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MIGRATING MAGYARS AND CANADIAN INCLUSIVENESS:
RESPONSES OF THE STATE AND VOLUNTARY
ORGANIZATIONS TO THE HUNGARIAN REFUGEES,
1956–1958

On Maple Island near Sussex Drive in Ottawa, Ontario stands an impressive monument dedicated to Canada’s response to the thousands of Hungarians who fled Soviet oppression in the weeks and months following the Hungarian Revolution in October of 1956. The monument, with its blending of Canadian Shield red granite and a Hungarian art form known as a ‘kopjafa’ is inscribed with a message describing the links made between the two countries in the aftermath of a truly unprecedented national response to a humanitarian emergency.¹



(photo: Sarah Baxter)

¹ The inscription reads: “May this monument be a lasting symbol of the gratitude of Hungarian refugees who, having escaped after the revolution in Hungary, were welcomed and provided a safe haven to rebuild their lives in Canada.” French and Hungarian inscriptions are also on the monument.

My interest in researching the role of voluntary organizations with international links in the Hungarian refugee crisis came out of an interview I conducted with my great aunt and great uncle, Maria and Imre Toth, for the 1956 Memorial Project, an oral history archive, co-sponsored by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and the Rakoczi Foundation.² The focus of the program was for descendants and relatives to interview those members of their families about the events that unfolded in 1956 and the aftermath. Over the course of the interview, and in listening to it some time later, I was struck by how much their experience was marked by assistance from voluntary organizations, both in the refugee camps and then in Canada.

Most scholars of immigration, such as Gerald Dirks and Robert Keyserlingk, underline the importance of the reception of Hungarian refugees as having a liberalizing impact in the immigration policy arena in Canada, serving as a useful precedent for other refugee migrations during times of crisis.³ The crisis also had an immediate impact on the operation of Canada's refugee program, as Freda Hawkins notes: "Briefly, during the Hungarian crisis and refugee movement, there was a glimpse of what better leadership and a much more co-operative approach to immigration in Canada might achieve."⁴ It is also interesting to note that while some of the above-mentioned scholars claim that the decision to accept a significant number of refugees was reached only after pressure was exerted on policy-makers from within and beyond the federal government, they do not indicate either the methods by which such pressure was applied, or the international characteristics of the pressure itself.

The transnational links, however, are important. An earlier work, co-authored with Andrew S. Thompson, describes how the Canadian Council

² Due to extensive renovations and the current project of digitization at the MHSO, excerpts from my interview can be obtained here: Collection X, Maria and Imre Toth interview excerpt, <http://www.collectionx.museum/en/media/5146.html>. This and other interviews in both English and Hungarian can be found in the oral history collection of the MHSO.

³ Gerald Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977): 190–191; Robert Keyserlingk, ed., *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada* (Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1993): VIII–IX

⁴ Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*, 2nd ed., (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988): 118.

of Churches (CCC) played a facilitative role in immigration and intergovernmental affairs throughout the Hungarian refugee crisis, while taking some direction from their overseas contacts, the World Council of Churches. Using a transnational advocacy networks framework, we noted how state and voluntary actors conceived of the place of the Hungarian refugees within Canadian society, how voluntary agencies served as highly valued players on both the domestic and international scenes, and ultimately how the combination of international and national pressure could lead to more humane Canadian immigration and refugee policies, even if only temporarily.⁵

This study will examine the responses of both state and religious and ethnic voluntary organizations to the massive influx of refugees from Hungary during the period between 1956 and 1958. In particular, this paper will highlight the efforts of the Canadian Red Cross, Hungarian Canadian groups, and religious organizations, all of which played a facilitative role in immigration and intergovernmental affairs throughout the Hungarian refugee crisis. Taking some direction from overseas contacts the advocacy movement for the Hungarian refugees can also be understood within a larger, transnational context. Using government documents, newspapers, organizational funds, oral histories, and published memoirs, this paper will demonstrate how state and voluntary actors conceived of the place of the Hungarian refugees within Canadian society. It will also analyze how transnational contacts played an important function in the reception of Hungarian refugees in Canada and in the short-lived, but foundational, formation of public policy to address the refugee crisis situation.

