ukrainian immigrants came before the First World War. My parents came in 1913, so they came just before a depression hit Western Canada - well actually Canada. They took a homestead with my father's family. My father was almost 20 years old when he came, my mom was three. My father's homestead was by Myrnam, and Myrnam means "peace to us". It was one of the first Ukrainian named places that officially appeared. My mom's parents settled close to Derwent. That's a more usual name, because it was English. Of course all of the official names, especially those that were begun by the railways when they moved into the west, were named after English gentlemen and ladies and places and that sort of thing, including Edmonton.

My mom's family had 12 children in it; my father's family had nine, but only two of them came to Canada, a few later. I was born the 13th child of 15 to Stephania Bykowski, who was almost given away to my father in an arranged marriage, she being so much younger than my father and married probably at the age of 15. Father, when he arranged for the marriage license, said she was 18 and got the justice of the peace in Mundare, Alberta, to put that on the marriage license. They immediately started having children and, as I said, had 15. Three didn't survive infancy, which was pretty regular for those days.

My mother and father lived the lives of a lot of Ukrainian immigrants. They were brought to Western Canada as migrant labour. There was a development boom in Western Canada for many of the years just before the First World War, and there was a need for labour. The Canadian government, the interior minister Sifton, and Laurier had decided that they would respond to the need for labour, pure and simply migrant labour. They accessed the international labour market. The British, the Scandinavians, the other preferred settlers, didn't want much of a part of it, and all of the immigration schemes to bring them in basically failed. In fact, there were years when the out-migration of those preferred settlers was greater than the in-migration. So they finally were forced to go where they didn't want to go, and that was to east and central Europe. That's where my people, the Ukrainians, came from.

When I call them 'Ukrainians', you must understand that there was no such thing as Ukraine. There's a recent book published, called *Borderlands*, which kind of describes the territory. When people refer to The Ukraine, they were referring to the borderlands between imperial powers that moved back and forth across the regions where my people came from, my mother from Galicia,

my father from Bukovyna, which is just to the south on the western side of Ukraine. Not to go into too much history, but under the partitions of the Polish Lithuanian commonwealth, the Russian part of what is today Ukraine ended on the east side of the Dnipro River and the Polish dominated side, the Austro-Hungarian dominated side, ended on the west side of that river. So my father and mother both came from the Polish and the Romanian dominated sides of the borderland; 'ukraina' means 'borderlands.'

When they came, they came in response to a very aggressive immigration campaign launched by the authorities in Canada, where they hired companies like The Northwest Trading Company to entice settlers. Settlers didn't have to be enticed very hard though, because of conditions in the old country. The Ukrainian peasants, there were very few of a proletarian nature because there was very little industry in that part of Ukraine at that time. Those who were used to being migrant labourers would work in other parts of Europe, so there was a bit of a tradition. But those that didn't would have to work as peasants, really under quite dire circumstances. It was quite grim. Even though feudalism was abolished after the rebellions in 1848 in the Austro-Hungarian side of things, nonetheless, peasants remained in various ways bonded to the gentry and the clergy who owned most of the land. The peasants themselves would have to try to make a living on increasingly small parcels of land, some as small as two hectares, I guess maybe about five acres or even smaller.

There was kind of a population boom in Ukraine. I guess the poor peasants kept having children and they'd have to continually subdivide the land. They had no choice, there being very little industry, they had to choose but to go and work for the landowners. Even though the corvée, the system of bonded serfs working on the lords' manorial lands had been abolished, they nonetheless had to make a living. So they would owe the landlord several days of labour a week, and they would sometimes satisfy that by sending their children to go work there. At the same time, though, the notion that somehow these were ignorant, stupid peasants, which was the popular stereotype put forward by politicians and the media and other people who had an interest in exploiting these peasants when they came to Canada; even though the stereotype holds them to be ignorant and stupid, they weren't really. There was a nationalist movement, an uprising of nationalists and, if you want, romantic enlightenment, going on in Ukraine. Many people were partaking of the enlightenment that was available through the enlightenment societies at that time and through the community halls that were developing, and all of the programs that were put forward by the intelligentsia in Ukraine, who were very interested in promoting enlightenment and who targeted the peasants.

So many of the people who came to Western Canada had a tradition of political cooperative thinking and of practise that they brought with them from Ukraine. Of course, when they arrived in Western Canada, it was quite hard to put that into place, although they tried. I just wanted to add that the enlightenment people, the intelligentsia in Ukraine, certainly weren't thanked for their efforts. People like Shevchenko spent a lot of time in exile, in prison for instance; Franko and the other people promoting enlightenment, nationalists, socialists of the brand that was practised at that time and that was discussed at that time. So the radical movements Ukrainians are credited for far go beyond what they actually should be credited for, but still they were credited with being very dangerous radicals in the west. Firstly, they were ignorant,

unenlightened servants that were treated just like serfs almost in Western Canada. Secondly, they were these dangerous radicals discussing socialist ideas. That had its roots in Ukraine and it certainly had its roots in Western Canada.

Q: What conditions in Western Canada caused them to maintain these radical views?

