



National Internment Education Day

October 28, 2021 — Today, the Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union (SUSK) joins in commemorating the first National Internment Education Day in recognition of Canada's first national internment operations from 1914 -1920. On this day, we honour the 8,579 Ukrainians and other civilian Europeans who were unjustly branded “enemy aliens” and “enemy illegal residents,” stripped of any possessions or wealth they had, imprisoned, and sent to one of 24 camps across the country. These civilians suffered not because of crimes they had committed, but because of where they came from.

Between the years 1896 and 1911, about 2.5 million immigrants arrived in Canada from Eastern Europe. The Canadian Government specifically invited Ukrainians to come to Canada to farm the prairie provinces. Following the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, the Canadian government became suspicious of Ukrainians and others, who had emigrated from the occupied territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - the territory of the enemy. As such, the Canadian Government implemented the War Measures Act (1914) by means of Order In Council P2721. The passing of the War Measures Act legally sanctioned the denial of basic civil rights to all those labelled as “enemy aliens”.

First World War Internment impacted several ethnocultural communities including Ukrainians, Polish, Romanians, Russians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croatians, Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Jews, and peoples from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, with most of the internees being Ukrainian. Internment operations spanned the nation, from coast to coast, in mostly rural, but sometimes urban, locales. Forced, heavy labour and subpar, terrible living conditions were a daily reality for those who were interned. At these sites of internment, 125 innocent men and children died while incarcerated and were buried in 33 unmarked graves or cemeteries across Canada. These deaths were unnecessary and unjust. Additionally, internees also faced other state censures simply due to their country of origin. It is vital to note that an additional 80,000 individuals (the vast majority of whom were Ukrainian), were forced to register as “enemy aliens” and report to the local Dominion Police, the predecessors of the RCMP.

SUSK commits to raising awareness of historical injustices, especially those motivated and justified through discriminatory and prejudiced ideas. Today, we call upon all in the Ukrainian Canadian community and those in broader Canadian society to take time to recognize and commemorate the long-standing impacts Internment Operations have had on our nation. Descendants from interned family members live on and continue to wrestle with this historical injustice and intergenerational trauma. Thus, we encourage all who read this to take the time to better educate themselves about First World War Canadian Internment Operations at the [Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund](#), the [Ukrainian Canadian Congress's Internment Education Campaign](#), and through the resources available at [Library and Archives Canada](#) or here at [InfoUkes](#).