

PART II

The Revolution, the Refugees and Canada — in 1956 and After: An Introduction

Nándor Dreisziger

Perhaps it is appropriate for a journal edited in Canada to devote a large part of one of its issues to the Canadian circumstances and consequences of the events of 1956 in Hungary. We wish to accomplish this in Part II of our present volume, which contains some half-dozen studies.

Setting the scene is my own paper dealing with the Canadian decision, made in late-November 1956, to admit a large number of the Hungarian refugees to the country. The main question the paper tries to answer is why the Canadian government of the times, after hesitations and delays, reacted with such unprecedented generosity to the issue of the admission of refugees. It suggests that a number of factors were involved: the robust health of the Canadian economy, the greatly improved image of Hungarians in the country, the wide-spread public sympathy generated towards Hungarians by television coverage of the events in Hungary and at the Austrian border, and — above all — the fact that Canada's politicians were preparing for a federal election in 1957. The paper also explains how Canada's Suez crisis contributed to a decision by the government in Ottawa to open Canada's doors wide to the refugees. An appendix to this paper contains the report of the Honourable John Yaremko about his tour of Austria — and its camps for Hungarian refugees — in the late fall and early winter of 1956.

The next paper in this section of the volume is also a document, an eye-witness account dating from the time. This is Professor Audrey Wipper's report on the efforts of Toronto's Hungarian community to help first the people of Hungary and eventually the refugees with a fund-raising drive. The drive was started by the members of the community who had neither the time nor the expertise to conduct it properly. The result was frenzied activity — and a great deal of chaos. Eventually professional fund-raisers took over and completed the task.

The next three papers deal with some of the long-term consequences of the coming of the refugees. In the first one of these University of Ottawa doctoral candidate Christopher Adam examines the way the Kádár regime in

Hungary looked upon the refugees in Canada in particular, and the whole expatriate Hungarian community in the country in general. Having decided that such communities constituted a danger to its interests, the regime set out to spy on their activities and leaders. In a unique paper based on research in contemporary Hungarian intelligence files, the author outlines this sordid story which few Hungarian Canadians — or as a matter of fact, Canadians — have any knowledge of.

The next paper deals with the life-time achievements of those among the refugees who became entrepreneurs. Mrs. Éva Tömöry, a doctoral candidate in business administration at the University of Pécs in Hungary, examines their story and tries to explain why among the Hungarian refugees there was greater propensity to undertake business ventures than has been the case among some other refugees to Canada, or in fact among Hungarian immigrants who came to the country at other times. In seeking answers to her questions she finds certain parallels with refugees who had fled Fidel Castro's communist Cuba.

In this section's last paper Márta Mihály, a 1956 refugee herself, reminisces about coming to Canada, being a student at the Sopron School of Forestry of the University of British Columbia, and about the legacy of the Soproners and their more nature-friendly attitudes to silviculture.