

ARTICLES

“Audacity, audacity, still more audacity”: Tim Buck, the Party, and the People, 1932-1939

John Manley

Introduction

ON 20 FEBRUARY 1932, Communist Party of Canada (CPC) general secretary Tim Buck and six political bureau colleagues — Sam Carr, Malcolm Bruce, Tom Ewan, A.T. Hill, John Boychuk, and Matt Popovic — began five-year jail sentences in Kingston federal penitentiary. They were accompanied by Tom Cacic, a minor Party functionary who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time when, precisely six months earlier, the Ontario government had netted the Party’s big fish, charging them under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada with seditious conspiracy and membership of an illegal revolutionary organization; Cacic’s sentence was a mere two years. Three years in the making, the crackdown had been prompted by the CPC’s remarkable success in organizing the unemployed in the spring and summer of 1931, the strongest available evidence that the CPC had started to recover from a long-term decline that had seen membership fall from over 4,000 in 1924 to fewer than 1,400 in February 1931. Even after the guilty verdicts (and the “Eight” were by no means the only Communist political detainees in 1931) jobless workers continued to seek the assistance of the Party’s unemployed councils, in defiance of lower levels of persecution and harassment.¹ Nevertheless, there

¹For background, see Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 201-55; Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band: The*

John Manley, “‘Audacity, audacity, still more audacity’: Tim Buck, the Party, and the People, 1932-1939,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 9-41.

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was little solace to be found in any amount of bluster about how “life itself” had confirmed the correctness of the Party’s contemporary line of “Class Against Class,” even if it had predicted that crisis-ridden capitalism would slide inexorably towards fascism. Decapitated, illegal, and fearing a comprehensive purge, the CPC entered the underground even before the Eight entered Kingston.

One Communist, however, clearly *benefited* from the purge. Tim Buck’s elevation to the general secretaryship of the Party after its Sixth Annual Convention in June 1929 stemmed less from an outstanding record of achievement than from a lack of alternatives and, above all, from the favour in which he was viewed by the Communist International (Comintern), which had chosen him to ramrod the Class Against Class (or Third Period) line in Canada. As Buck well knew, however, Moscow’s patronage was a privilege that might be withdrawn at any moment. Told on a visit to Moscow in winter 1929-1930 to raise his performance, he returned to Toronto and promptly suffered a nervous collapse.² Buck, however, possessed a private reserve of ambition and resolve. Recovering after several months of hospital and convalescence, he brought himself fully into line with the Comintern’s left turn; at a special enlarged plenum of the Central Committee in February 1931, and in the presence of Earl Browder and other Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) envoys, he brazenly presented the slump in Party numbers as a political advance — a necessary cleansing of the weak-willed and weak-kneed. If some comrades remained unimpressed with this bravado, his unexpectedly staunch and articulate defence of revolutionary socialism at the Party trial won general acclaim. He went off to prison armed with unprecedented moral and intellectual authority.³

Clashes Between the Communists and the Political and Legal Establishment in Canada (Ottawa 1982), 53-8; John Manley, “Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the ‘Third Period’: The Workers’ Unity League, 1929-1935,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 5 (1994), 167-94; and John Manley, “‘Starve, Be Damned!’: Communists and Canada’s Urban Unemployed, 1929-1939,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 79 (September 1998), 467-73.

²For criticism of Buck’s performance as Party trade-union secretary, see University of Toronto (hereafter UT), Fisher Rare Book Room (hereafter FRBR), Robert Kenny Collection (hereafter RKC), Box 2, *Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of the Communist Party of Canada* (hereafter *Proceedings of the Fifth Convention*), Toronto, 19-20 June 1927, 80ff. For his visit to Moscow and illness, see National Archives of Canada (hereafter NA), Comintern Fonds (hereafter CF), Reel 11, File 97, Tim Buck to Stewart Smith, 15, 24 January 1930; and NA, CF, Reel 11, File 97, Resolution of the American-Canadian Landersecretariat of the International Lenin School on the Situation in the Communist Party of Canada, 2 April 1930; NA Communist Party of Canada Papers (hereafter CPCP), Box 8, File 7, Stewart Smith to Tim Buck, 27 May 1930; NA, CPCP, Box 8, File 7, Jack Davis (Sam Carr) to Tim Buck, 5 July 1930; NA, CPCP, Box 8, File 7, Buck to Davis; and NA, CPCP, Box 8, File 7, Smith to Buck, 4 December 1930.

³Provincial Archives of Ontario (AO), CPCP (microfilm), Reports and speeches at Enlarged Plenum, 8C 0588 ff. Cape Bretoner James B. McLachlan was notably unimpressed. For

Prisoner 2425

During the two years and nine months of Buck's incarceration, the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL) became the underground Party's public face. It represented the "Eight" as the party's "symbolic centre." Buck's personal position was never in doubt. Apart from the fact that his two likeliest successors as general secretary, Stewart Smith (acting general secretary from 1932-34) and Leslie Morris, had blemished records, Buck, the only one of the seven polburo comrades who was nationally known and of British stock, was still basking in the heroic image he had cut in the dock. The CLDL very quickly focused its attention on him. It was his face the CLDL placed on picture-postcards of Kingston prison for mass mailings to "Hon. Mr. Hugh Guthrie, Minister of Justice, Ottawa, Ont."⁴

The CLDL, a section of Willi Munzenberg's International Red Aid (MOPR), had achieved little since its formation in 1925. That did not change when the arrests occurred. Its calls for labour solidarity evoked little response from a Canadian labour movement embittered by the Class Against Class thesis that social democrats were "social fascists" — "objectively" part of the class enemy. By February 1932, however, CLDL national secretary A.E. Smith claimed the support of workers' organizations with a combined membership of 200,000 when he handed Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett a mass petition for the repeal of Section 98 and the release of the "Kingston Eight." Thanks in no small part to Smith's readiness to mitigate Communist sectarianism, the CLDL became not only a "front" for the party but also a half-way house for leftward moving workers — and some non-proletarians — who were not prepared for the demands and dangers of party membership. Between 1931-33 CLDL membership rose from 10,000 to 25,000. Its later petitions bore almost a half-million signatures.⁵

Buck's trial performance, see UT, Fisher Library (hereafter FL), RKC, Box 27, Supreme Court of Ontario, *Rex v. Tim Buck et al.*, 382-490.

