

The Biggest Welcome Ever: the Toronto Tories, the Ottawa Liberals, and the Admission of Hungarian Refugees to Canada in 1956

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The coming of the refugees of the Hungarian Revolution to Canada in 1956-57 has been called an “unprecedented” event in the annals of Canadian immigration history.¹ It was unrivalled above all because at no time in the country's past did so many refugees come in such a short time. The uniqueness of this event was the result of vigorous steps taken by Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's Liberal government at the end of November, 1956, to hasten the movement of Hungarian refugees to Canada. These measures were unparalleled in the history of Canadian immigration policies. They placed no limit on the number of people who could be accepted. They involved a dramatic relaxation of immigration regulations in order to facilitate the speedy admission of thousands of applicants. And they provided free transport for everyone who came. The extraordinary generosity of these measures justifies the calling of the welcome extended to the Hungarian 56-ers the “biggest ever” given to any large group of newcomers to Canada.

Ever since 1956 historians have been asking what conditions made possible such a “big welcome” for the Hungarian refugees? The answers given to this question have varied. Most authors point to the outpouring of sympathy for Hungary and Hungarians during and immediately after the Revolution in Hungary. According to Professor Gerald Dirks of Brock University for example, this sympathy translated into enough political pressure to bring Ottawa around to a policy of vigorous refugee admission.² This view is shared by Valerie Knowles, the author of a survey of Canadian immigration and immigration policies from the mid-16th to the late 20th century.³ “Humanitarianism” has also been identified as being one of the driving forces behind Canada's 1956 “Hungarian refugee policy” by Howard Adelman, a one-time Director of York University's Centre for Refugee Studies. Adelman, however, listed other factors that in his opinion also contributed to the Canadian decision favouring a generous admission policy: the yearning to reinforce the nation's “self-identity as European” and the desire

to further Canada's interests "both in terms of helping our friends and embarrassing our enemies."⁴

While not disputing the importance of such factors as a sympathetic Canadian public in Ottawa's decision to bring a great number of refugees to Canada, some historians stress the role that individual politicians played in the matter. Greg Donaghy and Michael Stevenson, students of post-World War II Canadian foreign policies, point to Lester ["Mike"] B. Pearson, the Secretary for External Affairs in 1956, as being the man behind Canada's decision to implement a policy of generous refugee admission.⁵ Still others, especially Hungarian Canadians, identify Pearson's colleague in the Cabinet, Minister of Immigration and Citizenship Jack W. Pickersgill, as the principal author of the vigorous steps the Ottawa government had taken to bring Hungarian refugees to Canada.⁶

It is not the aim of this study to dispute any of the above interpretations. This paper hopes to take a fresh look at the evidence and offer a more nuanced explanation of the actions of the country's political elite in the fall of 1956 in regard to the issue of refugee admittance. It will suggest that, in addition to the humanitarian inclinations of the Canadian population and certain Canadian public figures, the most important consideration in this matter was political expediency — and it had to do with the fact that 1957 was to be an election year in Canada.

Besides the political situation in Canada in the fall of 1956 there were of course larger, mainly long-term developments that favoured the adoption of a policy of generous refugee admittance by the Ottawa government. These included the economic prosperity Canada had enjoyed since the end of World War II, the long-standing Canadian tradition to welcome immigrants from other lands, an auspicious change in the image that Hungarians had in the country, as well as several fortuitous political events that had taken place in the years or months before the fall of 1956.

Post-War Canada

By the end of World War II the United States had become the predominant economic power in the world. Japan, Germany, France and Italy lay in ruins and Russia's industrial heartland had been devastated. Britain was exhausted economically, while "the American mainland," as British historian Arthur Marwick pointed out, suffered "no bomb attacks." In fact, as Marwick put it, "far from fighting a battle for survival [as did the British], the Americans found themselves between 1940 and 1945 enjoying a higher standard of living than ever before."⁷ The health of the American economy in general and this high standard of living in particular had a positive impact on the post-war economic situation in Canada. It manifested itself above all in massive

American investment in the country as US companies ploughed large funds into Canadian ventures especially in resource industries.⁸

Post-war prosperity in Canada also had home-grown roots. Canadians had deferred "big ticket" purchases throughout the war, in fact in many cases from the darkest days of the Great Depression. With the Depression and the war over, and industry returning to civilian production, elevated levels of consumer spending propelled the Canadian economy to function in high gear. The seeds of prosperity had been planted during the war. The high unemployment that had characterized the Depression years had disappeared by 1942 and soon gave way to labour shortages especially in the country's war industries. Most workers could put in overtime to their hearts' content. Personal savings had increased and were often not touched till the war's end. During the war Canada's manufacturing sector had re-tooled for war production with the latest in machinery and technology. At war's end, much of this potential was put in the service of manufacturing for the civilian market.

But there was still another reason why World War II was not followed by an economic recession. This was the fact that during the war the Canadian government made extensive plans for assuring the continuation of wartime prosperity. Planning for the post-war economy was so extensive that one historian of the times, Donald Creighton, entitled a chapter in his book dealing with the subject "The Coming of the Planners."⁹ Another historian, David Slater, added that these undertakings by the government in Ottawa represented "the first real Canadian adaptations of Keynesian economic stabilization strategies..."¹⁰ To a large extent then, post-war prosperity in Canada had been planned, but it took place in a favourable internal and external (i.e. North American) economic environment.

The First World War had been followed by a prolonged recession but no such event came after the Second. The economic down-turn of the autumn of 1955 was short-lived and its quick passing further demonstrated that post-war prosperity was here to stay. Not surprisingly under the circumstances, consumer confidence in the country remained high and living standards continued to increase, as did employment. The expanded labour market created a trend toward the increased growth of Canada's manufacturing centres, a trend that had been already evident throughout much of the war. The labour shortages boosted the demand for more vigorous immigration policies while the arrival of newcomers served to further intensify consumer spending. But before we discuss immigration, we must note still another post-1945 Canadian phenomenon that was both a sign of a healthy economy and a promoter of economic activity: the advent of the famous post-war "baby boom."

It all started in 1945. The marriages and births that Canadians had postponed during the war, in fact already during the Great Depression, began happening. In 1946 for example there were 33,000 more weddings than there had been two years earlier. Canada's birth rate that had hit a low point in the

mid-1930s now started a swift ascent. In 1947 it reached a remarkable rate of 28.9 births per thousand, and this extraordinary birth rate was not a flash-in-the-pan as it continued at a high level for years. It was higher than that of any industrialized nation on the planet.¹¹ More important from the point of view of our inquiry was the fact that immigration also grew in the post-war period. By the early 1950s the number of immigrants had reached new highs. In 1951 for example, 194,391 newcomers came to the country.¹²

Canada as a Land of Immigrants

Most readers need not be reminded that Canada was a nation of immigrants and that it had almost always been more of a receiver of population than a source of migrants going to other places. The volume of immigration to this land, however, always had its ebb and flow. This had been the situation even during the French regime. The late 1660s and early 1670s, the time when Canada was being converted from a commercial outpost of France to one of its important royal colonies, witnessed great efforts at boosting the colony's population. This situation did not last long and these efforts soon came to a virtual end when the French government's, more precisely Louis XIV's attention was diverted to European wars. Another time of great influx of newcomers came two short decades after the British conquest of Canada when the land saw the coming of the Loyalists, the refugees of the War of American Independence. This immigration gave rise to a bi-racial Canada, one that in time would become increasingly English everywhere except in the regions of original French settlement. Still another influx came, again mainly of English-speakers, after the Napoleonic Wars. And then in the late 1840s came the victims of the famine in Ireland, adding economic refugees to the mainly political ones who had arrived in the wake of the above-mentioned wars.

