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The Assistance of Canada and the Polish Diaspora in Canada to Polish Immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s, Canada accepted more than 115,000 Polish immigrants. Some of them went through refugee camps in Western Europe, some arrived in Canada from the U.S., and there were also those who came directly from Poland. This great influx of Poles to Canada was caused by a confluence of factors. The most vital was obviously the economic and political situation in Poland, but Canada's immigration policy also played a significant role, particularly the new regulations enacted in 1978. They gave temporary preferences for East-European Self-Exiled Persons – those who left the Communist bloc and could not or did not want to return to their home countries. It is worth emphasizing that the Self-Exiled class formally existed in Canada until as late as 1990. Moreover, the new Canadian regulations enabled admitting immigrants who were sponsored by Canadian residents. This allowed the Canadian Polish Congress (CPC), following the 1981 agreement with the Minister of Employment and Immigration, to act as a guarantor to persons and institutions bringing in immigrants. With the cooperation of the CPC, ethnic organizations, and Roman Catholic Church institutions, a network of Polish information and aid centers was established in Canada. They were actively supporting the Canadian system of assistance for new immigrants, helping the newly arrived to adapt to life in a new country.

Keywords: Polish immigrants, the 1980s and 1990s, Polish Diaspora in Canada, help for immigrants

History of Polish immigration to Canada is longer than history of the Dominion of Canada, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2017. However, it is worth emphasizing that the largest number of newcomers from Poland was received in

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Canada during the last two decades of the 20th century; the estimated number exceeds 100,000. At that time, Canada was one of the few countries open to immigrants. Valuing their significance for economic development of the country, it conducted an effective, though non-formal, selection of incomers. The persons selected for immigration had qualifications that were sought for in Canada and at least a secondary education. They preferably were to be Europeans, yet this criterion was never formally confirmed by the immigration authorities. This attitude was also reflected in the decisions regarding refugees. It is worth reminding that after 1956, Canada admitted approximately 37,000 Hungarians, and after 1968 nearly 11,000 Czechs; whereas after the coup d'état in Chile, only 1,188 Chilean refugees were allowed into Canada by 1975, despite the pressure from several churches². Since 1967, Canadian immigration regulations had been based on the points system. The system abolished the pre-existent racial preferences, promoting the admission of young people with sought-for professions and knowledge of one of the two Canada's official languages. The entrance of refugees into Canada was determined on emergent basis. The new Immigration Act that came into effect in 1978 clarified entry criteria. The Act defined the categories of people who were inadmissible to Canada (criminals, TB patients, epileptics, homosexuals, the mentally handicapped, moral offenders) and those who were allowed entry. The admissible category included the following: immigrants eligible on the basis of the points system, family class (immediate family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents), refugees, and a new category of individuals having private sponsors. A sponsor was required to achieve a certain level of income and take responsibility for the sponsored immigrant for 5 years.

The 1978 Act introduced special immigration programs. A year later, based on this regulation, three new classes were granted temporary preferences in admission to Canada, among them the East-European Self-Exiled Persons towards whom Canadians were applying an unusually liberal interpretation of regulations. This created an opportunity to relocate to Canada for these East Europeans who could not or did not want to return to their home country. It was presumed that those who left the Communist bloc countries (excluding Yugoslavia) would face persecution upon return. Thence, they were automatically granted a political refugee status without being required to produce evidence of being persecuted. In practice, their motifs for escaping from behind the Iron Curtain were only subjectively assessed by immigration officers issuing Canadian visas³. It is worth emphasizing that the Self-Exiled class remained formally in existence in Canada

² *A Hundred Years of Immigration to Canada 1900–1999* (Part 2), <http://ccrweb.ca/en/hundred-years-immigration-canada-part-2> [Accessed 10.10.2017].

³ J.C. Hathaway (1988), *Selective Concern: An Overview of Refugee Law in Canada*, "McGill Law Journal", vol. 33, p. 692–694. <http://lawjournal.mcgill.ca/userfiles/other/8290193-hathaway.pdf> [Accessed 09.10.2017].

until as late as 1990, and, in practice even a year longer, until all applications submitted by the immigrants in this category were processed. The interest and sympathy for the Solidarity movement were also of great importance. After martial law was declared in Poland, there was also compassion for the Polish people and the will to help and assist them. Interestingly, the immigration authorities argued for the maintenance of self-exiled person category due to widespread social approval, generally high qualifications, and professional experience of the persons admitted to Canada through this program, as well as the relatively high percentage of immigrants who were very productive and highly talented. Canadian researchers of immigration issues also draw attention to the fact that Polish people included in the Self-Exiled category reinforced the white population groups in Canada and were proponents (sometimes avid) of the capitalist economic and political system – unlike, for instance, refugees from Chile⁴. These arguments however, did not appear either in official documents or the press, possibly because of Canada's policy of multiculturalism.

