

FIVE DECADES OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP UKRAINIAN NATIONAL YOUTH FEDERATION OF CANADA 1934-1984

by Taras Pidzamecky

The Beginnings

Intense sectarian rivalry between the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches and a strong Ukrainian communist movement posed a major threat to Ukrainian Canadian community life in the Great Depression era of the 1930's. It was in response to this turmoil that in the prairie city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, a group of ambitious Canadian-born Ukrainian students and public school teachers founded the Ukrainian National Youth Federation of Canada on July 27, 1934. Together with its affiliate parent body, the Ukrainian National Federation of Canada (UNO, established 1932), the UNYF, or *Molodi Ukrainski Natsionalisty (MUN)*, as it was originally called in Ukrainian, was to adopt the following credo: Faith in the Principles of Christianity, Faith in Canada, Faith in the Dignity of the Individual, Faith in Cultural Traditions, Faith in Democracy, Faith in the Liberty of All Peoples, and, Faith in the Liberty of Ukraine. It was around these ideals that the UNYF succeeded in rallying youth from across Canada to promote among them a spirit of an all-around Ukrainianism.

The roots of the UNYF can be traced to the Ukrainian National Students Association (*USNO-Ukrainska Studentska Natsionalistychna Orhanizatsia*), an organization conceived by one Mychailo Ukrainets, a student studying in Edmonton, who having been inspired by a Ukrainian National Federation concert in that city in 1933, proposed the formation of a nationalist student organization affiliated with the UNF. The first branch of USNO became a reality in Edmonton on September 22, 1933. The organization aimed to put greater emphasis on ties with the old country and support of the Ukrainian nationalist revolutionary movement, a concern which they felt was being ignored by other student organizations then in existence and one which they resolved did not conflict with being good citizens of Canada. Several branches of USNO sprung up across Canada, including Saskatoon, which was organized by two Hafford school teachers and future UNYF National Presidents Paul Yuzyk (now a Canadian Senator) and Walter Davidiuk. The ultimate aim of the USNO organization was to centralize all Ukrainian student clubs in Canada and to become affiliated to the Central Executive of the Ukrainian Students' Union (CESUS), then located in Prague, Czechoslovakia. By 1937, USNO ceased to

exist as an organization, since its leadership turned most of its attention to building the Ukrainian National Youth Federation. Nevertheless, the ideals of USNO were to influence the new youth organization.

At the first UNF Convention held in Saskatoon from July 26-28, 1934, a number of the ten USNO delegates present together with UNF members and other youth interested in establishing a broadly-based youth organization, combined to form a 'Commission on Youth and PLAST.'

The mandate of the commission, which was headed by the UNYF's fourth National President, Kornlyo Magera, was to develop a plan for a new organization of youth to be called *Natsionalistychna Ukrainska Molod (NUM - in English - Nationalist Ukrainian Youth)*. The UNF convention resolved that the UNF National Executive was to oversee the development of NUM and it elected Paul Yuzyk to the UNF National Executive, as Director of Youth, to carry out this task. In this capacity, Paul Yuzyk effectively served as first President of the UNYF. Despite the lack of a UNYF National Executive *per se*, in the organization's formative years, the student-led UNYF functioned rather autonomously.

The Ukrainian name of the UNYF was changed in its first year from NUM to MUN (*Molodi Ukrainski Natsionalisty*). Historical data suggest that NUM was favoured by Kornlyo Magera, who was apparently one of the most fervently nationalistic of the new organization. The name MUN was later adopted, but also over the objections of Paul Yuzyk, who felt that the name was forced upon the youth by the UNF. Yuzyk, however, admittedly liked the acronym 'MUN' since during his organizing he found it appealed to young people. In English, MUN was briefly known as the *Ukrainian National Youth Association*, then as the *Ukrainian National Youth Federation*, although some branches continued to use the direct translation of MUN -- *Young Ukrainian Nationalists* up to World War II. As will be seen below, the controversy surrounding the UNYF's name was not resolved until some 25 years later.

Rapid Growth

In the first five and half years of its existence, the UNYF boasted 50 branches, 60% of which were located west of the Manitoba-Ontario border. However, about two-thirds of the western branches were located in small rural centres and were not destined to last long, due to the organization's underdeveloped infrastructure and because of the upheaval created by the Second World War. Thus, the numerical strength of the UNYF lay in the urban centres like Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Edmonton and particularly in eastern Canadian cities like Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Sudbury, Kirkland Lake and Fort William (now part of Thunder Bay). Most of the branches in Western Canada were organized in 1937 and 1938 largely through the efforts of Paul Yuzyk, and the late John Kishinsky, a student who died tragically in his youth. The UNYF movement in Eastern Canada took off rather independently of organizational developments in the west and in fact, an Eastern Provincial Executive in Toronto under the leadership of Stephan Pawluk was in place with 7 branches by 1935. By the outbreak of the war, however, and certainly after Yuzyk's touring of eastern

