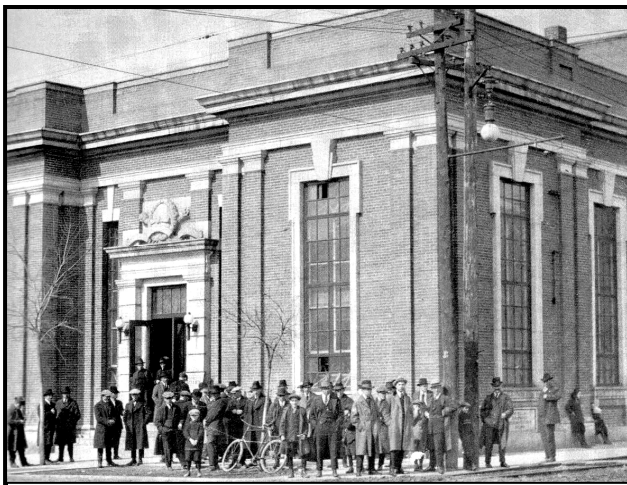


The Ukrainian Labour Temple Association

The Ukrainian Labour Temple Association (ULTA) was born in Winnipeg shortly before the end of the First World War. At a meeting in the Royal Theatre on 1 March 1918, radical Ukrainian Social Democrats, members of the Volodymyr Vynnychenko Dramatic and Educational Society, and the staff of the weekly newspaper *Robochyi narod* (whose editors had already endorsed the Bolshevik seizure of power and the nascent Soviet regime in Russia and in eastern Ukraine), approved the construction of a Ukrainian labour temple (*robitnychiy dim*), where the city's left-wing Ukrainians could hold political meetings, stage concerts and plays, print books, pamphlets and newspapers, and provide accommodation for like-minded organizations. Because the founders were eager to establish a mass organization capable of embracing workers who were not party members, the ULTA was created. After the Social Democratic party of Canada, its Ukrainian section, and *Robochyi narod* were outlawed in the fall of 1918, the Ukrainian Labour Temple emerged as a convenient base from which to rebuild the Ukrainian-Canadian left.



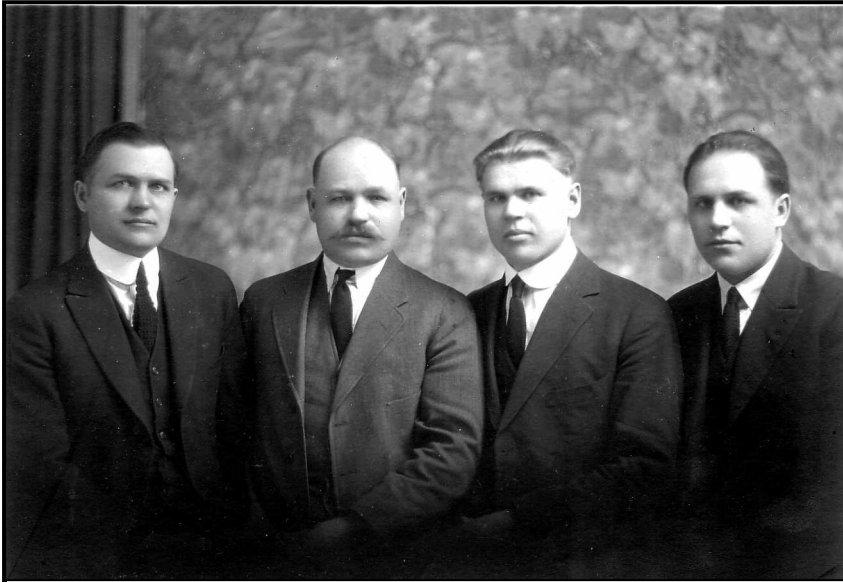
The Ukrainian Labour Temple viewed from the corner of Selkirk and McGregor (AUUC)

During the Winnipeg General Strike, on 17 June 1919, the Ukrainian Labour Temple was raided by the RCMP, all correspondence, account and address books were confiscated, and the print shop and offices were ransacked.