WG: The answer starts with a notion that somehow the act of bringing them over was a humanitarian benevolent act on the part of a nation that really reached out beyond the borders to bring in people who needed a good life. That's far from the truth. When you bring in migrant labour – and that practise continues to this day with the temporary workers who were just brought in. They were brought in because they were totally exploitable, or at least that was the idea. They were brought in to fill a need for labour, and furthermore to fill a need for labour that was desperate enough that it would put up with the conditions that these people would have to put up with in Western Canada. First of all, they have the memory of how they were enticed, essentially lied to, about the conditions that they could expect. Before they came over, they would sell what land they had. There were so many coming over at that time that they would sell their land for only a fraction of what the land was worth. They'd pack their stuff into a steamer trunk, come over. By the time they were exploited along the way and by the time the vultures were finished with them. . . There were all kinds of conmen who'd sell them tickets; they'd get to the ship and find out that the tickets were no good and they'd have to buy other tickets. They'd have to put up with all kinds of people who'd promised them things, so they had all kinds of bitter memories.

The ships they came over on, where they departed - let's say from Hamburg - after several days they'd reach Hamburg and by that time many of them were penniless. They'd get on the ships and discover that the ships were used to transport cattle or grain to Europe, and they'd have to get on that same ship. They would whitewash the inside of the holds where they would pack these immigrants, hundreds of them on each voyage. The ships, many of them were owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway. They'd whitewash these ships and they'd put the people in there, and on the way over they'd discover that the whitewash would flake off and that there'd be manure on the sides of the ships. That tale is told by many. I'm doing research for the University of Alberta on the Ukrainian Canadian workers, their history in Alberta. These stories that I'm uncovering you find are repeated over and over again by various people who had an immigrant beginning here in Western Canada.

So anyway, they'd come over on these horrible ships where they were packed in like sardines, not quite as bad a story as the 'black cargoes', but nonetheless not a pleasant story. They'd arrive in Halifax or Montreal or Quebec City in specially outfitted colonist trains, which were nothing like the trains that we are fond of seeing pictures of today, which are quite luxurious by comparison. These had wooden benches, wooden berths, very little place for the people to sleep or even to sit. There was no food service, or if there was food service, very little. They'd kind of have to feed themselves on a long journey across Western Canada, first to Winnipeg immigration halls, if they were lucky in Winnipeg, or further. Most of our people, the largest bloc settlement of Ukrainians, occurred in Alberta just east of Edmonton, north and east actually. If you can

imagine a flashlight beam coming north and east from Edmonton going up towards St. Paul, Alberta, and even beyond Athabasca, and as it goes it broadens, that would spell the large bloc settlement of Ukrainian that many of the first 170,000 thought they were destined for. Some settled a little south of Edmonton around Calmar and places like that, so there were other settlements for sure. Generally along the Beaver Hills going south towards Camrose you see a lot of settlement of Ukrainians. They loved to settle on lands that had trees and water. It was seen as not being preferred land; the preferred land was given to the British and people of preferred descent. But it turned out to be better land. During the Great Depression, ironically, it was the land that continued to produce, whereas land further to the south that had been plowed by the preferred settlers, much of it was vacated because of the Depression and the drought conditions.

Anyway, to go back to the original settlement, they would literally be dumped off. My parents on my mom's side - I want to add that I interviewed my mom just before she died. She died two weeks short of 100 years old, this peasant woman who had raised a family on the farm with no labour-saving devices – doing the chores on the land, doing other work around the farm. When that was finished, she'd pick up the pitchfork or something and go work in the fields, somehow raising the 12 who lived, including myself. These were the real heroes of the West whom you seldom hear about. But when they came to Western Canada on a colonist train, a few would land in Strathcona. Many others would be dumped off on the siding in places that became Vermillion, Manville, places like that, where they would meet people, hopefully if things worked out. My mom tells a story of traveling in a grain wagon north of Vermillion to the homestead close to Derwent. She tells the story of her father pushing poles into a mud bank and putting branches and blankets over the poles, blankets over the front, and that was where they lived for the first six months. It's called a bordei.

Most of the Ukrainians lived in a bordei for a little while. Some others lived with some immigrants who had come out earlier, the earliest coming in about 1894 and thereafter. Quite a few came before the turn of the century. These were the ones that people like my parents would sometimes go live with or they would, as I said, fashion a bordei. They were given a quarter section of land for \$10 that they would file for. If they fulfilled certain conditions under the *Dominion Lands Act*, they could then ask for a patent that would show that they were owners of this piece of land. But they'd have to satisfy certain conditions. They'd have to cultivate a certain portion, I believe in a period of time, of at least 30 acres. I may be wrong on that, but 30 acres sticks in my mind. They'd have to build a dwelling, they'd have to reside on the land for at least six months out of the year, and there were various other conditions. They'd have to make various improvements.

Q: Those who couldn't meet the conditions ended up in the industrial workforce?

WG: The people who imported this migrant labour were not fools. They knew that migrant labour would fulfill various purposes. First of all, they'd settle and develop the land that the CPR and the Hudson Bay and various eastern American and British interests wanted them to develop this wilderness into productive land that would serve the interests of the National Policy. They also supplied the frontier labour, because of course you cannot make a living on a piece of wilderness. The wife and children would be left on the homestead in their bordeis, or the lucky

ones in a log cabin, and the husband and maybe the grown male child would go and find work. They would walk all the way to let's say Fort McLeod, where a contractor would pick them up and take them either to the mines in the Crowsnest Pass or areas like that or to the railway construction sites, and in some cases to the lumber camps. The railways, the mines and the lumber camps were kind of dependent on each other; you'd need supports for the mines and things like that.

