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Canada's First National Internment Operations, 1914-1920: The Serbian experience

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Across Europe and the world the 2014 remembrance of the centennial of the commencement of the Great War focused on the tragedy that had unfolded on the ancient continent. Commemorative books, films, speeches and concerts all conveyed the enormous impact of the four-year conflict. As the winds of war gained momentum one hundred years ago, the catastrophe that affected the Serbian nation reached cataclysmic proportions unprecedented in our ancestral history - the loss of 27% of the population to war, slaughter and disease and the threat of Serbia's total annihilation by the mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire. Notwithstanding the enormity of the human losses and sacrifice, the "war to end all wars" failed to end the bloodshed of nations. Not many years passed before tensions regained momentum in the same theatre of war, in the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes - later Yugoslavia - where the ferocity intensified and even surpassed the horrors of World War I causing even more agony for the Serbian people.

While the old continent was groaning under the endless explosions of guns, cannons and bombs and Serbia was lamenting the monumental catastrophe evolving on its terrain, there were tensions in faraway Canada where Serbs and other ethnic groups had emigrated choosing to leave the cherished hearths and homes of generations rather than be subjected to the oppression of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One aspect of the war chronicles was not marked during the centennial, namely a tragic episode in Canadian history related to the catastrophe overseas - Canada's unjust treatment of many of its immigrants from Austria-Hungary. "During Canada's first national internment operations of 1914-1920 thousands of men, women and children were branded as 'enemy aliens'. Many were imprisoned. Stripped of what little wealth they had, forced to do heavy labour in Canada's hinterlands, they were also disenfranchised and subjected to other state sanctioned censures - not because of anything they had done but only because of where they had come from, who they were."¹

In fact, the internment of East Europeans during World War I and beyond was almost lost to oblivion, but a chance discovery 37 years ago by Ukrainian Canadian professor Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk salvaged the painful story from the dustbin of history. Years of lobbying efforts by Canada's Ukrainian community to obtain government acknowledgement of Canada's first national internment operations yielded a posi-

¹ Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWIRF). *Recognition, Restitution & Reconciliation*. Poster. 2009

tive result. “In May 2008 representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian community reached an agreement with the Government of Canada providing for the creation of an endowment fund to support commemorative, educational, scholarly and cultural projects intended to remind all Canadians of this episode in our nation’s history.”² Mary Manko Haskett, the last survivor of the internment operations who was a child in the Spirit Lake internment camp, charged us “to never forget what was done to her and all the other internees. She did not ask for an apology, or compensation. She asked only that we secure their memory.”³ The silenced voices would be remembered.

Canada then and now

Technically, Canada’s demographics have always been reflective of a diversity of immigrants. In the 1960s, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism focused on the British and French as the “two founding nations”, and served as the foundation for a response from the third segment of the population – the ethnocultural communities who had been settling and developing this land, mainly since the 19th century. As a response to the Commission’s report, the Government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau implemented a policy of multiculturalism in October 1971 which recognized the third element in Canadian society within the framework of bilingualism and biculturalism. The development of that policy over more than four decades confirmed what was already a reality – Canada has always been a diverse society. “Cultural pluralism” was officially acknowledged as the essence of our national identity, a program which encouraged adaptation, retention of languages and cultural heritage within the Canadian framework and reinforced equality and inclusiveness. In other words, immigrants would be included in the national partnership. It was a groundbreaking policy whose goal was to accommodate the changing demographics in the interests of Canada’s harmony, cohesiveness and prosperity. Since then, Canada’s approach toward immigrants has been generous, especially toward refugees from war torn regions of the world. True to its beneficence, Canada has assisted millions of immigrants in adjusting to a new society, helping them with official language acquisition, education, employment and social services. Sadly, that was not the case in 1914. What happened in the past was inconsistent with the values Canadians cherish today.

Canada’s immigration policy from 1891 to 1914 recruited East Europeans to settle the Prairies and develop the huge expanse of empty, fertile land. Canadian Pacific Railway posters can still be found promoting passage for a nominal fee of fifteen dollars, affordable even by contemporary standards. Thousands of citizens of Austria-Hungary seized the opportunity, eager for a better life and anxious to escape the yoke of Austro-Hungarian rule. Reaching Canada’s eastern shore

² CFWWIRF. Poster.

³ Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, *Without Just Cause: Canada’s first national internment operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920* (KingsTon: Kashtan Press, 2007): 56.

at Halifax, immigrants from many diverse ethnic backgrounds produced Austro-Hungarian passports – and in some cases Ottoman passports – proof of their birth and/or citizenship in the vast Empires. Guided only by citizenship status, while unfamiliar with the foreign names and the disparate ethnic composition of the Empires, Immigration Officers did not register the ethnic origin of the new arrivals. Individually, the immigrants were simply registered as “Austro-Hungarian” or “Austrian”, or in some cases as “Ottoman” or “Turk”, an inaccuracy which cost the new arrivals dearly only a few years later when the Great War broke out.

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Why was the precision of the name registration so vital? The Dominion of Canada was part of the British Empire and naturally took up the British cause when it entered the war on 4 August 1914 against Germany and its allies, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Canada’s membership in the Allied Powers meant that it was also an ally of Serbia and Montenegro whose passports guaranteed protection for their émigrés in the war environment. Canada directly supported the Kingdom of Serbia by sending medical delegations to assist the war ravaged country. English and Scottish medical personnel also offered their assistance. On the other hand, since Canada was officially at war with the two Empires, its many immigrants from those territories were immediately placed under suspicion, regarded as disloyal to Canada and labeled “enemy aliens”, an unjust stigma that led to severe consequences.

It was a very different Canada at the turn of the 20th century. Canadians were fearful of these immigrants who looked different, dressed differently and spoke strange languages. Xenophobia was rampant in the general population stoked by hostile pronouncements of some politicians and the media. Those factors, in conjunction with the pejorative label, set the stage for the internment tragedy which followed between 1914 and 1920. Australia, New Zealand and South Africa also had internment operations, but with Canada’s climate, the operations here proved to be the harshest.

War Measures Act

On 22 August 1914 Canada implemented the *War Measures Act*⁴ which mandated state-sanctioned deprivation of all civil rights including: disenfranchisement; restrictions on freedom of speech, movement and association; confiscation of little accumulated wealth and property; internment and deportation. This Act came into effect two more times in Canadian history: on 3 September 1939 inducing the internment of Japanese, Italian and German Canadians during World War II; and on 16 October 1970, the only peacetime enforcement of the Act in response to the Quebec Crisis. Later criticized for its severity and the removal of rights such as “habeas corpus” which safeguards individuals against illegal detention or imprisonment, the *War Measures Act* was repealed on 21 July 1988 and replaced by the *Emergencies Act* which

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Measures_Act

differs from it in two ways. First, any Federal Cabinet declaration of a national emergency “must be reviewed by Parliament, and secondly, any temporary laws made under the Act are subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms”, thus guaranteeing that a suspension of civil rights is subject to the Charter.

Compounding the severity of the ramifications of the *War Measures Act* was the *Wartime Elections Act* in effect from 1917 to 1920 which authorized the disenfranchisement of “enemy alien” citizens naturalized after 31 March 1902. Kingston’s Daily British Whig, one of the few voices of protest, reacted to the *Wartime Elections Act* in an 8 September 1917 commentary with these words: “It is very probably that if this proposal (*Wartime Elections Act*, 1917) becomes law, the ‘alleged’ foreigners and hitherto ‘naturalized’ Canadians will bear their reproach meekly, but they will have sown in their hearts the seeds of a bitterness that can never be extirpated. The man whose honour has been mistrusted, and who has been singled out for national humiliation, will remember it and sooner or later it will have to be atoned for.”⁵

Setting the stage for internment

With the enforcement of the 1914 War Measures Act, Canada issued an *Order in Council* on 28 October 1914 for the immediate registration and internment of “enemy aliens”. Those who fell into this category were those registered at entry as “Austro-Hungarians”, mainly Ukrainians, Serbs, Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, German-speaking Austrians, Poles, Italians, Croats, Russians, Jews, Czechs and Slovaks. Among them were also Armenians, Bulgarians, Kurds and other citizens of the Ottoman Empire. More than 80,000 so-called “enemy aliens” were obligated to carry identification and report regularly to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, while 8,579 “Austro-Hungarians”, including women and children, were rounded up and shipped to 24 internment camps across the country. Those classed as POWs (prisoners of war) were of German nationality and German-speaking Austrians and were treated as first class internees not obliged to do hard labour. The remaining internees, actually civilians who were already naturalized citizens of Canada or in the process of obtaining citizenship, were treated as second class internees.

