The On-To-Ottawa Trek, 1935. Unemployed workers arrive in Regina.

Rediscovering Canadian History

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> "It seems to me for some time that Canadians have been looking at their constitutional development from too narrow a point of view. As Canada has grown, the old interpretations of Canadian history have become less and less satisfactory. What Professor W. L. Morton has described as the themes of survival and self-government are not adequate to account for a subtle and complex pattern of events . . . For one thing these historians were, whether consciously or not, partisans . . . Their heroes and villains, were, as it were, preselected. They painted with strong lights and shadows. They provided, for their time, not only a history but an ideology."

J. R. Mallory, who wrote the above words, is by no means the first person to point out the salient truth of Canadian history. It is written from a particular class viewpoint: it pre-selects facts, it stresses a narrow constitutionalist bias and it buries from sight the largest part of the Canadian historical record. The cost of teaching and learning from a one-dimensional history is very high. Canadian students learn next to nothing about the events, the issues, the classes of people that comprise the making of Canada. The charge that students make about Canadian history being irrelevent, boring, or unreal remains true so long as Canadian history is confined to the present curtain of ignorance.

It is widely believed that very little other than the official version of Canadian history is available. In compiling this select annotated bibliography it will become clear that in varying degrees a counter-body of historical writings on Canada exists and is readily accessable. Although not complete in all respects, the fundamentals are there. The first step in reinterpreting Canadian history is to pry it loose from the ideologists and to re-establish the economic and political issues which constitute the Canadian historical reality.

To restore to Canadian history its integrity requires first of all identifying the broad themes. There is no single piece of writing which does this

adequately. In a certain sense this reflects the fact that there has been no major reinterpretation of Canadian history since the pioneering work of Innis and Creighton done in the 1930's. The struggle for Canadian independence and the crises in national survival are the great themes of Canadian history. The exploitation of resources, the settlement of the land, the emergence of classes, the growth of Canadian institutions, the establishment of an identity, the search for social and political values all are arraigned for and against Canadian independence. Strategically the recurring problem has been how, under what circumstances, led by which class, would Canada break free from the political and economic domination of the French, then British, and finally American imperialist control. The single most, influential, deciding factor in Canadian life has been the presence of an imperial power in Canada's national affairs.

But within this one theme there are two parallel and connected histories, the history of the Quebec people as a separate nation and the history of English Canada developing its national sense of itself. The so-called duality of Canadian life is in reality the reflection of two peoples and two nations trapped in a political union which offered neither one self-determination and independence. In fact the political union which lead to the founding of modern Canada came into existence in such a way that if offered no adequate basis for the national survival of either the people of English or French Canada. Hence a hundred years after Confederation the two national peoples of Canada find themselves more integrated and assimilated into the structure of American imperialism with less freedom than they had under British rule. Politically this must be accounted for. The shape of Confederation provided neither the defence nor the will to establish an independent bi-national state strong enough to withstand the economic forces that would re-integrate Canada into a much stronger system of political domination. The design of Confederation committed the new Canada to be systematically exploited and kept as a political dependency for a greater duration of time than perhaps any other country in modern history. The sum total of Canadian history is reflected in the complex nature of Canadian dependency. Nationally, Canada has the ambivalent status of the most favoured colony. Within Canada there exists a second colcnized people, the French-speaking nation, Quebec.

It is not necessary to agree with the above historical premises. But re-discovering Canadian history requires that the broad themes of imperialism, colonialism, and class politics in the context of Canada be tested against historical reality and for factual correctness. The review of books by historians and other social scientists which follows illustrates what work has been done on these broad themes and comments on what these radicalizing perspectives teach about Canada and its history.

Creighton's *Empire of the St. Lawrence** remains the best pre-Confedera-

* Complete lists to follow.

tion study explaining the economic and political ties between the British mercantile order and the development of Canada's business, financial, and political ruling classes. For too long this valuable piece of historical writing has been passed off as something resembling a colourful travelogue down the St. Lawrence. But it is nothing of the sort. The Laurentian school of history ties the development of Canada to a materialist explanation of the social and class forces exploiting Canadian resources. The St. Lawrence symbolizes the Canadian bourgeoisie's link with the imperial finance and markets. Although Creighton is badly deficient in his treatment of Quebec his economic interpretation of Canadian history shows the early beginnings of the economic basis of political life in Canada.

