

Canada and Immigrants from Europe post 1945

The Canadian government was recently vilified for the appearance and recognition in Parliament of an immigrant from Ukraine who served in the Galicia Division that was formed in 1943, made up of Ukrainian volunteers to fight against the Soviet Union. I decided to look into the text of the 1985-1986 Deschênes Commission that was [digitized](#) in 2012 by Privy Council Office to educate myself on this issue. This Commission was established specifically to report on the issue of war criminals in Canada and included discussion of this specific movement. Text is provided for Part I that was designed to be published with Part II, destined to remain confidential although there are calls to have this released. The number of war criminals in Canada ranged from a “handful” to 6000 at the time of the Commission. It should be noted that outside interveners in this Commission never quoted a figure under 1000.

The Report shows the geo-political role played by Canada at the end of the War in Europe, suffering immensely due to the economic collapse of decades of hostilities and war. All Europe was now moving, in one direction or another, and Canada’s economic goals aligned with geo-political goals of managing the recovery of Europe through the acceptance of large numbers of persons displaced by war, even if many of these policies originated in Washington or London. The Report also shows the limitations of Canadian authority as it emerged from its subordinate Dominion status. The accoutrements of a mature state were not yet in place.

As a (barely) former colony of the British Crown, Canada only enacted an independent Immigration Act in [1952](#) and decisions made by Cabinet in this instance must be considered using this lens. Independent foreign policy was less than [two decades old](#) at the close of hostilities. Immigration was subsumed under [Order in Council P.C. 1931-695](#), a tightly restrictive policy. The [Citizenship Act of 1947](#) was a step away from Canada’s status as dependent but a “Canadian” immigration act was still years away. Immigration was controlled from the centre, as it was in 1919, policies put in place after the Great War.

I'll also add that since Canada was not a signatory to the [Charter](#) or the [1945 London Agreement](#), it didn't have any jurisdiction over this type of offence. Canada still did not have fully developed State authority over elements that would have been needed here. This was only to come over the next decade. As the report makes clear, there was no attempt to hide the fact that these persons were members of the German military that Canada was at war with so no basis to claim that these people hid their histories and overturn their status in Canada.

Canada began to play a key role in the emergent Cold War of the late 1940s as a "release valve" for emigrants from across Europe, including those who lived in former Nazi and fascist controlled areas across Europe. Immigrants from all over the continent wanted to immigrate out of Europe, many of them living years directly or indirectly under fascist rule, suffering oppression and genocide. The initial years of the post-war were dedicated to returning Canadian service personnel from across the globe. Immigration as we know it was non-existent and "who" could immigrate was moot. As order returned, so too did the desire to manage this migration for state goals. Demand was coming both from our allies in Europe and the US, along with Canadians who wanted their family members to join them here, not to mention economic growth. Economic growth as a key policy priority was evident in the 1947 agreement with the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Agency and the International Refugee Organization to bring people from Europe as contract workers in specific labour markets.

In June 1949 all immigration was restricted by [Order in Council 2743](#) to those with relatives in Canada, citizens of the UK, USA, and France and agriculturalists, miners, lumberers, loggers and domestic workers. These occupations did not, of course, have Occupational Codes since no system such as the National Occupational Classification or any occupational codes were in place. This data was not to be collected for decades. But I digress. Important for us here is that the Canadian government had denied the entrance of Ukrainians currently held in the UK including the Galicia / Halychyna Division.

This Ukrainian division had surrendered to British forces in May 1945 and were held in Rimini until 1946 when they were screened and transferred to the UK. After the repeal of [P.C. 2743](#) in 1950 by [P.C. 2856](#) there was a

change in policy to accept, among others, this group that was currently held in the UK noting that they still required screening both for the immigrant and the applicant in Canada, if applicable. The Canadian Jewish Congress objected and Ottawa paused.

The British Foreign Office stated that both Soviet and British missions had no evidence that these persons fought against Western Allies or engaged in crimes against humanity. And while the CJC continued its objection, Canada opened the doors to Ukrainian immigration from the UK.

According to the Deschênes Commission, approximately 600 of these former members of the Galicia Division were in Canada in the mid 1980s. Simon Wiesenthal gave a list of 217 specific names to then Solicitor General Robert Kaplan. This list was investigated and of those, over 86% never set foot in Canada and the few that did had no specific accusations leveled against them. Investigations by both the RCMP and the Commission reached the same conclusion.

I invite you to read the report. It is an interesting story of immigration to Canada that reaches into our own day with the resignation of the Speaker of the House last month.

Source: <https://www.idonhaveacoolname.com/canada-and-immigrants-from-europe-post-1945/>