



Reading from the left

by David Camfield

Canada has no equivalent to such fine publications as the American independent radical magazine *Zed* or the Weekly Marxist newspapers available in the U.K. and France. Unlike a number of its European social democratic counterparts, the N.D.P. doesn't publish a single periodical.

However, the Canadian Left does produce four magazines and two newspapers which have both a substantial circulation from coast to coast and attempt to deal with a wide range of issues from Left perspective.

There are also a number of regional and specialist publications, and those of the Quebecois Left, but these fall outside the scope of this review.

Canadian Dimension proclaims itself "Canada's socialist newsmagazine," not without justification. Unaffiliated, it tends to articulate the kind of politics preferred by most of those outside the N.D.P. mainstream: a more radical gradualist socialism which combines Canadian nationalism with support for social movements.

Nationalism got the better of *Canadian Dimension's* socialism in the 1988 election (when an editorial called for a vote for the Liberals in ridings where their candidates stood a better chance of winning than the N.D.P.), and has continued to do so in articles and editorials examining Quebec and the constitutional crisis. *Canadian Dimension* remains better than

its two main competitors, although the competition is pretty weak.

This Magazine does not claim to be "socialist," with such prominent Canadian cultural nationalists as Rick Salutin and Mel Watkins as frequent contributors this is no great surprise. Unlike *Canadian Dimension*, it prints some fiction in addition to broad political and social coverage from a social democratic perspective. Antitortory fury abounds, but there is little of substance concerning social transformation to be found in *This Magazine*.

Canadian Forum, "a monthly journal of opinion and the arts," is somewhat different in orientation, devoting considerable space to poetry, short fiction and various aspects of culture. Politically, it is the least radical of the Left periodicals (while the military build-up for the assault on Iraq was underway, it ran an article which said the warships aimed to enforce "non-military deterrence!"), but its nationalism is unsurpassed.

Typical is the September issue, which contains an editorial on "The Conservative plot to destroy Canadian culture" followed by a column explaining why "Canadian civilization begins on the road to the cottage."

Our Times, "an independent Canadian labour magazine committed to social change through unionism and democratic pluralism," prints articles on general political issues as well as news and analysis on developments in the labour movement. Articles such as those in the August issue on "Labour's Response to the Gulf War" and on the fight of telephone operators against robots distinguish *Our Times* from the other three magazines.

There are only two significant newspapers on the Canadian Left, and they differ from the magazines by virtue of their links to political organizations.

Socialist Worker, published by the International Socialists, is a paper of news, opinion, and theory written from an openly revolutionary inter-

nationalist perspective that sets it apart from the reformist nationalism of all other publications. It also aims to provide activists with strategies for fighting current social struggles. *Socialist Worker* has traditionally suffered from unattractive layout and writing of uneven quality, both of which have been gradually improving.

Canadian Tribune, the paper of the Communist Party of Canada,

carries news, and some analysis. It is a somewhat less radical version of *Canadian Dimension*. *Canadian Tribune* reflects the identity crisis that the Communist Party is undergoing after the collapse of the East bloc.

Since the demand for a thin weekly modelled on a major Left magazine is likely to be low, this paper's future does not look rosy.

The Left's periodicals ought to be a widely-read and exciting segment of the alternative press. Sadly, this is not the case, because — with some exceptions — the Left does not produce the interesting and illuminating publications that it needs to meet the challenges of the "New World Order."

If a few periodicals began to take the initiative and provoked debate by moving beyond the uninspiring, nationalist, "common sense" moderation that is so dominant today, the forging of a truly radical Left in Canada would be one step closer.

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