Immigration continued during the 1850s. In the following decade began — one might say accelerated — the process of Canada becoming a self-governing colony of Great Britain. Soon thereafter started the expansion of a newly-established Dominion of Canada across the continent. The acquisition of the vast lands of much of the Canadian West, formerly administered by the Hudson's Bay Company, did not immediately result in a large influx of settlers. It wasn't till the last years of the century — after the prolonged economic recession of the 1870s, 1880s, and the early 1890s, and the filling-up of the American prairies south of the border — that settlers began to pour into the Canadian West, a process that was halted only by the outbreak of the First World War.

The war had more than a temporary impact on Canadian immigration. Before the war the idea had taken root that Canada needed only agricultural newcomers. With the war came the belief that those newcomers should come only from friendly countries, above all Great Britain. Furthermore, the conflict

was followed by an economic downturn which meant that for a few years no immigrants were seen as needed, no matter where they wanted to come from. Nevertheless, with the advent of better times in 1924, the need for labour especially in the Canadian West became so great that immigrants were once again encouraged to come, even from the former enemy lands of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Great Depression saw Canada's gates shut once more. The gates remained closed during the Second World War, even though there were thousands of people who were desperate to leave a Europe increasingly dominated by Nazi Germany and threatened by renewed conflict. With war's end many in Canada expected immigration not to resume soon, as had been the case after the First World War. But, as we have seen, the situation in Canada after 1945 was greatly different from what it had been after 1918, and immigration resumed almost immediately. Most of the immigrants coming to Canada after the war's end came from the British Isles. Britain had been economically exhausted by the war and her living standards were low. Britons were anxious to exchange the poverty in their country for the relative affluence of Canada. There were also Central Europeans coming, people displaced by the war. Of these, Canada initially took only a rather small number, some 123,000, mainly manual labourers who were perceived to be in demand by Canada's resource industries and manufacturers.¹³

Admitting Displaced Persons from Western European refugee camps was one matter, but welcoming refugees from Communist rule in Eastern Europe was another.¹⁴ Canada's security establishment, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the officials in the Immigration Department charged with protecting national security, had suspicions about people who were escaping communist rule that had been imposed by the Soviets in the territories they had occupied at the end of the Second World War. Could these people be sympathizers of the new socialist order? Or, worse still, could they be agents of the Soviets? These suspicions were deep-seeded and were fed by such phenomena as the McCarthy witch-hunts in the United States — that saw the questioning the loyalty of such people as the writer Graham Greene and actor Charlie Chaplin.

Throughout the early Cold War years Canadian security personnel continued to have reservations about admitting refugees from Communist countries. Reflecting these concerns about "national security" were the strict guidelines regarding the processing of would-be newcomers that resulted in the Canadian admission process of the times being heavy on red-tape and short on speedy decisions.¹⁵ Interestingly, the revolution in Hungary in 1956 and the coming of the Hungarian refugees served to diminish the reservations about refugees from Communist countries.

Conditions in post-war Canada then — economic prosperity, high employment, population growth, the resumption of immigration — favoured the generous admission of refugees in 1956. The fear of communist

sympathizers and agents coming, somewhat blunted these prospects. But what might have reduced them even more in the case of the refugees from Hungary was negative Canadian public opinion about Hungarians.

The Image of Hungarians in Canada

For much of the first half of the twentieth century the image of Hungarians in Canada had been an unfavourable one. East European immigrants in general had a negative image in the country. They were often referred to as “men in sheepskin coats” and were considered uncouth and poorly educated. Added to this perception was the fact that Hungarians were deemed enemy aliens in both World War I and World War II. There had been a time in North America when Hungary and the Magyars had a positive image. This was after the 1848-49 War of Independence against Austria when the Hungarians, and especially their leader Lajos Kossuth, were seen as people who had fought for freedom against the despotic monarchical rule of the Habsburg prince Francis-Joseph aided by the even more despotic Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. The refugees of that war who had made it to North America were men of soldierly bearing — often with a good knowledge of English and even some aristocratic charisma. Alas, for Hungarians, this image barely survived the nineteenth century. By the turn of the new century, the Hungarian image in the United States, and soon afterwards also in Canada, had become one of simple peasants who had come to the New World to take jobs from North Americans, often in the capacity of strike-breakers. Instead of dashing gentlemen-officers, the new immigrants became seen as backward labourers, “bohunks” as they were often called especially south of the border.¹⁶

Anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia were rampant in the Canada of the times. They were openly proclaimed even by some politicians. Such attitudes got a boost in both World War I and II as a result of anti-enemy propaganda. They began abating in Canada in the late 1940s, but it was not till decades later that multiculturalism became accepted and cultural diversity became tolerated. The fact that many of the post-World War II newcomers from Hungary were educated people also helped to improve their image.

The image of Hungarians was also linked to the image that Hungary enjoyed abroad. This image was quite favourable throughout the second half of the nineteenth century but began declining early during the twentieth. Rather than being seen as an upholder of freedoms the Hungary of the times began to be viewed as an “oppressor” of minorities. The transformation coincided with a revolution in European international relations manifested by the rise of an *entente* first between France and Russia and then between these powers and Britain.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Hungary's reputation declined further during the First World War. In the interwar years Hungary's image suffered even more. The war had been followed by revolutions in Hungary, first by

moderate leftists and then by social democrats and communists. When the "old order" was restored, some two hundred thousand people who had participated in the revolutions or sympathised with their aims left Hungary. In emigration many of these people denounced the interwar Hungarian regime in the international media, contributing to the growing negative image of Hungary.¹⁸ Not surprisingly under these circumstances, Hungary's reputation reached its nadir during and immediately after World War II when the country was viewed in the West, as well as the East, as "Hitler's last ally".¹⁹

The image of Hungary and Hungarians in the West, including Canada, underwent a most dramatic transformation in the fall of 1956. By mid-November, the events in Budapest had been filling the TV screens of Canadian viewers for weeks. The revolution was the first international happening that had such extensive exposure throughout Canada as well as the entire Western world. The images of poorly armed youths fighting Soviet tanks, of buildings in ruin, and then of frightened civilians carrying their children and meagre belongings across Hungary's border with Austria created great compassion for the Revolution's victims. That they had the courage of standing up against the vast "evil empire" of the Soviets, made them objects of admiration. From former enemies, Hungarians became allies in the fight against communism. The fact that the West had not been able to help the freedom fighters in their struggle for liberty made the Western public, including Canada's, all the more eager to help the refugees. Never before — or since — had the image of Hungarians been so positive. Not surprisingly this swelling of public sympathy created an atmosphere in which the Canadian government found it easier to opt for a policy of generous admittance rather than one that denied entry to the majority of refugees.²⁰

The Political Scene in Canada Prior to the Autumn of 1956

In the foregoing discussion of post-war Canada we have established that the economic situation in the country had created a climate favourable to the admission of new groups of immigrants. The prosperity and growth Canada was experiencing made it difficult for anyone to question the capacity of the country to absorb additional people. We have also seen that the image of Hungarians in particular had improved dramatically in October and November of 1956. Next we have to examine the political situation in Canada and its potential to affect governmental decision-making on the issue of the admission of a large group of refugees in response to a refugee crisis in Europe.

In the fall of 1956 the Liberal Party of Canada was looking forward to the expected 1957 elections and to their re-election for an unprecedented sixth time in a row. Four years earlier the Liberals did not have a particularly difficult time retaining power. In 1953 the Ontario Tory Party did not support

the federal Conservatives led by former Premier of Ontario George Drew. In November of 1956 however, there was no evidence that this situation would repeat itself. The amicable relationship that Prime Minister St. Laurent had with Ontario Premier Leslie M. Frost during the negotiations of the US-Canada St. Lawrence Seaway Project was fading from memory. The Trans Canada Pipeline project, and especially, the debate about it in the House of Commons in the spring of 1956, instead of gaining popularity for the Liberals, strengthened the position of the opposition parties. Furthermore, there had been a clash between Premier Frost and Jack Pickersgill, St. Laurent's right-hand man in the cabinet, over the planned introduction of hospitalization insurance in Canada. The Toronto Conservative newspaper *Globe and Mail* had even accused Pickersgill of calling for a "regime change" in Toronto, a serious allegation that Pickersgill denied;²¹ nevertheless, the affair embittered relations between the two men — they would clash again in November of 1956 over the question of the admission of Hungarian refugees.