The best summary of the Laurentian thesis is W. L. Morton's essay, "Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History" which appears in Canadian Historical Readings, Volume 1, *Approaches to Canadian History,** a valuable collection of articles in its own right. Morton spells out the price Canadians would pay for remaining an economic and political colony within the structure of imperialism. ". . . the Canadian people were brought together in Confederation not for the increase of liberty or the ends of justice, which were taken for granted, but to meet certain commercial, strategic, and imperial purposes . . ." So long as Canada's dominant classes remained wedded to the imperial vision of Laurentian commerce what would be taken for granted or to be more precise, "What was irrelevent to it, (was) namely, justice as between race and race and section and section."

The capitalism of the St. Lawrence did not promote Canadian unity or a national basis of operation. But the Laurentian thesis does imply why the liberal interpretation of regional rivalry, interest group rights, brokerage politics, masks class interests and regional class divisions in Canada. "The implications of the Laurentian thesis, are, then, a metropolitan economy, a political imperialism of the metropolitan area, and uniformity of the metropolitan culture throughout the hinterlands." In so many respects Canadian history has its origins in the material conditions created by a political economy which Canada's pre-industrial economy set in motion. It is no exaggeration to claim that Canadian history has been locked into this one pattern. According to this view of historical development, the industrialization of Eastern Canada proceeded more rapidly than either Quebec or the West, the two other great economic regions of central Canada because of its direct access to both local capital and metropolitan money markets. The structure of power in Canada followed capital. Politically this meant by force of material logic Ontario would seek to extend its control over all the other economic areas of Canada. The bitter pill the political hinterland refused to swallow easily was that their regional prosperity and productivity strengthened the hand of the East as the go-between a domestic economy and external markets. What they saw was that the more they produced the less they had to show for their efforts. The revolt of the West and the subsequent

destruction of the wheat economy is the best known and most readily understood instance of this parasitic relationship. The massive wheat exports of the West paid for the industrialization of Ontario while not being allowed to share in the wealth that it produced. W. A. Mackintosh's *Economic Background of Dominion – Provincial Relations* studies the subjugation of the West as one of the major aspects in the history of political economy of Canada.

The major problem that Laurentian history encounters is that it makes the mechanism of exploitation visible but leaves the exploiters faceless and unnamed. It speaks of regions but not classes. The resulting distortion is that the revolt of the West is treated solely as populist unrest of discontent. It does not explain adequately how the systematic exploitation of the West is linked to the rise of an Eastern business class and the foreign domination of the Canadian economy. If Mackintosh is defficient in this regard it does not detract from the comprehensiveness of his study. He provides all the necessary information so the reader can see for himself how Canadian capitalism developed as a dependent entity within the framework of the dual imperialism of Britain and the U.S. He covers the period 1880-1939. The great merit of this presentation is the lucid arrangement of historical statistics with an accompanying commentary that is without equal.

Harold Innis' *Essays in Canadian Economic History* provides a wealth of insights and hard economic argument showing why King could remain in office by using the social divisions created and sustained by the forces of capital. In particular his essays which he wrote in the thirties and the early forties brilliantly explores the roots of Canada's chronic economic and political instability. He saw that a national economy wholly dependent on primary resources and extractive industries made Canada a continuing victim of a spiral of increasing economic and political dependency. In the context of Canada that vulnerability meant disintegration. He warned: "Industrialism" provides "an abundance of goods but not the first luxury of security."

The studies in political economy which produced a critical interpretation of Canadian history fell victim to the Cold War and the Americanization of Canadian studies. The national question which figured so prominently in the Innis-Creighton school of history was removed from the agenda of Canadian historians beginning in the late forties and continuing right into the early 1960's. The new breed of liberal historian such as Ramsay Cook presents Canadian history in one of two guises: the constitutional and political evolution of federal Canada and/or Canadian biography. Both approaches celebrate the logic and common sense attitude of continentalism, the bread-and-butter policy of the Liberal party and Canadian bourgeoisie. The wholesale surrender of Canadian resources and Canadian sovereignty to American imperialism is presented to Canadians vividly and starkly in George Grant's masterful *Lament for a Nation**. Marred only by its colonial

pessimism, Grant writes the most powerful indictment and complete exposure yet of the betrayal of Canadian liberalism.

Along side Grant it is necessary to mention two other books which reinforce his presentation. Though much neglected, Park and Park's *Anatomy of Big Business** presents a wealth of documentation showing the American takeover of the Canadian economy in the '50's. It is a study of the corporate power structure in Canada. John Porter's *Vertical Mosaic** provides a second massive source of information on the ideological operation of the institutions and the social composition of Canada's national class structure. As important as Porter's book is as a compendium of fact and original research, it never overcomes its liberal bias of substituting elites for the existence of classes.