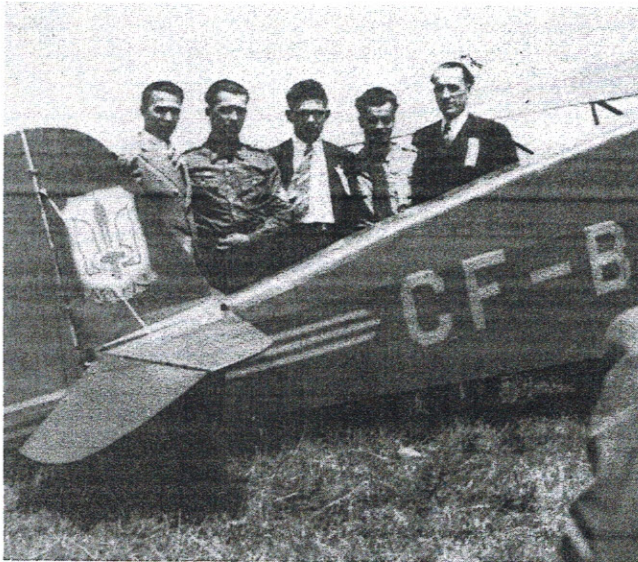


Paul Yuzyk with Redberry, Sask. UNYF Orchestra, 1939

Canada during his organizing excursion, the UNYF was consolidated into a national organization.

Flying and Radio-Telegraphy Schools and the UNYF's War Effort

While certainly not unmindful of promoting Canadian patriotism or spreading Ukrainian culture among its membership, the emphasis in the UNYF's activities in its formative years was organizing Ukrainian youth for the purpose of supporting the underground liberation struggle then being carried on in Ukraine by the Organization of Ukrainian



UNYF Plane "Evhen", Toronto, 1983

Paul Yuzyk (2nd left), Michael Wladyka (flying school pres. - 2nd right), Kornlyo Magera (Nat'l Pres., 1937-39)

Nationalists under the leadership of Evhen Konovalts. The UNYF also took aim at a growing communist movement in Canada, which by the early 1930's claimed over 1,600 youth members. Through the vigorous agitation of leaders like Paul Yuzyk, the UNYF did much to undercut the communist hold on many Ukrainian Canadian young people.

With the clouds of war gathering over Europe, the UNYF undertook activities which might be of assistance to Ukraine's fight for independence. To this end, the UNYF sponsored a flying school in Oshawa, Ontario which was organized in 1938 and in which the then future mayor of Port Hope, Ontario, Michael Wladyka, played a leading role. In Toronto, Stephen Pawluk and another Muniivets, John Stogrin, spearheaded the

formation of a radio telegraphy school in 1935. These activities were given official status in the UNYF's 1937 constitution, which stated that one of the UNYF's aims was "the encouragement and enrollment of Ukrainian youth in all types of institutions (including) military and flying schools."

Thus, when World War II broke out, many of the UNYF members were physically and psychologically prepared to participate. Many of these UNYF boys were among the first to volunteer for service in the armed forces, among them, seven past presidents of the UNYF Toronto branch. Several Muniivets also paid the supreme sacrifice for Canada. They included Sydney Filipchuk, a member of the RCAF from Sudbury, Ontario and Tony Leskiw of Saskatoon, a 20 year old naval gunner who was killed in a German attack off the coast of England in October, 1940. A lake in the northern part of his native province of Saskatchewan, Lake Leskiw, was named in Tony's honour.

During the war, the Ukrainian National Federation and the UNYF came under increasingly hostile attacks from so-called "progressive" (pro-Soviet) organizations, which were trying to capitalize on Canada's wartime alliance with the Soviet Union by drawing false analogies between the UNYF and Nazi and fascist movements in Europe in an attempt to discredit the organization. It was at this time that the "Seven Faiths" - Credo - of the UNYF emerged, inspired to a great extent by Paul Yuzyk, who refined what was already in previous UNYF constitutions and stated it in a succinct form understandable not only to Muniivets, but to the general Canadian public. That the defamation campaign by pro-Soviet organizations against the UNYF and the UNF failed is perhaps best attested to by the incorporation of the Ukrainian National Federation by an Act of Canadian Parliament (Bill "G") in July, 1950. It was in this Act that the UNYF's existence was first recognized officially at law.

