

## Ukrainian Section of the Socialist Party of Canada / Social Democratic Party of Canada

In the fall of 1907, socialists led by Paul Crath (Pavlo Krat), Myroslav Stechishin and Wasyl Holowacky gained control of the progressive but non-partisan Taras Shevchenko Educational Society at 467 Manitoba Avenue and Powers Street. When those who were not in sympathy withdrew, the socialists established a Ukrainian section of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), consisting of about 55 members, and the Shevchenko Society's hall became a gathering place for workers of various ethnic backgrounds. In November, the first Ukrainian socialist newspaper, *Chervonyi prapor* (The Red Flag) appeared in Winnipeg, dedicated to the task of "creating among Ukrainians in Canada cadrés of socialist fighters for a new socioeconomic order, for a better way of life for all people, a way of life which mankind cannot realize under the capitalist system." Although at least 10 Ukrainian socialist societies sprang up during the next few months, they and *Chervonyi prapor* had collapsed by the summer of 1908, victims of the 1908 recession. A second attempt to mobilize Ukrainian workers was made in June 1909 when *Robochyi narod* (The Working People), edited by Myroslaw Stechishin, appeared in Winnipeg. In November 1909 delegates representing 11 Western Canadian Ukrainian socialist societies established the Federation of Ukrainian Social Democrats (FUSD). They resolved that the basis of federation would be class rather than nationality, that autonomy within the SPC was needed to facilitate the mobilization of Ukrainian-speaking immigrants, and that unskilled Ukrainian workers should join locals of the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or the 'Wobblies'). SPC leaders were also urged to join the Socialist International and to reconsider their dogmatic opposition to unions, and their rather cavalier attitude to electoral politics and remedial legislation. When the SPC took little notice, the Ukrainians, Jews, Poles and representatives of other Winnipeg 'language locals' broke with the SPC in July 1910 and called for the formation of the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC), which took place in 1911.



**Paul Crath  
(PAA)**



**Stechishin and Popovich in *Robochyi narod* office (UCEC)**

Winnipeg was the headquarters of the Ukrainian socialist movement in Canada from 1907 until the summer of 1912, and again from January 1914 through 1918, and it was home to *Robochyi narod* from June 1909 until its demise in September 1918. While the city had a Ukrainian socialist branch from 1907 through 1918, that branch was never one of the largest in Canada (those were located in the Crow's Nest Pass),

and membership fluctuated from year to year, rarely surpassing 60-70 members and falling as low as 25 dues-paying members in 1916. Nor did the city's socialists have a hall or building of their

own after they were forced to vacate the old premises of the Taras Shevchenko Educational Society in 1909. During the next decade meetings were held in many locales including the SDPC hall at 213 Jarvis Avenue (1912-13); a hall on Higgins Avenue near Argyle Street (1913); Koziarsky's hall at the corner of Pritchard Avenue and McKenzie Street (1914-15); the *Robochyi narod* print shop at 873 Main Street (1917); a building at the corner of Burrows Avenue and Powers Street (1917); a building at 907 Main Street (1917); the Royal Theatre near the corner of Main Street and Selkirk Avenue (1918); and finally, Minuk's Hall at 260 Dufferin Avenue, where the organization also held many dances, proceeds from which were earmarked for the construction of the Ukrainian Labour Temple.

Ukrainian socialists believed that capitalism was an inherently exploitative system of production. They argued that most 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 Negroes' (*bili nehry*) within the capitalist system. As a result they attempted to make immigrant labourers conscious of their place in the socioeconomic order, and to impress upon them the need for interethnic and international working class solidarity. While their ultimate goal - the abolition of private property in the means of production, and the creation of a just and egalitarian society where production was carried on to satisfy human needs rather than to facilitate the accumulation of private profits - was revolutionary, their methods were moderate. They encouraged their followers to join unions, participated actively in electoral politics, and agitated for the 8 hour working day, a minimum wage of \$2.25 per day, old-age and disability insurance, the abolition of child labour, universal suffrage for all people over 21, and the introduction of the initiative, referendum and recall into Canadian politics. Such reforms, they believed, advanced the evolution of capitalism and created the preconditions for a smooth and orderly transition to socialism.