The most significant and successful attempt to develop a new historiography is contained in Stanley Ryerson's *Unequal Union** covering Canadian history from 1815-1880. In this single volume he presents a coherent overview of the political, economic, cultural forces at work prior to and following Confederation. What the liberal historians have systematically eliminated from their historiography, namely the interaction of all classes making history, is the starting point of this lucid account of the origins and problems of modern Canada. To identify, assess, and analyze the making of history from a class viewpoint puts the historian in the centre of the historical process. But it is not a matter of getting the correct label on this or that class that constitutes the first task of Marxist historian. For what he hopes to locate and explain is the raison d'etre of any individual event, act, or decision in terms of the social forces which constitute the specific historical present of the period to be considered. Therefore, in Ryerson's study of Confederation, he brings together the two general themes that shape it: "the interweaving of industrial capitalist development and the existence of two distinct national communities of people." How does Ryerson present the Confederation settlement?

On one hand, he says the French Canadian nation is "given to understand that it is entering into a partnership based on the principle of equality. On the other hand, it is accorded a state structure which embodies no such relationship. The much-vaunted "federalism" is not that of a bi-national state; it is something else again. The optical illusion may persist, but the reality is different." And why? The Fathers of Confederation "evaded the bi-national reality because they conceived of a nation that reduced one of its parts to a religious and linguistic pecularity denying it an organic entity of nationhood by detaching the culture from its socio-economic being." Or more simply explained: "The federal character of the new state structure embodied at least partial recognition of the 'French fact' in Canada. But full recognition was withheld."

And the political nature of the settlement had its roots the economic conditions that supported the Confederation idea. He singles out three of these economic factors: First, "The ruling bloc of social forces of the Canada

of 1867 . . . . while incapable of promoting capitalist enterprise, proved inadequate as a creator of national values or of democratic solidarity." Secondly, "the collusion of the bourgeois-clerical French-Canadian leadership with Anglo-Canadian big business and the imperial power constituted a more potent force than the small middle-class, national democratic and radical movement."

Finally, "economic development tied the new Canada to English and American money markets which furthered dependency."

Confederation did result in the creation of a state but failed in the more important aspect, to provide the social and class basis of an independent nation. Ryerson's final assessment might be harsh but events show him to be nonetheless correct. In summary he says "the concept of the nation held by the men of property who had founded the new Dominion was coloured by their pre-occupation with the 'cash nexus.' Nation-building was a huge transaction in real estate and railway company shares, an investor's challenge. Such an approach might unite the business classes of the two national communities; it would with difficulty inspire the great mass of working men and women who did the work of production, who by their labour built the new country. Still less could it offer an answer to the deep-seated inequality between the national communities." It is by focusing on the above themes, not only with regards to the act of Confederation but on the key events such as the Rebellions of 1837 and the Riel Rebellions, that allows Ryerson to restore to Canadian history all of its dimensions.

By comparison, then, the Innis-Creighton-Grant school of history, though useful in so many respects, disregards the role of Canada's working class in the making of history. The seriousness of this limitation reflects the class outlook and ideological bias of these historians. H. S. Ferns and B. Ostry's *The Age of Mackenzie King: The Rise of the Leader**, provides a detailed and invaluable record of King acquiring his credentials as an anti-labour expert in Canada and the U.S. The reputation King made for himself at "handling" labour disputes prepared King for his rise to power. The book illustrates the class basis of liberal politics.

The more comprehensive examination of the role and history of the Canadian labour movement is found in Charles Lipton's *The Trade Union Movement of Canada 1827-1959**. More than any other book, Lipton has gathered the evidence for refuting the often-cited argument that U.S. unions serve the interests of Canadian workers. In fact the opposite is true. The American domination of the Canadian trade union movement has a long history of creating disunity and a weakening of working class militancy in Canada. The growth of a national trade union movement was effectively prevented by American unions using their monopoly of labour to force Canadian workers to join U.S. unions in Canada. The point Lipton stresses is that American unions came to Canada as a silent partner of American Capital. The net effect of this "arrangement" meant that Canadian trade unionism has

Members of the Canadian Chemical & Textile Union being arrested in the Texpack strike in Brantford, Ont. August, 1971

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had to fight both management and U.S. unions in their struggle to defend worker's rights. The defeat of the national trade union movement by the "internationals" paved the way for establishing a labour aristocracy of trade unions in Canada with the philosophy of American business unionism.

