

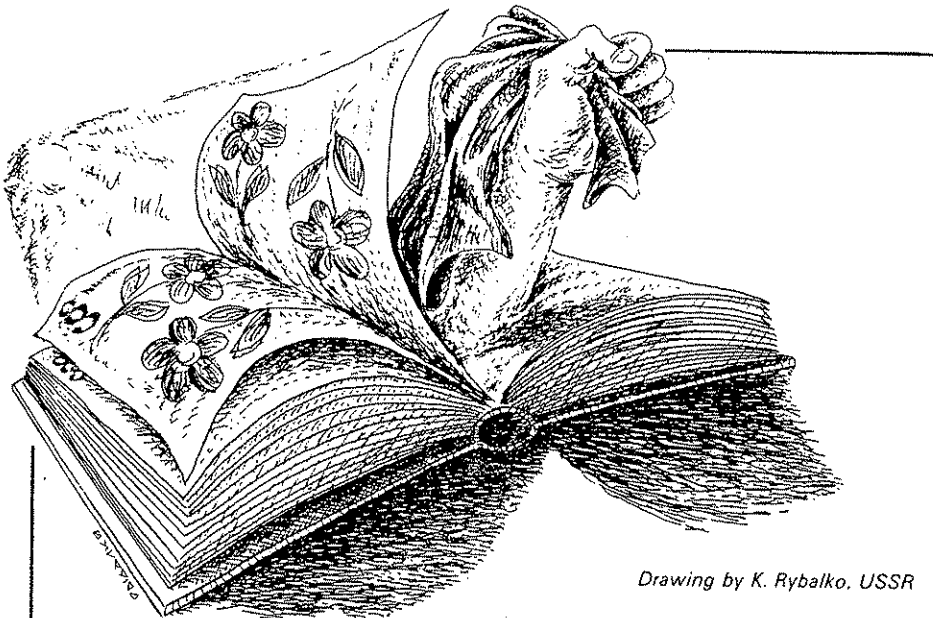
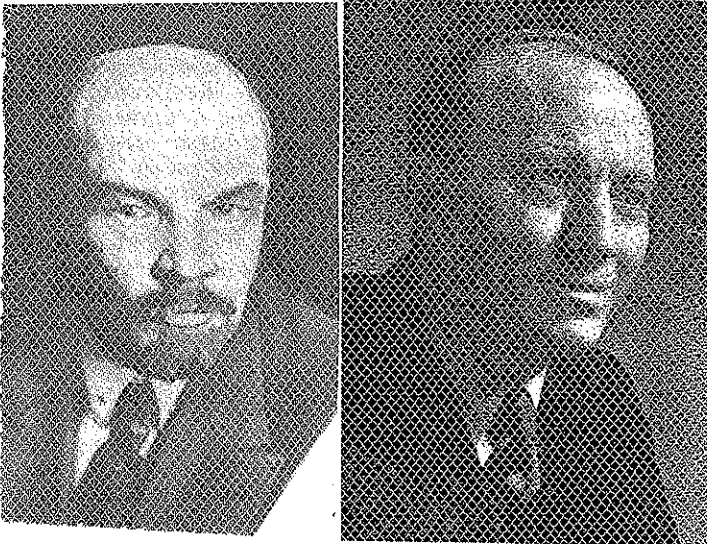
# FOCUS newsletter

Volume 9, Number 3

October, 1989

EXAMINING THE RECORD FROM A COMMUNIST POINT OF VIEW

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA  
ARISING FROM A READING OF  
CANADIAN COMMUNISM, The Stalin Years and Beyond, by Norman Penner



*Drawing by K. Rybalko, USSR*

**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PAST IS  
THE KEY TO THE PROBLEMS OF  
TODAY**

**FOCUS Newsletter** is published by the Committee of Canadian Communists.

Its publication is made possible by the generous support of its readers.

Please make cheques/money orders payable to:

New Times Books, 217-1808 Smith St., Regina, Sask., S4P 2N3

Read **The Daily World**, especially for its up-to-date analysis of contemporary events. Columnists deal with current events in the socialist world and relations between the two systems. \$20.00 U.S. funds -- send to Longview Publishing Company, 239 W 23 St., New York, 10011, U.S.A.



*This is how the Second World War started. Photos top—Hitlerites destroying the boundary posts on the Polish-German border; bottom—the nazi troops brought death and destruction to the Polish people.*



## What led to the Second World War

In his speech devoted to the 70th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution M. S. Gorbachev said that "in the West, the situation on the eve of the war is actively discussed, mixing the truth with half-truth. Particularly zealous are those who are discontented with the results of the Second World War—political, territorial and social, they are figuring out how to change the situation. This is why they are out to turn the historical truth around, to mix up the cause and effect relationships and to falsify dates. Thus they resort to any falsehood in putting the blame for World War II on the Soviet Union which supposedly paved the way to it with the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact."

The bourgeois propaganda is going out of its way to make the people believe that the signal for the invasion of Poland by the German armed forces on September 1, 1939, and thus for the beginning of the world-wide slaughter was the Soviet-German non-aggression treaty of August 23, 1939. But this is at odds with the facts of history. The Second World War was germinating in the womb of the capitalist system and was prepared by the entire development of the world situation.

When *Yours In The Struggle* was published, the CEC ordered party bookstores not to sell it; later amended to only order it on request. At one time party members were ordered not to read it; and naturally B.C.'s Jack Phillips publicly boasted the HE would NEVER read it.

In contrast, Norman Penner's *Canadian Communism* was on sale at this year's B.C. convention. Of course interested party members should read it because it contains information; and its criticisms of the Communist Party should be known, understood and discussed. But to have it on sale at a party convention without the party membership having access to the Communist Party's official position on it is unacceptable, particularly in view of the fact that many of the newer party members do not know party history.