It can be argued to what extent Canada's interests and needs influenced the introduction of regulations facilitating entry of refugees and self-exiled people, and if and how they were affected by international pressures to depopulate immigration camps and by the appeals of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees addressed to the Canadian government regarding this matter. It is also difficult to assess if the decisions of Canadians were influenced by the echoes of the Cold War politics and how effective was the lobbying of representatives of diasporas from the Soviet bloc countries in the Canadian Parliament⁵. Presumably, the fact that since March 1980, the post of the Minister of Employment and Immigration in the liberal Cabinet of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was held by relatively young Lloyd Axworthy was also not without significance. Moreover, it is worth remembering that in the early 1980s, Canadians were testing the implementation of the new immigration laws, and at the turn of 1987 and 1988, the Senate and the House of Commons were still debating the refugee law reform. The involvement of Minister L. Axworthy, who had also actively supported the resettlement of Vietnamese boat people in Canada, is also mentioned as a factor influencing Canada's immigration policy in the early 1980s⁶. Lloyd Axworthy

⁴ D. Matas, *Self Exile Class*, "Canada's Journal on Refugee", Vol. 9, No.4 (May 1990), p.23.

⁵ Canadian Polish Congers in Toronto, an unorganized collection (CPC Toronto archive), *Rok 40-lecia Kongresu Polonii Kanadyjskiej* [duplicated typescript, n. a., Toronto 1984], p. 15–16.

⁶ J. C. Hathaway (1989), *Postscript – Selective Concern: An Overview of Refugee Law in Canada*, "McGill Law Journal", Vol. 34, p. 354–357, <http://lawjournal.mcgill.ca/userfiles/other/8290193-hathaway.pdf> [Accessed 10.09.2017]; J. Geddes (2016), *Lloyd Axworthy: A Politician Who Thinks Globally, and Act Locally*, "Maclean's", February 23, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/lloyd-axworthy-a-politician-who-thinks-globally-and-acts-locally/>, [Accessed 20.10.2018]; L. Axworthy Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs during 1996–2000 period, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his lifetime work, including his efforts in support of a treaty on prohibition of the anti-personnel

served as Minister of Employment and Immigration until August 1983, and noticeably was in favor of receiving immigrants from Eastern Europe. As early as at the end of July 1981, he declared that Canada would accept 1,000 refugees from this region. At the turn of October and November, the Minister announced that special measures would be undertaken to reunite Polish families with their relatives in Canada, and his proposal to the Parliament regarding the level of immigration was to raise the numbers for Eastern Europeans⁷. These facts indicate that the decision to admit into Canada immigrants from this region, among them Poles, was affected by a confluence of factors.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out a coincidence that the new immigration regulations were implemented in Canada shortly before the revolutionary changes in Poland triggered off a huge wave of emigration. The Polish people who chose Canada as their country of destination at that time, or those who found themselves in Canada by chance, benefited from the new regulations. The majority also became beneficiaries of the assistance offered by Canadian federal and local institutions. It is worth emphasizing that there were various forms of aid available to Poles sponsored through the Canadian government or private sponsors, as well as individuals admitted through the points system and family reunification. Moreover, under the influence of news reports from Poland, new aid projects were developed. They involved the authorities and administrative officials at different levels and private persons as well. The latter were mainly old Polish settlers and persons of Polish descent, but Canadians and other ethnic groups descended from Central Europe were also engaged in many activities, and so were people without any connections with Poland whatsoever. They were primarily motivated by the usually critical attitude toward the Soviet Union, its politics, and the political system in its satellite countries. Many of them, frequently guided by emotions, transferred their affinity for the Independent Self-governing Labor Union "Solidarity" [Solidarity] onto the new Polish immigrants⁸.

In the late 1970s, the Polish ethnic group in Canada comprised approximately 250,000 persons claiming first (the most important) Polish ancestry and approximately 150,000 of those who claimed partial Polish ancestry⁹. Only a fraction of

mines. See: *Lloyd Axworthy* in: *Historica Canada*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/lloyd-axworthy/> [Accessed 20.10.2017].

⁷ CPC Toronto archive, *Chronicle of Cooperation. An Account of the Joint Efforts of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission and the Canadian Polish Congress to Assist Polish Refugees*, [Toronto, June 1984, printed material], p. 10.

⁸ CPC Toronto archive, *Rok 40-lecia...*, p. 13.