FUSD convention 1912 Edmonton (PAA)

Internationalism - commitment to interethnic and international working class solidarity - was the one point that set the Ukrainian socialist organization apart from other Ukrainian community organizations. In Winnipeg, Ukrainian, Jewish, Polish and Russian socialists jointly commemorated St Petersburg's 1905 'Bloody Sunday'; expressed their opposition to the Balkan Wars and the Canadian Naval Bill which allocated millions for the British navy; protested the suppression of miners' strikes by the militia, and the arrest of socialists and unionists by the police; and organized picnics, concerts, rallies and 'Socialist Sunday Schools.' The latter, established in the winter of 1915-16, had three goals: "to neutralize the inculcation of submission in the capitalist public school system"; to provide an education "based on socialist and rationalist principles"; and "to implant the high moral values and socialist ideals of peace and international brotherhood." In May 1914 and April 1915, they organized massive street demonstrations to bring attention to the plight of unemployed immigrant labourers, and they established an Unemployed Workers' Committee to meet with provincial authorities. May Day parades were the most visible manifestations of internationalism and working class solidarity in Winnipeg. Led by red banners inscribed with the slogan "Proletarians of the World Unite," and bands playing the 'Marseillaise,' 'Internationale,' and other labour anthems, workers marched, four abreast, with placards demanding the eight-hour day, work and bread, peace and an end to exploitation. Ukrainian socialists usually assembled in St John's Park, at the corner of Main Street and Mountain Avenue, where they held their own ceremonies before marching down Main Street to join representatives of other groups. The largest May Day parade occurred in 1915 when war and unemployment created widespread unrest and brought out anywhere from 12,000 to 35,000 marchers (depending on the sources). The parade always culminated at Market Square where speakers addressed the crowd in English, Ukrainian, German, Yiddish, Polish and Russian from several podiums. Because they were convinced that the interests of Ukrainian labourers and those of Ukrainian businessmen and government employees were fundamentally at odds, Ukrainian Social Democrats refused to support 'bourgeois' Ukrainians who entered politics. In Winnipeg municipal (1911, 1914) and Manitoba provincial (1915) elections they opposed Ukrainian candidates like Theodore Stefanik, a Conservative agent, and Taras Ferley, an Independent Liberal, and chose instead to support Anglo-Canadian and Jewish Social Democratic and Labour candidates RA Rigg, Herman Saltzman, Bill Hoop, AA Heaps, AW Puttee and John Queen.

There was also a distinctly Ukrainian dimension to the Social Democratic program. Between 1908 and 1918, Ukrainian Social Democrats sponsored three active drama circles - the Marko Kropyvnytsky drama circle (1908-09), the Ivan Tobilevych drama circle (1911-12), and the Volodymyr Vynnychenko Dramatic and Educational Society (1914-18) - and they staged concerts and meetings in memory of progressive Ukrainians like the poet Taras Shevchenko and the writer Mykhailo Pavlyk. In 1910 the FUSD created a Society for the Liberation of Myroslav Sichynsky, a Ukrainian student sentenced to life imprisonment for the 1908 assassination of Galician governor Count Andrzej Potocki, after gendarmes killed several Ukrainian peasant activists. The Society collected over \$4,000 for Sichynsky's release and some of the money was used to spring the youthful assassin from prison in November 1911. The city's Ukrainian Social Democrats also supported the principle of bilingual education in Manitoba public schools, arguing that unilingual instruction and knowledge of English only would make it easier for the capitalist ruling class to impose its self-serving social values and biased interpretation of history on students. In 1916 the party censured RA Rigg, a SDPC member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, when he voted for the abolition of bilingual schools. Finally, Ukrainian Social Democrats also organized several lecture series for workers in 1907-08 and again in 1916-18, usually giving them rather ostentatious titles like "Workers' University," "School of Social Studies" and "The First Ukrainian Free School."