This paper uses the framework of the transnational advocacy network as proffered by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink to analyze the direction of the Hungarian refugee crisis. Transnational advocacy networks are those networks of activists that coalesce and operate across national boundaries and whose members are motivated by values rather than by material concerns or professional norms and who engage in the “voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal exchange of information and ser-

⁵ Andrew S. Thompson and Stephanie Bangarth, “Transnational Christian Charity: the Canadian Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the Hungarian Refugee Crisis, 1956–1957,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn 2008).

vices.”⁶ Keck and Sikkink note that “when a state recognizes the legitimacy of international interventions and changes its domestic behavior in response to international pressure, it reconstitutes the relationship between the state, its citizens, and international actors.”⁷

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In late October of 1956, pro-democracy, anti-Soviet demonstrations directed at the Soviet-backed government of Matyas Rakosi broke out in Budapest. Fearing that its control of the Warsaw Pact was unravelling, the Kremlin ordered the Red Army to put down the revolution on 4 November 1956. Events quickly turned violent. Soviet forces clashed with protestors, killing roughly 20,000 and imprisoning many, many more.⁸ To escape a similar fate, tens of thousands of Hungarians crossed the border into neighbouring Austria. For its part, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was powerless to intervene militarily, its members divided by the conflict over control of the Suez Canal. But they were able to relieve the pressure placed on Austria. Days after the invasion, Canadian immigration officials reinforced the number of immigration officers at the Canadian Embassy in Vienna, loosened the normal requirements concerning proper travel documentation, medical exams and security clearances, and enlisted commercial airplanes to transport the refugees out of Austria. The effort produced impressive results: by the end of 1957, more than 37,000 Hungarians had been accepted into Canada. But government actors were not solely responsible for this shift in policy; indeed, the response was truly a national one, and would not have been possible without the support and assistance of a whole host of voluntary organizations from a wide range of sectors of Canadian society who lobbied the federal government for a more humane response to the mass movement of refugees from Hungary and contributed greatly to the resettlement process.⁹

⁶ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998): 16, 200.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ Anna Porter, “It still haunts us all,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 October 2006, pp. F1 and F6.

⁹ See Gerald E. Dirks, “Canada and Immigration: International and Domestic Considerations in the Decade Preceding the 1956 Hungarian Exodus,” in Robert H. Keyserlingk

With the first news of the Hungarian revolution and the subsequent social and political upheaval in the beleaguered country, representatives of voluntary organizations in Europe travelled to Austria to consult with official government bodies to determine an appropriate level of response to the refugee crisis. These included representatives from the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Brethren Service Committee, and the International Red Cross. They coordinated their activities with the Evangelisches Hilfswerk, an auxiliary organization of the Evangelical Church in Austria established after the Second World War to provide relief for the Austrian people. Conferences were held with officials of the Austrian churches, the U.S. Escapee Programme, the U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees' representative in Austria and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).¹⁰

In Canada in early November, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and his cabinet met to determine the nature of Canadian relief efforts. It was clear that, according to one of many memoranda on the subject, those in attendance were aware that “unless the West gives some expression of its solidarity with and sympathy for the Hungarians, we will have lost the last remnants of our prestige in all of Eastern Europe.”¹¹ To that end, the

(ed.), *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada* (Toronto: York Lanes Press, Inc., 1993), pp. 5–11.

Throughout the crisis, the Federal Government relied heavily on groups such as the Canadian Catholic Conference, the Canadian Rural Settlement Society, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Canadian Red Cross, the Canadian Hungarian Relief Committee, the Canadian Hungarian Protestant Ministerial Association, the Canadian Christian Council for the Rehabilitation of Refugees, the Canadian Welfare Council, and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society to assist with the resettlement and integration of the Hungarian refugees that arrived in Canada. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG26-A-1-c, Vol. 117, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, “Minutes of the Meeting Respecting Hungarian Refugees”, Toronto, 27 November 1956; Thompson and Bangarth, ‘Transnational Christian Charity,’ pp. 295–6.