Were these stigmatized new Canadians truly “enemy aliens” or were they “loyal aliens”? Although there was never any evidence of disloyalty, thousands were subjected to this injustice and humiliation even though the British Foreign Office had confirmed that these people were “friendly aliens”. In a letter to the Honourable Secretary of State dated 29 December 1916, US Consul G. Willrich disagreed with their mistreatment: “The prisoners in Canadian internment camps came to the Dominion as peaceful emigrants and the good majority of them have been good, law-abiding citizens residents... most of them desiring to become Canadian citizens. The idea, therefore, of a treatment of

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergencies_Act

⁶ Luciuk 12.

such men as quasi criminals seems contrary to the best interests of the Dominion.”⁷

Dichotomous situation of the Serbs

In this scenario the Serbs found themselves in a unique dichotomous situation. Serbs affected by the slipshod registration at the point of entry and the resulting internment were those from regions within the boundaries of Austria-Hungary, namely Bosna-Hercegovina and today's Croatia (Lika, Kordun, Slavonija and Dalmacija). Ironically, these Serbs left the Empire as its opponents to seek a better life in Canada where their dreams were quickly shattered precisely because of the Empire.

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Unlike the Ukrainians who numbered more than 100,000 in 1914, the number of Serbs has not yet been confirmed, other than to say that the estimated minimum number was 2,500. Confirmation of the number of Serbian internees is complicated by the fact that many Serbian and Croatian surnames are similar, or actually the same. The number of Serbian internees can be finalized only when the ethnic origin of the names are substantiated through primary research.

In contrast to the above, Serbs from the other side of the Drina River, from Serbia proper or Montenegro, were not affected by the internment as they were automatically viewed as Canada's allies.

Vilification by media and politicians

The general atmosphere of wartime anxiety led to measures which abrogated the civil rights of both naturalized and non-naturalized Canadians. In that atmosphere, xenophobia was on the rise and all those labeled “enemy aliens” were viewed as a threat to the country, to the job market, to society in general. There were street protests with banners openly condemning the “enemy aliens”. The hostilities continued even after the war. In 1919 Herbert S. Clements, Member of Parliament for Kent West near Chatham, still showed no mercy for these destitute people, some of whom were still incarcerated when he said: “I say unhesitatingly that every enemy alien who was interned during the war is today just as much an enemy as he was during the war, and I demand of this Government that each and every alien in this Dominion should be deported at the earliest opportunity. Cattle ships are good enough for them.”⁸

Vilification went beyond the internees. The Globe for 2 August 1918 wrote: “No Civic Aid for Alien Enemy Baby - Under the order recently passed the City Council the authorities at City Hall have decided that an eight-weeks old baby, born of Austrian parents, is an alien enemy, and it has been denied civic assistance at one of the hospitals. A city official has undertaken to pay for the infant for two days to see if in the meantime some way out of the difficulty cannot be found.”⁹

⁷ CFWWIRF. *Canada's First National Internment Operation, 1914-1920*. Brochure. n.d.

⁸ CFWWIRF. Brochure.

⁹ Endowment Council. *The Causes and Consequences of Canada's First National Internment Operations, 1914-1920: The Affirmation of Witnesses*. Working Paper. (Kingston: Kashtan Press, 2011): 17.