The war did much to "canadianize" the attitudes of both the UNYF members who served in the armed forces and those that were part of the effort on the home front. While the war did not erase the strong Ukrainian nationalist sentiment characteristic of the UNYF in the 1930's, it did place it much more within a Canadian context. The UNYF did away with its pre-war blue and yellow-trimmed paramilitary uniform worn up to the outbreak of the war (reminiscent of the Plast scouting movement) and in the 1950's, replaced it with a navy blue blazer with the UNYF crest over the breast pocket. Eventually, in 1961, the UNYF changed its Ukrainian name from MUN to MUNO (*Molod' Ukrainskoho Natsional'noho Obiednania*) to reflect the adjustment the organization had made in its philosophy in the post-war period. Contrary to misleading interpretations, this change in name did not alter the UNYF's support of the Ukrainian nation's right to political independence. Rather, it represented what some considered a long overdue adjustment, reflecting more precisely the nature of the UNYF and its position vis a vis Ukraine and Canadian society.

In terms of its organizational programme, the UNYF began to increasingly emphasize the promotion of Ukrainian folk culture among Canada's youth of Ukrainian ancestry. Indeed, Ukrainian song and dance became the organization's main tool for organizing Ukrainian Canadian youth. Between 1946 and

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6th UNYF Eastern Provincial Conference, Montreal, 1946. First Row: William Hladun (Nat'l Pres. 1947-54 - 3rd left), Eastern Prov'l Sec. Ann Mysyk-Wach (4th left), Stephen Pawluk (5th left), East. Prov'l Pres. Michael Zahrebelny (centre), Michael Orychiwsky (Nat'l Pres. 1956-59 - 2nd right).

1949, Michael Orychiwsky, an energetic and charming young Munivets hailing from Montreal, took on the job of National Organizer in an effort to rebuild the UNYF branches which had been weakened by the war. A consummate organizer, Orychiwsky in his three-year term, organized 10 new branches, prepared 6 provincial Youth Day Festivals, organized 45 "Ukrainian Cavalcades" and addressed public gatherings across Canada on more than 400 occasions! A Ukrainian Cavalcade generally involved the local Ukrainian youth talent of a given region, which Orychiwsky would organize, often train, and then take on a tour of centres of Ukrainian population in the area.

Cavalcades did much to popularize Ukrainian song and dance among Canada's post-war youth. It should be noted that female UNYF members also played an important role in organizational redevelopment during the immediate post-war period as exemplified by the field work of Ukrainian school teacher and choir conductor Olha Mysyk (Rohatyn) in Vancouver and in Kenora, Ontario in the late 1940's.

At about the same time the UNYF experienced a surge in its membership as many young Ukrainians immigrated to Canada from displaced persons camps in Europe. The UNYF acted very often as host for the newcomers, many of whom joined the ranks of the organization. While many newcomers remained members, it appears that many also left the UNYF after only a short while. The growing Canadian trend within the UNYF often came into direct conflict with the newcomer's views. Having just arrived from war-torn Europe, barred by Soviet rule from returning to their native Ukraine, these refugee youths, many of whom had served in Ukrainian nationalist military formations during the war, saw as their sole priority the

liberation of their occupied homeland. This inconsistency of views, as well a significant discrepancy between the Canadian's and the newcomer's knowledge of Ukrainian, in addition to other inevitable differences which arise when the products of one migration meet another, led to the multiplication of Ukrainian youth organizations in Canada. Whereas up to the war, the UNYF had co-existed with the *Ukrainian Catholic Youth (UKiU)* and the *Canadian Ukrainian Youth Association (SUMK-Orthodox)*, these original three organizations were now joined by organizations transplanted from abroad, namely Plast, SUM and ODUM.

This is not to say that differences of opinion did not arise between old and newcomers within the UNYF itself. Indeed, the UNYF was not left unaffected by a controversy which came to a head within the Ukrainian National Federation in the late 1950's. The controversy centred on the UNF's relationship to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which became factionalized during the war in the wake of OUN leader Evhen Konovalts' assassination in 1938 at the hands of a Soviet agent. Leading UNYF members took part in this debate which, while partially resolved, continues within the UNF system until today, although with far less intensity.

The UNYF generally differed from all other Ukrainian youth organizations in Canada in that its own membership ran UNYF organizational affairs without parent body intervention. It should also be noted that the UNYF was also later involved in the formation of the now defunct RUMK (*Rada Ukrainskoyi Molodi Kanady*), which aimed to coordinate the efforts of all Ukrainian Canadian youth organizations.

Many of the post-war youth immigrants who remained within the UNYF did much to invigorate the organization with their often greater knowledge of things Ukrainian. Among these newcomers were Bohdan Bociurkiw, (currently Professor of Soviet and East European Studies at Carleton University, Ottawa), who acted as national UNYF secretary and Yaroslav Bilak, (Past President of the Ukrainian National Federation of Canada and recently chairman of the IV World Congress of Free Ukrainians) who took up Michael Orychiwsky's position as National Organizer in 1949



The cast of Michael Orychiwsky's Saskatoon "Ukrainian Cavalcade", 1947.



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