For an account of the experiences of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, see Joseph Kage, “The Settlement of Hungarian Refugees in Canada,” in Robert H. Keyserlingk (ed.), *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada* (Toronto: York Lanes Press, Inc., 1993), pp. 99–107.

¹⁰ LAC, MG28-I327, CCC Papers, ‘WCC Activities in Connection with the Hungarian Emergency, 29th October—20th November, 1956,’ pp. 1–4.

¹¹ Draft Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 3 November 1956, in Michael D. Stevenson, ed.,

prime minister and his cabinet considered their options, chief among which was the idea of giving monetary aid that would be administered by the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) for aid to refugees outside of Hungary. A grant of \$100,000 to the CRC was subsequently approved at the meeting, representing one of the first transnational links in the early stages of the Hungarian refugee crisis.¹² Later, Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, recommended an additional offer of \$800,000 to be made available to the CRC to provide relief including, “to the extent practical and economical, of appropriate supplies of Canadian origin.” In his lengthy memo to Cabinet, Pearson justified the increase in monetary aid to the CRC by noting the importance of aid from Western countries “on humanitarian as well as political grounds,” and noted that providing substantial emergency relief would serve as a replacement for military intervention.¹³

On 13 November the Minister of Immigration, J. W. Pickersgill, met with ethnic organizations representing not only Hungarian groups, but other representatives from other Eastern European countries. At that time Pickersgill resolved to ensure that the Canadian government would take steps to alleviate the suffering of those in Europe and to allow for the entry of such refugees to Canada. Days later at a meeting hosted by the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto, Department of Citizenship and Immigration officials met again with the Canadian-Hungarian Federation, and also with church, voluntary, and social groups, including the CCC and the CRC. This meeting was followed up with another on 22 November with representatives from many of the same organizations. What emerged from this meeting is a clear indication of the shared goals between the federal government and voluntary organizations, initially that all parties were interested in securing adequate reception for Hungarian refugees. It is also clear that both government and voluntary agencies did not yet appreciate issues that the Hungarian representatives expressed concern over at this early stage, their knowledge stemming from their

Documents on Canadian External Relations, Vol. 23 1955–1956 Part II (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2004), p. 461.

¹² Extract from Cabinet Conclusions in *Ibid*, p. 464.

¹³ Confidential Memorandum from Secretary of State for External Affairs to Cabinet, 15 November 1956 in *Ibid*, p. 474. Cabinet subsequently approved Pearson’s recommendation in a meeting on 22 November 1956. Extract from Cabinet Conclusions in *Ibid*, p. 477.

contacts in the refugee camps in Austria: money for refugee arrivals; refugee sponsorship, including children, older, and sick refugees; and the clarification and increased leniency in the granting of visas under current regulations.¹⁴ The measured responses on the part of both government and voluntary officials can be explained by the relatively small numbers of Hungarian refugees making their way to Canada by this point.

Nonetheless, offers of employment, sponsorship and other assistance for Hungarian refugees were flooding the Department of Citizenship and Immigration headquarters and its offices throughout Canada as its Director, C. E. Smith, noted in a memo to Col. Laval Fortier (deputy minister of Immigration) dated 22 November. At the same time, applications from refugees without direct sponsors were being refused, with the rate of refusal at one out of every three applications. The disconnect between the large pool of assistance from voluntary agencies and the tangible desire of refugees to come to Canada, as well as the possibility of adverse publicity if applications continued to be refused at the present rate, resulted in government officials turning to voluntary agencies for help. Historically, such cooperation between voluntary agencies and the state on matters relating to refugee and immigration reception was not uncommon. In the immediate post-war period, the CCC and the JIAS, among other groups, established an amicable relationship with the Federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the Department of Labour. It was, for all intents and purposes, a mutually beneficial relationship: the federal government obtained two reliable partners that were able to relieve it of much of the burden of refugee resettlement; the CCC and the JIAS were provided with opportunities both to fulfil their obligations to their international contacts while at the same time satisfying their humanitarian and spiritual impulses. The Rural Settlement Society of Canada, the Canadian Jewish Congress (with the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society), the Canadian Christian Council for Resettlement of Refugees, and the Canadian Council of Churches were singled out in a memo as “national voluntary agencies with which we [the Immigration Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration]

