

THE COMMITTEE OF CANADIAN COMMUNISTS

Le comite de communistes canadiens

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C.C.C. PRE-CONVENTION (1988) DISCUSSION BULLETIN #1

1. Does glasnost apply to the Communist Party of Canada?
2. Does a role model of socialism exist?
3. The job to be done and how to do it.
4. The crisis of leadership.
5. Tim Buck's birthday.

CREATING A PRE-CONVENTION ATMOSPHERE

The Globe & Mail recently reported that W. Kashtan will step down as the general-secretary of the Communist Party.

The news stories report W. Kashtan as explaining that, during his 22 years as general-secretary, the Party was a victim of the past image of the Soviet Union and that glasnost and perestroika will help Canadians to see a different image of the Soviet Union than they saw in the past.

This explanation is an open invitation to a debate.

It becomes necessary to ask whether W. Kashtan does or does not welcome glasnost and perestroika?

A story originating with W. Kashtan, himself, claims that he insisted on an interview with general-secretary M. Gorbachev, was granted the interview at which he told M. Gorbachev that perestroika and glasnost was harming the Communist Parties of the west and that its application should be slowed down.

He did not see M. Gorbachev. But he likely did see someone else from the CPSU's central committee who responded that the policy of glasnost and perestroika is correct, is working and will be pursued as rapidly as possible.

It appears, then, that W. Kashtan is trying to distance the Canadian Party from the CPSU. Why?

ROLE MODELS?

One of the first amendments proposed

for the Party's programme states: "There are no models for socialism in Canada." This statement is followed with an explanation that, in Canada, the building of socialism will bring wider democracy.

If this amendment had gone on to say that that Canadians will follow their own path in building socialism because, while the path to socialism is government by laws which are common to all, there are differences in the objective characteristics of their economies, their level of development and histories. Blind copying from the socialist countries won't answer the problem, although surely we Canadians will learn from the achievements and errors of the socialist countries and will be only too happy to adopt experiences which can answer specific Canadian conditions.

After all, objectively there is no other model of socialism than existing socialism. No doubt mistakes made by the socialist countries contribute to the problems being experienced by the Communist parties, and vice versa. However, it is inevitable that there will be diverse different paths and rates of coming to power because of the diversity of the world, itself.

The transitional stages leading to the establishment of socialism in Canada, and some of the ways in which it will be built, are a subject to be studied. The socialist revolution, no matter where, faces the same tasks that faced the peoples of Russia and the other socialist countries.

In short, the vagueness surrounding the statement needs clearing up.

Whether it is the intention, or not, and

it must be made clear. Otherwise it negates the experience of October, the changes in the balance of world forces, the successful building of socialism, the significance of a community of socialist countries.

This question is also an integral part of the Party's struggle against anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism which denies the universal significance of Leninism.

The Canadian bourgeoisie makes every effort to counter the influence of the Communist Party in the working-class movement by conducting an offensive against existing socialism.

Existing socialism is the living, real expression of the ideals and goals of the struggle for socialism which the ideologists of the bourgeoisie spare no effort to smear.

If the role model of the USSR is called into question it indicates the influence of revisionist and bourgeois theories. Or has it been concluded that a socialist society is still an abstraction, implying there is nothing in the achievements of the socialist countries to be inspired about?

If such a theory as convergence continues to exist in the eighties, it is expressed in these ideas which converge with the ideas of democratic socialism.

The changes taking place in the USSR, the renewal of policies will strengthen socialism in that country and the world. Its success will contribute to bringing about a new world situation favourable for peace, socialism and progressive advance.

The policy of glasnost in the USSR means that the Soviet people are examining anew the revolutionary ideas which inspired the masses in 1917 and how those ideas apply to today's problems.

That is why the next Party convention, if it is to help the Party to realise the rich possibilities emerging in today's situation, cannot avoid discussing how to rid the Party of all the negatives holding up its work. That should be the

atmosphere in which pre-convention discussion takes place.

CHANGE? -- OR NO CHANGE?

Is the steady decline in the fortunes of the Communist Party during this past 22 years attributable solely to the alleged problems created in Canada by the allegedly poor performance of the CPSU?

Have not the Party's difficulties basically been created by the massive anti-Communist propaganda combined with the illusions and distortions in people's thinking created by the psychology of consumerism--all compounded by the weak and inadequate leadership coming from 24 Cecil Street--sometimes referred to as the most costly ivory tower in North America.

Will the selection of G. Hewison as general-secretary be the answer to these problems? What solutions does he propose? What does he stand for? What policies does he advocate? What are his plans to solve the Party's problems?