On 10 September 1917 Sir Wilfrid Laurier rose above the clamour and xenophobia to demonstrate true statesmanship when he assessed the misguided path of the internment operations with these words: “This measure is such that it must have serious consequences. If it be said in Canada that the pledges which we have given to immigrants when inviting them to come to this country to settle with us, can be broken with impunity, that we will not trust these men, and we will not be true to the promise which we made to them, then I despair for the future of this country.”¹⁰

Mass arrests

The authorities arrested the “enemy aliens” en masse and sent them to 24 internment camps of which two were family camps with men, women and small children at Spirit Lake in northern Quebec and Vernon, British Columbia. The other 22 camps were located at military forts, government buildings, barracks, bunk houses, armouries, railway cars, militia camps and malleable iron works. From east to west these were at: Halifax and Amherst in Nova Scotia; Montreal, Valcartier and Beauport in Quebec; Kingston, Toronto, Kapuskasing, Niagara Falls, Sault Ste. Marie and Petawawa in Ontario; Winnipeg and Brandon in Manitoba; Eaton, Saskatchewan/Munson, Alberta; Lethbridge, Banff National Park (Castle Mountain and Cave and Basin) and Jasper in Alberta; Monashee-Mara Lake, Fernie/Morrissey, Edgewood, Revelstoke/Field-Otter and Nanaimo in British Columbia. Kapuskasing was the last camp to close in 1920, two years after the Armistice. Generally speaking, the liberated internees remained silent about their experience out of fear of reprisals, re-arrest or other punishment. Some started a new life in Canada while others, embittered by the injustice they had endured, returned to their homelands. Their reticence explains why Ukrainian and other scholars were totally unfamiliar with Canada’s first national internment operations for more than six decades.

Internees dispossessed

The arrest of “enemy aliens” left indelible marks on the internees and their families. Uprooted and marginalized, the families’ property and valuables were seized, their money was stolen, economic losses were staggering.

General William Otter, Chief of the General Staff of the Canadian Army and founder of the Royal Canadian Military Institute, came out of retirement to oversee Canada’s first national internment operations. He said with assurance: “As many of those interned were residents of Canada and possessed real estate, securities, etc. such have been turned over to the Custodian of Enemy Alien Properties for the future decision of the Government.”¹¹ Years later Professor J. H. Thompson of McGill University reported a very different observation: “The Canadian government sold the seized property of “enemy aliens” at auction for 10 cents on the dollar.”¹²

¹⁰ Endowment Council 18.

¹¹ Luciuk 7.

¹² Luciuk 16.

An extract from the minutes of a meeting of the Treasury Board held in Ottawa 5 March 1954 supports Professor Thompson's claim. The letter addressed to the Secretary of State on the recommendation of the Public Records Committee granted authority for the destruction of all archival records pertaining to the operations of the Custodian of Enemy Property during World War I. These included: files and ledgers related to the internment, settled claims for damages arising out of act of illegal warfare committed by the enemy, records covering claims for property located in enemy countries and debts owing by Canadians to creditors in enemy countries, files dealing with applications for release of property vested in the Custodian, and files pertaining to the administration and liquidation of enemy property in Canada.¹³ Although the amount deposited with the Custodian was a meager amount even by standards of the period, a professional assessment conducted in 1992 assessed its value today would be in the millions.

Confined behind barbed wire with nowhere to escape, the internees were mistreated by the guards and their mail was censored. Internees were used as forced labour to develop Banff National Park and Parks Canada; in logging, steel & mining industries; and for Government and private companies. Exposed to the extreme cold and isolation, internees suffered frozen limbs, tuberculosis, insanity, depression and other illnesses. Many emerged from the camps broken in health and psyche.