#### A REFORMED COMMUNIST

N. Penner, himself, was a leading member of the party and led the National Federation of Labour Youth (there was no YCL then). He was considered to be a promising young cadre and sat on the party's leading bodies. He was an active and vocal participant in working out party policies. On occasion he quoted J. Stalin to substantiate an argument he was advancing. He took part in the mass campaigns of the party, some of which made a contribution to progressive advance in our country.

However, he writes as though he had been a bystander without personal responsibility for party policies. He avoids discussing his reasons for what he did when a member because it would reveal how he thought about things then; and how he has changed and why.

It is important because he has written a book which is his vindication for leaving the Communist Party.

N. Penner neither asks nor answers the logical question: how well did the programmes and proposals of the Communist Party meet the needs of the time? Did the Communist Party lead movements which benefitted the Canadian people; or was the

party and its efforts nothing but a chronicle of errors as one must assume from the book?

Moreover, to make a "critical study" of the Communist Party it is necessary to compare the proposals it made to meet people's problems with those made by the CCF-NDP. Such a comparison would help to decide whose political line, one allegedly dictated by the Communist International and J. Stalin, adequately met the needs of the CANADIAN people.

#### THE DISTORTION AND TRUTH OF STALIN'S ROLE

While it is correct that Stalin and what has become known as "Stalinism" did influence the Communist Party of Canada (more later), the picture of Stalin is incomplete until the Communist Party of the Soviet Union produces a definitive work on him and his place in history. The lack of such a history is a striking criticism of the CPSU since Stalin has now been dead for over 30 years.

Judging by some of the articles written by some Soviet intellectuals we hope that the job is not rushed. The propensity of some Soviet intellectuals to find no good, no achievements, during the Stalin years, and to blame everything bad that happened entirely on Stalin, their avid willingness to assume guilt even for being the cause of getting Hitler elected, the Second World War and the Cold war, should not be the basis for a history of the Stalin era. Of course the government of the USSR and the party made errors, but it is historical revisionism to suggest that they bear the main, even sole, responsibility for the cold war and the successes of Fascism as so many Soviet intellectuals eagerly do.

Such an approach means that the communists voluntarily and even avidly accept the guilt of causing the Second World War!

And if, as some Soviet intellectuals do, everything is to be spoken about in general and as a collective responsibility--such as honour and morals and policy--then the individual, no matter who, has neither responsibility nor character. The search

for the historical truth about these matters is going on and will give rise to some new works and new thinking.

Enough is known about Stalin and his theories for all communists to be aware of its negative effects and criminal content. The phenomenon of Stalin and "Stalinism", its roots, expression, accomplishments, goals and why party members accepted for so long needs to be understood by all revolutionaries. It is not solely a Soviet problem.

On our part, we believe the world has known many Stalins and will know others in the future. In a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann in 1871, Karl Marx wrote "...accelerations and delay are VERY MUCH dependent upon such 'accidents', including the accident of the character of the people who first head the movement." (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 421, 1973).

Many of us can be numbered among those who did not believe it was possible for the communist movement to produce a Stalin who would commit bizarre and monstrous crimes in the name of building socialism and who would, at the same time, make some outstanding contributions to history.

Despite the blemishes, the real accomplishment of the Soviet people is that they have built a new society--more moral than capitalism--which is in process of emerging at a higher level and, despite the deformations, there is in place in the USSR the broad edifice of the future depicted by Marx, Engels and Lenin. Overcoming errors and rebuilding are its constant life processes and reveal the strength of socialism. The foundations for further progress are being laid by the Soviet people.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is busy rectifying the problem which is vividly expressed in these few words "We have failed to build a society which could be a model to emulate in the course of the struggle for socialism in the world.

"We communists live and work with the conviction that 'history is moving towards communism, that is, towards a society based on justice, equality, and liberty, in which humanitarianism and wider democracy hold sway'".

N. Penner's treatment of the subject turns on the person of J. Stalin, thereby turning him into a myth (as no few Soviet intellectuals do) making him, rather than the Soviet people, the prime mover in their history. It provides a convenient political excuse for all party leaders to blame Stalin instead of frankly discussing **THEIR shortcomings**.

Since N. Penner's book is read by Canadians, most of whom get their information about the communists and communism from the capitalist media, it is necessary to compare J. Stalin with other world leaders. The leaders which capitalism produces are "overlooked" when communists are discussed. And many western pundits isolate incidents and events in the USSR, blow them up as examples of communist perfidy and as "proof" that the communist system doesn't work. They also assert that only the communist system could produce a Stalin.

Compare J. Stalin, let us say, with a Harry Truman who, without a twinge of conscience, dropped the first atomic bombs in what has been termed "the greatest single act of destruction in history"; opening the period of atomic blackmail and cold war which robbed generations of the kind of life that human beings have a right to expect--or to a Ronald Reagan who, at one time in his presidency, was prepared as a self-chosen messenger of God to bring about an apocalypse in the name of biblical Armageddon.

To be historically accurate any assessment has to take into account the times, the kinds of problems, how well this or that leader performed, what was achieved not only by a particular leader but also in comparison with other leaders, and what was achievable given the specific circumstances of the times under examination. People, goals, needs, levels of understanding, the level of political understanding and activity of the masses, are all factors which cannot be overlooked.

Moreover, the Soviet people created a modern industrial state and defeated fascism--one of the great feats of the working-class in this century--all when Stalin was the leader of the Soviet state.

Of course communists first of all have to

criticise their shortcomings and errors; and the question remains to be answered: how does spiritual decay and hypocrisy invade the party when its constitution says that its membership should be concerned about the moral climate prevailing in the party?

#### **THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA IS AND ALWAYS WAS A CANADIAN PARTY**

By depicting the Communist Party of Canada as being "foreign" N. Penner conforms to the traditionally distorted image that anti-communism seeks to portray it.

Such a scenario leaves out the party's connections with the working-class, its growth (both quantitative and qualitative) through its participation in struggle, and the proof that grows out of practice that "Marxism is invincible because it is true."

