

Strategy for Canada



By Jim Harding

Colonial mentality

WHEN I WENT TO PUBLIC SCHOOL in Regina a person who had travelled to the United States, even just to Montana or North Dakota, had more status among the students than someone who had been East or to the West coast.

Canada didn't really exist for us. We knew more about events in the (then) 49 states than in the 10 provinces. An anti-eastern attitude rooted in the depression had something to do with this attitude (Toronto financiers controlled farm mortgages then) but basically our colonial mentality was responsible. Post-war Canada was a primary market for U.S. capitalism and the attitudes of the

first post-war generations reflected the boom mentality. A majority of my friends in public and high school talked openly about Canada becoming a part of the United States.

This colonial mentality is deeply rooted in Canadian culture, but it is more a social than a natural culture. The symbols of our colonialism are imposed, not grounded in the realities of our history. U.S. magazines, radio and TV programs (or specially prepared 'subsidiary programs') inject U.S. folklore and propaganda into Canada. It is mainly the mythology of an alienated urban society (much of it of a romantic rural life). It is as often as not inappropriate to the practical lives of the Canadian people all of whom have special local and regional characteristics. This social culture is

basically middle class in its symbols and this further removes it from the realities of most Canadians.

It is the branch plant market place which integrates the U.S. and Canadian cultures more than a common life and work style among the people. Canada as a branch plant satellite has a unique political economy (which I will later describe). The historical development of the country also has a unique character (e.g. French Canada). Our colonial mentality is strong since as a satellite we are ideologically, not only economically, integrated into the U.S. empire. But in the day-to-day lives of Canadians there is an explosive potential for revolutionary nationalism. As the United States becomes further and further isolated in the world this potential will escalate.

Chauvinist vs. revolutionary

IT IS PART OF THE RHETORIC of the Canadian movement to be opposed to chauvinism (both male and national). This is a healthy sentiment but it is necessary to understand the conditions that give rise to chauvinism, not just to oppose it in principle.

National chauvinism arises from a defensive posture. Chauvinism in Canada arises as a reaction to the American colonization of the country. As anti-Americanism grows here so does Canadian chauvinism. Lacking a historical perspective of ourselves (which neither a flag nor formally nationalist school texts will provide) but still reacting to our colonization we end up with an abstract anti-Americanism and Canadian chauvinism. It is not abstract in that it comes from our own experience but that experience is far more colonial (we are a national nigger) than revolutionary thus far. Until there is struggle our chauvinism will remain.

This chauvinism must of course be challenged, but not with a leftist purism. We do not have to

choose between a potentially conservative chauvinism that stresses the symbols of Canada rather than the self-determination and quality of life of the people and a naive internationalism and humanism which opposes all forms of nationalism in principle. Both these are irrelevant to the task of building a liberation front in Canada. The thing is to challenge the chauvinism in terms of its roots and its potential. It can be a stage towards revolutionary nationalism once the colonial mentality is replaced with an existential understanding of our historical experience as a people.

A militant form of nationalism is beginning to develop in Canada — mainly among the young. It is militant because people are willing to struggle and take the necessary risks because of it. The value of self determination is central to this new militancy. It takes autonomous people to struggle for an autonomous land. As the libertarian ethic grows among youth in Canada, so too can a militant nationalism.

This is not the nationalism of the social democrats (New Democratic Party). Their

nationalist rhetoric ("Canada must be socialist to be independent") plays only a minor role in breaking up our colonial mentality but it remains of an academic, parliamentary variety. In a sense it is chauvinist since symbolism and form, not personal commitment, lies behind it. Somehow new content (nationalism and bureaucratic socialism) and the same old forms (parliamentary politics, centralism, etc.) is going to provide freedom for the Canadian people. Our analysis will show that this is not only a false position but a totally irrelevant one.

Chauvinist nationalism is not reactionary but it does not breed the belief that Canada can be independent without a radical movement — without political struggle. Such belief, in effect, aids those who are daily building and managing the satellite political economy. A strategy for Canadians then must attempt to transform all chauvinism and nationalism into a militant form.

continued next page