The human costs were immeasurable. Isolated by vast geographic distances, camp living conditions were substandard. In a letter to his wife, Nick Olinyk, internee #98 at Castle Mountain camp in Alberta wrote: "The conditions here are very poor, so that we cannot go on much longer, we are not getting enough to eat – we are hungry as dogs."¹⁴ For both the internees and their families life was painful and harsh on either side of the barbed wire fence, each enduring this injustice in their own way. Little Katie Domytryk, a 9-year old Ukrainian child, wrote these painful words to her father, internee #1100 arrested in Edmonton, interned initially at Lethbridge and later incarcerated in the Spirit Lake camp in northern Quebec far, far away from home: "My dear father. We haven't nothing to eat and they do not want to give us no wood. My mother has to go four times to get something to eat. It is better with you, because we had everything to eat. This shack is no good, my mother is going down town every day and I have to go with her and I don't go to school at winter. It is cold in that shack. We your small children kiss your hands my dear father. Goodbye my dear father. Come home right away. Katie."¹⁵ With the arrest, departure and internment of their husbands and breadwinners, with the loss of their residence and jobs, the women were left to raise children alone with no language or labour skills and no infrastructure to assist them. Indeed, the reality for entire families was very grim.

¹³ Luciuk 48.

¹⁴ CFWWIRF. Brochure.

¹⁵ CFWWIRF. Brochure.

Recognition, restitution and reconciliation

In 1978, Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk, a Ukrainian Canadian professor, literally tripped over the story of the internment in a chance conversation with the elderly Nick Sakaliuk. Dr. Luciuk and other Ukrainian scholars started combing through archives and newspapers to solve this missing piece of Canadian history. In 1987, the Ukrainian community initiated a campaign to have the Government acknowledge the internment. Nothing happened for 18 years until Member of Parliament Inky Mark proposed a *Private Member's Bill C-331* to acknowledge the Ukrainian internment, although research began to show that other ethnic groups were affected too. In May 2008, the Ukrainian Canadian community represented by the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress negotiated an agreement with the Government of Canada for the creation of an endowment fund named the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWWIRF) for the period 2008-2023. Its mandate is to support commemorative, educational, scholarly and cultural projects related to the internment operations of 1914 to 1920 utilizing the interest earned on the ten million dollars allocated to fulfill this objective. The work of the CFWWIRF is overseen by the Endowment Council comprised of representatives from the three Ukrainian organizations, representatives from three other affected groups, an appointed Chair and one internee descendent. Draga Dragašević was selected to represent the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada (Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi) on the Endowment Council for the period 2008-2012.

Endowment Council's work

Since its inception in 2008, the Endowment Council has worked diligently to meet its objective. Over the first six years of its mandate it has awarded more than one million dollars¹⁶ in grants for a variety of projects to educate Canadians about the internment: the Spirit Lake Interpretive Centre in Quebec and the National Internment Exhibit in Banff, both open to the public; the renewal of the Kapuskasing cemetery; archaeological work at camp sites; academic books, novels, photojournalism, artistic projects; National Education Project whose goal is to include the internment in curricula across Canada; development of resources for students and teachers; commemorative stamp unveiling at a cancellation ceremony in the Senate; research on affected communities; and media outreach with articles and promotional announcements.

To further preserve the memory of the internees, the Endowment Council has hosted symposia; appraised museums, libraries, media and boards of education; initiated the establishment of internment archives at Queen's University in Kingston; sought artifacts of internees; and advocated for an internment gallery at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg.

¹⁶ CFWWIRF. *Recalling Canada's First National Internment Operations: Annual Report 2014* (Winnipeg: CFWWIRF, 2014): 4.

Serbian research

The Ukrainian community has been researching the internment of its community members for more than 30 years. However, research on the Serbian experience has only just begun. At this point in time, the little we know about the Serbian experience stems from evidence left by Božidar M. Markovich in a series of articles published in 1938 in the newspaper *Glas Kanade*,¹⁷ mention of Serbs in Ukrainian Canadian research and now the ongoing work of Dr. Marinel Mandreš.

Božidar M. Markovich, one-time president and secretary of the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada (Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi), owner and editor of *Voice of Canada (Glas Kanade)* which later became *Voice of Canadian Serbs (Glas Kanadskih Srba)*, long-time president of the Saint Sava Serbian Orthodox Church in Toronto, and one of the founders of Radio Šumadija, had a very direct and significant connection with Serbian internees.

