



The Russian-Canadian Press: Historical Overview

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The Library and Archives Canada (LAC) collection charts the history of the Russian press in Canada from the turn of the 20th century. This history reflects the diverse cultural and religious groups who have published the periodicals of the Russian-speaking community. Those who have participated in publishing these newspapers and magazines include Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews and Cossacks, among others.

There were four main waves who emigrated from the Russian empire. The first wave coincided with the revolutions of 1905 and 1917; next was the post-Second World War period that brought thousands of displaced persons; the third wave began in the 1960s when a number of Russian Jews left the country; the last and most recent wave of immigration began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. (Pierce, p. 1100–1108)

The periodicals that have been established by these particular groups serve three main functions: they help newcomers to adjust quickly by providing information about Canada; they keep their readers connected to the larger community; and they aid in preserving Russian heritage and culture.

The earliest Russian community to settle in Canada in statistically significant numbers was the Doukhobors, a splinter group of the Old Believers of the Russian Orthodox Church who were often persecuted by the imperial authorities, particularly for their refusal to serve in the army. In 1899, Leo Tolstoy, himself a committed pacifist, aided a group of 7,500 people in finding a new homeland on the Western Canadian Frontier. (Kosachova, p. 17)

At first, the Doukhobors settled in Saskatchewan, but many moved farther west to British Columbia in 1906. It is primarily the youth and student group publications which emerged in the 1940s that survive in the Library and Archives Canada collection. Many, like *The Inquirer* and *Mir*, were important periodicals, but had life spans of only a few years or months. By contrast, the magazine *Iskra*, which is an invaluable resource for information about this particular community, has been continuously published since 1945.

Many of those groups who immigrated to Canada during the political upheavals of early 20th-century Russia were attracted by the prospect of work in Canadian cities, and many settled in major urban centres such as Toronto, Montréal, Windsor, Winnipeg and Edmonton.

The earliest Russian-language newspaper in the Library and Archives Canada collection, *Russkii Golos*, began in 1913 and was printed in Edmonton by the Russophile Ukrainians of Galician origin. In addition to news, the paper provided information for new



immigrants, discussed the challenges of starting a new life in Canada, and kept community members in touch with each other. Publications such as this played an instrumental role in helping immigrants to overcome the challenges of adapting to a new world.

Many who joined the urban working classes became instrumental in organizing the labour movement and workers' unions; activities that are well documented in the communist publications. The first of these was called *Kanadskii Gudok*, which was launched in 1931. The paper was suspended, on security grounds, in 1940 but continued under other titles once the USSR joined the war effort; first as *Gudok* (unfortunately no copies have been preserved in the LAC collection), then *Vestnik*, a publication that had a life span of over half a century. This part of the collection is especially interesting for the illustrations and propaganda posters that adorn the pages of these newspapers.

The publications of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as of the Russian evangelical movement, are also represented in the Library and Archives Canada collection. The centres of Russian Orthodoxy in Canada are Toronto and Montréal, and many publications have issued from these cities since 1952. They document the lives of many different Russian Orthodox communities throughout Canada and the annual *Kanadskii Pravoslavnyi Kalendar* offers a wealth of information about different churches, the services that they provide and the people who attend them.

The organizations that were formed abroad by those who opposed the Soviet Union are represented in the publications associated with the Russian Cultural Society in Toronto. Their *Russkoe Slovo v Kanade* as well as *Bor'ba*, put out by the "United Struggle for Freedom of the Peoples of Russia" (SBORN), provide counterpoint to the communist newspapers. The literary, semi-annual *Sovremennik* complements the anti-communist periodicals.

The most recent wave of immigration produced publications that began to appear in the early 1990s. These are often general-interest periodicals that contain bits and pieces of news, editorials, information on immigration, entertainment such as crosswords, puzzles, celebrity news and horoscopes, as well as a significant amount of advertising. *Info Toronto* and *Russian Canadian Info* are two examples of such publications, but there are many others in the collection that fit this general description. A few, such as *Russkii Vancouver*, target specific communities.

The Russian press in Canada has undergone significant changes over the years. Many of the long-standing publications reflect these changes in perspective. Most document the birth and growth of a new social group in the Canadian landscape: how newcomers settled, adjusted, and added to the life and politics of their new homeland. An enormous amount of information can be gathered about churches, schools, and other community associations. Researchers interested in the early settlers will find many first-hand accounts of farming communities in the West; those concerned with the labour movement will benefit from the recollections of strike organizers. Genealogists may appreciate



these sources, since the names of individuals and families are abundant throughout the periodicals.

Sources

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About the Author:

Olga Tkachuk grew up in Soviet Ukraine and immigrated to Canada in 1991 where she earned a Baccalaureate degree from the University of Ottawa in Religious and Cultural Studies. She works as a freelance translator.