So anyway, they'd go and work, and the terms of contract labour just were expressed as blatant exploitation – there's no other way to put it. These poor brutes would be put to work. They would be picked up by the contractor, who'd take them let's say to the railway construction site. He may take 50, only to arrive at the construction site and find out that only 30 of them were needed. The 20 who weren't needed would have to walk back to Fort McLeod or wherever. I just gave a paper in Ukraine, and I explained the distance from let's say Redwater to Fort McLeod as being twice the distance from Lviv to Chernivtsi in Bukovyna, where I was giving the paper. People would gasp – you mean to say they'd walk? Yes, they'd walk there. When their work wasn't needed, when they were fired or whatever, they'd have to walk back. If they wanted to visit the woman left alone on the homestead, they'd have to walk back. And they did.

It's incomprehensible today to think of the hardships they put up with, working for gypo contractors in many cases. Many contractors, when they paid the men at the end of the work period, would have a revolver on the desk with them because they knew that the men would complain. They would have to sleep in flea-infested beds. They could buy blankets at an incredible cost from the company store, and anything else they needed. It wasn't rare for them to reach the end of a pay period to find that they had no money coming to them, or ridiculously little money. There are stories published about men in these lumber camps or even the railway construction sites or even in the mines, having a hard time sleeping at night because there'd be so many fleas. There's stories of them stripping all their clothes off, running outside in the winter, and rolling in the snow to get rid of the torment of the fleas. We can go on and on with stories like that. Just suffice it to say, it was quite difficult.

They were given no breaks. The homesteaders were given no assistance, unlike the British, who for instance when they started the British experiment around Brooks, Alberta, the government spent a lot of money building irrigation canals and in other ways developing the land, all to no avail. Very few of the original settlers remained. But anyway, to get back to the story, the women left on the homesteads were incredibly isolated. First of all, most of them could speak no English. They had very little means of transportation anyway, and worse yet, the land that they settled on, much of it had been claimed by the CPR and Hudson Bay Company beforehand. In many cases, where they settled north and east of Edmonton, the CPR had already claimed every second section of land. When you look at a map you see a patchwork of CPR sections. So in many cases, the homesteaders were a mile away from each other, a mile and a half away from each other - no roads, trails through the bush around sloughs and around marshes and things like that. Quite often the women would just go crazy. I'm running into all kinds of stories where they say they could hear the woman howling at night because of the deprivation and loneliness. And of course the children; there was very little thought of school. Even when the settlers got together and constructed their schools with no help or very little help from the government, and registered

a school board, they were expected to foot the bill all themselves, including hiring a teacher. So the children could supposedly go to school, except many of them would not go to school; they were needed on the land.

The third part of the saga, what the planners of migrant labour had in mind, is that the family unit would be the basic economic unit that was so vital to settling the west. They would support the work that needed to be done, including the work by children and the woman and men. They would propagate further generations of workers. They would be the consumers that the interests in the east definitely wanted. They would provide for the traffic that the railway companies wanted. They fulfilled all those roles – migrant labour, consumers, maintainers of the family unit – all with no help.

Q: How did many of them become involved in radical movements, given their isolation and language barrier, etc.

WG: We're getting to the point where we find a lot of Ukrainians were involved in some of the earliest political parties, the socialist parties – the Socialist Party of Canada and the Ukrainian or Social Democratic Party, the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, and other parties that arose. Ukrainians became involved in them, and once again, the idea propagated by people like commissioner of the Northwest Mounted Police, A.B. Perry, and people after him, much later by Watson Kirkconnell, the ex-internment camp guard who the Government of Canada called on to form the Ukrainian Canadian Committee before the Second World War. The myth was that somehow radical worker behaviour, strikes and other kinds of labour unrest, occurred because of foreign agitators, radical agitators. It occurred because of the material conditions that these people experienced, some of which I have begun to describe to you, and I could go on describing until January. You can go on and on, and describe the material conditions that led to Ukrainians becoming involved in what today we call radical politics. They began their community halls; they launched their *prosvita*, their enlightenment societies. They would talk to each other in these halls where they would have reading rooms where those who could read would read to those who could not read, and they would discuss the ideas. Many of them were socialist ideas, some of which were imported from the old country but really which were generated in the new land by the people who were experiencing these things.

They became involved in the Socialist Party of Canada but weren't exactly satisfied with it, because it just did not, in the minds of many, respect the needs of the Ukrainian Canadian wing. They would hive off and form their own parties, and eventually they were involved with forming the Communist Party of Canada. In fact, when the Communist Party of Canada was born after the First World War out of the Workers Party, the second largest wing was Ukrainian. As I said earlier, they were given much more credit than maybe they deserve, because actually the Finnish wing of the Communist Party was larger. But you don't see A.B. Perry or any other of the people who you see quoted in the RCMP bulletins that were published at that time, you don't see them talking about the others much. As far as they were concerned, it was Ukrainian radical. From the conditions that I described, you could see how the Ukrainian radical came to be.

They were under surveillance constantly. There were all sorts of threats. When the war started in 1914, immediately there were plans to first of all intimidate and then to inter these people. When

you think of the internment camps that were put in place during the First World War by the Canadian government, of the 8,000 roughly that were in internment camps, a good percentage of them were Ukrainian or were seen as coming from that area. As I said, it's a very ill-defined area. They refer to them as Ruthenian at one point, Austrian at another point, even Polish. My mom came with Polish papers, because she came from that part of Galicia that was Polish. My dad came with papers from Bukovyna, and they were Austrian papers, so my dad was called an Austrian. They'd refer to these people as 'Austrians'. Of course the Austrians were the enemy in the First World War, so under the ruse that somehow there were many of them not having achieved naturalization, they were not citizens. They were seen as being foreign nationals or whatever term, and the term "enemy alien" came into broad usage.