In 1919, one year after the Armistice, Consul General Antun Sefirović of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes sent Božidar M. Markovich to Kapuskasing.¹⁸ Acting on behalf of the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada which had been established in Toronto in 1916, Mr. Markovich interviewed several hundred¹⁹ Serbian internees during the course of two days in the presence of camp authorities. His goal was to facilitate the liberation of Serbs interned in the Kapuskasing camp. "One by one, escorted by armed soldiers, all the Serbs in that camp were brought before Markovich to be interviewed. Downcast men with long beards said their name, place of birth, year of birth, when they had arrived in Canada, where they were when they were arrested and why they were arrested... During the interview many cried like babies, describing their oppression which had lasted three or four years and which was without reason or need."²⁰

Odbrana membership cards confirmed the members' identity and loyalty to Canada and accelerated their release. In fact, many Serbs who were not interned had been protected by their membership in the Odbrana.²¹ During the course of two days, Mr. Markovich expedited the release of 264 Serbian internees.²²

The only other known fact about the Serbs was that they were interned in many of the camps, but mainly at Mara Lake in British Columbia and Kapuskasing where some may be buried in the restored cemetery there.²³

¹⁷ Olga B. Markovich, *Doseljavanje Srba u Kanadu i njihova aktivnost* (Windsor: Avala Printing and Publishing, 1965): 101-103.

¹⁸ Bora Dragašević, *Stopama predaka: autobiografija* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2012): 361.

¹⁹ Marinel Mandreš, *Loyal Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Ethnic Serbs and Romanians in Canada during the Great War (1914-1920)*. Powerpoint presentation. 22 August 2014.

²⁰ Markovich 102.

²¹ Mandreš 22 August 2014.

²² Markovich 103.

²³ Mandreš 22 August 2014.

For the remainder of the Serbian story to be told, more research needs to be done. Fortunately, Dr. Marinel Mandreš, of Serbian-Romanian heritage, received a grant from the Endowment Council to study the internment of Serbian and Romanian internees during the Great War. His research will: examine the dichotomous predicament of the Serbs as both “enemy aliens” and “friendly aliens”; record the advocacy work of the Odrbrana; confirm the Serbian names; chronicle the internee experience; and determine the location and/or fate of internees after the war.

Dr. Mandreš will also be examining the diplomatic initiatives of Mihajlo Pupin and Antun Seferović vis á vis the internees. His research has unearthed names of Serbs and Romanians, including ex-internees, who volunteered in the Canadian Expeditionary Force or Serbian, Montenegrin and British military units, thus proving their loyalty. As part of the Allied effort, in 1917 Srpska Narodna Odbrana founding members Božidar M. Markovich of Toronto and Špiro Hutararović of Winnipeg were appointed respectively as the Serbian War Mission’s representative and its recruiting agent. There is evidence that other Odrbrana members were also representatives.

The primary research of Dr. Mandreš, undertaken in Canadian archives and the Arhiv Jugoslavije in Belgrade, is scheduled to be completed within three years.²⁴

Project “CTO”

The Government and Canadian institutions had not included the centennial of Canada’s first national internment operations in the centennial commemorations of the start of the Great War. On the initiative of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation, the Endowment Council of the CFWWIRF funded Project “CTO” – meaning one hundred – to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the enforcement of the *War Measures Act* on 22 August 1914 which had loomed so ominously in Canadian history and which had left such painful memories to so many. It had inspired intolerance, prejudice, injustice and suffering. The Act and its ramifications had almost been erased from collective memory. In fact, one can speculate whether the internment of the Japanese, Italians and Germans in World War II would have even taken place if the memory of Canada’s first national internment had been imbued in the collective historical consciousness. Project “CTO”, led by Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk, was a symbolic effort to remedy that omission.

One hundred memorial plaques were manufactured and distributed to one hundred ethnic and community organizations in 59 cities across the country with the intention of unveiling them in remembrance ceremonies. Most plaques were distributed to Ukrainian organizations while a nominal number were distributed to the affected communities. Demand was so high that the final number of plaques reached 115. The design of the oval plaque was comprised of an archival photo of internees behind barbed wire enhanced with the words “Re-

²⁴ CFWWIRF. *Annual Report* 2014. 19–20.

calling Canada's First National Internment Operations 1914-1920" in both official languages.