If it does anything, N. Penner's book nudges the party leadership in the self-critical direction in which it ought to have been moving. The past can be studied on the basis of reality, on actual experience; and such a study must set itself the task of eliciting the truth.

#### **BUCK VERSUS PENNER ON HISTORY**

N. Penner deplors the fact that the party's official history doesn't mention J. Stalin until page 193. It is a fact that communist parties have problems dealing with J. Stalin, but the truth of the matter is that the rise, founding and development of the Communist Party of Canada cannot be described as a Stalinist phenomenon. The founding of the Communist Party cannot be separated from Canadian people in struggle.

The history of the Communist Party of Canada is also the history of the Canadian working-class, of its historical development as modern capitalism developed and transformed Canada into an imperialist country.

Canadian workers and farmers attempted to accomplish things, sometimes influenced by the party, without giving a thought to what Stalin's positions were. Of course they suffered from serious theoretical shortcomings, but they were not pie-in-the-sky types either. Party members and supporters

faced up to difficult tasks and carried them off, often very well--something that the isolated world of academia often misses.

When the people's movements are not taken into account, all socio-economic processes are reduced to a game of manoeuvre between a few "clever" operators without giving thought to the fact that if politics is given those kinds of limitations one can always be outwitted and defeated by other "clever" individuals, since no one has a monopoly on cleverness. Mass movements and mass struggle are quite another matter.

As Engels wrote, what has to be examined is not only the class base but also the various elements of the superstructure, the political forms the class struggle took and its results, the constitutional forms adopted by the ruling class, juridical forms and the reflection of all these struggles in the brains of the participants.

N. Penner is correct in saying that the theory of socialism was imported into Canada by early immigrants, although Marx's Capital was being published in Chicago as early as 1906. However, it wasn't "popular" literature.

Many of the Slavic immigrants had been participants in the failed 1905 revolution in Tsarist Russia and their presence in Canada was augmented by new immigrants, some of whom had been active participants in the 1917 revolution.

Many of the British and German immigrants, some of whom were socialists, had been occupied with struggling for unions and economic improvements for the working-class in the countries of their origin and were more intensely involved in that field in Canada.

Tim Buck correctly emphasizes another factor of being of primary importance. In 1969, the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party set up a historical commission headed by Tim Buck. Its members were W.C. Beeching, A. Dewhurst, A. Kenny, W. Sydney and J. Weir.

Buck drafted an outline for the history and drafted the first two chapters. The work didn't go beyond that before it was

stopped as a result of Buck's sickness.

In his draft Tim Buck made the following basic point: "The Communist Party arose within the Canadian working-class movement as the logical and historically necessary result of the development of that movement to a stage at which the majority of the revolutionary activists recognized that then existing socialist and other revolutionary organizations were not adequate for the historical task of playing a leading role in the socialist transformation of society, and could even be considered as obstacles.

"The significance of the formation of the Communist Party of Canada" wrote Buck, "was a rejection of the theory which tries to make it appear that political action will be limited to reformism."

Buck went on to say that, in some instances the role of the Communist Party in struggle was of decisive importance and in others it was a contribution to the struggle. At the time the Communist Party was organized Canada's population amounted to 3.5 million people, with small industries dependent on local markets mostly located in the East. Immigrants from the British Isles were active in establishing trade unions and, in several places in Ontario, they played leading roles. But, Buck said, they did not initiate trade unions, nor did they introduce the idea of trade unions into Canada. The real source of trade union organization, he wrote, is capitalist exploitation and the conditions it engenders.

The large-scale settlement of the West and the railway building spree in the early 1890s brought changes in Canada's economy engendering a rapid diversification of industry and growth of the economy. Both British and U.S. manufacturers established branch plants or subsidiary companies in Canada to best the tariff system.

Buck's draft points out that a feature of trade unionism in Canada was that the internationals crossed the border, although they were mainly craft unions which organized only skilled craftsmen.

Buck pointed out that when historians say that Marxism in Canada dates back to the 1870s they are referring to the fact that two members of the Communist Party in 1921,

Dick Kerrigan of Montreal and Fred Hazelgrave of London, Ontario, had been members of local Marxist groups which corresponded with the First International after its headquarters were moved to the United States. Socialist and Anarchist workers in Canada supported the Haymarket martyrs and the first labour paper to become an institution in Canada, The Ontario Workman, associated itself with Marx.

At the time of the outbreak of the first world war there were 175,000 unionists in Canada. Many were attracted to syndicalism and the theory of the revolutionary general strike, such as the I.W.W.

Then, Buck continued, "The Great October Revolution stirred Canadian radicals, indeed the majority of Canadians, as they had never been stirred before". Buck's purpose was to show by actual events the naturalness of the development of socialist thought and activity in Canada, its "Canadianness."

N. Penner makes a special point that no one (of those alive and interviewed) remembers T. Buck as having been present at the founding convention held in Guelph. In this he reveals a petty bias which is an outcome of the sharp struggles which took place in the party in the late fifties of which he was a part and an opponent of Buck's.

However, the Guelph convention elected Tim Buck as the party's national organizer, so obviously he was with the movement at that time. Buck, himself, states that he was at Guelph.

T. Buck writes about the founding of the Communist Party in Guelph in these words,

"Changes in Canada's economy and in the organized labour movement had brought changes in the political organizations and activities of the working class. The socialist leagues with their general, all-too-general support for the idea of socialism, had been replaced by the Socialist Party of Canada, the Socialist Labour Party (of America) and the Social-Democratic Federation which renamed itself the Social-Democratic Party of Canada.

"All three were avowedly Marxist parties. It is easy now to see that their members'



understanding of Marxism was very limited, but they represented a big stride forward in the political level of the class conscious members of the Canadian working class...

"...In addition to the three Socialist parties which operated on a Canada-wide scale there had arisen a number of local and regional parties. Some called themselves socialist, most called themselves Labour Parties, all of them were patterned upon the Independent Labour Party movement in Great Britain..."