It was under these circumstances that the crises of the fall of 1956, the revolt against Soviet rule in Hungary and soon afterwards the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt, confronted Canada. The news of the Hungarian Revolution caused few ripples in Ottawa. As Donaghy tells us, some Canadian diplomats worried that any Canadian condemnation of Soviet actions would endanger carefully-built good relations between Canada and third world countries, especially the India of Jawaharlal Nehru.²² The Suez Crisis had a far worse impact on the governing Liberals. In siding with the United States (and, coincidentally, the USSR) on this issue, the Canadian government offended the pro-British sentiments of a large section of Canada's Anglophone population (and probably also the country's never too numerous pro-French Francophone residents). The Tories tried to make much mileage of this "perfidy". Ottawa's actions probably surprised no foreign policy expert, but they seemed to have driven still another nail into the coffin of the Liberals' re-election expectations. No wonder they were very keen on finding a solution to the crisis.

Less than two weeks later, when the Suez Crisis seemed almost under control (but not forgotten by many Anglo-Canadians), another crisis began surfacing in Ottawa. It was the question of what to do with the masses of Hungarian refugees who started to pour into Austria after their uprising had been crushed by the Soviets. The government could not afford to be on the wrong side of public opinion on still another policy issue.

The Liberal Government in Ottawa was slow to react to this latest crisis. On the 6th of November, Minister of Immigration Pickersgill announced that any Hungarian refugees wanting to immigrate to Canada would be given priority, but would have to meet all the requirements of the Immigration Act. This meant little, since large numbers of them could not be processed in a short time unless the government relaxed the complex rules governing admission to Canada. One Cabinet colleague of Pickersgill who

realized this problem was Secretary of State for External Affairs Pearson. He told the Minister of Immigration in a letter that Canada should adopt "a more liberal policy". "[I]f we stick rigidly" he continued, "to the usual health and job training requirements, Canada's offer to give priority will seem a rather meagre one..." Pearson concluded his letter by saying "I need not emphasize the domestic and international political desirability of making it clear that Canada is taking an unselfish interest in the plight of the Hungarian refugees..."²³ In Ottawa, however, nothing was done in response to Pearson's plea. Five days after Pearson's letter, Pickersgill was still telling his Cabinet colleagues that Canada should be admitting only those refugees "who could take employment or who could be looked after by others,"²⁴ and ten days later an External Affairs official, Jules Léger (a future Governor-General of Canada), could complain that Pickersgill had still not replied to Pearson's letter.²⁵ Within the next fortnight, however, events would take place in the country, in particular in Ontario, that would force the hand of the Liberal government to take decisive action.

Hungary and Hungarians in the Ontario Media

During the middle of November the crisis in Austria continued to grow. In the meantime it continued to attract attention in Canada where tens of thousands of people were watching daily images of frightened and exhausted refugees, often with small children and minimum belongings, arriving at Austrian border stations. The situation also caught the attention of the Canadian media, in particular the influential Toronto conservative paper *The Globe and Mail* [hereafter the *Globe*].

The coverage of the subject of Hungary and Hungarians in 1956 by this paper started innocuously enough. In its October 25 issue, the *Globe's* editors reported on the events in Warsaw and Budapest and made a few comments. They observed that the USSR, the "self-proclaimed anti-colonist", had "no aversion to sending in tanks... when one of her numerous colonies [made] a bid for self-determination." They added that it was obvious that "the Soviet Empire has weak spots all around its periphery..."²⁶

Two days later the paper's editors returned to the subject. They lamented the fact that the bid for self-determination by the Poles and Hungarians had not brought "an instant and passionate response from the capital of every free nation." They admitted that statements of sympathy had been issued by the American administration, but regretted that no such pronouncements have been issued in London and Paris. "Britain and France may feel..." they speculated "that their own colonial problems preclude them from denouncing Russia's bloody colonialism." Then they went on to criticize the silence they perceived in Ottawa: "Our Government is understood to have firm views on the subject of colonialism; was not this a time to express them?"

They also criticised the government of India, that “rarely misses an opportunity to attack the colonial policies [of the western powers],” yet have been “unmoved” by Soviet intervention in Hungary. And, the same went for the UN. Does it have to “wait for somebody to lodge an official protest? Can it not... speak on its own?” “There may be no way, without bringing on global war,” giving Poland and Hungary “physical support,” the editorial concluded, but “they surely deserve far greater moral support than they have been getting....”²⁷

In the next two *Globe* editorials, entitled “Spam” and “The Yawn,” the paper returned to the subject on the 29th of October and the 3rd of November respectively. In the first of these the editors outlined that, according to American statements, Hungarians could not expect any direct help from the United States in their fight for liberty “the thing the West has consistently encouraged them to fight for...” but, the editorial went on quoting a speech US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had made in Texas, the US will give economic aid to Hungary once it manages to break with Russia. They won’t get help with their quest for freedom, the editorial concluded, but “under certain condition [Hungary] might have a tin of spam.” Five days later the paper’s editors turned to the subject of the Hungarian question and the United Nations. They noted that while the United States was not reluctant to denounce Anglo-French “imperialism” in the Middle East, it agreed to a postponement of the debate on Hungary. This approach, the editors concluded, allowed the Soviets “to steel a march — a march with armoured tanks into the suburbs of the Hungarian capital.”²⁸

As the *Globe* had predicted, the Soviets stole a march and undertook to crush the Hungarian Revolution in the early hours of November 4th. During the next five days the paper’s editors returned to the subject twice. In their editorial of the 7th they discussed what possible steps the West should take in view of the Soviet refusal to consider a cease-fire in Hungary or even to allow a UN inspection team “to enter the brave land.” They felt that the extreme measure of expelling the Soviet Union warranted discussion under the circumstances.²⁹ Two days later in an editorial entitled “What About Hungary?” the paper’s editors found it ironic that the UN was “energetic” and “united” in confronting the issue of British and French intervention in Egypt, but not so in dealing with the Soviet Union in regards to Hungary. They also regretted that, unlike in the case of the crisis in the Middle East, there was no police force established “for the Hungarians.” The editors next went on to report on the opinions of the paper’s readers:

This newspaper has reason to think, from the many letters and telephone calls it has received, that the majority of its readers support the action of Britain and France. It is Russia’s action that angers and horrifies them. It is Russia’s action they want the UN to deal with. And the UN’s utter failure to deal with it is making them bitterly hostile to that wordy organization.