Those who vote for him, or against him, should know. When the central committee selected him were these questions discussed?

THE PROBLEMS ARE NOT NEW

In discussing the leadership crisis in the Party, it will help to recall the history of W. Kashtan's election as general-secretary.

As long ago as January, 1963, Tim Buck proposed to a central committee meeting a policy of rejuvenating the Party, steps to activate it and inspire confidence in it among the revolutionary workers. He said, "We don't need to spend time looking into ourselves to find out what we should do. We must exhibit initiative at every level. We have to campaign on issues. We have got to continually help the members to raise the political level of their work. Everyone has to search out the issues around which our members can be activated and, above all, we have to learn to take advantage of criticism and deal with it so that we benefit from it."

THE STRUGGLE TO DEFEAT TIM BUCK

In 1964 general-secretary Leslie Morris died of cancer. Tim Buck claimed that W. Kashtan tried to head off his quick return to Canada from Europe by telling him over the phone that Leslie Morris was doing well. In the meantime, W. Kashtan set his machine into motion to line up his support for the position.

On January 16-19, 1965, a special session of the central committee took place. At that plenary session, Nelson Clarke, on behalf of the CEC, proposed that W. Kashtan be elected as general-secretary; that there be a division of labour between the general-secretary and someone else who would be responsible for the Party's public work (a response to W. Kashtan's poor public image and lack of popularity among the rank-and-file Party members).

Veteran communist, Tom McEwen rose to oppose the proposal. He angrily claimed that a breakdown in leadership had taken place which was paralysing the Party's work, and he called for a special convention to deal with leadership. In the interim, he suggested, there should be a caretaker leadership. He supported George Harris and Nigel Morgan, in that order, for general-secretary.

BUCK'S CHARACTERISATION OF KASHTAN

Tim Buck took the floor. He said,

"The future of our Party is at stake at this time. I criticise and oppose the manner in which this matter was dealt with in the CEC. The CEC actually obstructed the sending out of a letter which I wished to go to all Party members on this question. In my letter I had pointed out that it is a tradition of Canadian politics to signal, that is, to link changes in the Party to the election of new leaders.

"It is the time for us to study Party leadership as a whole; and we should elect a national leader as part of the changing image of the Party in the eyes of the Canadian people. The political situation prevailing in Canada today requires a demonstration from us signalling a change. Nigel Morgan, in many ways, represents the outward going of our Party more than any

other Party organization in Canada. What is needed is a broad public discussion throughout the Party. This would be of value.

"The election of William Kashtan as our national leader would have a disappointing impact both on the membership of our Party and on the general public. If a change is needed to elect a comrade who is more outward, more sensitive to people and political moods, then that comrade is not William Kashtan. Bill Kashtan has become typed; he does not have instinctive, sensitive feelings for people. Just before this plenum he actually gave an interview about our Party to a scab newspaper, that is, a newspaper whose staff is out on strike. He is a comrade who has occupied himself with administrative affairs, not with political affairs of the Party. His role has been to gather all the levers of power in his own hands and, once he has them, he does not let go.

"I therefore propose the following amendment:

"1. That our national convention be held at Easter, 1965;

"2. That we elect here, at this meeting, a secretariat of three members;

"3. That the convention be a leadership convention."

Nigel Morgan stated that he favoured a three-stage reconstruction of leadership which would name William Kashtan as Party leader, which would quickly open a widespread discussion of the Party's work and usher in a pre-convention critical discussion. He said he would like to be part of the central leadership but that he had personal problems which might stand in the way.

George Harris refused to consider the proposal.

Later on, the CEC made efforts to bring Nigel Morgan to Toronto, but Tim Buck advised him to remain in BC because, in Buck's opinion, the aim of the CEC was to bring Morgan to Toronto in order to politically destroy him.

The CC endorsed the CEC recommendation to elect W. Kashtan as general-secretary

and declared that the position of general-secretary was synonymous with that of party leader.

BUCK ON THE PROGRAMME

Tim Buck delivered the main report to that session of the central committee. He said,

"The emphasis we must have on all our work is that the Communist Party must have a clear position on all questions. The youth of our Party will judge us mainly on what we say about their future and what our Party does about that programme. The content of the programme will be determined only by how we work for it.

"There are members who condemn everything the Party has done. That's bound to occur. That extremism is reflected by Rae Murphy and Tommy Morris, but isn't widespread in our Party and shouldn't be incorporated in any documents of the Party's.