⁹ 1981 Census of Canada. Ethnicity, Place of Birth, Citizenship, Income, Statistic Canada, [Ottawa 1983], <https://ia600500.us.archive.org/26/items/198193F0036XPE1983eng/198193F0036XPE1983-eng.pdf> [Accessed 24.10.2017]; R. Kogler (1985), *The Poles in Canada: Present and Future*, in: Heydenkorn B. (ed.), *A Community in Transittion. The Polish Group in Canada*, Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, p. 258.

this community (estimated at 4 to 7%¹⁰ got engaged in the activities of Polish ethnic organizations. The most active and influential group was the elderly combatants of World War II, organized in branches of the Polish Combatants' Association. Its most "steadfast" members did not visit Poland even in the 1970s. Despite divisions into political fractions, since the 1950s they had been dominant in the Canadian Polish Congress (CPC), which had been playing a role of a superior Polish Canadian organization since 1944. The CPC authorities unwaveringly did not acknowledge the Polish government in Warsaw and did not maintain relations with the government officials. This stance led in 1972 to the withdrawal from the Congress of its largest fraternal organization – the Polish Alliance of Canada, which consistently pledged allegiance to Canada first and foremost. Nevertheless, this secession did not weaken the position of the CPC, which continued to represent the Polish ethnic group in relations with the Canadian government¹¹. The CPC also maintained official relations with Canadian politicians of various ranks and expressed opinions on the government's policy (including immigration policy) on behalf of Polish Canadians.

The representatives of the CPC and six other Central European diasporas formed the Canadian Committee of Captive European Nations to defend common interests of these groups in relations between Canada and the Soviet Union. They organized joint public appearances and demonstrations; the Committee was also lobbying for the admission to Canada of immigrants from this region. These endeavors contributed to the signing of the agreement between the CPC and the Minister of Employment and Immigration on March 2, 1981. Under this agreement, the CPC was authorized to privately sponsor Poles arriving in Canada from Europe (from outside of Poland). They were admitted regardless of the immigrants sponsored by the government. The quotas for immigrants having private sponsors were established annually (4,000 in 1981, and a year later –6,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe). According to data provided by the Minister of Employment and Immigration, 1,752 persons from Poland arrived in Canada to join their relatives in 1981 (714 of them were family class and 1,038 were assisted by the relatives)¹².

The Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Elliott Trudeau was one of the very few Western politicians who did not unequivocally denounce the martial law in Poland. However, on January 14, 1982, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously accepted the motion of support for the Polish cause proposed by an MP of Polish descent Jesse Flis. Simultaneously, pursuant to special regulations, the Poles who were temporary visitors in Canada at that time were granted temporary residence with work permits for a year. Their number is estimated at about 3,000. Those

¹⁰ R. Kogler, (1985), *The Poles ...*, p. 265.

¹¹ CPC Toronto archive, *Rok 40-lecia Kongresu...*, p. 11–12.

¹² CPC Toronto archive, *Chronicle of Cooperation...*, p. 9.

who could not rely on their relatives' support were allowed to apply for permanent resident status without leaving the country and obtained it quite easily. What is more, only in 1982, Canada accepted 77 Polish political prisoners who were forced to leave the country following their release from internment. They were sponsored by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)¹³ and arrived in Canada directly from Poland. In the following years, the CLC also supported other activists of the Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity" released from internment or prisons, whose number is estimated at over 1,000 (3,000 including families).

After martial law was declared in Poland, Minister Axworthy abolished all restrictions on the number of Polish refugees admitted into Canada under private sponsorship and appealed to all Canadians to aid the Polish refugees temporarily staying in camps in Austria in relocation to Canada. Moreover, the Minister sent special Canadian missions to Vienna on two occasions (in September 1981 and January 1982). In October 1982, he personally flew to Austria, where he visited the Treiskirchen camp "...to discuss the refugee situation first-hand"¹⁴.

The events in Poland and favorable attitude of Canadian authorities resulted in a considerable activation of the Polish ethnic group in Canada, mainly organizations, but also individuals. An example of this is a letter of the Chairman of the Head Executive Board of the Polish Combatants' Association (PCA) Mieczysław Szczeciński from January 1982, in which the author calls on each of the several dozen of Canadian branches of the PCA to aid at least one person or family in relocating to Canada. Szczeciński invoked the Minister of Employment and Immigration Loyd Axworthy's appeal; in his correspondence with the Polish ethnic group officials, the Minister had called on the Poles residing in Canada to aid and get involved in actions of sponsoring Polish refugees by private persons and organizations as much as possible¹⁵.

It is worth pointing out that the agreement between the Minister of Employment and Immigration and the Canadian Polish Congress concerning private sponsorship of Polish immigrants had been negotiated and implemented several months before martial law was declared in Poland¹⁶. According to this agreement, the CPC, its cooperating organizations, and private persons were obliged to assist the new immigrants for only one year. In practice, the agreement enabled the CPC to give approval to legal obligations that were required for immigration applying for refugee status. The CPC became their *de facto* guarantor. The agreement gave the right to groups consisting of at least five adults (18 years of age or more and having Canadian citizenship) to sponsor immigrants. A formal commitment was

¹³ Ibid., p. 4–8.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6, 10.

¹⁵ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania uchodźców przez ottawskich kombatantów, Reduta Ottawska* http://www.spkottawa.ca/polski/reduta/reduta_15.html [Accessed 4. 09.2017].

