

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS:

ONTARIO AND HUNGARIAN ETHNIC LIFE IN CANADA AND ELSEWHERE

The coming of the refugees in 1956-57 was the last great momentous event in the history of the Hungarian community of Ontario. The evolution of this ethnic group since that time has not been uneventful, but no development during the past two-and-a-half decades has come even close to the transformation that had taken place as a result of the arrival of the refugees. Undoubtedly, in the life of some subsections of the Hungarian community there have been important turning points in this period. The establishment in 1974 of the Hungarian-Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto undoubtedly has been a milestone in the life of the Hungarian community of that city. Other important events that might be mentioned were the founding of the Toronto Hungarian School Board in 1971, the establishment of a Hungarian Jesuit noviciate a few years later, and the creation of the Chair of Hungarian Studies at the University of Toronto. But all of these (and other — the list could go on) developments affected only a portion, in some cases a small portion of the Hungarian community in the Province. There might have been events that were memorable for the whole, or at least large portions of the community, such as the visit of Cardinal Mindszenty during the mid-1970s, but these hardly had lasting and fundamental consequences for the group as a whole.

Nevertheless, important developments have been taking place within the group during these last few decades. One of these is the increasing respect and influence many members of the group enjoy in the Province. Numerous Hungarians have “made it” in their

vocations, professions, business undertakings and even in social circles. They have successfully adjusted to Canadian life. Simultaneously with this process of adjustment came another development, one that might cause some concern to the leaders of the community. This is the increasingly rapid assimilation of the group as revealed both by census figures and scholarly research. Census after census, fewer people in Ontario report speaking Hungarian as the main language of communication at home. Moreover, studies of ethnic group attitudes to language maintenance reveal that Hungarians tend to be the least concerned about this issue. At the same time that the group is becoming more and more assimilated, its leadership — made up often of immigrants who came as D.P.s or refugees — is aging. More and more of the group's organizations are headed by men in their 60's and 70's. Inevitably, these tendencies will lead to a crisis in the community's evolution, a crisis that will manifest itself only slowly, but will lead to a fundamental change in the group's long-term evolution. The Hungarian community of Ontario of the future might become a culturally far less distinct group than it is today.

Whatever the fate of this community at the turn of the twentyfirst century and later, we can count on Ontario remaining the focal point of the Hungarian subculture in Canada for a long time. The Province has been a magnet for Hungarian-Canadians ever since the beginning of this century; the growth of its Hungarian population has been faster than that of most of the other provinces. It might be just recalled that in 1921 Ontario was the home of about 13 per cent of Canada's Hungarian population whereas sixty years later slightly more than half of Hungarian Canadians resided in this province. While this extraordinary rate of growth may not recur in the future, it is most likely that the Hungarian community of the Province will continue to experience increases in its size that will be greater than those of the Magyar colonies of any of the other provinces.

The presence of a Hungarian subculture in Ontario on a long-term basis is undoubtable. What has been changing during the past few decades, and what is most likely to continue to change in the future is the nature of that presence. Until recently, Hungarians in this province constituted a subculture that was very much an immigrant subculture. In recent times the transition to the status of a predominantly non-immigrant, ethnic subculture has started, or, more precisely, accelerated. Unless a new wave of Hungarian immigrants will arrive from East Central Europe in the near future, this transition will continue during the balance of this century, and

the early part of the next. Eventually, it might lead to total, or at least near-total assimilation, and the disappearance of an identifiable Hungarian subculture in the province. But until that happens, if it will happen at all, Hungarians will continue to enhance the cultural diversity of Ontario and will continue to make a valuable contribution to its cultural development.