So, 8,000 were interred. Many Ukrainians, I'd say the majority or a good portion, 88,000 people roughly, had to register with the local authorities. They had to report regularly to a local authority, a constable, a justice of the peace, or someone, as to their movements, much like the conditions imposed on the indigenous people under the Indian Acts, where if you wanted to travel somewhere, you had to get the okay of somebody, a signature on your registration paper. When you arrived where you were going, you had to find somebody to sign your registration paper. When you came back, then you had to have proof that you came back. I showed them in Ukraine a copy of a registration paper that was filled with signatures. It was by somebody from Redwater who had to travel to Edmonton occasionally. Every time, he needed three signatures.

So anyway, that kind of condition- we can go on describing those conditions. As the war progressed, the surveillance and the clampdown increased on the Ukrainians and others deemed to be enemy aliens, and others just deemed to be subversives because they took part in strikes and other forms of disruption. And of course, under the hardships of war, it's not hard to see why people would become more restive. They had to put up with rationing, they had to put up with hardships, at the same time as it became widely known that certain other people were making a killing. Corporations and millionaires were making a killing on the war, on the very war that they were sending their kids to be slaughtered in or that they were, at least, putting up with hardships on the home front. Wartime conditions are never good. Ukrainians were definitely against war. They were against anything that looked like enlistment or conscription or registration, because back home in the old country they would be conscripted to serve in the Austria army, and when they were conscripted they would be treated quite badly.

The Austrians, in spite of the fact that they were slightly better imperialists as far as Ukrainians were concerned than the Poles, still were very rough on these conscripts. They would treat them as stupid brutes and beat them regularly and make fun of them and in other ways discriminate against them. Of course the discrimination that was practised in the old country was another factor that led to resentment and to the feeling that they really, even though they were technically British subjects when they became naturalized, they were still discriminated against horribly in every possible way, whether it be the denial of the right to teach Ukrainian language in the schools, or just the kind of treatment in the press. A common word to describe a Ukrainian was "grotesque". That's how they were treated. I just want to add that as the war progressed, even those Ukrainians that won citizenship, that became naturalized. . . An act was passed in the latter

part of the war, 1918 I believe, which said that essentially anyone naturalized after 1902 had it revoked; they had their voting rights revoked. So they were disenfranchised.

When the strikes broke out in advance of the Great Labour Revolt and during the labour revolt, it's not mystery why these people would get involved in it, especially the miners, the huge number of miners that were out during that period of time. Many of them were Ukrainian. In the Crows Nest Pass it was estimated that almost 90 percent of the miners at a certain period of time were of Central European descent. I've looked at figures, and they vary. But suffice it to say, many were. They went out on strike, they were happy to see the One Big Union. They had fond memories of the Industrial Workers of the World, and they would not be put down that way. So when the Northwest Mounted Police became the RCMP, A.B. Perry was the first commissioner. When he told his officers to keep close watch on the Ukrainians, they had earned the reputation of being very radical.

Q: How did discrimination manifest itself in the kinds of jobs Ukrainians could get, versus those of Anglo-Saxons in the mines.

WG: In the mines and everywhere else, there was definitely an ethnic caste system in place. No doubt about it in the mines. The further you were away from the coal face in the mines, the less you got paid. The Ukrainians were back somewhere. They got to load the carts, they got to take the coal out of the mine. Then the Chinese, that were first of all lucky (and I use that word advisedly) to be in Canada, they might be the ones to sort the coal. Ukrainians were known for the longest time as 'non-white', which doesn't bother me a great deal. The whole notion of how race has been used by imperial powers throughout history to discriminate against people, to justify discrimination and exploitation So, the sooner that "race" disappears completely from our lexicon, the better. We're all members of the human race.

Q: What was happening close to 1919 that there was the ability of these preferred workers to accept to some degree the nonpreferred workers as part of a social class with them, as opposed to part of a different planet?

WG: I'm not sure I understand the question, but it calls to mind the Marxian maxim that a working person has no country. Of course it was put forward by Marx, but the ones who demonstrated a true belief in that maxim were the CPR and the Canadian government when they accessed the international labour market for workers and didn't much mind where they came from as long as they could be exploited. There was a very powerful Socialist movement during this time, because of course even though the Ukrainians were subject to super discrimination and exploitation, exploitation pretty well defined what other workers were putting up with at that time too. You had all kinds of political parties, all kinds of discussions going on about the concerns of the working people. I described at least two of the parties that were born at that time. The Ukrainian workers weren't especially conspicuous in their participation in the trade unions at that time. The trade unions were seen as serving the interests of the preferred classes, English and others. In fact, many of the pronouncements coming out of the labour leaders at that time only reinforced that point.

When the crackdowns, for instance, began on the Ukrainians, when there were a bunch of patriotic dismissals of Ukrainians at the beginning of the war, you'd find that the Trades and Labour Congress and the local trades and labour committees didn't exactly object to that. In fact, some of them thought it was a good idea. You did have strikes occurring here and there where workers of other ethnic descent demanded the dismissal of Ukrainians and refused to work alongside people of other races. That was happening, but at the same time things definitely moved in the direction of unity of the working class. A lot of the differences were overlooked when the Great Labour Revolt broke out in the years leading up to the Great Labour Revolt in 1919. When you have the Edmonton street railway people going out or the freight handlers in Calgary and the CPR employees, many of those were not Ukrainians. Ukrainian participation in that was not very high. They were in the mines and the lumber camps and other places like that, and there there definitely was solidarity. Nobody builds solidarity as well as the Canadian elite.