¹⁶ CPC Toronto archive, *Rok 40-lecia Kongresu...*, p. 16.

usually signed by two sponsors and a person authorized by the Canadian Polish Congress. It was also required that the annual income of the entire group of sponsors be at least CAD 40,000 a total. The total income for those who sponsored the Polish families, was raised to CAD 20,000 for each individual¹⁷. Sponsors had an obligation "...to provide refugees with necessities of life, such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as moral support and guidance..."¹⁸. What was extremely important, the sponsoring groups also obliged themselves "...to provide general orientation and moral support, welcoming the newcomers on arrival and guiding them through the difficult first stages of resettlement"¹⁹. The Canadian authorities provided new immigrants with interest-free transportation loans, work permits, employment service, occupational training, and a six-month medical insurance. The newcomers were also entitled to enroll for free in language courses, where one of Canada's two official languages (English or French) was taught²⁰.

The agreement was the first of about forty to be concluded by the Minister with organizations of various ethnic groups and churches. Among them was the Polish Alliance of Canada, operating independently of the CPC. Throughout Canada, a network of thirteen "sponsorship, aid and information offices" was created, co-financed by the federal and provincial authorities and organizations signing the agreements, including the CPC. Only one month after signing of the agreement, the Central Immigration Committee was convened at the CPC's Executive Board in Toronto together with a network of local committees in eleven cities. Each of these committees independently dealt with the formalities related to the sponsoring of their chosen immigrants; they also set up the requirements for admission and the scope of additional aid. This aid took different forms in individual centers. It was also subject to change. For instance, the Refugee Aid Committee founded at the Ottawa branch of the Polish Combatants' Association started collections in cooperation with the local Polish Roman Catholic parish (St. Hyacinth) and a few Polish organizations operating in Ottawa. Only in 1982, they managed to raise over CAD 21,000, along with furniture and clothing. Thanks to the involvement of many people and considerable mobilization of the Polish community, the first twenty refugees sponsored by the Ottawa branch received financial and material aid. The newly arrived were offered rent-free apartments and even financial loans. This effort however, depleted the accumulated resources, dedication and organizational capabilities of the Polish community in Canada's capital²¹.

¹⁷ A. Grzywalska, (2007), *Działalność polskiej parafii personalnej pod wezwaniem Św. Maksymiliana Kolbego w Mississauga, Ont.*, MA Thesis, IAiSP UJ, Kraków, p.77.

¹⁸ CPC Toronto archive, *Chronicle of Cooperation...*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...* [Accessed 4. 09.2017]; CPC Toronto collection, *Chronicle of Cooperation...*, p. 2-3.

²¹ Ibid.

When sponsoring other people, the Ottawa committee requested that co-sponsors (usually relatives or friends of people applying for admission to Canada) pay the costs of the administrative procedure and the affidavit of one-year responsibility for the sponsored (together from CAD 85 for individuals to CAD 170 for families), as well as a deposit of CAD 1,000, paid before the arrival of an immigrant. This sum was to be returned to the sponsor after a year²². Based on the deposit, the Ottawa committee gave sponsorship guarantees for those who had their own financial means, as did other centers run by the branches of the Canadian Polish Congress. The amount of the deposit depended on the size of the family, estimated costs of accommodation and food, medical insurance, and public transportation fees. The procedure based on deposit was mainly directed towards the sponsored families. The family which transferred the means to Canada in the initial phase of the application process obtained a refund upon arrival in 12 monthly payments²³.

Interviews with immigrants conducted in Canada in 2016 by a group of researchers from the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora at Jagiellonian University in Cracow²⁴ prove that deposits were also required by other committees operating within the network created by the Canadian Polish Congress. An interviewee from Toronto said that he had received interest on the money he had paid in²⁵. Another interviewee sponsored by a Polish parish in Winnipeg recounted that her sponsors were deducting from the deposit even minor expenses made for her family²⁶. One immigrant, who insisted on anonymity, mentions that in some cases, the so-called deposit was treated as a form of payment for the sponsor's signature on official documents²⁷. However, the scale of such practices is impossible to assess because the people involved are reluctant to talk about it even after all these years. On the other hand, the existent materials show that the committees organizing sponsoring actions based on deposits were aware that immigrants-to-be acquired the necessary financial means working illegally in the countries of their temporary residence, which could be the reason of their deportation. It also turned out that some Polish emigrants interested in relocating to Canada had concerns about the honesty of people offering sponsorship after they paid a sum of money which was quite large, considering their capabilities. According to a member of the Ottawa committee, they were reassured by the Canadian Polish Congress that they would not be cheated. Presumably, the organizers of the deposit-based sponsoring

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ It was a realization of the research program: Documentation of the activity of the Polish Diaspora in Toronto in favor of Poland and Polish immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s which was financed by the Senate of the Republic of Poland.

²⁵ Interview with L.W., Toronto 16.08. 2016.

²⁶ Interview with T. E., Toronto, 30.07. 2016.