The paper next listed what had been done by ordinary citizens throughout the world against the Soviets: the attacks on communist party headquarters (Paris), on Russian embassies (Luxembourg, Denmark), the burning of Soviet flags and anti-Soviet demonstrations everywhere in the West.³⁰ Four days later the subject of the *Globe* editorials changed. From dealing with the question of Hungary, the paper turned its attention to the matter of Hungarian refugees streaming across the Hungarian-Austrian border. It deplored the decision of the federal government to take only 2,500 of the some 11,000 refugees who had crossed into Austria during the first half of November. It also regretted that the "Immigration Department" in Ottawa insisted that the refugees will have to meet all the regulations in order to qualify for admittance. The paper's editors predicted that Canadians "will be disgusted by Ottawa's cold, calculating attitude..." The Liberal Government should have "shown liberality" and admit all "young or old, sick or well, skilled or unskilled..." and should have met the "full cost of bringing them here..." The government should have made a "generous gesture" the *Globe* editorial concluded. "In failing to make it, the Liberal Government showed once again... that it is totally out of touch with the Canadian people."³¹

A Time for Decision: From "Codfish" to Generous Host

During the course of the next ten days, the *Globe's* editorials dealt with the international situation. In the meantime the Government in Ottawa seemed to be doing nothing. By the second week of November the perceived inaction of the government had started receiving criticism especially from members of the opposition Conservative Party and more importantly, from the Tory establishment in Ontario. There the man of the hour was Premier Leslie Frost, the most powerful Tory politician in the country.³²

Another prominent Tory in Toronto was John Yaremko. The son of poor Ukrainian immigrants, he had been a brilliant law student. He was enticed to enter politics to prove that the Tory party's elite was not composed entirely of WASP individuals.³³ Yaremko was a friend of Hungarians (he even tried to learn Magyar) and now he began urging Frost that the refugees be flown over in the manner former Ontario Premier George Drew had brought immigrants over from Britain in 1947.³⁴

At about the same time the *Globe* returned to the subject of the Hungarian refugees and began its campaign for large-scale admission — combined with ever more vigorous denunciations of the Liberals' non-action in the matter. The paper's opening salvo in this renewed campaign came on the 24th, a Saturday. The editorial was entitled "Open Ontario's Doors". It began by denouncing the free world's reluctance to take the refugees fleeing Hungary as "inhuman" and said that Canada had "gone along with that

inhumanity." Canada's continued insistence that the refugees meet existing immigration requirements and provide assurances that they will not be a "charge on the public purse" the papers' editors called "shame." The "Government of Canada," they went on, "has displayed the ... generosity of a codfish;" and they continued:

We believe that [the people of Canada] want bold action on the refugees.... Believing that, we propose the Ontario Government rescue Ottawa from its hypocrisy.... We propose that Ontario charter all the aircraft and shipping necessary — and bring here, at its own expense, every Hungarian refugee who... wishes to come.... Let Ontario feed and house them initially,... Then let them filter into the lifestream of this wealthy and expanding Province.... Let the Ontario Government tear away every artificial barrier as the Hungarians tore at Russian tanks. Let it fling the door wide, wide open.³⁵

Two days later the paper praised the government at Queen's Park for accepting the proposals to bring to Ontario, "at its own expense, every Hungarian refugee who... is willing to come." The *Globe* also announced that Premier Frost had instructed Major (retired) J. S. P. Armstrong, Ontario's Agent-General in London, England, to fly to Vienna to make arrangements. Next the paper's editors assured the readers that from the flood of letters they had received it was evident that the people of Ontario are anxious to receive the refugees and to give them "...the biggest welcome we ever gave anybody."³⁶

The Tory establishment in Toronto had thrown down the gauntlet. From London, they dispatched their official agent, and from Toronto they were about to send to Austria Yaremko to lend prestige and credibility to their plans. The Liberals in Ottawa saw through the Queen's Park Tories' scheme and they were not about to be shamed into doing, at the bidding of their political opponents, what the Canadian public was expecting their politicians to do. As one Liberal official remarked about Ottawa's response to Premier Frost's challenge: "Jack [Pickersgill] pulled the carpet out from under [Frost]..."³⁷ and made sure that the initiative in admitting the Hungarians remained with his government. Indeed, when William M. Nickle, Ontario's Minister of Planning and Development, phoned Pickersgill informing him about the Ontario Government's plans for an air-lift, Pickersgill could tell him that the federal government had already "chartered all available aircraft".³⁹

A few weeks earlier St. Laurent had tasked Pearson to tackle Canada's Suez crisis, now he assigned his friend and confidant Pickersgill to solve Canada's Hungarian refugee predicament. Accordingly, Pickersgill swung into action. On the 26th, the day the *Globe* reported the measures taken by Queen's Park, he announced before the re-convened House of Commons that Canada will admit every Hungarian refugee who wanted to come to Canada. The next

day a large meeting convened in Ottawa to discuss matters. It was attended by representatives of various government departments and agencies, provincial delegates, NGOs as well as leaders of the Hungarian community. At this meeting Pickersgill emphasized not so much what his government had done to accelerate the admission of refugees, but the tasks that would remain after they arrived, tasks with which the government needed all kinds of help, especially from the provinces and non-governmental agencies.⁴⁰ Then Pickersgill left the meeting to attend a session of the House of Commons.

The job of informing those in attendance about the steps the government had taken fell to Laval Fortier, the Deputy Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, and the meeting's chairman. "...the Department," Fortier began, "has endeavoured to simplify immigration procedures and eliminate all but the most necessary paper work..." In addition, "[s]taff had been added to the Immigration office in Vienna..." and measures had been taken to find "additional office space;" further, aircraft have been chartered and much space had been booked on passenger ships leaving Europe for Canada. Last but not least Fortier added, the Department had dispatched one of its high-ranking officials to the Austrian capital to expedite "high level decisions immediately."⁴¹ Soon the government announced that it would go even further: Pickersgill himself would fly to Vienna to oversee the prompt processing of refugees.⁴² Of course, another unstated purpose of the trip was to counteract the impression that only Queen's Park sent high-level delegations there. And, one more development came on that fateful day, Tuesday the 27th. Near the end of the meeting described above, it was reported that Pickersgill had made a public announcement that the "government will pay the cost of [the refugees'] transportation [to Canada]."⁴³ The news came late in the day and couldn't make the *Globe's* headlines the next morning. It did on the following day: "Free Passage for Refugees; Pickersgill Flying to Vienna" proclaimed the paper's front page in large print.⁴⁴

In the closing days of November, 1956, Pickersgill had "thrown away the books" — the Canadian Immigration Act of 1952 allowed him to do so. He did so after weeks of seeming procrastination and governmental half-measures in the matter of the admission of Hungarian refugees. By taking dramatic action at this time, however, he and his government had pulled the rug from under the Toronto Tories' scheme to embarrass the Liberal administration in Ottawa. The rest, as they say, is history. Thousands of refugees were "processed" in December and many thousands followed in the next several months.

The Aftermath

The business of admitting and settling the Hungarian refugees was not all smooth sailing from late November 1956 on. The war of words between the

two antagonists, instead of abating in early December, only escalated. Now it was the Liberals' turn to make the accusations. First came a salvo of charges by Pickersgill against the Toronto Tories, in particular against the delegations they had sent to Vienna. The minister's words were relayed to Canadians on the pages of the other Toronto mass-circulation paper, the *Toronto Daily Star* [hereafter: *The Star*], by Douglas Blanchard the paper's staff correspondent accompanying Pickersgill on his visit to Austria.

First, the minister accused the Toronto Conservatives of playing partisan politics. "There is no room for politics here" he asserted. "The situation is much too serious [and the] urgency is much too pressing." He was especially bitter about Ontario Agent-General Armstrong who had been to Vienna before Pickersgill arrived there. The *Star* reporter described the minister's criticisms of this "once-over-lightly visitor" whose "arrival in Vienna was announced by Premier Frost before he [Armstrong] had even left England." Pickersgill grumbled about Austrian officials becoming "bewildered" about just which visitor from Canada was speaking for her government: "To Austrians all Canadians are Canadians and they still can't grasp of the fact that various parts of Canada have various axes to grind."

Next the Minister of Immigration rebutted the accusations Armstrong had made after his "hasty tour" against the federal government's handling of the refugee crisis. Pickersgill went on:

The Ontario government has made a series of announcements about its intention of speeding the entry of Hungarian refugees. So far, however, the nearest thing to action that has been seen over here is Major Armstrong's visit. It was announced today that he is coming back to Vienna, this time bringing with him John Yaremko....