As if he had anticipated N. Penner's **Canadian Communism** T. Buck wrote in his draft Chapter II,

"The first attempt to establish a communist party in Canada was in February, 1919. Because of the repressive legislation noted in Chapter One...a Communist Party would have been illegal and, necessarily underground...The conference was raided by the police and the members of the Conference Committee were arrested. They were Mrs. Florence Custance, Tom Bell, Mr & Mrs. Ewart and John Boychuk..'

"The unity convention which founded the Communist Party of Canada, was held during the weekend of June 1st, 1921. It was held in the barn of a very small farm which at that time was on the outskirts of the City of Guelph, Ontario. The occupants of the farm and host to the convention was Fred Farley, a municipal employee, a member of the Guelph unit of the United Communist Party of America.

"Eighteen delegates participated in the conference...The joint committee of the two parties in the United States sent an official representative who, also, was accredited as the representative of the American Commission of the Third (Communist) International.

"The convention decided by unanimous vote to unite the two Canadian sections in one independent party, to be named the Communist Party of Canada. It adopted a programme and a draft constitution and decided, also by unanimous vote, to apply for affiliation to the Third (Communist) Inter-

national...It elected a central committee of twelve members and elected four national officers..."

Buck names the national officers and the positions to which each one was elected as follows: J. McDonald, Chairman; T. Burpee, secretary; M. Spector, editor; and Tim Buck, organizer.

### STALIN INVENTS THE TRUTH!

In 1929, eight years later, the struggle over American Exceptionalism came to a head. N. Penner asserts (page 14) that Stalin "invented a term called 'American Exceptionalism' " as a means of distinguishing between those who followed the line of the Communist International and those who believed that in the "United States the general laws of capitalism operated differently or not at all..."; and that Buck seized upon it in order to capture the leadership from John MacDonald.

The term American Exceptionalism was used to describe a very real and widely-held theory that the American economy was immune to economic depression. The stock market crash in October, 1929, ended the debate as to whether or not the theory was correct. If, indeed, J. Stalin was responsible for coining the phrase it is one of the things he did correctly firstly because the American economy is not immune to crisis and, secondly, because the conclusion can be drawn that, if the theory is correct then capitalism has found a way to solve its problems and there is no need for a communist party.

Therefore one would think that the theory of American Exceptionalism (or variations) is not one that social democratic theoreticians would be inclined to reject out of hand. The idea that capitalism has found a way to resolve its problems and that no major dislocations of the economy can occur in it, fits into the idea that reforms which modify the worst excesses of the system are all that are required. It is this difference in approach to reforms that brings into focus the key differences between the communists and the social democrats.

### PENNER ON TROTSKYISM

N. Penner doesn't bring clarity to the question of Trotsky and his theories. There was a Leon Trotsky who made a contribution to the struggle for socialism in Russia and who should be recognized for having done so. There is also a set of theories which, in the main, contended with the theories put forward by Lenin who, when he was alive and active, was Trotsky's chief ideological opponent on strategy, tactics and theory. In his day Trotsky's theories represented one of the several different trends of thought in the revolutionary movement.

Sometimes Trotsky's positions were supported by the central committee of the CPSU. However, what is chiefly involved is the way Stalin dealt with Trotsky which is part of the picture of the way a Communist Party ought not to deal with differences over theory and policy. It represents the crude distortions of democratic centralism which has persisted up to our time in one form or another. In Canada, it gave the Central Executive Committee a monopoly on debate and decision-making.

Today the CPSU is reassessing Trotsky and his role. However, such a reassessment is not an endorsement of the correctness of all of Trotsky's theories but is a recognition of his positive contributions to the revolutionary struggle.

#### HOW SHOULD HISTORY BE APPROACHED?

Was the influence of J. Stalin on the Communist Party of Canada as N. Penner depicts it? An answer must involve a careful study of the policies and propositions advanced by the Communist Party over the many decades of its existence, a rather formidable but necessary task.

A history of the Communist Party should establish not only the party's position on struggle but also what the working-class and its role as the leading force of social progress is, how the party dealt with anti-scientific conceptions and the falsifiers of the true history of the working people; the influence of October, 1917, the growing contradictions of contemporary capitalism, the ideological manoeuvres and tactics adopted by the bourgeoisie and the struggle for the integrity of revolutionary theory;

the present situation of the working-class and all others. Without such a basis it is impossible for N. Penner, or for the Communist Party itself, to depict the historical role of the Communist Party and its outstanding leaders.

In the thirties, the Communist Party opposed fascism and appeasement, ran in elections, fought for jobs and homes and development, and helped to build the trade union movement.

In the immediate post-world war II period, the party campaigned for the needs of the people against the sell-out of Canada's interests to U.S. monopoly, worked to bring into existence a peace movement and to make its campaigns successful. The names of hundreds of devoted communists are identified with the early ban-the-bomb campaigns. The needs of youth received the party's attention. None of these campaigns were "foreign" to Canadians.

No doubt some of the policies adopted by the party were influenced by the Cominform, and the perspective of building socialism in Canada had some such colouration. That, also, is a matter for party historians and theoreticians.

#### HOW WAS STALINISM REFLECTED IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY?

Stalinism was expressed in its theories, perspectives, in its organization and in its style of leadership.

Democratic centralism which was turned into bureaucratic centralism forbade inner-party provincial contacts. Secretaries responsible for the various fields of work guarded those fields against any intrusion as fiercely as feudal empires were guarded in the past.

Any criticism of W. Kashtan or of the CEC was viewed as an attack on the Communist Party; and, very often, whoever made the criticism was labelled as an enemy of the party. A case in point is that Nelson Clarke said that when he sat on the CEC he always had to preface the introduction of his proposals in such a way as to reassure W. Kashtan that he wasn't being challenged for leadership. D. Currie, when central organizer experienced the identical problem



Whenever a criticism was made of the leadership, the leadership demanded that the criticism be unconditionally withdrawn without a discussion of its contents and, if that wasn't done, those who made the criticism were punished.