²⁷ Interview with X.X., Gdynia, 17.09. 2017.

were not aware that this method lead to selection of the immigrants-to-be, creating opportunity to immigrate to Canada mainly for those who were resourceful and able to acquire the necessary financial means²⁸.

Canadian authorities realized that some Polish committees had been acting unlawfully. The correspondence of Canada's Employment and Immigration addressed to the Executive Board of Canadian Polish Congress reads that immigration offices, as well as "... many Canadian Consulates have many well documented concerns about a multitude..." of such cases²⁹. In the above-quoted document, six major concerns were mentioned:

1. "Denial of Sponsor's Responsibilities [if persons interested in obtaining a sponsor]... agree not to expect any kind of assistance from the Congress on his/her arrival in Canada".
2. Non-fulfillment of Sponsor's Responsibilities.
3. "Deposit or Payment to the Congress ...of monetary deposit... as a precondition to sponsorship by the Congress".
4. Deposit or payment to persons sponsoring through the Congress.
5. There were registered instances "...of one person sponsoring as many as 30 cases in one year..."
6. "There are cases where persons acting on behalf of the Congress were also acting as immigration consultants and accepting fees for their services."³⁰

The employees of the Department of Employment and Immigration had concerns that the cases of infringement of the agreement with the Canadian Polish Congress would be publicized and used as arguments by the critics of the government. A letter of the same nature, with a note "CPC internal use only"³¹ was sent to the local branches and – following the declarations received in reply – some offices were reorganized and the practice of taking a deposit ceased³².

Despite the above mentioned reservations, Canadian authorities maintained the procedures of sponsoring Polish immigrants, which remained in force until September 1, 1990³³. After that date, the previously existing programs for Polish people were discontinued, and persons interested in relocation to Canada became subject to general immigration regulations applying in Canada. However, the procedures initiated before September 1990 and based on the agreement of the Minister of Employment and Immigration with the Canadian Polish Congress and other organizations were continued, and thus the Poles were admitted to Canada through

²⁸ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...* [Accessed 4. 09.2017].

²⁹ Nina Skoczyńska's collection, Toronto, "CPC Circular" no. 2/90, p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3–4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

³² J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...*, [Accessed: 4. 09.2017].

³³ CPC Toronto archive, *Rok 40-lecia Kongresu...*, p. 30.

sponsoring until the mid 1990s. At that time also the families of the persons who had been admitted earlier were arriving in Canada³⁴.

Most Polish immigrants in the 1980s landed in Ontario Province, mostly in Toronto, where sponsoring actions and Canadian aid to the new Polish immigrants were concentrated. Toronto had the largest community of Polish diaspora. Moreover, the Canadian Polish Congress Executive Board was (and still is) located in Toronto. Also Polish Information and Immigrant Aid Center was situated at the Executive Board of the CPC.

St. Maximilian Kolbe Polish parish in Mississauga played an absolutely vital role in organizing the sponsoring action. Mississauga is a town in the immediate vicinity of Toronto. The parish was founded on October 15, 1979, and in March 1983, the construction of the parish church began. As early as in November 1981, the parish community was already involved in assisting the incoming Poles. According to accounts, this actually began by coincidence, when an employee of the local immigration office phoned the church administrative office requesting help in communicating with a Polish family sponsored by the government and staying at a hotel at that time. In response, the parish not only found an interpreter, but also took care of this family, helping it rent an apartment, complete formalities, and adjust to Canadian reality. This event initiated the community's positive response to requests from the local immigration office to aid other Polish families admitted to Canada. Furthermore, on the basis of the agreement concluded with the Minister of Immigration by the Archbishop of Toronto Cardinal Gerald Emmett Carter, St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish began to sponsor and bring in more Polish immigrants, mainly families, on their own. This endeavor was successful owing to the kindness and help of Father Stanisław Bąk and his congregation of Oblates, but first of all, due to a great commitment and devotion of the pastoral assistant Felician Sister Alicja Kwiecień, who came from Poland. Her work and the team of people she gathered were extraordinary. The number of Polish people sponsored through St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish significantly exceeded the limit of 16 families allocated on the basis of the agreement between the Archbishop and the Minister. According to data quoted in one of Sister Alicja's interviews, by 1988, her parish supported and partially sponsored 1,822 families (215 were sponsored in full) and moreover, only in 1989, 1,350 families of Polish immigrants received various forms of aid³⁵. Among them there were large families as well as families with disabled members (children or parents) who needed additional assistance. At the peak period of arrivals, a few people worked in the parish office, and sponsors used to meet and welcome 30 families per week at the airport. Every arriving

³⁴ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...*, [Accessed 4.09.2017].