Q: How did Ukrainian workers participate in the Great Labour Revolt? The trade union movement itself was largely led by the Anglo-Saxon workers. How does this unity look in practise?

WG: The Ukrainians increasingly joined in on the actions that were taking place, especially in the mines. We had the formal trade union organizations, but it would be a mistake to say that the Ukrainians were not organized. They organized themselves around their halls and their *prosvitas*. As I said, they came to Canada. I don't want to promote the notion that these are actually foreign imported radicals, but they did come to Canada with a tradition of cooperative action, collective action. They were the strongest supporters of the One Big Union when it was finally decided in March of the year of the Great Labour Revolt. When you read the Ukrainian newspapers, you find them absolutely full of analyses and information about what's happening. I think at one time there were up to 30 Ukrainian publications going on, which of course the government clamped down on. In 1918, they [the government] passed an order in council under a particular Act that abolished two or three of the major Ukrainian newspapers as well as others, and it became illegal to hold meetings or to publish things in other languages in about 14 different languages, Ukrainian being one of them. It has to be understood that Ukrainians were highly organized. They were meeting constantly by this time in groups. They had started up in 1918, they had started up the Ukrainian Labour Temple, for instance, the first one being built in Welland but the one we all know about was the big one built in Winnipeg in 1918, which is preserved today, by the way, as a national historical site. By the time this had happened, they had developed. There's all kinds of accounts of the clubs, the organizations that they developed to educate themselves, to organize themselves. So they went into these actions before and after the Great Labour Revolt as well organized cadre of the trade union movement, even though a lot of trade union leaders still had trouble with them.

Q: And the Canadian state went out of their way to blame Ukrainian workers as being the real defining force of labour revolt and that they were doing it on behalf of Austria-Hungary.

WG: Absolutely. The Ukrainian Catholic bishop, Budka, didn't do his countrymen any favour when he, just at the outbreak of the war, he issued a bulletin directing Ukrainians in Canada to defend the fatherland, the fatherland being Austria, ostensibly. Because of course as I said, there

was no Ukraine. I just want to fill in that that was the first wave of Ukrainians that really got involved in the Great Labour Revolt in spite of the fact that they had every reason not to. The reasons for becoming involved outweighed all the reasons for not becoming involved, such as police surveillance, internment, disenfranchisement, and ultimately deportation. Right after the Great Labour Revolt they started deporting people by the thousands. Many of them were British.

Q: How did the Ukrainians feel about being thought of as Austrian?

WG: Of course the Ukrainians didn't like Austria. Austria being a dominant imperial power, they had every reason to resent the Austrian empire. Conscription was one reason, the taxes were another. At the same time, there's all kinds of evidence that the Austrians put into place a system of law that was much more liberal than what they were allowed under the Poles. I just want to say that the notion that Canada was this benevolent humanitarian country that would bring in thousands of people, the poor and the helpless, in an effort to help them and give them a new life.

First of all, people came because they were searching for a better life, there's no doubt about that. But it was demonstrated so clearly that what the authorities were interested in was migrant, exploitable labour. The three big waves of Ukrainian immigration corresponded with three eras of development, the first being before the First World War. Then when the First World War was over, gradually things picked up. Even though I couldn't say there was an economic boom, there was a definite demand for labour. The government of course had no intention of importing any more of these non-preferred settlers, but the railway companies put pressure on them. The Railway Act began in 1924 and was formally put in place in 1925, under which the Government of Canada literally handed over immigration responsibilities to the two railway companies – the CNR and CPR. They sent their agents abroad to import thousands of workers who were needed. These generally, even though they demanded their priority was agriculturalists and domestics, Ukrainian girls were highly preferred as domestics. We can go into the extent to which domestics were exploited when they came here, and it continued even when they turned to Jamaica, for instance, to supply the domestics; much the same kind of practise. But not to get away from the general narrative. There was a boom created by the mining and railway and other interests. They needed labour, so the *Railways Act* allowed them to import labour on their terms, labour that was generally indentured.

Many of them went to work in the mines of Ontario, some in the factories. Many more came out to the west and put up with some of the conditions that the earlier settlers did, many of them going up to the Peace River country, for instance, to land that definitely was nonpreferred. The next big development boom occurred after the Second World War. The Government of Canada, having no intention of bringing in the poor people from the camps in Germany, from the displaced persons camps, finally was persuaded to bring them in, by pressure once again, from interests that needed the labour. They would bring in only so much. There was a powerful lobbying group set up by the Ukrainian servicemen to pressure the Canadian government. There was pressure put on by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which had been created by this time. But really, the key was that these people were needed for their labour. They allowed companies to send agents into the displaced persons camps in Germany and outside of Germany, I believe mainly to Germany and Austria. These people would go into the camps and find the best

specimens that they could find, to the extent where the host countries and the host authorities started to complain that you were picking these people out like cattle. They would ask those interested in coming to Canada to line up, they would look at them, check their teeth, check their muscles, and they'd also check to see whether they were radicals. The Government of Canada allowed people in for another reason. They said, these people in the displaced camps – and it's true – are fervent anti-communists. We need these Ukrainians and others to offset, to counterbalance the Ukrainian radicals in Canada.