More sinister was that promising cadres were promoted and brought to Toronto for the purpose of either integrating them in the Kashtan machine or of destroying them politically. Tim Buck told W. Beeching that he had phoned Nigel Morgan when the proposal was made for Morgan to fill a leading position in Toronto to advise him not to make the move because he would put himself in that kind of no-win situation.

Talented intellectuals experienced real problems. They were treated with contempt, intolerance and spite. Charles and Karen McFadden who gave up promising academic careers to work full-time in the party have remarked that, as badly as intellectuals are sometimes treated by those in authority, they have never experienced any treatment which compares with what they received at the hands of the party leadership.

Minutes and records of what leading comrades said at CEC and CC meetings were changed after the meeting so that they did not conform to what had actually been said at the meeting. Only Top Cadres became the authority of what went on at meetings and any members of a leading committee who wrote his/her own notes of the meeting was warned that in so doing he/she was suspected of having ulterior motives, or of even being an agent!

When a contentious question was to come up at a CC meeting, a group of W. Kashtan's trusted lieutenants were briefed so they could take the lead to either attack someone or something, or to fight for or against some particular proposal.

In 1977, when the CC was dealing with Phyllis Clarke and W. Beeching for their part in publishing **Yours In the Struggle**, no few members of the CC had been prepared to take the floor with the "official" line. B.C.'s famous Jack Phillips quickly proposed that Clarke and Beeching only be given five minutes (!) in which to speak to the subject. He, and those others who had been lined up, already had found them

7 guilty

and any further discussion was, therefore, redundant. Not a single member of the CC, other than W. Beeching, challenged the five-minute ruling, including W.C. Ross who was the chairman. Beeching appealed to the CC to reject the five-minute decision, but it stood. The ruling, however, was ignored by Beeching and Clarke.

For years 24 Cecil Street carried on a whispering campaign against Tim Buck as part of its efforts to undermine his political positions. They claimed that, at one time, he had played a good role but now he was finished as an effective political leader, that he could no longer contribute to the struggle, that he couldn't speak to young people and, as a result, had become an impediment to the party; and the most bizarre of all was the concoction that he MIGHT have been a police agent.

#### SOCIAL DEMOCRACY -- INNOCENT AND PERFECT

We do not know what goes on at NDP meetings. But N. Pender implies that social democracy is a political movement without fault, a victim of the communists, sinned against but, itself, without sin. His rule-of-thumb is: the communists are always wrong; the social democrats are always right. Unfortunately, it is in these kinds of absolutes that Penner deals throughout his book.

Much of his criticism of the Communist Party's sectarian approaches to social democracy is correct; and those positions did harm.

But it ought not to be concluded that the leaders of social democracy were eagerly in favour of united actions and were merely turned off and repelled by communist slander.

That is historical revisionism. Of course, the negative attitude towards communists was not improved by name-calling and labelling. But basic differences in theory and ideology existed; and there is no historical justification to claim that the social democrats would have joined a united front excepting for communist errors. But, of course, name-calling does nothing to make such a proposal succeed.

The differences between the communists and the social democrats date back to the

latter 1800s before the time of J. Stalin. Opportunism emerged in the socialist movement at the end of the last century in the form of the positions of E. Bernstein. Rosa Luxemburg criticised his views in her **Social Reform or Revolution?** In pre-World War One years Karl Kautsky openly opposed mass struggle and based his position entirely on parliamentary methods of struggle, arguing that war would relegate class contradictions to the background.

Despite the growing need for unity on many questions, opportunism resisted it, turned its back on it, rejected it--and the divisions between the Right and the Left in the socialist movement finally led to a split.

#### **BROWDERISM--THE NON-CLASS APPROACH**

Obviously there was a serious problem of unity in the post-World War Two period, especially at the height of the Cold War.

In the immediate post-war period what became known as Browderism, a theory which basically advocated class peace, did have an influence on the party in Canada. But the Canadian party didn't face proposals for self-dissolution as was the case with the party in the United States; it saw itself as a necessary part of the post-war political scene.

The influence of the U.S. party crossed the border into Canada and a significant number of party members and leaders embraced the ideas of Browderism. But also many rank-and-file activists rejected Browderism and openly challenged party leaders. Such a struggle, emanating from the rank-and-file helped the leadership to overcome wrong tendencies--something that all party leaders are reluctant to admit, but which often happens.

The illusions which grew up during the war as a result of the wartime collaboration between the allies and the defeat of fascism were rather quickly dispelled after the war was over. History provided convincing proof that Browder's idea that the Communist Party as a revolutionary party was no longer needed, and that Marxists would assume the role of wise advisers and guides to the other political parties and movements, was a fiction.

#### **MORE COMMUNIST SINS**

On page 198, N. Penner asserts that the Communist Party ran 100 candidates as part of its post-war Liberal-Labour coalition proposal and as a means of by-passing the CCF. The question presents far too large a topic to be dealt with adequately in this issue of **Focus**; but N. Penner's position conforms to the traditional position taken by the social democrats.

In essence, it challenges the legitimacy of Marxism, of the Communist Party and its right to run candidates. The communists are even charged by the social democrats with accepting bribes from the old line parties in order to take the vote away from them. Being called a class traitor is hardly prettier than being called a social fascist when you come to think about it.

The proposal made by the party at the end of the war for a Liberal-Labour coalition still needs analysis by party historians. It was a proposal predicated on the idea that no one political party had sufficient electoral support to command a parliamentary majority and, under the circumstances, that it was a way to continue the wartime alliance in domestic politics in order to win some reforms for Canadians, i.e., to make sure that the lavish and generous wartime promises didn't vanish into empty air.

The CCF attacked the proposal as a betrayal and charged that the Communist Party had sold out the interests of the working people which only it, the CCF, represented; and that the CCF would not cooperate with the Liberals in order to achieve its goals.

