

Rhonda L. Hinther. *Perogies and Politics: Canada's Ukrainian Left, 1891-1991*. U of Toronto P, 2018. Studies in Gender and History, general editors, Franca Iacovetta and Karen Dubinsky. xii, 300 pp. Illustrations. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$33.50, cloth.

Focusing mainly on the interwar, World War II, and Cold War periods, Rhonda L. Hinther's book *Perogies and Politics: Canada's Ukrainian Left, 1891-1991* deftly traces the interweaving of culture and politics within Canada's Ukrainian Left over the course of the twentieth century. For those leftists, there were never politics without perogies, but as the years passed, the perogies became ever less political. Although Hinther tries, a bit jarringly, to end her book on an upbeat, she in fact recounts the slow demise of an originally vibrant and powerful Ukrainian Canadian leftist culture. Yet, as she rightly argues, understanding this demise may prove useful today.

Perogies are equated with culture—or, more specifically, with the kitchen. Hinther pays close attention to the many ways in which immigrant and Canadian-born Ukrainian women practised their leftist politics in the traditionally female (and routinely undervalued) areas of cooking, stitching, and child-rearing and, later on, in their roles as fundraisers, secretaries, and peace activists. Women had limited options within the movement. Men usually kept the prestige positions for themselves, jealously guarding them not only from their female peers but also from the younger generations. The patriarchal intransigence of these “older men” was, Hinther argues, one key reason for the demise of the movement. Another was the increased social and cultural mobility of English-savvy post-World War II Ukrainian Canadians. It surely helped that they came to be viewed as white Europeans, albeit with “funny names” and “garlicky habits.”

The great strength of Hinther's study is her success in revealing the lives of grassroots activists through countless concrete examples. We encounter, for instance, the following episode: During the 1922 miner's strike in Cardiff, Alberta, Katherine Diachuk rushed to the scene with a baseball bat. Spying a policeman handcuffing an Italian miner, she let loose, hitting the policeman so hard across the shoulders “that his jacket burst.” Diachuk and the miner escaped. The fate of the policeman is not mentioned (70). So, while women were largely barred from prestige positions, they also acted in ways that were not viewed typically as feminine. This points to a weakness in Hinther's study. While her distinction between masculinity and femininity often powerfully illustrates the additional barriers faced by women in a clearly patriarchal movement, stories like the one above show the limitations of such a distinction in relation to daily life. Hinther might have done more to acknowledge these limitations. Nevertheless, her take-home message still

stands: the internal inequalities of a political movement may help to bring it down.

Not surprisingly, Ukrainian leftists were constantly surveilled and harassed by the Canadian state. The internment of most of their male leadership at the beginning of World War II is one, striking example. Women activists were key in winning their release in 1942. More novel was the unrelenting, and occasionally violent, assault on the Ukrainian Left by rightist Ukrainian nationalists. Sometimes, as Hinthier shows, they were abetted by the state. In 1950, the same year that Canada began to admit former Ukrainian S.S. servicemen, Toronto's Ukrainian Labour Temple was bombed while it was hosting a children's concert. No one was killed, but many people were injured by flying glass. The Ukrainian Left immediately pointed to the Ukrainian Right. The Right, in turn, argued that the Left had bombed itself in order to defame the Right. Following an investigation, the RCMP concluded that the arguments of the Right were more plausible (160-61).

Intense pressure on the Ukrainian Left also came from the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Hinthier shows that in the interwar period, CPC officials repeatedly denounced Ukrainian culture-based activism as "right-wing deviationism" (102). Yet one-third of the CPC membership was Ukrainian, mostly men. Things grew more fraught when the Party was Stalinized. As reports emerged about the dire effects of Stalin's policies in Soviet Ukraine, several prominent Ukrainian leftists publicly criticized the leadership of both the CPC and the Ukrainian Left. Ukrainian leaders responded by expelling the dissidents, and they reaffirmed their loyalty to the CPC.

Hinthier argues that by quelling this dissent, Ukrainian leftist leaders "reinforced . . . the movement's hegemonic masculine discourse, in this case, loyalty to the party" (47). But she neglects to explain how deference to authority is a specifically masculine trait. In any event, as Jim Mochoruk argues, the Ukrainian leaders' vocal loyalty to the CPC provided a cover for their continuing efforts to protect the autonomy of their community.

For those who are allergic to the "heroism" of leaders, however, Hinthier's book suggests an alternate explanation, one that emphasizes people power. The Ukrainian leaders were clearly just as buffeted by the demands of their own membership as they were by the CPC. In this case, too, they were likely led by the rank and file's passionate insistence on the independence of their own, distinct culture-based activism. And women must have lent their powerful voice to the matter as well.

This culture-based activism could be quite effective. In 1926, Ukrainian leftists helped elect a Communist politician—the first Communist elected in North America, Winnipeg alderman William Kolisnyk (41). Ukrainian Communists served on the Winnipeg City Council into the 1930s, much to the

alarm of the Ukrainian Right. As Orest T. Martynowych notes, when one Ukrainian Canadian alderman urged the city to assist Jewish refugees, he was viciously attacked in the Ukrainian right-wing press. And Ukrainian leftists were ridiculed as witless agents of a “Judeo-Bolshevik” plot (Martynowych 190-94).

It is disappointing that Hinthier’s book mentions nothing about attitudes toward anti-Semitism within Canada’s Ukrainian Left. Although she pointedly defines *nationalism* as conservative, and so never applies it to the Left, there are grounds for seeing in the Ukrainian Left a kind of left-wing nationalism. Indeed, their perogy-fuelled politics may have represented what James E. Mace, writing about Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s, calls “national communism.” These were, writes Stephen Velychenko, “red nationalists” in a fight against “red imperialists.”

Once this leftist nationalism had been crushed in the Old Country, Canada-based activists were on their own. In the face of sharp domestic opposition from many different factions and stubborn internal gender and generational inequalities, it was perhaps inevitable that the perogies would slowly lose their radical political filling and thus find their designated place in Canada’s polite multicultural buffet.

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