The history of Canadian unionism serves as a general introduction to a history of the working class making itself. It is a mistake to believe that the Canadian working class is without a tradition and a sense of itself. Lipton's volume brings together a large part of the record of its politics, which as he demonstrates, forms an integral part of Canada's national life. His documentation of strike action, political organizing, defeats, victories provides an impressive array of material dispelling the liberal notion that history is made by elites, and not classes.

Martin Robin's book, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour** goes into greater detail on the links between radicalism and labour in the late nineteenth and particularly the first three decades of the twentieth centuries. It is now forgotten that Canadian radicalism was born in the working class. Robin's study concentrates on the political movements which embodied class politics such as the One Big Union Movement and the early attempts at forming a workers socialist party. His presentation shares a common weakness with Gad Horowitz's *Canadian Labour in Politics* which documents trade union political activity in the C.C.F. for the period 1944-1960. Both writers ignore or pass over the significance of first the American penetration and then its control of the Canadian trade union movement. They fail to draw any conclusions from the wealth of evidence which they have collected connecting American unions to the takeover of Canada. Despite this, both of these books contain much information and present a vividly concrete picture of the working class first as an awakened, independent force in Canadian politics and more recently one, for specific reasons, that has been co-opted.

Finally, no presentation of the history of Canada's working class is complete without recognizing the leading role of the Canadian Communist Party, who did much of the original trade union organizing. The Communist viewpoint is presented on this and on other political questions in a wide-ranging collection of articles by Tim Buck, former leader of the Party, entitled *Our Fight for Canada**. Buck's writings provide a valuable corrective to conventional wisdom that identifies the socialist tradition in Canada exclusively in terms of the CCF-NDP.

The reawakening of the national consciousness in Canada is a direct result of the Americanization of all facets of Canadian Life. The most complete account of how Canadian capital financed American corporate takeovers of the economy is found in Karl Levitt's *Silent Surrender**. It gives all the data explaining the expansionist behaviour of American corporations. Written as a study of political economy, *Silent Surrender* is both highly readable and the most cogently argued study explaining how economic dependence leads to political disintegration. *Gordon to Watkins to You** is a

more popular version of this thesis. It presents a documentary record of the battle against foreign takeovers in the sixties. *Close the 49th Parallel** is a collection of essays showing American imperialism at work in all aspects of Canadian life. Essays include an analysis of the Canadian bourgeoise, the economy, foreign policy, education, media, art, sports. *Close the 49th Parallel* is one of the best books on Canadian-American relations written by the new generation of radical academics. In his new book, *Canada's First Century** Donald Creighton writes the definitive red-tory history of Canada. It is a superb study in political history recounting the decisions, events, and persons of the Liberal establishment responsible for the destruction of Canadian independence. Finally, the American penetration of Canada is the subject of four works specialising in particular aspects of the problem: *The Struggle for Canadian Universities** by Robin Mathews and Jim Steele present their research and an excellent collection of documents of the American invasion of Canadian universities; *Partner to Behemoth** by John Warnock is a reinterpretation of Canadian foreign policy explaining how Canada functions internationally as a satellite of American foreign policy; *The Politics of the Continental Resources Deal** by James Laxer documents the sell-out of Canada's natural resources to the U.S.; *Independence and Socialism in Canada** by *Progressive Worker* in the form of an extended pamphlet contains the most fully developed Marxist account, with careful and lucid argumentation, yet free of jargon, explaining why for theoretical and historical reasons independence and socialism have to be the main programmatic goals for Canadian socialists.

In direct contrast to the large body of knowledge on American imperialism there is very little radical work done on Quebec by English-Canadians. It is this area in particular which suffers from serious neglect. For instance, it is not possible to cite one major study which systematically unmasks the liberal propaganda about the cultural utopia of bi-culturalism or exposes the political myths of Canadian federalism. Rene Levesque's *Option Quebec** is a personalized statement of why he chose to become an independentiste. Solange Chaput Rolland's *My Country Canada or Quebec? ** is useful insofar as it shows English Canadians how isolated and uneasy Quebecers feel with the realities of Confederation. Michel Brunet, in his article "The British Conquest and the Canadians" in *Approaches to Canadian History** systematically goes through the distortions and falsification contained in the writings of English Canada's leading historians. These ideologists see only good in the long history stemming from the Conquest. As Brunet himself says: "One must never lose sight of the fact that a foreign conquest and occupation is the greatest impact a society can ever meet. How can social scientists ignore this fact when they study French Canada?" This painting of word pictures about glories of Anglo-Canadian justice and kindness towards a conquered people is for different reasons pre-eminent in the works of French-Canadian historians. "French Canadian historians have, in general,

adopted with only a few slight differences the historical interpretation of the American and English-Canadian scholars. This fact is a striking one and it has never been adequately pointed out. It indicates that the French-Canadian upper classes have been engaged, since the Conquest, in a process of assimilation into English Canada. *The assimilation of one people by another always begins with its leaders."* (Emphasis added). It is no wonder that the results of A. B. Hodgetts investigation of the teaching of Canadian history in *What Culture? What Heritage** should totally substantiate Brunet's conclusions – Canadian students are victims of systematic indoctrination against the aspirations of the Quebec people. It is only necessary to add that English Canadian students regard Quebecers with all the suspicion and hostility which befits an occupying power.