"A plenum of the C.C. should always adopt positions which are explicit. We have to avoid the idea that plenums can't deal with many questions, i.e., there could be a discussion on a Canadian constitution on which we only take an incomplete position. There is a problem with the questioning of everything, including the value of the Party, questioning aspects of Party organization, and so on. The extremists can say all change is equated to an anti-past, anti-Soviet position. Some do. But some changes are necessary. The CEC has to show statesmanship, not subjectivity."

On his part, W. Kashtan cagily said very little; although he spoke at length. One thing he did say was that it was his aim, as the new leader of the Party, to halt the decline in membership and readers of the Party press that had taken place during the tenure of both Tim Buck and Leslie Morris, and that this was the real reason why he wanted to be selected as general secretary.

It should be possible for ANY Party member to get the official figures for the number of delegates at each conven-

tion, how many members each delegate represented, in order to ascertain whether or not W. Kashtan succeeded in the goal he set himself. (He didn't). In a similar fashion, the circulation of Party journals can be calculated from the number of paid up annual subscriptions which should be available for each year.

Although Tim Buck was virtually isolated at the January, 1965, central committee meeting he did what a Communist ought to, with courage and integrity.

If any Party member is shocked, or wonders about the violations of socialist legality in the USSR, and other such problems, he should take a look at the performance of the leader and leading cadre of the Communist Party of Canada. It doesn't take much imagination to figure out what each one would have done in conditions where the Party held state power.

CULT BUILDING

Correctly, articles should appear in the Canadian Tribune reporting what W. Kashtan says about political events. However, increasingly, some of them depict him as being larger than life. Some of his claims for himself bear scrutiny.

For example, the book **Towards Socialism** contains his selected articles and speeches. It attributes to W. Kashtan authorship of four briefs submitted by the Communist Party of Canada on various questions. At least two of the briefs for which W. Kashtan claims authorship were written almost entirely by Nelson Clarke who had a major input into the other two as well. To have allowed them to be published under his name is not acceptable moral behaviour for a Communist.

Tribune to the
Moreover, the tribute in the Canadian/ volunteers in Spain (1936-39) almost entirely devotes itself to giving to W. Kashtan an exaggerated role, one not justified by history, in a process which objectively diminishes the role of hundreds of Party members who took part in that war.

GLASNOST AND PERESTROIKA IN ACTION -- IN CANADA

While many Party members see the door opened to positive change in W. Kashtan's

resignation, unless every aspect of the Party's work is critically examined with the aim of removing all negative impediments to forward advance, the change in leadership will not fulfil their hopes. The Party's problems cannot be overcome just by changing the leader, even though the change can be an important initial step.

The Communist Party needs a leader who combines the ability to creatively apply Marxism-Leninism with a close personal relationship with the masses and with the ability to unite the diverse trends within the Party so that it acts as a coherent and effective political body.

It will be a formidable task to restore the Party. If G. Hewison is surrounded by a group of strong, well-chosen comrades--chosen only after a thorough-going discussion of what the Party's problems are and what its main tasks are, then, over a period of time, it may prove possible to carry out the task. But it cannot be done without involving the membership of the Party in country-wide discussion. That is why the leading cadres have to get out of 24 Cecil Street and seek out the membership.

Glasnost could help the Party to break with the follow-the-leader cult. It means openness. It means that everyone knows what's going on and has a say in the processes taking place. It involves uncompromising criticism of all adverse phenomena and gives everyone timely information on EVERYTHING. It is a means of extending democracy inside of the Party which can become part of the mechanism of helping the Party to succeed in achieving its aims.

The rank-and-file Party members (and the trade union movement) are ahead of their leaders.

The pre-convention could, roughly be divided into two main parts: 1. What needs doing; and 2. How to do it. Both are interrelated and overlap.

The setting for the convention is that it takes place at a time when the contradictions between a handful of imperialist states and the developing countries are

sharpening, when the scientific and technological revolution is spurring a gigantic increase in the material and productive forces, when existing socialism is a mighty factor on the side of peace, democracy and progress, helping to create favourable conditions for the struggle of working people and for progressive advance in Canada.

The convention takes place at a time when a new historic situation involves the broad task of preserving humanity--a task which opens the door to influencing the working-class on the big questions affecting society as a whole. A community of interests faces the modern working-class, demanding class solidarity. The Party is in a position to open and maintain a dialogue in the working-class movement as one of the best ways to consolidate working-class unity. New opportunities are opening up to talk to non-Party workers and peace activists as never before, sometimes on a regular basis.