³⁵ *Kronika Emigracyjna – Ilość ksiąg 3 (lata 1980–1992)*, K. Grzywalska, (ed.) (duplicated material), [Mississauga, n. d.], p. 30, 153.

family was taken care of by 5 families from the parish. The parishioners created support groups, providing the newly arrived with accommodation and necessities. They dealt with immigration formalities, medical insurance, enrollment of adults in language courses and children in schools. They also did their best to diminish the shock related to settling in a new country. Moreover, they provided advice and necessary assistance to help the newcomers, as much as they could, find employment and become financially independent. Those in need were also offered spiritual and moral support, or even financial help. The latter came from the parish's means and collections gathered in the neighboring English-speaking parishes. The St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish organized meetings for the newcomers on a regular basis and, occasionally, excursions. During one year (1992), thanks to the Catholic Family Service, the parish was employing a professional psychologist speaking the Polish language as a social worker. Still, the process of adaptation of the newly arrived did was not free from tensions and clashes resulting from the sponsors' negligence on the one hand, and from too high expectations of the newcomers on the other hand. By Sister Alicja's account, they were fortunately rare and promptly solved³⁶. Regrettably, the parish did not pay attention to keeping records of the undertaken actions or even retaining gathered materials. Therefore, the efforts of that period can only be reconstructed on the basis of fragmentary documents, press releases, and recollections of immigrants and their caretakers. As Sister Alicja related, over 2,500 families connected to the Mississauga parish were engaged in the action of sponsoring and assisting the newcomers, which contributed significantly to the integration of this community. Photographs, letters and cards from them, which she kept, as well as the fact that they stayed in touch with her through all these years speak volumes about their gratitude.

Thanks to Sister Alicja's personality and personal engagement the Mississauga parish was exceptional given the manner and scope of provided aid. However, other parishes were also involved. For instance, the Holy Trinity Polish Parish in Windsor, Ontario guaranteed about 1,000 of sponsorship agreements since 1983, and the parish council was managing the Immigrant Aid Committee³⁷. Actions aimed at sponsoring Polish immigrants were also undertaken by other organizations and Catholic parishes, not only Polish, including those on the prairies and in Quebec. For instance, it is known that Our Lady of Czestochowa Polish parish in Montreal, run by the Franciscans, provided aid to the passengers of the "Stefan Batory" and Polish sailors who decided to leave ships and stay in Canada even before the proclamation of martial law in Poland. A fragment from the parish chronicle quoted on its website reads that in the fall of 1981, a group of young men was residing for three weeks in the parish basement. The parish bought them more than 20 mattresses,

³⁶ Interview with sister Alicja Kwiecień, Toronto 14.08. 2017.

³⁷ A. Rajski, (2008) *100 lat Polonii w Windsor. 1908–2008*, Windsor: Warkeville Publishing, p.52.

blankets, pillows, and towels. They also received meals twice a day. Moreover, the author informs that the parish either sponsored or acted as an intermediary in finding sponsors for numerous families "...arriving from different temporary camps in Europe", and made parish office space available for language courses and legal services³⁸. Unfortunately, there are no materials describing this and other actions conducted by Polish parishes and other organizations in Montreal.

The calculations based on the data from Canadian population census prove that in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, in total between 115,000 and 120,000 Poles arrived in Canada³⁹. Unfortunately, the information on the structure of this group is missing, especially data related to the categories of admitted immigrants (family class, "independent" immigrants qualified within the points system, refugees sponsored by Canadian authorities, or refugees brought in by private sponsors with support from the Canadian Polish Congress or other organizations). According to the Toronto Polish-language newspaper "Związkowiec" (Alliancer), by August 1990 (that is throughout the binding period of the agreement between the CPC and the Department of Employment and Immigration), the offices created by the CPC submitted 45,000 sponsored applications to the Minister. Some of them encompassed entire families. The cited article also contains information that about 40% of the people sponsored through this procedure entered Canada from refugee camps in Western Europe⁴⁰. The remaining 60% were most probably Poles arriving from the United States or the family members of the previously admitted persons, who arrived in Canada directly from Poland. Unfortunately, the CPC's archives do not hold reports with detailed lists or data representing the numbers of immigrants sponsored through the CPC.

Compiling a full list is further complicated by the fact that Polish immigrants found sponsors in Canada not only through the CPC offices; other organizations also cooperated in sponsoring immigrants. As a result, some sponsored individuals were counted twice. According to the information published by the Minister of Employment and Immigration, in 1982, Canada received 7,065 Polish immigrants classified as refugees, 4,417 (62,5%) of whom were sponsored by the Canadian authorities, 645 (9,1%) were brought in by families, 1,648 (23,3%) had sponsors (formally groups of sponsors) based on the new regulations, and 11 Poles were

³⁸ A. Guryn, Parafia Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej, Montreal, <http://www.franciszkanie.org/kanada/mbcz/pelna%20historia.html> [Accessed 20.10.2017].

