

CPC leader: he bucked the system

Yours in the Struggle, Reminiscences of Tim Buck; NC Press, 414 pages. Reviewed by Eric Walberg.



The memoirs of Tim Buck, leader of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) from 1929 to 1962, provide an opportunity not only to analyse some long-standing historical questions (Buck's rise to prominence in the 20's, the spy trials of the 50's), but also to view Buck critically as an international communist leader, and to consider the legacy of the CPC for contemporary political life.

The writing is conversational in style — the memoirs were originally taped in 1965 for the CBC and were to be edited by Buck. Unfortunately, his health deteriorated shortly after the tapings and he was never able to return to them. Only after his death in 1973 and after another 4 years of delays have they been published.

Despite the delays, they are still fascinating and full of surprises. To my mind, they establish Buck (though he was never elected to parliament himself), as the most important figure in recent Canadian political history.

For instance, his release from prison in 1934 was the occasion for what is still the largest political rally in Canada's history (though he modestly makes only a vague reference to this) — right here in Maple Leaf Gardens.

The other major political protagonists of this era all treated Buck and the CPC certainly with fear and occasionally with respect.

During his imprisonment under Bennett's 'Iron Heel', Buck was asked by the prison inmates to give a course on Marxism, though it had to be conducted in complete secrecy. The inmates learned quickly. They promptly organized a sit-down strike (prison conditions then were even worse than today), and got Buck to negotiate an independent investigation of prison conditions on their behalf. The RCMP attempted to assassinate him for this — a unique distinction in Canadian politics.

James Woodsworth and Buck had been quite close politically in the 1920's, and with CCF-Communist co-operation, Ontario could have had a socialist government in 1943. Unfortunately, the CCF thought it could make it alone and refused to 'trade off' ridings — thus, the Communists elected only 2 members and the CCF, 34. (The Communists did not put up candidates in certain left-wing but predominantly CCF ridings and campaigned for the CCF there, but the CCF refused to do likewise). Ontario would not likely have become the bastion of conservatism it is today if this election had had a different outcome.

Wily Mackenzie King was aware of the threat of a post-WWII coalition of the left, as was happening throughout Europe, and as a result implemented a then radical platform of social security and welfare. Believe it or not, every Canadian, according to the labour laws of that time, is supposed to have a right to a job!

St. Laurent certainly feared and hated the Communists. In Convocation Hall (U of T) in 1947, the then Minister of External Affairs told a select audience of Canada's business elite that "In this great struggle to preserve Christianity ... from atheistic Bolshevism ..., leadership will have to be taken by our great neighbour to the south and this fact makes it necessary for us to reconsider our foreign policy from its foundations". It appears that we have Buck to thank for Canada's

economic strangulation by our friendly southern neighbour.

Even if you disagree that Buck himself played a key role in Canadian politics, you will agree that this is the most important (and interesting) political document to be published in recent years (excepting, of course, King's confessions of a libertine).

If you're still not convinced, try this: in 1942 while the CPC was illegal, US army intelligence contacted the party and recruited 20 East Europeans from the Canadian party to do intelligence work in Nazi-occupied Europe. Within 4 years the same US and Canadian 'intelligence' was incarcerating similar politicians for collaborating with our allies (the so-called atheistic Bolsheviks).

Finally, we can begin to see through the anticommunism upon which we have been nurtured. Buck's memoirs are a step in the process, as are Dorothy Livesay's *Right Hand Left Hand*.

However, much more 'rewriting of history' is necessary. Like Khrushchev's memoirs, those of Buck were prepared during the leader's retirement without party approval, and thus do not claim to be definitive. Therein lies both their strength and their weakness. On the one hand, they are frank and full of the lively personality of an outstanding leader; on the other hand, they are rambling and at times confusing because of the inadequate conditions under which they were written. They also do not deal with Buck's family problems, though again this is hardly to be expected.

A partial remedy would have been a chronology of the important dates of Buck's and the party's life. This would have cleared up several confusing twists.

For example, the party was illegal till 1924 though it was founded as the CPC in 1921. In the meantime it was publicly called the Worker's Party. The party was again illegal from 1931-36 and from 1939-47. During the latter period it was allowed to function publicly from 1943 on as the Labour-Progressive Party (LPP), and elected MP's both federally and provincially. For almost one-third of its existence, the party has been illegal — this in a country which flaunts its supposedly democratic principles and economic prosperity.

While Buck may not be a Lenin or a Gramsci, he stood far above many other communist leaders of his time both in his understanding of international affairs and the needs of his own country.

Cook like a master

Recently a film was shown to members of the Council of York Student Federation. It showed a 14 ounce breast of chicken, flavoured with tomato, sour cream, onion,



Pierre de Serres

paprika and marjoram, being made table-ready in 5 minutes. This included 4 ounce servings of both peas and rice. The total cost was approximately 95 cents. The food preparation phase of this meal was less than 2 minutes. The clean-up was minimal; there is no pot to scour since a disposable cooking bag is used. A ten year-old could have done it on a hot plate in a rooming house. The nutrition is tops.

This cooking system was developed by Pierre de Serres, a food chemist with a strong background in food development and food service. He calls it Gourmet Numero Uno. It pulls together the chemical and biological properties of meats and vegetables, the physical properties of water as a heating medium, and the lore of international food flavourings. "paint-by-number-like" approach

to flavouring makes possible a broad range of succulent dishes, even by inexperienced cooks. Doug Wise, the Council's business manager, studied this system and confirms these claims as accurate.

Needless to say, a number of students could bring dignity to their tables with this approach to cooking. The Council is willing to organize special classes on campus to make its learning convenient. The fee will be \$15.00 for three hour sessions. Optional supplies will add a few dollars.

Student response to this article will determine the action taken. If you are interested, make a reservation at the Council's office. The initial class will be limited to 50. Other classes will be formed if interest warrants it. A suitable date will be announced shortly after registration is known.

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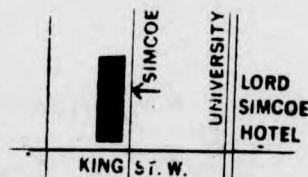
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