UNITY, STAGES, AND THE NDP

Does bringing unity into being embrace all struggles, both big and small? We see no contradiction in struggling for unity around short-term as well as long-term goals. But W. Kashtan imposes limits on what is possible in the anti-monopoly stage. He spent more time saying what couldn't be done than in clearing up what could be done.

The paper of indictment that the CEC presented in 1970 against the positions taken by W. Beeching, D. Curie and C. McFadden, essentially said that you can't have struggle and unity simultaneously, i.e., it was put you don't criticise those with whom you wish to cooperate. Simple common sense should indicate that, in building unity, all differences with other parties have to be overcome in a positive and constructive way. The main problem is to find a minimum programme around which all can unite.

The NDP rejects unity on the basis of anti-Communism. Is that not an ideological struggle? The NDP relegates the unions to electoral support of the NDP, and financial support, whereas the Communists advocate mass political action led by the unions.

Is that not an ideological question?

W. Kashtan sees the united front as emerging as a fully born big alliance rather than an alliance emerging and taking shape in the struggle for reforms and immediate needs. His concept of stages has become a riddle because very often who holds power at a given stage is all decisive. That is why T. Buck wrote **Put Monopoly Under Control**, in 1969.

At one time it was the policy of the Party to view the NDP as the embodiment of the united front. In the January-February, 1970, issue of the Communist Viewpoint, W. Beeching argued "It (the NDP) is the single largest expression at this time of the anti-monopoly, pro-peace, reformist-minded sentiment in the country. But it is not a coalition, nor should it be confused with an anti-monopoly front. It is one of the political forces within the united front..."

"There are theories that the NDP will be transformed into the organized expression of the united front. This theory imposes dangerous limits to our conception of the anti-monopoly united front and what forces it will encompass...The theory tends to justify uncritical support of the NDP and obstructs the leading role of the Communist Party. The NDP is still only a single political party and to become a united front it would have to undergo radical transformations."

Although the new draft programme of the Party was corrected precisely to conform with this argument, nonetheless, the CEC used the article to charge W. Beeching, D. Currie and C. McFadden with opposing the Dimitrov conception of the united front!!!!

A solution to such problems was complicated by the fact that, at one time, Leslie Morris had raised questions about the vanguard role of the Party which were never properly debated out. The positions taken by the CEC in 1970 contained much residue from similar unresolved problems.

In 1970 Party members who are now members of the CCC demanded that the Party systematically fight for unity on a wide range of questions and on many fronts, combined with a systematic fight against the illusion that socialism can be achieved

by a process of adaptation to capitalist traditions and methods. We opposed the path to the future being through social democracy, advancing the claim that the struggle for anti-monopoly unity is the struggle of the Communist Party to be the leader of the working-class struggle.

THE FUTURE

Party ideologists have the task of presenting a true picture of the future, a scientific forecast, not a utopia, as a method of finding a solution to the economic, political, moral and humanistic problems of the day, and it is in this context that the policy of glasnost and perestroika in the USSR has to be viewed.

The convention has the task of selecting the key main tasks and uncovering capitalism's weakest link. The convention must aim at making the Communist Party the wellhead of the important debate on politics, on public ownership, on new problems facing people, particularly those problems which have reached an explosive and dangerous character or which head in that direction.

Every Party member is called upon to have a more profound understanding of economic, political and social life, than ever before. Today two opposing civilisations confront each other in a dramatic period of change and sharpening crisis. The task even involves preserving bourgeois capitalist society against the destructive effect of capitalism itself which has created the monsters that can destroy everyone. What a challenging source of inspiration to action that is!

Because of its character, the Communist Party assumes responsibility to lay emphasis on the importance of people, on the general cultural development of people.

Thus a multiplicity of new opportunities has opened for the Communist Party which, sadly enough, seems to have been missed by the incumbents at 24 Cecil Street, Toronto.

The basic purpose of the policies adopted by the governments of Canada need exposing, along with a clarion call for class battles. Work has to be done to win basic shifts in the balance of political

forces in Canada. Its old, but worth repeating: the capitalist class will do everything to preserve itself except to get off the backs of working people.

SOURCE OF WORLD CHANGES

The world changes and shifts do not come about because the CPSU has adopted a policy of glasnost and perestroika. Glasnost and perestroika was not responsible for the signing of the world's first disarmament treaty since the end of the second world war. To think so would be to underestimate the shifts in world relationships in favour of socialism, peace and progress.