¹⁴ RG 26 Vol. 117, file # 3-24-34-1 v. 1, Report of Meeting Convened with the Hon. J. W. Pickersgill and Ethnic Representatives from Countries Behind the Iron Curtain, 13 November 1956; International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto Minutes of Meeting, 19 November 1956; Minutes of an Informal Meeting held at the Office of the Citizenship Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, 22 November 1956.

have dealt with for some time.” Moreover, the memo indicated that government officials were well aware of the international contacts of these agencies, suggesting that voluntary agencies could contact “their affiliates or representatives in Europe” to find refugees suitable for sponsorship, essentially serving as another arm of refugee recruitment for the government.¹⁵

The Canadian Red Cross, via its affiliation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, and in cooperation in Europe with the ICEM, played a valuable transnational role in the refugee crisis, and could be counted among the major organizations regularly present at official meetings held between federal government departments, the Ontario government, the Unemployment Insurance Commission and other voluntary agencies. Additionally, the CRC worked closely with the Canadian Hungarian Relief Committee in dispersing the funds collected by way of the Hungarian Relief Fund. In many ways, the activities of the CRC in the Hungarian refugee crisis represented an extension of its work among refugees and orphans in the post-WWII period and earlier during the Second World War when the society contributed volunteer services and \$80 million in goods and money.

In the early days of the refugee crisis, the CRC engaged in its customary fundraising initiatives when faced with a humanitarian emergency. The 6 November edition of the *Globe and Mail* indicated that the CRC initiated the Canadian Red Cross Hungarian Relief Fund, launched in cooperation with the Canadian Hungarian Federation. The fund would be used to purchase medical and hospital supplies, bulk food and clothing for distribution by the International Red Cross in Hungary. It was only when the Soviet Army had quelled the Hungarian revolution two weeks following its outbreak were envoys from the Red Cross allowed to enter Hungary. As an aside, by mid-February 1957, the Canadian Hungarian Relief Fund exceeded the national objective of \$500,000.¹⁶

¹⁵ RG 26, Vol. 117, file #3-24-34-1 Vol. 1, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Immigration Branch memo, from the director to the deputy minister, 22 November 1956; Thompson and Bangarth, ‘Transnational Christian Charity,’ pp. 297–302.

¹⁶ ‘Red Cross Directs Drive To Provide Aid to Hungary,’ *Globe and Mail*, 6 November 1956; ‘All Her Savings,’ *Ibid*, 9 November 1956; ‘Russians Let Red Cross Aid Enter Hungary,’ *Ibid*, 12 November 1956; ‘Hungarian Fund Goes Over Top; Total at \$512,071,’ *Ibid*, 11 February 1957. It should be noted that at about the same time Pearson was expressing his disappointment in subscriptions from the public to the

The CRC frequently made use of information politics as a strategy to obtain a desired outcome by way of presenting information to the public and in encouraging government action. In particular, Richard Gluns, publicity director of the CRC, traveled to the Red Cross refugee camps in Austria to observe the relief efforts there and most importantly, to report on those actions upon his return to Canada. Later, in January of 1957, Marguerite Wilson, director of public relations for the CRC Society in Quebec (on loan to the League of Red Cross Societies and the International Red Cross Committee as press secretary), toured the refugee camps in Austria, noting in her report to Red Cross headquarters in Toronto the courage of the refugees and of the high regard for the CRC in Europe. According to Wilson, “the camps maintained by the Canadian Red Cross in Austria were cleaner, with better facilities than the other camps.” Such information about the nature of the relief process, and about the burgeoning needs of refugees, in the early stages of the crisis was important in highlighting the value of the Canadian Hungarian Relief Fund.¹⁷