The *Star's* correspondent then concluded his report by saying that Pickersgill would leave Austria as soon as his job was accomplished because, in the minister's words, "outside visitors merely hamper the work of the... overworked staff...". Concerning the minister's accomplishments, the reporter had a glowing assessment. According to him, Pickersgill left "Austrian officials... breathless. The refugee situation has been transformed over one week-end."⁴⁵ The next day the *Star's* editors also commented on the subject:

This is no time for politics. Charges by the Ontario government's agent in England about the handling of the refugees have a partizan ring to them, considering his very short visit to the scene. It would be better for the provincial government to devote its energies to the task at hand....⁴⁶

William Nickle, Ontario's minister of Planning and Development, sent a clipping of the *Star* article of the 4th to Premier Frost with the comment that

"Jack Pickersgill is rather critical of Mr. Armstrong." The minister added that he had instructed his officials not to give statements to the press regarding the Hungarian refugee situation before he drafted a statement, that he planned to show to Frost, "...so there will be no controversy develop between the Federal authorities and the Government of Ontario." No doubt, the debate was becoming embarrassing for the Tories and they now switched to "damage control".⁴⁷

Damage control or not, by the second week of the month a more serious, new dispute had begun emerging between Ottawa and Queen's Park. It had to do with the defrayal of some of the costs involved in refugee resettlement. Interestingly, the Ontario provincial government that had been ready to "fly over" thousands of refugees at its own expense found the prospect of paying for some basic expenses incurred by the newcomers burdensome. The dispute was not resolved for months.⁴⁸

Misunderstandings and squabbles between different levels of government were not the only source of problems after November, 1956. There were difficulties associated with the settlement and integration of the refugees. Perhaps the most serious among these had to do with the culture-shock many of them experienced after arrival in Canada. Hardships were often encountered especially by middle-aged and older persons, including the parents of the writer of these lines. Some refugees could repeat the complaint of a Hungarian immigrant of the 1920s who said in this connection that Canada gave newcomers from Hungary "material things" but little in the way of "spiritual solace".⁴⁹

Many of those who experienced culture-shock found it especially difficult to accept the fact that in Canada of the 'fifties there existed no cradle-to-grave social safety net. There was no public health insurance, the state offered no help with finding employment, university students had to pay tuition fees, and so on. Some refugees came to regret their departure from Hungary. This is not surprising since many of them had no time to learn anything about Canada or even to mull over their decision to leave Hungary as they made this often in a day or less, or started toward the Austrian border simply because their friends had decided to do so. In this respect more problems were encountered with the refugees than with the members of any other wave of previous Hungarian arrivals.⁵⁰ In time, however, most of these difficulties were resolved.

Conclusions

In November of 1956 the massive influx of Hungarian refugees into Austria developed first into an Austrian and then into an international crisis that affected all the countries of the Free World. The development soon began to have serious repercussions in Canada. The country's Liberal administration

was slow to react to this crisis. It tried to deflect public criticism of its seeming lack of concern with half measures. As late as the beginning of the Cabinet meeting of the 28th of November, Minister of Immigration Jack Pickersgill could tell his colleagues that "Canada was the only country which had not offered free passage to Hungarian refugees" who wanted to come to the country.⁵¹

Actually, Prime Minister St. Laurent's government had been staggering, one might say meandering toward a policy liberal refugee admission for some time before the last days of November. Manifestations of this trend were numerous. Certain members of the Liberal establishment were keen on such a policy. As has been mentioned, among the members of the Cabinet there was Pearson. Among the high-profile bureaucrats there was Jules Léger of the Department of External Affairs.⁵² Certain plans and actions of the Liberals also pointed in this direction. The proposal to send Pickersgill to Austria emerged as early as the middle of the month. On the 22nd the Cabinet agreed to ask Parliament to increase the funds allotted for Hungarian relief (including the refugees) from the \$200,000 earmarked earlier to one million.⁵³ The next day the Cabinet agreed to speed up the flow of refugees by, among other things, the hiring of aircraft to bring them over from Europe.⁵⁴

The crowning moves in this process, the agreement to bring here every refugee who wanted to come, and to provide free transport for them, however, were not made until the last days of the month, after it became obvious that if Ottawa did not act, Queen's Park would. But, in this jockeying for the higher moral ground, the Liberals were not to be outdone, hence the measures announced by Pickersgill and the government in the evening of the 27th and the following two days.⁵⁵ These measures resulted in Canada admitting more Hungarian 56-ers relative to its population than any other country in the Americas or Western Europe. They also assured that these Hungarian fugitives received the "biggest welcome" ever accorded to refugees by Canada. Lastly and more importantly, the measures taken at the time by the federal government assured that credit for all this would go not to the Toronto Tories but to the ruling Liberal administration in Ottawa.

At this point it might be worth asking what can be considered as the real historical catalyst of the "biggest welcome" that had been extended to the Hungarian refugees in the fall of 1956? If we had to answer this question in fifty words or less we could say that it was a political row between the Tory Party's Ontario branch and the leadership of the Liberal Party in Ottawa. It was more than the latter being spooked by the actions of the former. There was a meanness underlying the actions of both sides. First it was the Tories of Queen's Park who wanted to embarrass their federal counterparts. Then it was the latter who wanted to inflict political damage on their adversaries. If we want to reduce the conflict to personalities we might say that the catalyst of the events of late November was the by-product of enmity between Leslie Frost, the most powerful Tory politician in the country, and Jack Pickersgill,

arguably the second most powerful Liberal politician in Ottawa. Their clash produced, almost as an incidental side-effect, a chain of events that we can truly call the "biggest welcome" ever accorded to refugees in Canada's history.

In the way of further conclusions to this story of "the biggest welcome ever" we might ask who were its foremost beneficiaries? There can be little doubt that they were not the politicians involved. They were the some 38,000 fugitives of the events in Hungary in the fall of 1956 who ended up as newcomers to Canada.⁵⁶ They came to a country where they, or at least most of them, found political freedom and opportunities for economic advancement — as well as for personal fulfilment.

Another obvious beneficiary of the arrival of a great number of 1956 refugees was Hungarian-Canadian society. Despite the stresses the influx of thousands of Hungarians with their different attitudes and value systems had caused, the Hungarian-Canadian society that had pre-dated 1956 — many of whose communities were on the verge of complete cultural assimilation — was reinvigorated by the coming of the 56-ers.⁵⁷

The greatest beneficiary, however, was Canada. First of all, the country gained experience in how to handle the admission and re-settlement of large masses of newcomers at the time of a serious refugee crisis in the world. This experience would be used time and again, as for example during the crisis of the Vietnamese boat people. But Canada also benefited from the admission of many, often well-trained young Hungarians, especially the students whom Pickersgill was fond of admitting. Most of them made valuable contributions to Canada, and the contributions of some were remarkable.⁵⁸ And, as a group, the 56-ers helped to make Canada what it became in the second half of the 20th century: a truly pluralistic, multicultural society where not only the native-born but also immigrants could fulfil their dreams.

It must be added to this analysis that, indirectly and in the long term, Hungary also benefited from the settlement of the 1956 refugees in Canada. The story of the demise of communism in Hungary some thirty-three years later is a complex one. There can be little doubt however, that the refugees who had come to Canada in 1956 and 1957 made a contribution to the weakening of communist rule in that country. They were instrumental above all for undermining the isolation that Hungary's rulers wished to impose on their people. Through their contacts with their relatives and friends in Hungary, through their frequent visits to the country and, especially, through their habit of bringing their loved ones for visits to Canada, the refugees spread a knowledge of life in Western democracies, as well as of western ideas, among the population of Hungary. All this no doubt helped to weaken the hold of communist ideology on her people and helped to undermine communist rule there.⁵⁹ The end of communism in Hungary came in 1989, a little more than three decades after the Revolution of 1956 and the flight of the refugees.