The past 44 years has provided many examples of the CCF-NDP cooperation with both the Liberals and Tories to win reforms. In fact, sometimes the CCF-NDP parliamentarians have acted as though they were partners in government.

#### **THE NEW CHALLENGES OF TODAY**

However, the question isn't who committed the most horrendous blunders. The question is: can the communists and social democrats efficiently cope with the problems of the day, and can they rise above the blunders both movements have made

in the past to pool their efforts in order to accomplish the things needed in this unique world situation?

History indicates that the capitalist class also has learned lessons and developed policies in the post-war years better to preserve their system and advance its interests; but not policies which were able to end the class struggle or which resolved the shortcomings of capitalism as a system.

In the forties and fifties the NDP parliamentary wing passionately embraced aspects of the Cold War and supported the formation of NATO, the containment of communism as well as America's atomic diplomacy. There were notable exceptions including T.C. Douglas. Its leadership was not an early participant in the mass peace movements of the day. And, as the repressive and undemocratic atmosphere of the Cold War blighted peoples' lives, the NDP parliamentary wing bitterly rejected communist electoral support for the CCF-NDP calling it "the kiss of death".

#### **HOW LEGITIMATE IS N. PENNER'S CRITICISM OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WAR TIME RECORD?**

In 1939 the world scene was much more complicated than N. Penner would have us think. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet-German friendship pact and the beginning of the second world war. There is still controversy about the pact.

On page 23 N. Penner states that the pact was justified but criticises the communist parties for opposing the war their government's had declared against fascism which, he claims, is another example of the Communist Party of Canada slavishly following the Stalin line.

In doing this N. Penner dodges a whole period of history.

No doubt the Communist Party followed the line of the Communist International. But what has to be taken into account is how earnestly and quickly western government changed their policy orientations, as well as the deep mistrust that most progressive people held the Chamberlain government. The Munich Pact provided a sound basis for this mistrust. Appeasement followed by the

King government in the form of neutrality and non-involvement in European affairs had resulted in the betrayal of Canada's interests. Underlying it all was the desire on the part of the west to have socialism destroyed. Western governments saw a victory for their goals if fascism would do the job for them.

Communists had to face the fact that during the German-Polish war, September 1, 1939, both Britain and France remained militarily inactive, which could and was read as an assurance to the fascists that they would not become involved on two fronts. In October, 1939, the British cabinet decided to wait it out; they clearly had not abandoned their dreams of turning the ongoing war away from a confrontation between the capitalist powers to a joint military campaign against the Soviet Union.

In 1939, the Soviet government had limited alternatives. From 1917 to 1939, there never was a time when the Soviet Union could channel all of its resources to peaceful development. Hitler wasn't the first problem nor the first source of the danger of aggression faced by the Soviet state.

The war crimes trials at Nuremburg reveal much of the plans of the Nazi hierarchy to go to war. Discussing the pact, on August 11, 1939, Hitler stated to the High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Danzig,

"Everything I am doing is against Russia. If the west is either blind or stupid not to understand this, I will have to make a deal with the Russians. Then I will attack the west and, after it is defeated, I'll pool our resources and I'll attack Russia."

The Soviet government understood this and was aware of what it had to do. From time-to-time there seemed to emerge promising possibilities, such as the earlier pacts with France and Czechoslovakia when collective security seemed to have become a possibility. As time went by, Soviet spokesmen presented their proposals with a tone of urgency. Both the British and French governments were not serious in dealing with the Soviet Union. The hostility of the Chamberlain government made finding solutions well-nigh impossible.

The concern of Stalin about the lack of commitment on the part of Britain and France to defeat Hitler was well justified.

The League of Nations expelled the USSR from membership in that body on December 14, 1939, under pressure from Britain and France; and on December 16th the League called on member states to extend maximum assistance to Finland which was at war with the USSR. The USA imposed a "moral" embargo on trade with the USSR and also rendered aid to Finland.

The Anglo-French position was hostile to the Soviet Union and on February 5, 1940 an Anglo-French Supreme Allied council passed a decision to send 100,000 effectives to Finland, that is, Britain and France began to become militarily active not against fascist Germany but against the USSR.

Canadian communists harboured doubts as to the real aims of the King government. However, wrong theories did emerge in the party during that period, including the idea that Canada was still a British colony and should wait out the war until Great Britain had been defeated and then join in the struggle against fascism! It brought Buck and Carr back to Canada.

For these reasons Tim Buck refers to the first years of the war as being the most confused period in the history of the party that he could remember; and the reluctance of western governments to abandon the policy of appeasement and turn the war to a real war against fascism were the main source of the difficulties.

And, of course, the Munich Pact, dreamed up in England by conservative political and economic groups rejected collective security. It was a deliberate effort to achieve a division of influence in world events with Germany and it won goals at the expense of entire nations.

At Yalta Stalin told Churchill that if there had been no Munich Pact there would have been no Soviet-German pact.

#### THE PHONY WAR PERIOD

The period immediately after September 1, 1939, was called the phony war, i.e., a

policy of military inaction designed to achieve the goal of impelling Germany into a war against the USSR.

Lawrence A. Steinhardt, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, described the phony war in these words,

"The fundamental error of allied, and subsequently British, diplomacy in respect of the Soviet Union has been that it has at all times been directed towards attempting to persuade the Soviet Union to undertake positive action which if not leading immediately to an armed conflict with Germany would at least involve the real risk of such a contingency."

Steinhardt expressed his opinion that the Soviet Union was unlikely to do it.

#### THE HISTORICAL REVISIONISTS PROVIDE NO ANSWERS

We reject the idea that the Soviet government's foreign policy proposals were and are inevitably correct; but it is clear that the Soviet government faced the constant danger of a united front of western powers directed against it. Nor was there time to contemplate for long the selection of ideal alternatives. Events moved pretty rapidly in 1939.

The fact that the Soviet government placed no more trust in the British and French governments than it did in the German created some internal conflicts in the Canadian party. Some party members, particularly those of British descent, disagreed and some left the party.