Furthermore, the available primary evidence reveals that the CRC was influential in the early days of the crisis in persuading the federal government to offer a more generous and liberal response with regard to the admittance of Hungarian refugees. Dr. W. S. Stanbury, National Director of the CRC, relayed information pertaining to the confusion and dissatisfaction on the part of the Hungarian-Canadian Federation as regards the specifics of Canada’s immigration policy in relations to the Hungarian refugees. Ominously, Stanbury expressed to R. A. D. Ford, Head of the European Division of the Department of External Affairs, his worry of the “reaction of the Hungarian-Canadians when it became entirely clear to them that in fact Canada was not proposing to give any

Red Cross fund in a confidential memo to the Minister of Finance. While he called for more money to be released from the government purse, he also commented that the government should have taken a stronger lead to the public to ensure more private contributions. Confidential memorandum from the Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Minister of Finance, 11 January 1957 in Michael D. Stevenson, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 23 1955–1956 Part II (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2004), p. 492.

¹⁷ *Globe and Mail*, 19 November 1956; 11 January 1957.

assistance to refugees in the way of admitting them to this country except in cases which would be obviously profitable to Canada.”¹⁸

In response to pressure from within and without government circles on 26 November in the House of Commons Pickersgill went much further in committing his government to the reception of Hungarian refugees. In a speech that Col. Laval Fortier referred to as the “Magna Carta for the movement of Hungarian refugees,” Pickersgill reiterated his government’s commitment in giving priority to applications from Hungarian refugees, that any responsible individual or organization in Canada was free to sponsor immigrants, that arrangements would be made for those refugees requiring medical treatment, and that refugees would be given assisted passage to Canada.¹⁹

In addition to the cooperative efforts with organizations such as the CRC, the CCC and other voluntary immigrant settlement groups, the federal government, by way of the Citizenship and Immigration Department, mined assistance from a variety of directions. Toronto’s Board of Education approved sending up to ten teachers to Holland to teach English to Hungarians in refugee camps in that country.²⁰ Other indications of the link between international organizations and localized Canadian labours include the efforts of the Canadian YMCA groups to provide recreational activities in Hungarian refugee camps in Austria. The Canadian response was prompted by an urgent appeal for recreational, social and educational facilities from J. Bednarek, director of the World YMCA-YWCA Refugee Services based on ongoing reports from Hilda Pole, YWCA field representative. Additionally, Canadian students and professors were asked by the World University Service (WUS), an international student relief and exchange organization, to contribute to an international fund for the rehabilitation of their counterparts who fled from Hungary. At a meeting of the Canadian branch of the WUS in late

¹⁸ Confidential memorandum from Head, European Division, to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 14 November 1956, in Michael D. Stevenson, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 23 1955–1956 Part II (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2004), 473. Concern over the stinginess of Canadian policy was not restricted to the above-mentioned groups however. See RG 26, Vol. 117 file 3-24-34-1 Vol. 1, ‘Minutes of an Informal Meeting held at the Office of the Citizenship Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Toronto, Ont.,’ 22 November 1956.

¹⁹ Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 November 1956, pp. 36–40.

²⁰ *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 1957,

November, WUS executive secretary told of more than 1,300 Hungarian students and professor in refugee camps in Austria and Yugoslavia. Funds raised in Canada would be used to provide temporary housing for them and to effect their transfer to other countries. The response was impressive. While operating under their own financial strain, Canadian universities pledged \$100,000 to the fund and fourteen universities pledged to accept students, waive tuition fees and offer free housing. They were aided by the CRC which assisted in identifying appropriate recipients.²¹

Further nods to the centrality of volunteer organizations in the Hungarian refugee crisis were evidenced by requests made by government officials for such groups to orchestrate local aid, housing and employment for refugees, and to enforce the government's wishes to settle refugees in specific regional areas. To assist voluntary agencies in their work, the federal government produced educational and guidance materials on refugee reception. These materials, along with other related primary sources, reveal the myriad ways in which the reception of Hungarian refugees was framed. These include, but are not limited to, humanitarian concern, anti-Communist rhetoric, assimilationist language, and "otherization."