As a final observation on the subject of the Hungarian Revolution and the coming of its refugees to Canada a few words might be said about the Suez Crisis. Few people realize that there is an ironic connection between this crisis and the admission of the Hungarian refugees to Canada. Most students of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 agree that the Suez Crisis contributed to the Soviets' decision to crush the revolt in Hungary.⁶⁰ At the same time, the Suez Crisis also contributed to the Canadian government's decision to admit a large number of Hungarian refugees. The fact was that during that crisis substantial elements of the Canadian public sympathized with Great Britain and France and approved of their intervention in Egypt. The government in Ottawa, however, found it both reprehensible and impolitic to back the British and the French. Canada's leaders, and especially Prime Minister St. Laurent, felt that the intervention in Egypt smacked of colonial adventurism, while they also felt obliged to side with Washington on this issue and oppose London and Paris' stand.

The Ottawa government's position on the Suez Crisis stood to undermine the Liberal Party's prospects in the forthcoming federal election. When the debate about admitting the refugees of the Hungarian Revolution emerged into national limelight, the Liberals had to make sure that on this issue they would not be going against the grain of Canadian public opinion as they had with their initial policies concerning the Suez crisis. In other words, the Liberal government's stand on Suez made the adoption of a generous refugee policy in November of 1956 more necessary for a political party concerned about potential popular support in the forthcoming election.

Despite their being on the side of the angels on the issue of the admission of Hungarian refugees in the fall of 1956, the Liberals lost the election in 1957. That they did so probably had little to do with what they had or hadn't done for the Hungarian refugees. Other issues were no doubt more important. Above all, after five consecutive terms of Liberal rule, the Canadian public was ready to hand power to the Conservatives. Under the new Tory government of John G. Diefenbaker, a generous admission policy concerning Hungarians did not survive. Soon after the election, unemployment levels went up in Canada and politicians in Ottawa were worried about a further influx of newcomers who would swell the number of people on public relief.

This situation caused grief to the last of the Hungarian refugees who, after the Austro-Hungarian border had been sealed by Soviet and communist Hungarian security forces, had to make their way to socialist but not Soviet-dominated Yugoslavia. There such "anti-communists" were certainly not welcome, but they were not returned to Hungary because the Yugoslav regime did not want to offend Western public opinion. Never-the-less, these fugitives had to move on from Yugoslavia as soon as there were countries willing to take them. By this time, however, the entry of further groups of Hungarians into Canada was no longer a potential election issue and those among the

refugees who wanted to come to this country had to wait, in most cases for a long time.⁶¹

NOTES

An earlier, much shorter version of this paper was commented on by three anonymous readers, while the final draft was read by Mr. Jason Kovacs of the University of Waterloo. I am thankful for their remarks. I am also indebted to the Hon. John Yaremko for the information he gave me in an interview in 2006. Many years ago I had also interviewed Jack Pickersgill but at the time I was interested in Canadian wartime politics and personalities and I did not ask him about the events of November 1956 and his relations with Premier Frost of Ontario. I now deeply regret that I had not. I also knew the late Joseph Bottlik, the man who accompanied Yaremko to Austria. With him I used to discuss wartime politics in Hungary and never asked him about his days in Austria in 1956. I seem to have lived a life of missed opportunities.

¹ Gerald E. Dirks, "Canada and Immigration: International and Domestic Considerations in the Decade Preceding the 1956 Hungarian Exodus," in *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada*, ed. Robert H. Keyserlingk (Toronto: York Lane Press, 1993), 3-11 (p. 3).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. See also the same author's earlier work that also discusses the subject: Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal: McGill Queen's Press, 1977), chapter 9 (pp. 190-213).

³ Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1997* (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1997), 139f.

⁴ Howard Adelman, "An Immigration Dream: Hungarian Refugees Come to Canada – An Analysis," in *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada*, ed. Robert H. Keyserlingk (Toronto: York Lane Press, 1993), 25-44 (41).

⁵ Greg Donaghy and Michael Stevenson, in their introduction to the volume of documents: *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution, 1956-1957: a documentary perspective*, ed. & comp. Greg Donaghy and Michael Stevenson (Ottawa: Historical Section, Foreign Affairs Canada, 2004), p. vii.; also, Greg Donaghy, "'Unselfish Interest'? Canada and the Hungarian Revolution, 1954-57," a paper read at the conference on "1956: Year of Crises: Hungary & Suez," Munk Centre, University of Toronto, 30 Sept. 2006 (p. 16). Pearson's biographer John English is silent on the subject: John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson*, vol. 2, 1949-1972 (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). The events in Hungary are mentioned on pp. 138-40. Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's attitudes and role are outlined, rather briefly, by his biographer Dale C. Thomson. See his *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), 483-86 *in passim*. The documents in the booklet *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution* had been extracted from volumes 23 and 25 of the series *Documents on Canadian External Relations* published by Canada's Department of External Affairs, later known as Foreign Affairs Canada. See especially Vol. 23 (1956-1957 Part II),

chapter III "Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union," section I entitled "Hungarian Revolution". The suggestion that Pearson, more than Pickersgill, is responsible for Canada's generous refugee admission policy can be best based on Pearson's letter to Pickersgill of 9 Nov. 1956 in which the External Affairs Minister urges his colleague to "waive" for the Hungarian refugees the usual requirements that immigrants to Canada face. *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 23-24 (doc. no. 15). This little collection of documents is based on the volume of the *Canadian Documents on External Relations* dealing with 1956 that Greg Donaghy and Michael Stevenson edited. See vol. 23 in this series (1956-57 Part II), in particular Chapter III - Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The internet reference is: <http://international.gc.ca/departement/history/dcer/1957/menu-en.asp> .

⁶ See for example the paper of Charles Tarnoczai, "The University of Sopron in Canada," in *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement...*, 87-97 (96). Historian Peter I. Hidas, however, suggests that Pickersgill's role has been over-rated. See his "The Hungarian Refugee Student Movement of 1956-57 and Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 30, 1 (spring 1998): 19-49; an earlier version of this paper was published in Hungarian: "Menekült magyar egyetemisták Kanadában, 1956-1957" [Hungarian refugee university students in Canada, 1956-1957] *Évkönyv* [Yearbook] III, (Budapest: Az 1956-os Magyar Forradalom Történetének Dokumentációs és Kutatóintézete, 1994), 125-35. On the other hand, political scientist Reg Whitaker of York University thinks very highly of Pickersgill, of his intelligence, and of his liberal approach to matters of immigration. He was often opposed on matters relating to the admission of refugees from Eastern Europe by Canada's security establishment, but as Whitaker explains, "had the courage to stand up to the RCMP..." All this suggests that in the fall of 1956 Pickersgill would have endorsed a policy of liberal admission of Hungarian refugees earlier, but he could do it only after he overcame the opposition of Ottawa's security organisations. Reg Whitaker, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), 43 (and elsewhere).

⁷ Arthur Marwick, "Problems and Consequences of Organizing Society for Total War," in *Mobilization for Total War: The Canadian, American and British Experience, 1914-1945*, ed. N. F. Dreisziger (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 1-21 (pp. 6f).

⁸ The investment in resource-based industries (in oil, gas, potash, hydro-electric generation, aluminium refining, etc.) had started during war and continued thereafter.

⁹ Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), Chapter 5, "The Coming of the Planners," pp. 88-115, *in passim*.

¹⁰ David Slater, "Colour the Future Bright: The *White Paper*, the Green Book and the 1945-1946 Dominion-Provincial Conference on Reconstruction," in *Uncertain Horizons: Canadians and Their World in 1945*, ed. Greg Donaghy (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1996), pp. 191-208 (p. 191). On post-war reconstruction see also Steve Jobbitt, "Re-Civilizing the Land: Conservation and Post-war Reconstruction in Ontario, 1939-1961" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 2001), Chapter 3 of which deals with the work of the Ministry of Planning and Development. In 1956-57 it would be the officials of this Ministry that would deal with the Hungarian refugee issue.

¹¹ Creighton, *The Forked Road*, p. 117.

¹² Steven Globerman, "Background to Immigration Policy in Canada," in *The Immigration Dilemma*, ed. Steven Globerman (Vancouver, B.C.: Fraser Institute, 1992), 21. Globerman cites Department of Finance data.