Q: They brought 8,000 members of the Ukrainian home army, who were so fascist that Britain didn't want any of them.

WG: No, nobody wanted them. They brought them in kind of secretively as to their connections to the Nazis. You had the SS Waffen Galicia in Ukraine, so all kinds of fascists were included. My own father, I have to add, joined a club in Canada during the Second World War of Ukrainians who supported the Nazis.

Q: How did the divisions arise in Canada between the radicals, most of whom identified to some degree with the Communist Party and on the other hand were fascists.

WG: Well not all of them were fascists, there were many that were anti-Bolshevik for reasons that they thought were born out of experience. I'll answer your question by telling you that after the First World War, conditions in Ukraine, the borderlands, were worse than ever. There were armies sweeping back and forth, and generally death and destruction, starvation and everything else was the lot of many Ukrainians living in the borderlands, there being no Ukraine. There was a Ukrainian nation set up briefly during the First World War, but it disintegrated. There was the Bolshevik army moving in and joined with a lot of Bolsheviks, a lot of socialists and communists in Ukraine at that time. They had actually set up the Eastern Ukraine as a Bolshevik state. But suffice it to say, that war and pillage and hunger was generally for a lot of them, and a lot of them thought that they had good reason to oppose the Bolsheviks. They came too, fervent anti-Communists, especially when they were subjected to the propaganda being put out by the Canadian government and the media and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

Q: The Canadian government of course would give a degree of support to the Congress.

WG: Oh of course. The Ukrainian Canadian Committee at first and then the Congress was totally a creation of the Canadian government and Watson Kirkconnell. All you have to do is read one of the original speeches he gave to one of the conventions of the UCC to see where he stood on the question of displaced persons coming in and the need for people who were anti-Communists to offset these dangerous Ukrainian radicals. So you had the first wave of Ukrainians, many of them subjected to material conditions that made them radicals. The second wave that came in under the *Railways Act*, many of them came with mixed feelings, many of them came with anti-Bolshevik feelings; we know that. Many of them came as quite right-wing Ukrainian nationalists. They were fighting for Ukrainian independence. There's several books written about this – how they came to Canada with their hearts still in the old country. They came determined to fight for independence, and they saw the Bolshevik states as being one of their enemies, as being one of the obstacles to Ukrainian independence. You see strong right-wing

organizations – The Ukrainian Rifle and the Ukrainian War Veterans Association that came over with their hearts firmly in the old country and firmly set against Socialism, Bolshevism, or whatever - quite a few right-wing organizations being set up. There was even a Hetmanite organization that longed for the return of the Hetmans. That was where the great divide that affects the Ukrainian community to this day began, right after the First World War. It was only strengthened by the kind of people that came in after the First World War, strengthened by the proddings of the RCMP and the Canadian government and the media. I've never been able to understand why the media - I can understand why the corporate media would have right-wing tendencies, but why reporters allow themselves to be, why they buy into this right-wing crap, I've never been able to understand.

Q: As a former reporter, I know the reason. If you don't buy into it, you don't last.

WG: You don't have a job, okay I agree with you. But just to reinforce the point, the three major waves of Ukrainian immigration corresponded to three times when there was even a small economic boom that demanded bringing in labour. Otherwise, the large number of Ukrainians that you see in Canada today would not be here.

Q: That first wave of Ukrainians largely did support the radical movement.

WG: Sure. After the First World War you see the divide growing. The divide grew during the Great Depression when the Ukrainian radical movement, the radical side, actually strengthened. You had the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association. I'm not quite sure of the number, but there were hundreds of clubs and Ukrainian labour temple clubs. The reason Ukrainian Labour Temple Association arose was because they built their temple in Winnipeg, and it's a huge building. After building it, mainly with volunteer labour, they then had to have an association to run it. That was where people gravitated, because of course the Social Democratic party and other organizations and the press had been outlawed by the Canadian government. They had a home to go to, and it just spread like wildfire across the west.

I recently donated the papers of the AUC in Alberta to the Alberta archives, and I gave away something like 20 boxes packed with files from each one of the ULFTA (it became the Ukrainian Farmer Temple Association in the '20s), files from places that don't even exist today. The Dapp branch, for instance – I can go through the different branches all across Alberta. There were something like 45 branches of the ULFTA in Alberta alone in which they carried on education. The kids were taught Ukrainian and some of their own history through what we call the 'Ridna Shkola,' Our People Schools. They were definitely subjected to surveillance by the RCMP as being the hotbeds of Ukrainian radicalism. After the Edmonton Hunger March in 1932, for instance, in which Ukrainians played a major role, they raided the Ukrainian temple in Edmonton thinking that they'd find guns and ammunition and explosives. All they found were women making sandwiches for the hunger marchers. They came the next day and arrested a bunch of Ukrainian men on charges of being the leaders of the Hunger March, in spite of the fact that the people who really should've been arrested were the RCMP and the City constables who broke up the march.

It's interesting reading the memoirs of people like Mike Novakowski, who owned a garage in Mundare, who was one of the leaders of the ULFTA and also the leader of much of the radical activity that took place. When the police and the authorities heard, and our mayor and our premier at that time, Brownlee, heard that there was going to be a march, they of course made it illegal. They set up roadblocks around Edmonton. The Ukrainians coming in to the march, the farmers mainly, at the height of the depression selling their grain and hogs and cattle for nothing, came in to a legitimate hunger march, they had to go around the roadblocks. There are all kinds of stories of them being stopped, finding the next road over, coming up anyway. I want to just add that Mike Novakowski was one of the organizers of an almost successful strike against the elevator companies a few years later during the Great Depression. There was actually a successful elevator strike in Myrnam against the companies.