A 'Special Hungarian Issue' of the *Citizen*, a publication of the Canadian Citizenship Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, was one such tool made available to agencies assisting in the reception of Hungarian refugees.²² Drawing on available current scholarly literature in the section on 'Understanding the Refugee Immigrant,' the author likened the refugee to a transplanted flower that, in order to survive needs to set down roots and be cared for in order to flourish and to remain in its new environs. Another section related a story of 'English Through Gestures,' an account from a young couple in Ottawa who opened their home to "Joseph—, Age 25, General Labourer, R.C." as he was described on the file card given to them by an immigration officer. Without a knowledge of Hungarian, the young couple "tried to insist that Joseph use English words." In the interim however, they described their journey in becoming "masters of the sweeping gesture, the dramatic shrug, and the expressive face." The story continues to relate the trials

²¹ *Globe and Mail*, 21 and 22 November 1956, 21 December 1956.

²² LAC, RG 26 Vol. 117, file 3-24-34-3 Vol. 1, 'Special Hungarian Issue,' *Citizen*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (February, 1957).

and tribulations of refugee reception and of refugee adjustment, such as language barriers, food differences, and frustrations arising out of joblessness, concludes that “Joseph still has a long way to go and many things to learn before he will become the good Canadian citizen he is capable of being.”²³

In some ways, the *Citizen* special edition reflected the Cold War anti-Communist international environment and, thus, the federal government’s motivation for becoming involved in the refugee crisis, alluded to earlier in this article. In its analysis of Hungarian Canadian organizations, the writer noted that most Hungarians tended to participate in mutual benefit societies. Of the more recent associations concerned with Hungarian political matters, “they differ widely in their ideals but they are united in their anti-communism and nationalism. Their orientation is towards Hungary rather than towards Canada but observers believe that this type of organization will gradually lose its strength.”²⁴

The *Citizen* special edition is interesting for the nature of the information supplied to prospective and current volunteer agencies assisting in refugee reception. A brief section on contribution to Canadian life by earlier Hungarian immigrants indicated that Hungarians were noted in Canada for their pioneering farm activities in Saskatchewan and later in Ontario in developing the tobacco industry. In urban centres Hungarians were renowned for their restaurants, “justly famous for their splendid cooking and special Hungarian dishes.” Factory workers, arts and medicine were other areas of employment singled out by the writer, who also noted that “Hungarians ... appear to excel at figure skating and are now devoting their talents to teaching this sport in Canada.”²⁵ The pamphlet also included information on available dictionaries, word lists and other aids, such as the Hungarian versions of the *Handbook for Newcomers* and *How to Become a Canadian Citizen*, both published by the Canadian Citizenship Branch. Two National Film Board documenta-

²³ Ibid, pp. 8–11. When Joseph left for work in the Gatineau Hills, the author of the piece noted that he took with him books on “Learning the English Language” and was also supplied with a half a dozen bottles of Tobasco sauce to make “anaemic Canadian meals more palatable to his Hungarian taste. Included also in his luggage were several cans of paprika, which is a seasoning more familiar to him than our salt and pepper.”

²⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 17–18.

ries, *Canadian Notebook* (1953), highlighting the experiences of newly arrived immigrants in various regions of Canada to give an impression of working and living conditions in Canada, community life and educational facilities and *Physical Regions of Canada* (1953), a film that described the physical and economic geography of Canada on the basis of the six natural division, both featuring a Hungarian soundtrack, were also included in the list of resources. A brief (and colourless) one-page synopsis of Hungarian history was provided on page twenty-three, with a reading list of publications about Hungary so, presumably, volunteers and Canadians could choose to inform themselves about the newcomers in their midst. Lastly, an action plan titled ‘Suggestions for Local Committees’ offered potential and existing volunteers ideas on how to organize, the types of representatives to include, and how to make arrangements for such necessities as accommodation, refugee reception, provision of interpreters, language classes, counselling, finance, social activities and the importance of liaising with the Canadian Citizenship Branch.²⁶ The latter would be especially important in maintaining an effective advocacy network, both domestically and internationally, with the relevant federal departments relying on coordination to determine the nature of Canadian response to the crisis, while interacting with international organizations to obtain information.

While it is not possible in the confines of this article to discuss the myriad ways that volunteer organizations and local groups provided refugee reception across Canada, a representative sampling may be obtained via the *Citizen* special edition and in the pages of the *Globe and Mail*, for example. When the first group of refugees by sea arrived at the port of Quebec on 9 December 1956, they were met by over 3,000 people at the docks there to bid them welcome. The crowd threw bags of candy and packages of cigarettes to the newcomers while a military band played the national anthems of Canada and Hungary. Government and religious officials then bade the refugees welcome. The reception committee of the Bien-Etre des Immigrants, the co-ordinating body for refugees in Quebec City, was responsible for the event. When my great aunt and uncle arrived on 7 January 1957 at Pier 21 in Halifax by way of the Spanish steamship Venezuela, they were greeted by many Haligonians who gave them

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 21–24.

tickets to see a concert put on by the Halifax Philharmonic. Such generosity is still fondly recalled to this day.²⁷

Generally speaking, hospitality for refugees was offered in nearly every centre of Canada where refugees arrived, usually as a result of church coordination. These were normally in the form of hostels, private homes and church accommodations, although larger centres, such as Ottawa, established larger temporary residences in government buildings and barracks. A counselling service provided by the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto was made available for refugees in Toronto who moved out of the hostels. Across the country Canadians organized entertainment for the refugees which often doubled as fundraising opportunities. A concert, for example, was presented by the staff of the Conservatory of Music in Regina, Saskatchewan with recent Hungarian refugees as the guests of honour. Proceeds from the public concert went to the Hungarian Relief Fund. Nathan Phillips, mayor of Toronto, declared Saturday, December 15th, 1956, to be “Toronto Hungarian Relief Day”, with the funds to be directed toward the relief of Hungarian refugees in Europe.²⁸ In Brantford, Ontario, in mid-November women lined up for almost two hours for a tea service at the local YM-YWCA, which raised \$1,079 for Hungarian relief. At an interdenominational rally on 18 November in Mt. Brydges, Ontario, more than 100 families offered to open their homes to refugees. On 9 January 1957 at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, a Hungarian festival was held, with the proceeds going to a fund to assist Hungarian students to continue their studies in Canada. A programme of Hungarian folk music and folk dancing, exhibitions of old and new Hungarian arts and crafts, and a lecture on Hungarian rug design were among the attractions of the festival. Even the Hungarian ethnic media contributed to refugee reception. Free short-term subscriptions to two Hungarian Canadian newspapers, *Kanadai Magyar-sag* (published out of Toronto) and *Kanadai Magyar Ujsag* (published out of Winnipeg, Manitoba), were offered to refugees with mailing addresses.²⁹ Additionally, Hungarian and other ethnic organizations donated money to the Hungarian Relief Fund and expressed their support

²⁷ Interview by Stephanie Bangarth with Maria and Imre Toth, 31 August 2006.