**Winnipeg Ukrainian section of the Social Democratic Party of Canada 1917 (UCEC)**

The men who led the Ukrainian socialist movement in Winnipeg, came from different social and political backgrounds. Myroslav Stechishin was the son of a literate Galician peasant who had established a reading club and served several terms as the village reeve. Expelled from the gymnasium in Buchach and the teachers' seminary in Ternopil for reading radical literature, he had emigrated in 1902, participated in a communal venture in Hayward, California, and spent time in San Francisco, attending lectures by American socialists, including Jack London and Eugene Debs. Paul Crath (Krat) was a descendant of the eastern Ukrainian Cossack gentry. His father was a professor of agronomy and his maternal grandfather had large investments in the Donbas industrial region. Active in Ukrainian social democratic circles aligned with the Mensheviks, he had organized peasant strikes and boycotts during the Revolution of 1905, and dabbled in studies at universities in Kyiv, Warsaw and Lviv before immigrating to Canada in 1907. By 1914, Stechishin and Crath had left, or were moving away from the movement. Stechishin had resigned his post as editor and left the Ukrainian section of the SDPC in the summer of 1912 when it emerged that substantial amounts of money raised for Sichynsky had been diverted to cover FUSD debts. He would spend the next decade in Edmonton, the United States and Europe, before returning to Winnipeg as editor of the liberal nationalist *Ukrainskyi holos* (Ukrainian Voice). Meanwhile Crath, who had been impressed by local exponents of the Social Gospel, enrolled in theology at Manitoba College and became a Presbyterian minister before finally leaving the party in 1917. As a result, by 1914, when the FUSD was reorganized and renamed the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party of Canada (USDPC), leadership was devolving into the hands of a new generation of men who were more committed to the class struggle. They included experienced, veteran Social Democratic organizers from Galicia and Bukovyna like Yevhen Hutsailo, Hryhorii Tkachuk and Tymofei Koreichuk, and young newcomers like Matthew Popovich and John Navis (Navizivsky). Popovich, the son of poor peasants, and Navis, whose father was a cobbler and farm labourer, had belonged to clandestine student socialist circles while at the teachers' seminary in Zalishchyky. The colourless but efficient Navis had graduated while the gregarious and charismatic Popovich, who was a fine singer and actor, had been expelled for political activity. Both immigrated to the United States,

joined the Socialist Party of America (SPA), and eventually made their way to Winnipeg where they joined the FUSD. Prior to the war, Popovich returned to New York City on several occasions to organize Slavic workers for the SPA and became acquainted with the staff of the Russian Social Democratic *Novyi mir* (The New World), a periodical that included a number of soon-to-be prominent Bolshevik revolutionaries on its staff.

In 1917, the growth of labour militancy in Canada, socialist opposition to military conscription, and the Bolshevik seizure of power in the Russian Empire, prompted Canadian authorities to begin a systematic surveillance of radical organizations, including the Ukrainian sections of the SDPC. Ukrainian socialist branches in many parts of Canada were raided and Ukrainian party organizers were ordered to stop their activities (if they were naturalized British subjects) or interned (if they were unnaturalized Austrian nationals). Although the Winnipeg branch was not raided, it ceased to exist on 28 September 1918 when the Canadian government outlawed 14 radical organizations among them IWW and the SDPC, including all of its ethnic sections. Several months later, when the war came to an end, the Ukrainian section of the SDPC would re-emerge as the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association.

-- Orest T. Martynowych

### **Books and articles**

Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1991).

Orest T. Martynowych, "Tymofei Koreichuk" in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XIV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 562-63.