Although the cornerstone of Winnipeg's Ukrainian Labour Temple at 590 Pritchard Avenue and McGregor Street, had been placed on 17 August 1918 at a ceremony attended by 1,000 people, and the print shop opened a week later, the building was not completed until early 1919. Valued at \$72,000 and built by volunteer labour, with financial contributions from Ukrainians all across Canada, it became the headquarters of Canada's first nation-wide Ukrainian mass organization. At the time, it was the most impressive edifice erected by Ukrainian Canadians and a symbol of the left-wing community's strength in the face of adversity. During the Winnipeg General

The men who led the ULTA - Mathew Popovich, John Navis (Navizivsky), Danylo Lobay, Mathew Shatulsky and William Kolisnyk - openly sympathized with efforts to establish a Soviet regime in Ukraine. Shatulsky, Popovich and Navis travelled to Soviet Ukraine where they met and established contacts with Communist party leaders, state officials and prominent writers and artists. During the 1920s, the Association benefited greatly from its identification with Soviet Ukraine where the 'Ukrainization' of public life, impressive achievements in scholarship, literature and the arts, economic recovery, and a degree of prosperity among the as yet uncollectivized peasantry, created the impression that Ukrainians were not only 'equals among equals' in the Soviet Union, but that they were a nation in the very vanguard of humanity's march toward a better future. Inspired by communist ideals and convinced that the foundations of a workers' and peasants' state were being laid in their homeland, Ukrainian Labour Temple leaders became enthusiastic and outspoken defenders of the Soviet regime who regrettably overlooked or endorsed the Soviet system's many oppressive features. So powerful and hypnotic was their vision of a workers' and peasants' Soviet Ukraine and so fervent their faith in the men who led the Soviet Union, that they ultimately came to champion Soviet achievements, real and

imaginary, much more enthusiastically and effectively than they challenged the injustices of Canadian capitalism.



Navis, Shatulsky, Lobay and Popovich 1920s (UCEC)

By the early 1920s ULTA leaders were also actively involved in efforts to establish a Communist Party in Canada. When Canadian Communists laid the groundwork for the Workers Party of Canada (WPC) in 1921, Popovich, Navis and several other Ukrainian Labour Temple activists were present. The ULTA was recognized as one of the WPC's affiliated "language federations," *Ukrainski robotnychi visty* became an official

party news organ, and Popovich, Navis and John Boychuk of Toronto were elected to the party's central committee. In 1922, about 100 of Winnipeg's 230 WPC members were Ukrainians, virtually all of them ULTA members. While most ULTA members did not belong to the WPC they were expected to participate in fund-raising campaigns in support of the party. After the WPC changed its name to the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in April 1924, Ukrainian CPC members controlled the ULTA (or the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association as it came to be called in 1924) and its affiliated organizations through party fractions (or caucuses) that were established in every one of the association's branches.



1925 ULFTA convention participants (UCEC)

Prior to the Second World War the ULTA was the largest and best organized Ukrainian-Canadian community institution in Winnipeg. It provided those Ukrainian-Canadian workers who joined its ranks with an exceptionally broad array of cultural, recreational, fraternal and economic organizations during the 1920s.

During its first three years the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association remained a men's club in all but name. In the fall of

1921, however, several Ukrainian women's committees had been established to help with relief efforts for drought and famine victims in Soviet Russia and Ukraine. These committees became the nucleus of the association's Women's Section which was officially established in 1922 and

focused on fundraising and self-education. As fund-raisers women organized picnics, socials and suppers to sustain local labour temples and were especially active during the bi-annual campaigns on behalf of the Labour Temple press, going door-to-door collecting donations, organizing lotteries, holding bazaars, staging plays and preparing schoolchildren for concerts. Self-education involved literacy classes for illiterate women, group readings of newspapers and fiction by progressive Ukrainian and North American authors; the publication of wall newspapers; lectures on a variety of topics; and special summer courses at which male instructors taught the rudiments of Ukrainian grammar, arithmetic and world geography. In 1927, women's reading circles were advised to read fiction like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, Myroslav Irchan's *Tragediia pershoho travnia* (The Tragedy of May First), and Ivan Franko's *Boryslav smiietsia* (Boryslav is Laughing), as well as non-fiction titles like *The Struggle of Faith and Science*, *The Life of Lenin* and *Lenin's Teachings About the Party*. Instruction in embroidery and handicrafts was also provided. By 1929 there were well over 1500 Women's Section members in Canada, about a quarter to a third of them in Winnipeg and its suburbs.