²⁸ *Globe & Mail*, 15 December 1956

²⁹ LAC, RG 26 Vol. 117, file 3-24-34-3 Vol. 1, ‘Special Hungarian Issue,’ *Citizen*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (February, 1957), pp. 19–20; *Globe & Mail*, 11 January 1957, 13 November 1956, 19 November 1956,

for the Hungarian struggle. It was estimated that ten thousand Canadians from sixteen ethnic groups participated in a march in downtown Toronto on 3 November 1956 to focus attention on the situation in Hungary. From the early days of the revolution when Hungarians were raising money for the CRC to send food, clothes, and medical supplies to Hungary, to some months later when a series of cheques from various Italian groups in Toronto were donated to the fund, it is clear that already established immigrant communities were as eager as any in Canada to offer assistance.³⁰

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The Hungarian refugee crisis is illustrative of the relative potency of transnational movements, and the positive influence that they can have on state policies. Indeed, earlier research has indicated that the crisis marked a watershed moment in the relationship between international and local voluntary organizations and the Canadian government. Statistically, the results were quite impressive when considering the case of the WCC-CCC: in 1957 alone, the WCC was able to resettle more than 26, 000 Hungarians; over 5100 of these individuals found new homes in Canada, thanks to the collaborative efforts of the CCC and Canadian immigration officials. This represented roughly twenty percent of the 26, 205 refugees that the World Council of Churches helped to resettle during the crisis.³¹ Politically, the crisis also had the effect of solidifying the reputations of a number of voluntary organizations, including the CCC and the CRC for example, as reliable allies in the resettlement of refugee populations, and among the leading voices for the advancement of refugee rights in Canada, a role these groups continue to play to this day.

Still, the Hungarian refugee crisis is telling of the limits of transnational networks in an international system founded on the primacy of the nation-state. The transnational volunteerism that linked national voluntary

³⁰ *Globe & Mail*, 3 November 1956, 30 January 1957.

³¹ By December 1957, the CCC had found sponsors for 5172 of the Hungarian refugees. Canadian Council of Churches, "Minutes of the Committee on Immigration of Refugees", 12 December 1957, p. 2. See also, Canadian Council of Churches, "Memorandum of interview with the Deputy Minister of Immigration", Ottawa, 13 December 1956. MG29-I327, Vol. 37, file 8 "Department of Ecumenical Affairs—Minutes, 1954–1964"; Thompson and Bangarth, "Transnational Christian Charity," pp. 309–10.

organizations with their international ‘parent’ groups by shared values and information was an important catalyst for mobilizing action around the cause of refugee rights. But the crisis had the unanticipated effect of heightening the expectations of such groups, unrealistically so in fact; for some groups, the Hungarian crisis was not a “one-off”, but rather the standard to which future national responses to humanitarian crises should aspire. Indeed, Dirks has aptly noted that “the unqualified success of the Hungarian resettlement program for Canada acted as a useful precedent when in subsequent years, individuals and groups urged the Government to embark upon other humanitarian schemes aimed at relieving the plight of a portion of the world’s refugees.”³² Naturally, the federal government did not—indeed could not—share this view.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the relationship between the voluntary agencies and federal government was never quite the same after the Hungarian crisis. In the decades that followed, many of the organizations cited herein remained heavily involved in the resettlement process; however, with the sense of urgency passed the partnership was no longer essential. For this reason alone, the Hungarian refugee crisis, and the response that followed, remains a pinnacle event in terms of transnational cooperation among advocacy coalitions. If nothing else, it proved that the combination of international and national pressure, and the hard work of localized organizations, could lead, at least under certain circumstances, to more humane Canadian immigration and refugee policies, even if only momentarily.³³

³² Dirks, “Canada and Immigration,” p. 11.

³³ As an interesting footnote to this paper, I was alerted to the story of Stephen Tomosvary, a former refugee from Hungary, who, based on his own experiences as a refugee, took a family of Vietnamese Boat People into his home. CBC television featured him in a story that aired on 9 July 1979. CBC Digital Archives, ‘Sponsoring Refugees: Canadians Reach Out.’ Broadcast date: 9 July 1979. <http://archives.cbc.ca/dossier.asp?page=2&IDDossier=524&IDCat=&IDCatPa=> [accessed 8 April 2008).