³⁹ Compare: A. Reczyńska (2001), *Polska Diaspora w Kanadzie*, in: Walaszek A. (ed.), *Polska Diaspora*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2001, p.35; M. Krywułt-Albańska (2015), *Imigranci polscy w Kanadzie. Socjologiczna analiza procesów adaptacji*, Kraków: Impuls, p.9; J. C. Hathaway (1988), *Selective Concern. An Overview of Refugee Law in Canada "Reve de Droit de McGill"* vol. 33, p. 677–693, <http://lawjournal.mcgill.ca/userfiles/other/8290193-hathaway.pdf> [Accessed 12.10.2017].

⁴⁰ *Kronika Emigracyjna...*, P. Skeris, *Obrachunki z przeszłością*, a clipping from the weekly "Związkowiec", [p. 121].

qualified as immigrants of “special needs/joint assistance”⁴¹. The numbers quoted above show that during the first year of the agreement between the Minister and the CPC, almost one fourth of Polish immigrants were admitted to Canada through this program. It is difficult to verify the information repeated in various reports that about 30,000 Polish people were admitted to Canada through sponsorship by 1984. The fragmentary documentation that is preserved in the Toronto center for aid to Polish immigrants shows that only between March 1988 and March 1990, during the final stage of the sponsoring program under the auspices of the Congress, 6,056 Poles were allowed to relocate to Canada. The monthly reports shows that most people arrived in November 1988 (as many as 466)⁴². The available materials make it difficult to evaluate accurately the varying data regarding the numbers of persons sponsored by the Polish community in Ottawa. The report of the PCA mentions 522 persons (217 of whom paid the deposit), whereas Stanisław Zybała’s account mentions 820 (599 of whom were admitted thanks to the help of Ottawa combatants)⁴³.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable that in the 1980s, Poland became the third source of immigrants to Canada, exceeding countries such as Great Britain and the USA. It is worth noting an opinion from the account of the activities of the Ottawa Polish Immigrant Aid Committee run by Polish combatants. It states that persons involved in action of sponsoring of the newly arrived turned out to be “...highly responsible. Only two or three cases of misunderstandings between the sponsors and their beneficiaries were noted...”⁴⁴, and one case when the committee had to provide immigrants with financial aid. The same author emphasizes that the committee provided “... aid to all the newly arrived... regardless of their sponsor – the federal government, CPC, PCA, or private persons... English language courses were organized, diplomas and report cards were translated, immigrants were helped with preparing resumes and informed about job offers for specialists in many fields of science and technology.”⁴⁵

Other Polish immigrant aid committees founded by Polish ethnic organizations in various cities in Canada were carrying out similar operations. It is now very difficult to trace some endeavors because of the dispersal of these centers and the lack of sources. However, there are many indications that the Polish Diaspora took over, or complemented in the Canadian system, some responsibilities for assistance and adaptation of the newly arrived immigrants, which in the case of refugees were

⁴¹ CPC Toronto archive, *Chronicle of Cooperation...*, p. 9.

⁴² Nina Skoczyńska’s private collection, Toronto, Komunikat Ośrodka Pomocy Polskim Imigrantom [n.d.].

⁴³ S. Zybała, *Drugie ćwierćwiecze 1973–1997* in: *Reduta Ottawska*, http://www.spkottawa.ca/polski/reduta/reduta_9.html [Accessed 14.09.2017].

⁴⁴ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...*, [Accessed 4.09.2017].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

executed by relevant offices and non-governmental organizations. Social welfare in Canada is mainly within the competence of provinces, and in the 1980s, each one of them had slightly different programs. For instance, in many cities in Ontario, Immigrant Information Centers were organized, and in Toronto, also the Immigrant Women's Center, and centers to aid different ethnic groups, among them also the Polish Central Immigration Committee, which at the end of the 1980s, was divided into two institutions: Polish Information Center and Polish Immigrant Aid Center. In Toronto, there also existed Ontario Welcome House, subordinate to Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, where the new immigrants were offered information and aid in the first months following arrival. In the 1980s, Polish immigrants, especially the ones sponsored by the Canadian government and Canadian Polish Congress, constituted a considerable percentage (nearly 20%) of their recipients. Only in 1988, there were around 2,000 of them. They received information about the school system, language programs, adult education, labor market, family allowances and taxation. They were also offered advice and professional help in finding appropriate housing, insurance, and the right to obtain medical care when attending language courses. The children of immigrants were enrolled in schools and younger children in kindergartens. Moreover, immigrants had access to free-of-charge document translation services⁴⁶. Already on October 1, 1981, a Polish language version of *Newcomers Guide to Services in Ontario* was published. This 73-page brochure was distributed for free. Copies were also delivered to schools with immigrant children. The publication contained basic, helpful information on institutions and services for new immigrants available in Ontario. The guide gave practical tips essential during the first days of stay in an unknown city, for instance how to get help, how to use a telephone booth, public transport, a post office, and a bank. It contained fundamental regulations of the labor code, tax and social security principles. The guide also informed about the policy of multiculturalism, as well as the requirements and application procedures for Canadian citizenship⁴⁷.