Ultimately the dream of a holy alliance against the USSR led by Germany was replaced with an anti-fascist coalition, which had been the goal of Soviet foreign policy and communists around the world.

The historical revisionists are only too prone to rewrite history to make the facts conform with the way they are inclined; and who have no personal doubts that they would have performed much better than did the actual participants of 50 years ago, in their day, didn't have the benefit of five decades of subsequent history on which to draw.

The question must be asked about that period: did the Soviet government have the moral right to risk becoming the first and main victim of fascist aggression in a war in which it would have no allies? It is correct to say that Stalin, on his part, ardently believed that the Soviet-German Pact could save the USSR from an early attack.

In discussing this question in his book **The Second Oldest Profession**, Phillip Knightley writes,

"Whatever else he was, Stalin was no fool and his conclusions, which in retrospect look so pathetic, were nevertheless logical ones. Militarily, he did not believe that Hitler would be so foolish as to embark on a war on two fronts. Why then was Germany massing troops on her eastern border? Because, Stalin argued, Hitler was determined to squeeze every ounce of profit from the Soviet Union and his military build-up was intended to give him the clout that would allow him to make economic demands which would probably go beyond earlier agreements...Hess's flight to Britain on 15 May, coming at such a crucial time, bolstered Stalin's analysis: the British were up to something with the Germans..."

The prevailing mood among progressives also was conditioned by the fact the fact that the governments of most western capitalist democracies for years had consistently followed the path of appeasement.

Chamberlain resigned in June, 1940, to be replaced by Winston Churchill, an event which marked a turn in the British government's approach to fascist Germany. Churchill early had perceived a threat to British interests in a strong and rearmed Germany.

Such were some of the aspects of a complex, contradictory, confused period in which old and reactionary policies were not easily discarded nor quickly replaced by historically progressive and necessary ones; and these were factors which contributed to make working out a correct policy a difficult task.

**THE BANNER OF THE NATION  
N. PENNER PROCLAIMS THE COMMUNIST PARTY  
REDUNDANT**

On page 33, N. Penner refers to a speech made by J. Stalin in October, 1952, in which he quotes Stalin as saying "that the liberal bourgeoisie which once championed democratic freedoms and national independence, had forsaken these values and it was now up to the Communist and democratic parties...to lift up those banners if you wish to gather the majority of the people around you."

Scoffingly, N. Penner concludes, "The parties to whom this advise was directed followed it but did not reap the rewards suggested." He concludes that the decline of the western communist parties came about because most of them were subordinate to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as well as the contributing factor "the aims that Stalin laid out-to lift up the banner of liberal values-have in fact made the party redundant."

Politics are not as simple as N. Penner would have us believe; and one doubts that he, himself, believes in such a simplistic approach.

In the post-war years the communists were attempting to grapple with the changes taking place in the world and emerging new phenomena. Stalin put into words what the Communist Party of Canada and other communist parties were actively discussing on their own.

In his book **Canada, thme Communist Viewpoint (1948)** published four years prior to Stalin's statement, Tim Buck had said,

"In Canada, as in all capitalist countries, monopoly capitalism is forcing the labour movement more and more sharply up against the question: 'what is to be the political content and aim of Canada's national policies?' Shall they be based on the interests and hopes of th e great mass of the people, or shall they reflect mainly the parasitical in terests of finance capital?"

"...The monopolies are literally selling Canada to the United States...Having secured control of our country's vast resources...the avid 'geniuses of finance' in Canada are seeking now to use that control as the price of partnership for themselves in one or another of the great

American monopolies. They are peddling Canada's independence for U.S. dollars.

"Whether the monopolies will succeed depends on the labour movement.

"They will be defeated if the working-class and its allies among the masses of democratic Canadians organize wide and active popular support for policies aimed at democratic national development-with far-reaching integrated social reform at home, replacement of the Abbott Plan by a trade policy based upon the new emergent economic developments in the countries of the Commonwealth and New Democracies, and the proclaimed aim of Canadian co-operation with all nations of the socialist as well as the capitalist sector of the world..."

It cannot be claimed that Tim Buck saw the full picture at that time. But he saw the necessity for the Canadian working people to struggle against the inequalities and further oppression that would be their lot under economic integration with the United States.

We wonder who it is who can argue against an active labour movement demanding a greater share of the wealth the workers produce versus a trade union movement voluntarily making concession after concession on the basis of illusions that pay cuts mean jobs, along with an acceptance of monopoly's argument that "we" are all in this "together."

Elsewhere in his **Canada The Communist Viewpoint**, in contrasting the role of Mackenzie King with that of his grandfather, Tim Buck said it "reflects the passing of a whole historical stage of class struggle in Canada. The workers who condemn Mackenzie King's post war policy of deliberately distorting Canada's economic development so as to make our economy complementary to and dependent upon United States industry illustrates the fact that the working class is beginning to replace the capitalist class as the champion of the real interests of the nation..."

#### **FREE TRADE, A MISNOMER**

The Mulroney government's free trade deal confronts the labour movement with the nec-

essity of coming forward with alternative proposals. The establishment of common markets is a fact of modern life.

The tactic to oppose free trade was correct because the deal places Canada at a disadvantage. The labour movement has to produce a succinct analysis of what the situation is now, what it will lead to, and what to do about it.

The capitalists aren't going to give up their profits and privileges, a fact which calls for mass movements and political struggle to force them to make changes and concessions.

#### **THE REAL CAUSE OF THE DECLINE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY**

Communists aren't the driving force in what's taking place today. N. Penner knows full well that the decline in the influence of the communist parties in some western capitalist countries can be accurately, although not entirely, explained by the vicious and unprecedented, almost violent, cold war conducted against them on a scale hitherto unknown, spearheaded by a monopolised media which plays a new and qualitatively different role in shaping public opinion.

