

"*Dangerous Foreigners*" reflects both the strength and the weakness of Canadian labour history today. Its strength is a determination to uncover and present the history of people too long omitted from the history books, the people who actually built Canada. Its principal weakness is a desire to rush into print without doing the detailed, critical work needed. This book points in the right direction, but it does not travel very far along the road.

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IAN ANGUS. — *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada*. Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981. Pp. xii, 404.

It might not seem immediately apparent that the world needs yet another book on the Canadian Communist Party in the 1920s. Can anything substantial remain to be said after the work of William Rodney, Ivan Avakumovic, Norman Penner and Irving Abella, to say nothing of the successive versions from Tim Buck and his hagiographers?

The answer, according to Ian Angus, is yes. From his Trotskyite perspective, a good deal needs to be added and even more needs to be corrected, particularly in view of Comrade Buck's tireless labour of falsification and distortion. Even those with little ideological engagement in the factional struggles of half a century ago must concede that Angus has performed a service. Readers of the forthcoming official history of the Communist Party of Canada will now be much better equipped for that heavy task if they keep a copy of *Canadian Bolsheviks* by their side.

Angus has a proper scorn for "official histories", a form whose creation he attributes a little unfairly to his Stalinist foes. His most valuable contribution to scholarship is his reminder, not least to the non-Communist historians of Communism, to take nothing for granted, from the claims of Tim Buck to the romanticized achievements of the Workers' Unity League. After fifty years, Buck's attempts to insert himself among the founders of Canadian Communism may have acquired the same absurdity as George IV's conviction that he had fought at Waterloo. It is also a reminder that truth is a very minor virtue in the Orwellian world of Communist historiography.

*Canadian Bolsheviks* would not, of course, have appeared through Vanguard Publications if it was merely a work of detached bourgeois scholarship. It serves its own orthodoxy by providing not so much a history of the Communists in Canada as of the Stalinist deformation which led to the Trotskyite movement. Angus's thesis, simply put, is that the Canadian Communist Party was small but developing nicely under the early Leninist-Trotskyist advice of the Communist International. At Trotsky's insistence, the Communists spurned Bob Russell's One Big Union, avoided the temptation of forming what Lenin scornfully called the "brand new clean little workers' unions" and stayed firmly with the "masses" in the existing organizations. Whatever John L. Lewis and the United Mineworkers might do, the Communists kept the Cape Breton coal-miners in the International. Meanwhile, they penetrated and, in places, dominated the Canadian Labour Party.

The end of this idyllic period of growth and militancy, Angus insists, coincided with the displacement of Trotsky and his allies and the increasingly brutal take-over of Stalinist bureaucrats. Canadian Communists escaped the tragic con-

sequences; German and Chinese comrades suffered for obeying Comintern directives. They were not significant enough to persecute. None the less, ill-informed but peremptory commands from Moscow successively undermined what little the Communists managed to achieve. The most absurd phase, associated with the so-called "Third Period", saw the Communist Party of Canada deliberately isolating itself in crude sectarianism at precisely the historical moment, 1929-35, when collaboration could have given it the greatest possible gains. One consequence, as Angus mourns, was the emergence of the CCF as Canada's major party of the Left. Trotsky, we are left to believe, would have managed things better.

*Canadian Bolsheviks* is rather old-fashioned history, tied tightly to the doings of leaders and the recital of documents. There is, the author dutifully apologizes, no reference to French Canada or to women. There is not much reference to anyone else, either, beyond the limited circle of Communist chieftains. Party members appear, as they must have for the Communist leaders, as "troops", to be deployed or harangued. Until the Depression gave thousands the unsought leisure of unemployment, the "masses" came in rather small quantities. Perhaps, one sometimes suspects, the leaders were all there were.

Whatever their following, the men and women of the first decade of Canadian Communism remain a fascinating and sometimes attractive group. One of the charms of Angus's book, for all its preoccupation with documents and polemics, is the light it casts on the careers and personalities of men like Jack MacDonald, the party's first chairman, or Maurice Spector, its lonely theorist. In a classic conflict of arrogant intellectual and pragmatic working-man, the two grew to detest each other. United, they might have been able to save their party from a Stalinist take-over. Instead, they were expelled in succession, leaving Tim Buck and the first Canadian graduate of Moscow's Lenin School, Stewart Smith, to inherit the party apparatus.

Mr Angus is not the only historian of this period to leave the impression that MacDonald and Spector were somewhat finer human beings than those who displaced them. It was MacDonald, Angus maintains, whose stolid leadership preserved Canadian Communism from the factional struggles that beset the American party in this period. It was his indifference even to the Byzantine power shifts in the Kremlin that spelled his downfall and dictated his expulsion in 1929. Yet MacDonald shared with Buck, the leaders of the defunct Socialist Party of Canada and the rest of the Canadian Marxist Left, a sad but chronic incapacity to think for themselves. It was the weakness Keir Hardie, the British Socialist, had repeatedly underlined before World War I. It bound the Communists to the guidance of the Comintern whether Leninist, Trotskyist or Stalinist, regardless of its relevance to Canada or to North America. From intellectual dependence grew a political allegiance which made MacDonald as helpless before the Comintern's directives as was the more agile Tim Buck.

The best guidance for the Canadian Left would come not from Stalin, as Angus demonstrates, nor from Lenin and Trotsky, as he would apparently prefer, but from Canada's own circumstances and needs. That was what J. S. Woodsworth told the CCF in 1933 though even some members of his own party had trouble believing it. They, too, remained Bolsheviks.

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