The well-being of Ontario's Hungarian community is important not only to this province, but also to Hungarian communities elsewhere in the world. With one out of every two Canadians of Hungarian background living in Ontario, it is inevitable that the political leadership of Canada's Hungarian community emanates mainly from here. Furthermore, it might be argued that the flowering of the Hungarian subculture in Ontario has concrete and positive impact on Hungarian communities elsewhere on this continent and, especially, in neighbouring American states. A few concrete examples might be given to illustrate this point. The three large Hungarian-language papers of Toronto, for example, have numerous subscribers outside the Province, especially in some large American cities. The Kodaly Ensemble often gives performances south of the border, and a few of its present and past members have been involved in the teaching of Hungarian dance groups there. The University of Toronto's Chair of Hungarian Studies, in addition to publishing North America's only English-language journal of Hungarian affairs, also hosts the annual conference of the American Hungarian Educators' Association once every three years. These examples could be multiplied, as other Hungarian organizations in Ontario also extend their activities south of the border.

Probably more important than the work of ethnic institutions is the participation of individual Hungarian-Ontarians in the activities of Hungarian organizations that transcend international boundaries. An example that might be cited is the work of various committees, made up mainly of Hungarians from all parts of the Western World, dedicated to lobbying in Western capitals on behalf of the oppressed Hungarian minorities of Rumania and Czechoslovakia. While the majority of these committees have their headquarters elsewhere, a great many Hungarians in Ontario support their efforts either by monetary donations or by participating in some of their lobbying efforts or protest demonstrations.

This mention of Hungarians in East Central Europe should serve as an introduction to our penultimate point. That point simply is the following: the existence of a viable Hungarian community in Ontario is also of importance to Hungarians in their ancestral

homeland, in Hungary and the neighbouring lands of Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and, to a lesser extent, the U.S.S.R. and Austria. First of all, Hungarians in Ontario have often been a source of economic support to their relatives and friends in the o'country. Early Magyar immigrants to this province often sent home part of their savings to support their kinfolk. Help was especially generous in times of crises in East Central Europe. This fact has been illustrated by the success of the Hungarian-Canadian fundraising campaigns of 1945 and 1956. But the aid extended to Hungarians in the o'country transcended the realm of economics. Magyars in Ontario have served — and continue to serve — as sources of comfort, encouragement and even of reliable information on the state of international politics in times when their co-nationals in East Central Europe lived under an authoritarian regime. In fact, for some families at certain times, a relative or friend living in Ontario might have constituted the only link with the democratic world. This was true for much of East Central Europe's Hungarian population in the not too distant past, and it is still true for a few of the Hungarian minorities in that part of Europe, as their members still live in isolation from the outside world in accordance with the unacknowledged desires of their own governments.

Ontario's Hungarian community then, is a component of two different worlds. It is an integral part of the society of this province and therefore, that of Canada's. At the same time, it is also a part of the Hungarian diaspora and of the Hungarian cultural group of this planet. The continued existence of this community as a culturally distinct ethnic group is in the interest not only of Ontario, but also that of Hungarians everywhere. In fact, there might even be a very special reason why the survival of Magyar ethnic islands such as exist in this province might be of particular significance. Hungarians have an unusual geographic distribution in the world. About ten per cent of them live on this side of the Iron Curtain, the rest, in communist countries of rather divergent political orientation. This fact makes Hungarians into potential links between countries of the West and of the East. Indeed, there is evidence that unwittingly and to some extent unconsciously, Hungarians have begun to play this role already. Cultural and social contacts between Magyars in the Western diaspora and in East Central Europe have always existed. They have only intensified in recent years due mainly to the availability of convenient air travel. In Hungary too, the tendencies toward increased cultural and economic contacts with the West have strengthened in recent years and are not discouraged, and in some respect are even cultivated, by the country's government. Although

it is too early to tell what benefit these trends might bring for the rest of mankind in the long run, if they will help to reduce East-West tension and will help to promote understanding between the super-powers, humanity would be well-served.

Should the Hungarians, perhaps in combination with other East Central European nations, succeed in playing such a role, the Magyar community of Ontario will no doubt make a positive albeit necessarily small contribution. In the meantime, its members will be preoccupied mainly with other, more mundane matters. The "average" Hungarian-Canadian in the Province will most likely concern himself or herself with matters of everyday existence, while the more perceptive of their leaders will be most concerned with, among other things, the group's prospects, especially its continued cultural survival. This issue will undoubtedly remain an important one, as only time can tell if and for how long a small ethnic group can retain its cultural uniqueness in an age of mass culture and rapid social and technological change.