Moreover, the capitalists were able to provide relatively full employment and jobs, a rising standard of living, and to successfully sell the idea of "people's capitalism" among a receptive working-class, to denude agriculture of its population, to spread the illusion that anyone who wants to can become a successful small businessman, to use scabs and to sell the cold war and pay cuts.

The bourgeoisie was able to sell the working people the idea that an arms race means more jobs and that socialism was the source of the war danger.

The image of socialism presented to the world by the socialist countries was not attractive in the west.

The Communist parties, themselves, made mistakes, overestimated possibilities and internally faced a steady encroachment of opportunism and illusions which, in some



instances led to splits. It was at the heart of the Buck-Kashtan differences.

### THE NEW MASS MOVEMENTS

An important phenomenon today is that there are mass movements some of which have caught the NDP and the Communist Party flat-footed. The emergence of these mass movements comes about because of growing problems and dissatisfaction among the masses. If N. Penner understood the interconnectedness and continuity of history he would understand that the mass movements continue the early work of progressives and far-sighted individuals, including the communists.

There is some confusion as to how they will win their goals in these inspiring mass movements. Some forces in them are single-issue oriented to the exclusion of everything and everyone else. Sometimes there are strong elements of faddism and often they limit themselves to crusading. Sometimes they have the appearance of being a giant lobby demanding peace, a clean up of pollution and an easement of the problems of living.

Their demands are reflected in what political parties do and say. They are all an expression of a learning process going on among people and the accumulation of problems in society which give rise to militant and spontaneous protest actions which, despite some limitations, are changing politics.

Unity today (not around socialism) is an important question because of the growing need for far-reaching reforms and alternative programmes.

If history has taught us anything during the past 45 years it is that the reforms brought in by the CCF-NDP, and liberal governments, are reversible. They are either being taken away or are seriously modified by right wing governments.

The tide of Toryism which swept the western countries in the 1980s via its policy of privatisation and other methods have succeeded in worsening trade union laws and have given rise to the need for some completely new labour laws.

Homelessness, violence, drug addiction

and gangsterism have become a serious problem. The growth of the lumpen strata has become a mass phenomenon, a nightmare in western capitalist society. At the same time, reaction has been unable to take away all the real achievements of the people.

The lack of sensitivity for the worsening problems of the people shown by some of the political spokesmen for the NDP was apparent in the last election.

The differences between the social democrats and the communists, particularly ideological ones, will continue for a long time; but it is in the supreme interests of the cause of peace and progress to be able to discuss differences while finding ways to work together to resolve the burning problems of the day.

Joint activity between the New Democratic Party and the Communist Party cannot be achieved by demanding that the Communist Party makes all the concessions and makes way for the NDP to be the sole voice on the left. It isn't going to happen that way.

### PENNER'S DEATH WISH FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY

N. Penner concludes his **Canadian Communism** with a paragraph on page 283 which states "The Communist Party is still very dependent on ethnic groups for its members and financial contributors" and he reasons that the children of immigrants are breaking with the traditions of their parents. "That" asserts N. Penner "is without a doubt the Achilles' heel of the Canadian Communists."

Although there is some truth in the statement he makes, it is quite impossible to dismiss communism's historical role on such a premise.

The Communist Party and the NDP as well, cannot hope to be successful unless they put forward a programme which meets the demands of the times, policies leading to peace and international cooperation in the interests of the Canadian people.

If Canadians are to support such programmes; the problems which loom large in a small party still losing members and support can be overcome.

## AN EPILOGUE TOUCHING UPON ABSOLUTES

In conclusion, N. Penner's epilogue has certain peculiarities. It appears as though, after reading through his text, he had some doubts about its absolutes.

There is a lack of professional objectivity in N. Penner's conclusions, as there are with the main theme(s) in the book. His statements have elevated an error made in the 1920s by the communist movement, an error made within the framework of a general policy which opposed war and fascism, to be the main and enduring problem facing communists; while absolving the social democrats of any sin, depicting them as the victims of communist invective and spite. And he excuses the social democratic leaders of any responsibility for wrong policies over the entire period of nearly seven decades.

A sectarian interpretation of Lenin's concepts of united fronts was adopted by the communist parties in the twenties because of the influence of Trotsky's and other's positions. In the early 1930s some communist parties had defeated some sectarian groupings in their ranks and in January, 1930, the communist parties of France, Germany and Poland appealed to the social democrats to forge a united front.

An anti-fascist Congress was held in Paris, June, 1933, in which representatives of the social democratic parties took part but who refused to conclude an agreement for joint action with the communists.

In January, 1933, big German finance agreed that Hitler was to be given power. The leaders of German social democracy rejected the call of the Communist Party of Germany for a general political strike and by June Hitler banned all political parties.

Hitler came to power largely because of the policy of class collaboration and the Communist Party of Germany hadn't the strength to organize the masses without the participation of the social democrats. The sectarian mistakes made by the Communist Party of Germany made politics and unity difficult. But this cannot excuse the German social democrats and their approach to fascism at that time.

## THE RECORD SPEAKS FOR ITSELF

Despite inexperience, blunders and wrong theories, the record of the Communist Party of Canada is formidable. Its pioneering work in the trade unions, in the municipal field, and other struggles contributed much to widening democracy in Canada. The party's positions against appeasement and its participation in the first anti-fascist war in Spain helped to equip people with an anti-fascist understanding.

In the post-war years the Communist Party of Canada played a role in developing a peace movement and in the struggle against the cold war and America's atomic diplomacy, all of which was the forerunner of the mass peace movement of today.

And there is much more.

N. Penner did his best, but **Canadian Communism** falls far short of achieving the task he set himself: that of becoming Canada's expert on communism--or is it anti-Communism?

\*\*\*\*\*

*Don't wait too long to get wise to yourself.  
The indicator needle on the great weigh-scales  
Of Fortune never stops registering.  
You've got to rise  
or you'll sink,  
You've got to master and win  
or serve and lose:  
Misery or triumph.  
You've got to be either the anvil  
or the hammer.*

J. W. VON GOETHE