To attribute it entirely and only to glasnost and perestroika is not only a major concession to anti-Sovietism, but also a major underestimation of the potent force of the peace movement, the growing influence of the developing countries, the effectiveness of Soviet peace policy and its impact on world events.

The positions of the USSR have entered into consideration of wide sections of the world's population, even in countries like Canada where the influence of the Communist Party is relatively weak.

"I SUPPORT ANYTHING WHICH LEADS TO ACTION."
-- Tim Buck.

There is no shortage of issues on which to act. The stock market has the jitters, farmers go bankrupt every day, medicare is cut, welfare is cut, wages are cut, housing is cut--yet the resources used in war could offset the deficits facing nations and provide the money needed to undertake the vast programmes needed by people. It would provide work for all.

STRENGTHEN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, MAKE IT MORE REPRESENTATIVE

There can be no tackling of the problems of the Party without taking into account the CC and its role.

While the term is not precisely accurate, describing the present central committee as a select club indicates the kind of problems that exist.

Ordinary workers, women and youth, are not well represented.

There are a number of trade unionists on the CC but most of them represent the trade union bureaucracy. On occasion, members of the CC who are also business agents in the unions struggle for policies which will preserve them in their posts, limiting class struggle.

By changing the composition of the CC to better represent the working people would help the CC to get rid of the varnish pot and bring down to earth the elevated discussions.

Over the years the CC has lost its dynamic character. Its meetings became boasting scenes when exaggeration concealed a reality which never measured up to what was being reported.

It is the task of the CC to stimulate activity and overcome the lag between life and the present standards of Party work. The CC has to be more representative of the Canadian people, and more closely in touch with them.

What everyone in the CC needs to keep in mind is that, while it is correct to say that the Party represents the truth, it is Marxist-Leninist science that is the truth, not necessarily the Communist Party. A particular Party line, or part of it, while bearing the name of Marxism, issued by a party calling itself Marxist, can be incorrect and even a violation of Marxism. Democratic centralism doesn't resolve such problems.

The task is to help people see the Party as their organization. It involves the Party leaders becoming immersed in mass work, of uniting words with deeds, of developing correct theories and programmes which, in essence, are nothing more than the concentrated expression of the real experiences of the masses.

MASTER THE ART OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The art of political leadership requires the ability to identify and effectively solve contradictions, not to gloss them over, not to allow them to accumulate, but to turn their solution into a source of strength and progress.

Criticism and self-criticism has to be an active factor to bring in new concepts, to knock down the doors of resistance.

It involves a careful examination of the Party's work which has to lead to positive results.

The Communist Party has a rich and inspiring history which embraces not only the period of the present leadership, but all of its history. No one can say that the Communist Party had an easy road or that the future will be easy. The Party has endured fierce and even violent attacks, has been engaged in many bitter struggles and has emerged stronger from many of them.

The title "Communist" has a special meaning. It describes an individual who has voluntarily accepted full responsibility for peace, for class struggle and for the promotion of reforms which improve the wellbeing of all Canadians.

Such a "Communist" cannot remain passive or silent when struggle around the solution of the major problems of war, scarcity, ecological disaster, racism, is reaching new heights.

Socialism, as a system, and the Communist Parties everywhere, are called upon to demonstrate that a system of international cooperation for the resolution of such problems is a vital necessity.

The new central committee, and the new general-secretary, will face the task of elaborating new policies and finding a way to mobilise all the resources of the Party to struggle for them; while, at the same time, finding a source of strength by rectifying and overcoming negative features in past activity.

The Party leadership faces the need to examine in depth a vast area of work, including the large expulsions and purges carried out under the leadership of W. Kashtan--and their consequences for the Party.

The incoming CC faces the task of making the Communist Party of Canada a truly all-Canadian party--a party of action.

-- The Committee of Canadian Communists
January, 1988.

This bulletin was printed and distributed entirely by voluntary labour.

We thank all those who expressed their approval (and sometimes disagreement) with our previous letter.

We also thank all those who sent financial contributions to assist us in this work. We received financial aid from some persons who, while not agreeing with us entirely, see the necessity for such a struggle at this time.

Please write us your opinions.

We dedicate the following pages as a tribute to Tim Buck and his contribution to the struggle for socialism in Canada. The formation of the Communist Party of Canada marked a turning point in the history of the Canadian working-class movement. Tim Buck's special contribution was to build a Communist Party capable of bringing together the great movements for peace, to put monopoly under control, for national equality and an end to racism, into one powerful stream for socialism. **The forthcoming convention should consider the naming of 24 Cecil Street as Tim Buck Centre, a name more appropriate for Communist Party headquarters.**