You have the Ukrainians, the radical side, carrying on their activities at the same time as the conservative side, which was largely born after the First World War, increasingly organizing themselves, organizing militia. They even had a small air force, if you can believe, of Ukrainian nationalists. They were going to liberate the old country. At the same time, they saw the Bolsheviks and the Socialists and Communists in western Canada as being roadblocks to their organizing efforts. The hatred that built up towards Ukrainian Socialists or radicals was intense, and it carried on to today. When I ran for the NDP here in Alberta in 1982, I was called a Communist, a Socialist, a Bolshevik. I was told to go back to Moscow if I liked things so much over there. That all is borne out to this day. You see the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, not all the people in the Congress are bad people. Many of them are legitimately wanting to continue with the Ukrainian traditions and culture. But some of the leaders will respond to any evidence that anybody left of Atilla the Hun is a communist..

I do want to talk about the role that the Ukrainian community and Ukrainian organizations played in providing welfare or benevolent assistance to their fellow Ukrainians. Ukrainians not only had to fear patriotic dismissal – the major fear of the Ukrainian worker was disease, injury or death. His family would have to fear that too, because there were no means of support, very little means of support. When death or injury did occur or when any form of assistance was needed, surprisingly, in the really early days, the Northwest Mounted Police were the only authorities that appear to be concerned about whether or not these settlers and frontier labourers were even surviving. They would send the constables around to see whether people were starving in the middle of winter, freezing to death, and many dead, by the way. You read the reports of the constables when they visited homes. First of all, they describe the homes as being very dirty, grim, dimly lit. They'd say that they'd find a woman all alone, because her husband was hundreds of miles away in the mines during the winter, surviving the winter with one cow maybe if she was lucky, with a dog, with half a sack of flour, and with a few vegetables. The early winters, they hadn't even had a chance to prepare for the winter. The husband was away. You'd have reports of women leaving their children with a neighbour a mile and a half away where they'd have to get to, because there were no roads so they'd go through the forest to the neighbour's place, and walking to Edmonton to get another half sack of flour or some provisions. You'd have reports from Edmonton police, for instance, saying that this woman appeared at their

door nearly dead. They'd nurse her back to health. She'd pack 50 pounds of flour and other provisions on her head, and walk back to Myrnam in the middle of Winter.

The men? - the same thing. The hardship they put up with was incredible. As I said, the Canadian government or even the local authorities were really loathe to provide them any assistance. That's been the case throughout working class history, where nobody was there to provide the workers with assistance. In fact, local authorities, when they found people needing assistance, were very anxious to get them out of the area so they wouldn't have to provide assistance. There was a book published, for instance, on poverty during the Industrial Revolution in England. There were workhouses, for instance, that would boast to the local authorities that not a single child would survive. Anyway, we could go on with those tales of hardship. The workers, about the same time as they started the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association, started something called the Workers Benevolent Association. That was just one of several ways in which they responded to the need for welfare. Really, they didn't have the beginnings of a social welfare state in earnest until the Second World War. You had these people providing their own assistance of their own kind, and you had thousands of people joining the Workers Benevolent Association and all kinds of reports, some of which I'm including in my book, of the kind of assistance that was provided. Generally, benevolent assistance was provided on the community level by the workers themselves, with no assistance from the state. When the welfare system, the social assistance and other progressive measures began, Ukrainians were amongst the stoutest supporters. The right-wing Ukrainians who were strongly in place by the time of the Second World War, would usually find some reason to support the politicians and the media interests who would oppose these measures as being something that we couldn't possibly afford.

Q: What part did the halls play in the cultural component?

WG: The Ukrainian halls, the "narodni dim" and the ULFTA halls, became the centre of Ukrainian culture in this country. As I said, there were 45 halls in Alberta alone. Before the halls were built, people would meet in homes. There are all kinds of stories about how they carried on their traditions. They arrive in a new land, no assistance, extremely harsh conditions. There was only some relief when they would get together in somebody's home. Many of them knew how to play musical instruments; they'd play musical instruments, people would dance. They would eat their traditional Ukrainian food, which was peasant food, which ironically is very popular today amongst members of the bourgeoisie. They loved to eat perogies. The reason we ate perogies was because it's the only thing we could afford; same with the cabbage rolls and other things that have become so popular today. So they would meet in homes, and then when they built the halls, the halls became the centre.

Jars Balan, Director of the Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta, gave me one of his papers in which he lists the cultural activities taking place in Alberta in one year. There are pages and pages of cultural activities – choirs, theatre, put on by the Ukrainian people. Everybody it seemed would get involved. Ukrainian women would put down the slop pails with which they did the chores, the pitchforks with which they'd pitch sheaves, they would bundle up the children and go to the Ukrainian hall. They would put on the most incredible performances of the day, many of them by authors and playwrights in the old country, Ivan Franko or Stefanyk or

Shevchenko - as I said, pages and pages of the kind of cultural activities taking place in the halls. They would spend weekends in the Ukrainian halls. There was hardly a night when the Ukrainian hall, the Ukrainian Temple Association or the ukrainski or narodny dim, the Ukrainian homes, would not have something going on in them. That was the way they survived and that's the way they enlightened themselves.