ULFTA women's executive 1929 (UCEC)



Folk dancers (UCEC)

Formal activities for children were introduced at the Winnipeg Labour Temple in 1919 and by 1922 Ukrainian Workers' Children's Schools were being established in branches all across Canada. Because Ukrainian workers experienced class oppression as workers, and ethnic prejudice and discrimination as Ukrainians, the schools had a twofold purpose. First, they attempted to foster class consciousness and working class solidarity by teaching students that "they are the children of working people, the children of an enslaved and exploited class." Second, because "a child [who] forgets its native language [also] unconsciously rejects its family and its class," the schools attempted to sustain Ukrainian identity by combining instruction in Ukrainian language, reading and writing with some exposure to Ukrainian culture, particularly music, singing and dancing, and occasionally a smattering of history and geography. During the 1920s, classroom readings, discussions and songs raised issues of concern to Canadian workers and provided the children with a highly idealized and romanticized vision of life in the Soviet republics, which were presented as models to be emulated. As many children lacked the vocabulary to carry on a conversation in Ukrainian, teachers tried to impress the importance of

Ukrainian upon them and their parents. Ukrainian, they maintained, “was one of the languages of the Great Revolution which shook the world.” Alongside Russian, “the Ukrainian language is creating new values, and giving birth to a new proletarian literature and a new working class culture.” By 1928, more than 400 children attended the three schools in Winnipeg's North End, Transcona and Elmwood/East Kildonan. Some of the larger schools, including the one in North Winnipeg, also established girls’ mandolin orchestras, which embarked on local and national tours. Their repertoire combined traditional Ukrainian folk songs and European and American standards with working class anthems and new Soviet marches.



Ukrainian Labour Temple children's picnic 1927 (UCEC)

To provide adolescents with supervised activity and to combat demoralization bred by North American mass culture the Association of Ukrainian Labour Youth (later renamed the Youth Section of the ULFTA) was established in 1924. Led by Ukrainian members of the Young Communist League, the Youth Section was open to young people ten to eighteen years of age. By March 1927, the Youth Section had 32 branches and 1,506 members in Canada, including three branches and 504 members in Winnipeg and its suburbs. Co-educational in structure, Youth Section groups met on Sundays, learned how to run an organization, participated in ULFTA cultural activities and fund-raising drives, and learned about the international working class struggle from a Communist perspective. Sports also figured prominently in Youth Section activity, especially during the summer months when baseball, hiking, and track and field events at picnics and outings attracted new recruits. Gymnastics, which could be practiced year-round, did not require expensive equipment, accommodated both boys and girls, and could be incorporated

into public performances and readily adapted for purposes of political propaganda, proved to be the most popular form of athletic activity.

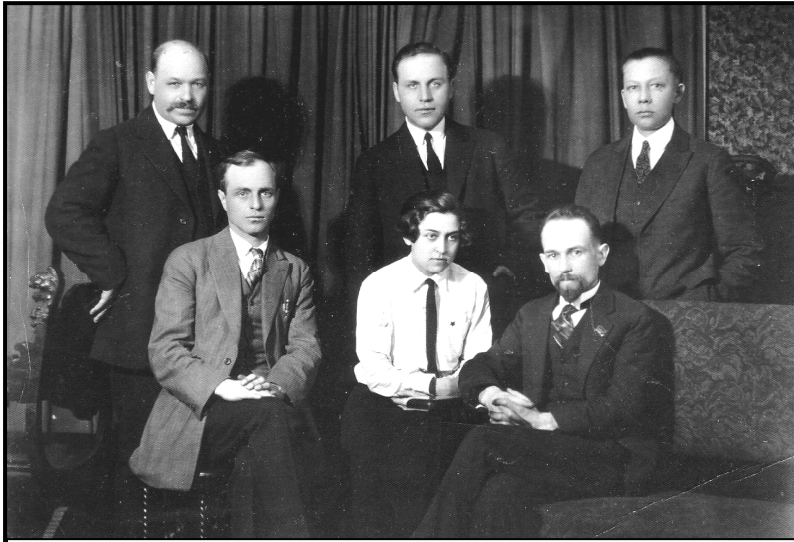


Ukrainian Labour Temple mandolin orchestra with teacher Petro Uhryniuk 1925 (UCEC)