The above mentioned publication and all other forms of aid were parts of the extensive, comprehensive, and well-organized Canadian system of aid for the new immigrants. The system had substantial means at its disposal, and they were used to facilitate the immigrants' adjustment and integration into Canadian society. Generally, this system relied on specific, periodically modified manners of selection, and persons admitted to Canada were provided with support and benefited from many forms of aid. In the 1980s, the criteria for entry were greatly liberalized in relation to Poles.

⁴⁶ A. Cieplik (1991), Ontario Welcome House, Downtown Toronto (Transcript) in: T. Kott, M. Celiński, Trojanowska T. (ed.), *Polonia 2000: Strategies for Participation in Canadian Life*, [Toronto], p. 86.

⁴⁷ *Informator dla nowo przybyłych. Usługi w Ontario / Newcomers Guide to Services in Ontario (Polish)*, Tinglin W. ed., (1981), [Toronto]: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture; the author of the Polish translation was Irma Zaleski.

In Canada, as it has already been described, numerous initiatives aimed at aiding new immigrants or specific groups of immigrants were also carried out by the institutions and organizations of the Polish Diaspora. The Polish Immigrant Aid Center operating at the Toronto CPC, which has already been mentioned here several times, offered information both for immigrants and sponsors. It provided Polish language versions of official forms and helped in filling them. It also organized individual and group consultations and courses. It is especially worth mentioning the refresher courses organized for Polish refugee physicians, which were necessary for recognition of their diplomas in Canada. The Polish Center, along with the Department of Lifelong Learning, University of Toronto and Ontario Board of Education organized such courses twice: in 1982 and 1983. They were 6 months long and covered 600 hours of specialized lectures delivered by physicians representing different fields of medicine. Out of 62 participants, 43 persons passed the required examinations⁴⁸. Attempts at conducting specialized English courses for engineers were also undertaken but they were less successful. Also, other very useful initiatives took place. For instance, some Polish newspapers in Canada offered the new immigrants a free three-month subscription and an option to place free advertisements (also in search for sponsors of family members and friends).

A report of the operations of the Polish Immigrant Aid Committee in Ottawa reads that "...many centers had serious problems with the sponsored persons"⁴⁹; however, details are lacking. On the other hand, the materials of the committee and the Executive Board of the Canadian Polish Congress in Toronto include a few documents mentioning cases where sponsors withdrew mainly on account of fraud and theft committed by the newly arrived, as well as alcohol abuse. There is also a letter sent from Poland by a wife asking the CPC to refuse sponsoring of her husband who left the country with his new partner⁵⁰. Unfortunately, there is no information about the fate of the people mentioned in those and other complaints. It is beyond doubt however, that stories of these incidents could cause distrust among the sponsors and decline of interest and involvement in aiding immigrants within some parts of the Polish community in Canada. However in general, the results of the system of sponsoring Polish immigrants through committees operating under the auspices of the Canadian Polish Congress and the Catholic Church were positively assessed by both the Canadian authorities and activists of Polish ethnic organizations.

Summing up the history of the Polish Combatants' Association in Ottawa, Stanisław Zybała called the endeavor to bring Polish refugees into Canada and the aid they obtained during 1980–1995 the greatest and most impressive achievement

⁴⁸ Jadwiga Gaszyńska's private collection, Toronto, medical courses documentation.

⁴⁹ J. A. Dobrowolski, *Historia sponsorowania...*, [Accessed 4.09.2017].

⁵⁰ Nina Skoczyńska's private collection, Toronto, letter from M.M., Lublin 6.12.1989.

of this organization⁵¹. This opinion can probably relate to the entire Polish ethnic group in Canada.

All the above mentioned instances demonstrate that both the leaders of the Polish Diaspora in Canada and Canadian government were very interested in the influx of Polish immigrants. It could be maintained that the agreement between the Minister of Employment and Immigration and the Canadian Polish Congress, together with the specific Canadian policy of selecting immigrants were not merely acts of charity. There are opinions that they contained elements of brain drain policy. However, it ought to be remembered that Polish emigration was a massive wave, and the majority of immigrants entered Canada from outside of Poland (many from refugee camps). They themselves pursued immigration to different countries. Therefore, it can be stated that the Canadian authorities only benefited from the circumstances.

The leaders of the Polish Diaspora in Canada had hopes that influx of new immigrants would strengthen the existing Polish organizations and raise the prestige of the Polish community. In fact, these hopes were not fulfilled, although new immigrants initiated many meaningful changes within the Polish community and its perception in the “Country of the Maple Leaf”. Nevertheless, it seems justified to say that it was mainly the Canadian government that attained its goals, gaining a significant number of relatively young and valuable citizens.

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- Interview with X.X., Gdynia, 17.09. 2017.

⁵¹ S. Zybala, Drugie ćwierćwiecze 1973–1997, in: *Reduta Ottawska*, http://www.spkottawa.ca/polski/reduta/reduta_9.html [Accessed 14.09.2017].

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