There was a very strong sentiment that we had to elevate ourselves. We'd elevate ourselves through formal education, we'd elevate ourselves through cultural activities, giving a complete lie to the popular stereotype that the Ukrainians were, after all, just dumb brutes worthy of nothing other than exploitation. That manifested itself also in the reaction to, first of all, the Jacks and Bulls. The Ukrainian term Jacks and Bulls meant something. It meant Ukrainian men who would respond to the hidden injuries of discrimination and class by becoming really rough people. We see it repeated over and over again in working class communities and in the black communities in the States, where people respond by becoming extremely tough and rough, people who gloried in getting really drunk on a Saturday night and going and busting up a wedding. There was a lot of that going on.

Enlightenment was a counterweight to that. They especially despised Ukrainian girls who would become what they called 'Kates' – dress up in a fashion that Ukrainian mothers did not consider to be suitable, put on bright red lipstick, smoke, and use language that girls shouldn't use. There was a strong tendency in that direction too where they would respond to discrimination and exploitation by becoming rough and assertive in their own way. But you had an incredible cultural tradition developing in western Canada, with many highly skilled cultural directors in the halls, one of them being Myroslaw Irchan, who was a director in Ukraine and here in Edmonton for several years, putting on highly skilled cultural productions. He went back to Ukraine because when the Soviet Ukraine was established after the First World War east of the Dnipro River, there was a period of cultural enlightenment of Ukrainianization in Ukraine at that point under Stalin, where they actually promoted Ukrainian culture and reawakening of the Romantic movement that had begun many years earlier. Irchan made the mistake of going back there just about the time that that the crackdown began. Stalin reversed his stance on all of that, and Irchan ended up being exiled to Siberia and he ended up being executed.

Q: The Ukrainian left in Canada was left in a funny position during the '30s where the Communist Party of Canada also turned against the idea of this kind of separate cultural groupings.

WG: You're right. In my research - I've got 1,500 pages of narrative; I've got about 4,000 pages of research - I'm trying to compress that all into a 350 or 400-page book. Very hard to do, because I want to relate some of the stories that are told of some of the decrees that came out of the Comintern landing on the desks of these Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple clubs all across western Canada saying, "Look! No more wasting your time and resources on cultural activities." The working class is on the edge of revolution. You have to devote your full energies to promoting the revolution. All kinds of decrees came out in that direction. They were resisted by people in the ULFTAs – well, not by everybody. When they began in earnest, you had all kinds of breakaways from both the Communist Party and the ULFTA. One of the largest breakaways

was here in Edmonton, where a large segment just broke off and said, we're not going to support the ULFTA anymore and we're certainly not going to support the Communist Party if that's the direction they're taking. So there was friction between the Communist Party and especially the directions coming from the Comintern, and the local Communists and radical or left-leaning Ukrainians, at the same time as being exacerbated by this growing political divide between them and the right wing Ukrainians that largely arose after the First World War.

Q: What would you say to Ukrainian Canadian people about what they need to know about their history?

WG: I would say that once again we see evidence of the importance of history. We collect and we analyse and preserve and disseminate history because we think it's important. Otherwise, people suffer from amnesia. Just like anyone suffering from amnesia, you can be lied to, you can be misdirected. That's what's happened in this case. If Ukrainians knew more of their own history, they might treat the new immigrants differently, they might regard the new immigrants differently. They would know that they're being subjected to exactly the same kind of treatment. They've been brought in, and they've only ever been brought in, other than the odd humanitarian act where a few refugees are brought in or a few people are sponsored, they were mainly brought in when their labour is needed. They were brought in to perform the labour that nobody else wanted to perform, such as being a domestic.

When you make people aware of their own history, they're much less likely to respond to the kind of propaganda being put out by people like Jason Kenney, who says that part of our problem are immigrants - and who's going around the world now propagating the lie that somehow people who are concerned with social justice in Alberta, people who are concerned with the degradation of our environment, are only saying the things they're saying because of foreigners, immigrants, people coming from outside propagating these ideas. They're being misled, says Jason Kenney, completely giving the lie to the fact there's good reason why people are concerned about social justice or about the environment.

When you think of the showdown that's coming up in Alberta, Premier Kenney and his people are definitely laying the groundwork for a showdown. It's as if they want there to be a showdown so they can ask the public, who's running this province? Us or the unions? That's what they want to be able to say. Us, the government you elected. We've got all these wonderful seats, mainly in the farming communities. Who's going to run this province? He's laying the groundwork for a showdown, and the showdown on his side will only be successful if we don't do our work, if we don't put out the history to people so they know that what he's saying is essentially a lie, that we've got all kinds of precedents for the same periods of time when people like him have gotten on a soapbox and talked this kind of vile, damaging propaganda. The workers in Alberta, especially the public sector workers, many of them haven't had a raise in pay for four years. He's targeting them as being part of the problem in Alberta. He's taunting and he's laying them off. He's threatening their jobs every day.

I know that there's going to be what they call 'labour unrest'. They have no choice. Workers' backs are up against the wall. Those that belong to a trade union will have to go on strike, they'll have to engage in forms of civil disobedience, they'll have to protest and demonstrate against

what's happening to them. It's going to be up to us. It's going to be up to trade union leaders and people such as us – historians, sociologists, all kinds of people – to bring some truths to bear on the situation and to say, that's not the way it is at all, and essentially to fight back. I know we can defeat him, because I've studied history and you have. We know that in the past when people have been faced with this kind of thing, sometimes the struggle takes a little while to develop, but inevitably it does. If we all do our work, we're going to win.