¹³ Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Chapter 5 "The Postwar Era" (296-345) especially p. 345. Many Hungarian professionals managed to get into Canada by claiming to be menial workers.

¹⁴ There was controversy over the business of admitting refugees who may have played a role in pro-Axis wartime governments and in the implementation of Nazi occupation and extermination policies. See Whitaker, *Double Standard*, especially chapter five "His Majesty's Late Enemies," and chapter six "Importing Old World Enmities: Wartime Collaborators" (pp. 102-147).

¹⁵ Whitaker, *Double Standard*, chapter four "Refugees from Communism: The Greatest Threat" (pages 74-101), especially pp. 77-85.

¹⁶ On attitudes to the "new" Hungarian immigrants in the United States see especially Stephen Béla Várdy, "Image and Self-Image among Hungarian-Americans since the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *East European Quarterly* 35, 3 (Sept. 2001): 309-42. For examples of the treatment of the subject in Canadian books see Ralph Connor's (Charles William Gordon) novel *The Foreigner*. In this book one Hungarian immigrant, Kalman, is portrayed favourably: he becomes a Protestant and marries a Scottish girl. But, we might ask, how many other Magyar newcomers could pay such a price for acceptance by Canadian society? Another Canadian author, Wellington Bridgman, in his book *Breaking Prairie Sod*, is even more stridently anti-"Austro-Hun". Both authors were Protestant ministers who had served as chaplains in the First World War.

¹⁷ On the rise of anti-German and then anti-Austrian and, in particular, anti-Hungarian sentiments in France see Dany Deschênes, "French Intellectuals and the Image of Austria-Hungary in France: Prelude to the Break-up of Historic Hungary, 1918-20," *Hungarian Studies Review*, 34, 1-2 (2006): 93-120; and on the rise of similar sentiments in Britain, see Géza Jeszenszky, *Az elvesztett presztízs: Magyarország megítélésének megváltozása Nagy-Britanniában (1894-1918)* [The lost prestige: the Transformation of Hungary's Image in Great Britain (1894-1918)] (Budapest: Magvető, 1986), and the more specialized and more recent monograph by Tibor Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary: The British Perception of the Habsburg Monarchy 1865-1870* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, Hungarian Studies Series, 2005).

¹⁸ A study that traces the activities of some of these emigres in North America is Thomas L. Sakmyster, "A Communist Newspaper for Hungarian-Americans: The Strange World of the *Új Előre*," *Hungarian Studies Review*, 32, 1-2 (2005): 41-70. The Canadian equivalent of the *Új Előre*, the *Kanadai Magyar Munkás*, is examined in Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians* (*op. cit.*). Among the non-communist progressive emigres in North America, the most prolific polemicist was Oscar Jaszi. On him see my own works, especially "A Hungarian Liberal in American Exile: The Life of Oscar Jaszi," *Hungarian Studies Review*, 32, 1-2 (2005): 127-36; "Oscar Jászi: Prophet and Danubian Federalist," *Hungarian Quarterly*, 47, 1 (Spring, 2006): 159-63 (a shorter version of the above), and the chapter on him entitled "Oscar Jaszi as a Prophet: His Early American Years, 1925-1937," in my

book *Hungarians: From Ancient Times to 1956. Biographical and Historical Essays* (Ottawa: Legas, 2007), 53-78.

¹⁹ This judgement was not unanimous. In the United States, for example, John F. Montgomery, a former American minister to Budapest, exempted Hungary's regime of most of such charges. See his *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947; reprint edition by Vista Books, Morristown, N.J., 1993), and in the United Kingdom C. A. Macartney, writing in the post-war period, did the same. See his *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1944* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957, 2nd edition, 1961, 2 vols., published in the United States as *A History of Hungary, 1929-1944*, New York: Praeger, 1957). While Montgomery can be dismissed as an inexperienced American diplomat (his background was in business administration), a similar charge can hardly be levelled against Macartney, a distinguished scholar and, at the end of his career, an Oxford academic. Hungary's association with Nazi Germany in the war can best be seen as a consequence of the harsh Treaty of Trianon of 1920. See my study "The Long Shadow of Trianon: Hungarian Alliance Policies during World War II," *Hungarian Studies* (Budapest), 17, 1 (2003): 33-55. Those who call Hungary "Hitler's last ally" often dismiss the fact that Hungary tried to defect from the Axis alliance in October 1944 but failed. Two months earlier Romania had succeeded. The main difference between the two attempts was the fact that in August of 1944 there were only a handful of German divisions in Romania but in October there were over twenty of them in Hungary. The fact that Slovakia and Croatia were also Hitler's allies is usually ignored as these states were not recognized by the Allies.

²⁰ There was some opposition to the admission of refugees, the most strident came from Hungarian-Canadian communists. Interestingly and perhaps not surprisingly, after 1957 the favourable image of Hungarian newcomers slowly began fading away. This story has not been told yet, but we know some of its components. One was the Peter Demeter trial and the negative publicity resulting from it. The trial revealed a Hungarian underworld in Canada. Another is probably such writing as Margaret Atwood's *Wilderness Tips*, one of whose heroes is a Hungarian who is depicted as a womanizer (a portrayal some Hungarians might take as a compliment). The main problem was that 90 years of anti-Hungarian propaganda could not be overcome by the favourable image generated in 1956.

²¹ Creighton, *The Forked Road*, pp. 266-273 *in passim*. On the pipeline debate see also English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson*, vol. 2, 1949-1972, pp. 156-59. On relations between Prime Minister St. Laurent and Premier Frost see Thomson, *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian*, especially p. 408. On the enmity between Frost and Pickersgill see J. W. Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St Laurent: A Political Memoir* (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 307-08.

²² Donaghy, "Unselfish Interest"? See also, Donaghy and Stevenson, eds., *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*; as well as Greg Donaghy and Stéphane Roussel, eds., *Escort Reid: Diplomat and Scholar* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen Press, 2004).

²³ Confidential letter, dated at Ottawa, 9 November 1956, from Pearson to [Pickersgill], re-printed in Donaghy and Stevenson, eds. *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 23-24 (doc. no. 15).

²⁴ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, [Ottawa], 14 November 1956, re-printed *ibid.*, pp. 30-31 (doc. no. 21).

²⁵ Telegraph, "Hungarian Refugees," [J.] Léger to [Pearson], 19 November 1956, reprinted in Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 35-36 (doc. no. 24). Léger suggested in this telegram that Pearson repeat to Pickersgill the plea for the adoption of a "more liberal policy" regarding Hungarian refugees. This document, incidentally, leaves little doubt that Léger, who would be Canada's Governor-General two decades later, sympathized with his superior's ideas about a more generous approach to the Hungarian refugee issue.

²⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, "Warsaw – and Budapest," 25 Oct. 1956.

²⁷ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, "The Great Silence," 27 Oct. 1956.

²⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, editorials, 29 Oct. and 3 Nov. 1956.

²⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, "Russia and the UN," 7 Nov. 1956.

³⁰ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, 9 Nov. 1956.

³¹ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial entitled "The Gains", 13 Nov. 1956. The same day, in another editorial, the *Globe* sharply criticized international efforts to censure France and Britain for their invasion of Egypt and repeated its attacks on so-called anti-colonial governments who condemned the French and the British and not the U.S.S.R. The government's policy on refugees was also criticized in the *Toronto Telegram*. See the editorial "Let Hungarian Refugees In" of the same day.

³² Had Frost been willing to switch to federal politics, he would have no doubt become the next leader of the federal Conservative Party which would have won the 1957 federal elections — and there would be no mention in Canadian history books of John Diefenbaker.

³³ Roger Graham, *Old Man Ontario: Leslie M. Frost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 394. Yaremko, along with Allan Grossman, were the provincial Tory Party's appeal to the "ethnic vote" in an increasingly multi-ethnic Toronto. See also Jonathan Manthorpe, *The Power and the Tories: Ontario Politics — 1943 to the Present* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).