Draga Dragašević, past member of the Endowment Council representing the Odbrana, co-ordinated the project in the Serbian community which received two plaques placed in the Serbian Heritage Museum in Windsor, Ontario and in front of the Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Working committees were formed in both cities to plan the unveiling ceremony, educational sessions and receptions. In Windsor the committee was comprised of Anne Dube, Miloš Savić, Draža Chuk, Julka Vlajić, Cathy Diklich and University of Windsor archivist, Dr. Brian Owens. In Niagara Falls the committee was comprised of John Mrmak with assistance from Denise Mateyk, president of the Saint George and Saint Archangel Michael Church Congregation; Aca Pantelić, president of the Odbrana; and George Yerich Sr., an internee descendent.

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At precisely 11 a.m. on Friday, 22 August 2014 in every time zone in Canada beginning in Nova Scotia, Project "CTO" came to life as plaques were ceremoniously unveiled "in a wave of remembrance hallowing all the victims of Canada's first national internment operations".²⁵ And in both Serbian communities a symbolic connection was made with the humanitarian work of Božidar M. Markovich on behalf of the Odbrana 95 years earlier. In Windsor honorary presidents of the Odbrana, Bora Dragašević and Milorad Gaćeša, and vice president Blažo Brković unveiled the plaque in remembrance of the internees and the Odbrana connection.²⁶ In Niagara Aca Pantelić and George Yerich Sr. unveiled the plaque in another symbolic connection with the past work of the Odbrana and the tragedy of a family member.²⁷ Powerpoint presentations compiled by Draga Dragašević and Dr. Marinel Mandreš formed the educational segment of the programs in both cities as did informative exhibits in the Serbian Heritage Museum and Niagara's Serbian hall. At both locations tributes were paid to the memory of interned Serbs who had been forgotten and for whom memorials were held for the first time in a century.

One of the highlights of the Niagara memorial was the recently discovered story of Nikola Yerich, a confirmed Serbian internee who settled in Niagara Falls in 1907. He was detained in 1914, sent to Kapuskasing and released in 1916.²⁸ His nephew was Pane Yerich and his great-nephew is George Yerich Sr., a prominent Niagara businessman. Nikola was secretary of the local Odbrana chapter in 1917 after his release. With the recent discovery of his grave, until now unknown even to his descendents, his great-nephew placed a wreath at his gravesite, a fitting tribute on this day of remembrance.

²⁵ Endowment Council. Remember. Learn. Never Forget Them... Pošter. 2014.

²⁶ Tanja Zec-O'Neill, "Project 'CTO' Memorial Plaque and Museum Exhibit: Remembering the Internment," *Voice of Canadian Serbs* (25 September 2014) 10.

²⁷ John Mrmak, "The Plaque on the stone: Niagara Serbs remember the internment." *Voice of Canadian Serbs* (25 September 2014) 11.

²⁸ Mandreš 22 August 2014.

Conclusion

The story of Canada's first national internment operations is still not in the public consciousness or in educational curricula, except in a localized way. More often than not, most Canadians recall the World War II internment of Japanese Canadians who won an apology in 1988 from then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and a restitution package for individual survivors and a community fund from the Government of Canada.

But there are no survivors of the World War I internment and their silence prevailed across the decades until 1978. Through the efforts of the Ukrainian community, which was most affected by the tragedy and which has worked steadfastly for decades to unveil this forgotten and lamentable episode, a settlement was negotiated with the Canadian Government for the establishment of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund. Through the grants which it awards what is being salvaged is "memory", just as Mary Manko Haskett had requested – not reparation or even an apology – rather a venue to ensure the remembrance of the souls who had suffered injustice and humiliation only because of where they had come from and who they were. It is a lesson for all. We must cherish and protect our freedom and civil rights.

Now that the Serbian story is moving forward through the efforts of the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada (Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi) and the superlative research of Dr. Marinel Mandreš, it is incumbent on all Serbs to memorialize all the silenced Serbian voices, victims of man's prejudice and intolerance on both sides of the ocean. Here in Canada we have an opportunity to learn, remember and never forget their sacrifice. May their memory be eternal.

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