Where does one begin to attack the roots of this ideological campaign? It requires hard facts explaining the economic and political history of Quebec as a colonial nation existing as the offspring of first an Anglo-Canadian metropolis and then as Anglo-American-Canadian metropolis. On the other hand it needs an analysis of why in the words of Brunet "as a collectivity, the Canadians were doomed to an anemic survival. One must never forget that to survive is not to live." The answers to these critical questions will not be found in learned journals. Two remarkable books have recently been published which are required reading. Between them they cover the fundamentals. Pierre Vallier's *White Niggers of North America* is without question, the most important book to appear on Quebec. Written in the form of political biography from the perspective of a revolutionary, his is the most politically articulate voice of a new generation of Quebecers who no longer tolerate the social injustice and colonial oppression of the Quebec people. His book is at once a manifesto of necessity and an analysis of the conditions creating a revolutionary free Quebec. Leandre Bergeron's, *Petit Manuel d'historire du Quebec,** (soon to be available in an English language edition) is simple in design but comprehensive in its understanding of Quebec history. In essence his book is a history of Quebec's colonialism under three regimes:

1. Le régime francais qui va des premiére explorations francaises au début du 16e siècle à 1760, date de la Conquete de la Nouvelle France par la puissance britannique.
2. le régime anglais qui commence avec la Conquête de la Nouvelle France et se poursuit jusqua'au debut du 20e siècle où il cède la place au régime américain.
3. Le régime américain qui commence avec l'invasion des capitaux américains au début du 20e siècle et se continue toujours avec l'emprise de plus en plus grande des capitalistes américains sur notre économic d'abord, ensuite sur notre politique et enfin sur notre culture.

One must go the contemporary journals for hard analysis and information on Quebec. *Canadian Dimension*, December 1970 has put out a special number devoted entirely to Quebec. It contains a number of very important

background articles particularly one by Lysiane Gagnon on "The Economics of the Quebec Independiste Movement", another by Daniel Latouche entitled "Political Violence in Perspective" and a third called, "Qu'est-ce que la FLQ?" The only satisfactory explanation of the "October events" exposing Trudeau's motives for creating a state of war is found in *The Last Post*, No. 5 December 1970. It is widely acknowledged as the best piece of writing to appear in French or English on the events leading to the implementation of the War Measures Act. *The Last Post* distributed over 100,000 advance copies of this article. Founded last year by a collective of journalists *The Last Post* has provided to date the best news coverage and reporting in depth of any Canadian magazine. In the same issue it carries major articles on FRAP, an exerpt from Vallier's book, and the "memoirs" of one of the collective who was held a prisoner of war by the Montreal police.

In order to obtain a broader perspective on the problems and forces determining Canada's past, present, and future there are a number of invaluable works on imperialism and colonialism which explain the framework presented here. Harry Magdoff's *Age of Imperialism** is the best single volume, written with extraordinary clarity which takes the reader through the system and economic structures of American imperialism. Magdoff updates and illustrates Lenin's *On Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.** David Horowitz's *From Yalta to Vietnam; the Origins of the Cold War* examines both how and why the U.S. started the Cold War and reviews the interventionist and expansionist designs of American foreign policy of the past quarter-century. A shorter discussion of imperialism expressed as foreign policy is G. Kolko's *The Roots of American Foreign Policy.**

There are two books on colonialism which tell us more about this phenomenon than what was known previously. Both are relevent to the Canadian experience and are a testimony to their authors' unusual brilliance. Both explore the inner world of the colonized, linking it to the social and historical origins of colonialism in modern times. The first is *Wretched of the Earth** by Franz Fanon. See particularly his essay "Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in which he defends violence as an instrument of liberation. The second is *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Albert Memmi. In his introduction he links the situation of Quebec to the worldwide movement of oppressed peoples. His book explains why bi-culturalism is the instrument of the colonizer. Memmi is one author who has had unusual influence on the new generation of Quebec students.

It is through using alternative sources of information that the rediscovery of Canadian and Quebec history begins to occur.

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