³⁴ I discussed these and other matters with the 88-year-old Mr. Yaremko, in the weeks running up to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Revolution, in a long telephone interview (28 July 2006).

³⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, 24 Nov. 1956.

³⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, editorial entitled "Action", 26 Nov. 1956.

³⁸ That official was Don Emerson, then private secretary to Paul Martin Sr. Emerson quoted by Martin in his memoirs, *A Very Public Life*, vol. 2 *So Many Worlds* (Toronto: Deneau, 1985), p. 287.

³⁹ Copy of telegram, Pickersgill to Nickle, 26 Nov. 1956, Records of the Ministry of Planning and Development of Ontario (RG 75-43-1-54, box 7), Archives of Ontario. Pickersgill recounted this discussion also in his letter to Premier Frost of 18 January 1957. A copy of this letter can be found in the above-cited file (RG 75-43-1-54, box 7). Pickersgill also mentions these events in his memoirs: *Seeing Canada Whole: A Memoir* (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1994), p. 432. Donaghy suggests that the news that the Tory government in Toronto was ready to fly refugees over "spooked" Pickersgill and helped to prompt him to action. Donaghy, "An Unselfish Interest?" p. 17. Pickersgill was motivated by more than fear: he wanted revenge for an attempt by the Toronto Tories to embarrass him.

⁴⁰ The minutes of this meeting, dated Ottawa, 27 Nov. 1956, can be found in the records of the Ministry of Planning and Development of Ontario (RG 75-43-1-54, box 7).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Pickersgill's trip had been contemplated as early as the 19th, at least according to an External Affairs telegram sent that day from Ottawa to Pearson, then in New York City. [J.] Léger to [Pearson], 19 November 1956, *loc. cit.* (Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 35-36 [doc. no. 24]).

⁴³ The Cabinet, however, didn't approve the free passage for the refugees until its meeting the following day. Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, [Ottawa], 28 November 1956, re-printed in Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 42-44 (doc. no. 29). The text of the Cabinet minute goes as follows: "The Cabinet.... agreed that free passage be offered to Hungarian refugees wishing to come to Canada and to those who already arrived or were en route;..." The writer of these lines — and his parents and brother — left Vienna on a plane with the knowledge that the family would have to pay for the voyage as soon as it would be able to do so. We discovered only after arrival in Canada, much to our relief, that our airfare would be paid by the government.

⁴⁴ *The Globe and Mail*, 29 Nov. 1956.

⁴⁵ Douglas Blanchard, "Toronto Area on Spot Handling Refugees: Big Job — Pickersgill," *Toronto Daily Star*, 4 December 1956, pages 1 and 4.

⁴⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, 5 December 1956.

⁴⁷ Letter, W. M. Nickle to Leslie M. Frost, 4 December 1956, records of the Ministry of Planning and Development, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ Correspondence regarding these disagreements can be found in the above-mentioned records of the Ministry of Planning and Development of Ontario (RG 75-43-1-54, box 7). The first indication of trouble came as early as the 10th of December, in a letter from Minister W. M. Nickle to Laval Fortier, the Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. In this brief note Nickle expressed his "shock" at the statement that had been reported to him that the Federal Government would pay "nothing to help re-clothe the Hungarian refugees who have arrived or will be arriving in this country poorly clad..." See, copy of letter, Nickle to Fortier, 10 Dec 1956, *ibid.* Later and actual case of clothing a Hungarian refugee came up. A certain new arrival by the name of Andor Tari, needed pyjamas. Who would pay for these? became an issue in Canadian dominion-provincial relations. I don't know how the dispute ended and who eventually paid the bill (it was under \$10). I also don't know who exactly this certain Andor Tari was. The Andor Tari I know came to Canada in 1956, became a child psychologist and a professor of family studies at the University of Guelph, as well as a President of the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada. The few dollars that one or another government invested in him in the winter of 1956-57 (if indeed the Andor Tari in question was he), was not a bad investment.

Copies of documents concerning the federal government's negotiations and agreement regarding the settlement of the refugees with the Province of Saskatchewan can be found in the above-mentioned records of the Ministry of Planning and Development of Ontario (RG 75-43-1-54, box 7). The attitudes and actions in this matter of the Province of New Brunswick are discussed in the study of Heather Steel, "Where's the Policy? Immigration to New Brunswick, 1945-1971," *Acadiensis*, 35, 2 (spring 2006), available at http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/Acadiensis/bin/get.cgi?directory=2006/&filename+acad35_2...

⁴⁹ Quoted in N. F. Dreisziger, "The Quest for Spiritual Fulfilment among Immigrants: The Rise of Organized Religious Life in Pioneer Hungarian-Canadian Communities, 1885-1939," *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok – Essays in Church History in Hungary*, 16, 3-4 (fall-winter 2004): 95-124 (p. 95). My parents (my dad was 50 in 1956) adjusted to Canadian life very slowly and with great difficulty. Yet with hard work and perseverance they prospered and in the mid-1960s moved to an affluent neighbourhood of Toronto. One of the stately houses they used to admire in the block north of them was John Yaremko's — as I found out some four decades later.

⁵⁰ N. F. Dreisziger, *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 208-10. The Hungarian immigrants of the turn-of-the-century, of the 1920s, and even to some extent those that came in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had a chance to contemplate for months if not years their emigration to Canada. Some 56-ers, languishing in Austrian refugee camps, hardly had a few hours or days to do so — which compounded the fact that most of them had left their homeland on an impulse.

⁵¹ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, [Ottawa], 28 November 1956, reprinted in Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 42-44 (doc. no. 29).

⁵² See Léger's telegram to Pearson of 9 November 1956; *loc. cit.*

⁵³ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, [Ottawa], 22 November 1956, reprinted in Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy and the Hungarian Revolution*, pp. 38-40 (doc. no. 26).

⁵⁴ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, [Ottawa], 23 November 1956, reprinted *ibid.*, pp. 40-41 (doc. no. 27).

⁵⁵ It was during the week following that the Liberals launched a propaganda offensive against the Queen's Park Tories. See above, notes 44 and 45.

⁵⁶ Their exact number has to be a guesstimate, despite the existence of supposedly accurate immigration statistics. A few who came were Hungarian refugees who had languished in Austrian camps even before the events of 1956. Other "real" refugees came late and were admitted as regular immigrants. Still other Hungarians (originally refugees, but in 1956-57 re-migrants) arrived at about this time from third countries — to where they had gone as post-World War II displaced persons.

⁵⁷ This is the main theme of the last chapter of my book *Struggle and Hope*, "Toward a Golden Age".

⁵⁸ The theme is explored briefly in the conclusions of the above book; in Magda Zalan, *Stubborn People* (Toronto: Canadian Stage and Arts Publications, 1985); in Éva Tömöry's paper (given at a recent annual meeting of the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada, York University, May 2006 and published in this volume) about Hungarian-Canadian entrepreneurs; in Enikő Pittner's video documentary about George Vari (shown at the same HSAC meeting), and in film producer Susan Papp Aykler's most recent documentary about the 56-ers.

⁵⁹ I develop this theme in my study "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: The Legacy of the Refugees," *Nationalities Papers, the journal of the Association for the Study of the Nationalities of the USSR and Eastern Europe*, 13, 2 (Fall 1985): 198-208.

⁶⁰ I elaborate on this in greater detail in my study "The 1956 Revolution in Hungary: The Historical and International Context," in my book of essays, *Hungarians: From Ancient Times*, cit. pp. 131-43 (139-40).

⁶¹ For the story of one family who came to Canada via Yugoslavia see Julie Gedeon, "Reflection of Revolution," *The Beaver, Canada's History Magazine*, October-November 2006, pp. 40-46. In the end, an additional 1,100 refugees were allowed to come. Donaghy and Stevenson, *Canadian Diplomacy*, Introduction, p. vii.