In keeping with its mandate to look after the material needs of Ukrainian-Canadian workers, in September 1922 the ULTA established the Workers' Benevolent Association (WBA), a mutual benefit organization that provided accident and sickness insurance and death benefits. Open to male and female workers who were in sympathy with the labour movement and did not belong to bourgeois political parties, the WBA experienced very slow growth during its first three years but expanded rapidly from 1926. In the summer of 1928, with Labour Temple backing, the WBA purchased two large buildings and more than one hundred acres of land in Parkdale, some 20 km north of Winnipeg. The property cost \$46,000 and was turned into an orphanage and retirement home for members of the Association; it flourished for a decade, before closing its doors on the eve of the Second World War. Almost simultaneously, the Labour Temple and WBA central executive committees, and their Winnipeg branches and affiliates, established the Workers and Farmers Co-operative Association (re-named People's Co-op in 1938), to serve the consumer needs of Winnipeg's Ukrainian and East European working class and to bring more members into the Labour Temple Association. Beginning with a small wood and coal yard, the Co-op branched out into the dairy trade, established a lumberyard, and even provided members with banking services. Unlike the orphanage and retirement home, the Co-op not only survived the Depression, it grew and expanded providing employment for fifty people in 1934 and one hundred by the end of the decade.

The Ukrainian Labour Temple's spacious theatre allowed the Association's executive to rent their facility to Ukrainian organizations in order to pay off construction debts which exceeded \$47,000 in 1920. As a result, in 1919-20, every Ukrainian drama circle in the city performed in the new theatre. Although this practice ended early in 1921, shortly after Labour Temple officials banned the staging of Volodymyr Vynnychenko's *Mizh dvokh syl* (Between Two Powers), which was set

during the bloody Bolshevik occupation of Kyiv in early 1918 and demonstrated that Russian Bolshevism was incompatible with the Ukrainian national cause, plays staged by the **Ukrainian Labour Temple Dramatic and Choral Circle** remained the Association's most popular cultural activity throughout the 1920s. In large measure, this was attributable to émigré journalist, critic, playwright and short story writer Myroslav Irchan, the Ukrainian Labour Temple's writer-in-residence between November 1923 and June 1929. Irchan and Mathew Shatulsky established a Workers' Theatre Studio and their productions consistently attracted enthusiastic, sell-out crowds.



**Canadian branch of HART. Front L to R: Irchan, Piontek, Kulyk
Back L to R Shatulsky, Popovich, Smyt (UCEC)**

The *Manitoba Free Press* reviewed Irchan's plays, and even Toronto's stodgy *Saturday Night* referred to Irchan as "the most popular and influential author in the country" because his plays were seen by more (Ukrainian) Canadians than those of any other Canadian playwright. When the 'old Bolshevik' Ivan Kulyk, a well-known Jewish-Ukrainian poet, short story writer and translator, accompanied by his wife

Luciana Piontek, also a writer, came to Canada in early 1924 as part of the

Soviet trade mission headquartered in Montreal, Irchan, Kulyk and Piontek formed a Canadian branch of "Hart" - a Soviet writers' organization dedicated to "the unification of proletarian writers ... who use Ukrainian ... who aim at the creation of one international, communist culture, who spread communist ideology and fight against petit-bourgeois propertied ideology" - in Winnipeg. Popovich, Shatulsky and several other Labour Temple members joined the organization, held literary readings and published their works in local Labour Temple and overseas Soviet Ukrainian periodicals. The branch survived Kulyk's and Piontek's return to Ukraine in 1927 but disbanded after Irchan moved to Kharkiv in 1929.

Finally, Ukrainian Labour Temple leaders were more actively involved in municipal, provincial and federal politics than were the leaders of the city's other Ukrainian associations. After making a lacklustre debut as a WPC candidate in Winnipeg in the 1922 Manitoba provincial elections, Mathew Popovich, who had already served as the CPC's interim District Organizer in Winnipeg, just barely missed winning a seat on Winnipeg City Council on four separate occasions (1923, 1924, 1925 and 1927) usually falling short by fewer than one hundred votes. During the 1926 federal election campaign, Popovich received the Communist nomination in Winnipeg North, although ultimately the CPC decided not to contest the seat. Several months later, in November 1926, a major turning point occurred when long-time ULTA activist William Kolisnyk was elected to Winnipeg City Council. An unprepossessing bicycle shop owner, Kolisnyk became the first democratically elected Communist legislator, at any level, in North America. Two years later, Kolisnyk increased his vote total and won re-election, thereby cementing the reputation of the city's North End, with its large Ukrainian working class population, as a hotbed of 'Canadian Bolshevism,' and provoking widespread anxiety among Winnipeg's moneyed elite in the South End.



Kolisnyk flanked by Shatulsky (l) and Lobay (r) (UCEC)



Kolisnyk's campaign headquarters (UCEC)



1928 Ukrainian Labour-Farmer almanac

-- Orest T. Martynowych

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