⁴Smith, Buck's right-hand man in the 1929 factional struggles, was not only barely in his twenties, but he could never quite get out from under the political cloud produced by his unorthodox views on Canada's colonial status; the arrival of veteran American Communist Jack Johnstone, on secondment from the CPUSA, to assist Smith underlined the latter's vulnerability. Morris, like Smith, a Lenin School "kid" (though somewhat older), was too acerbic, truculent, and inveterately factional to be seriously considered for the top job. In addition, he was another casualty of the anti-communist purge; he spent eighteen months in Bordeaux, Quebec, penitentiary for "seditious utterance" in Montréal. Four of the "Eight" were identifiably "ethnic": Boychuk and Popovic (Ukrainian), Hill (Finnish), and Carr (Jewish); Carr, though a Lenin School graduate, was also a novice. Of the two "Canadians," WUL secretary Tom Ewan (a Scot) had only entered the national leadership during the left turn, while Malcolm Bruce (a Prince Edward Islander) had always been a semi-detached member of the national leadership.

⁵J. Petyshyn, "Class Conflicts and Civil Liberties: The Origins and Activities of the Canadian Labour Defense League, 1925-1940," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (Autumn 1982), 39-63; Andrée Lévesque, *Scène de la vie en rouge: L'époque de Jeanne Corbin, 1906-1944*

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Matthew Popovich, Tom McEwen, Tom Hill, John Boychuk, Mike Golinsky (charges later dropped), Sam Carr, Tom Cacic, and Tim Buck. Absent: Malcolm Bruce. "Communists Charged Under Section 98, 1931," *Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library*, University of Toronto, Kenny Collection, Ms Coll 179, Box 636/#155.

Several long biographical articles on Buck appeared in *The Worker* during 1932, presumably to acquaint new Party members — a growing number — with their lost leader.⁶ These were consolidated in 1933 into a sixteen page pamphlet *Tim Buck — Dauntless Leader of the Canadian Working Class*. Even this was only a stop-gap: work was continuing on the "fair sized book" that was needed to do full justice to Buck's life. These publications marked the beginnings of a conscious "cult of personality," very much like the contemporaneous cult being constructed around Joseph Stalin, which sought to imbue its subject with unblemished moral

(Montréal 1999), 116-18. On the CLDL as a half-way house, see University of British Columbia Archives, Alex Fergusson interview. Fergusson was active in the CLDL and party-led unemployed councils before joining the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

⁶In a 4 May 1933 report to the ECCI's Anglo-American Secretariat, leading Ukrainian-Canadian official John Navis reported that membership had risen to over 3000. NA, CF, Reel 2, File 206, John Navis, Report on Communist Party of Canada, 4 May 1933.

qualities and an exceptional — even superhuman — array of practical abilities. The anonymous authors of *Tim Buck — Dauntless Leader*, even with deposed General Secretary Jack MacDonald and other victims of the left turn still around to refute them, could not resist inflating Buck's party-building role, claiming, for example, that he had played the biggest role in forming the Industrial Union of Needle Trades' Workers (IUNTW), the most stable union in the Party's "revolutionary" trade union centre, the Workers' Unity League (WUL). One omission was Buck's youthful membership of the British ILP (as an apprentice engineer in Suffolk he had shaken Keir Hardie's hand). Perhaps to protect Buck from the taint of association with a party the CPC identified as "social fascism" incarnate, the pamphlet gave him instead a pristine pre-party past that climaxed near the end of World War I when he became an anti-war campaigner (very topical in the context of 1933), a marxist and a communist virtually in one epiphanous moment. Unlike Buck's own later writings on Party history, the pamphlet did not claim that he had been present in Fred Farley's barn. Rather, it emphasized the "remarkable capacity for leadership" he displayed from the moment he joined. He was an "able theoretical leader" — as the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) acknowledged in electing him to its executive as early as 1924; a political writer with a "simple, flexible, lucid style," and a public speaker of "ready wit" and "a certain quiet, compelling force." He was also a man of action whose body had more than once "made contact with the heavy boots and pounding fists of police plug uglies." How, many party members wondered, could this small (5'6"), slightly built "dynamo of energy ... work at such an intense pitch"? Yet despite the toll "at times" exacted by sixteen to eighteen hour days, at no time did Buck display "any signs of nerve strain." Nor did he ever become detached from the rank and file. On the contrary, he was always ready to talk to ordinary party members "with much patience ... and unfailing geniality and good humour." In prison he remained a worker "of stout heart" with an "all-compelling faith in the working class." The pamphlet enjoined the working-class "to fight with might and main to free [him] and restore this peerless leader to his rightful place — at the head of the Canadian toilers' struggles."⁷

Meanwhile, the authorities were unwittingly boosting Buck's specialness. On 17 October 1932 a riot broke out at Kingston. Three days later the atmosphere was still simmering when prison officers pumped five bullets into Buck's cell. Whether they were following orders or simply showing initiative is unknown, but his cell was the only one in a completely peaceful "D" block to come under fire. Amazingly, news of the shootings was not leaked until the following spring, when Superintendent of Prisons General D.M Ormond charged suspected "ringleaders" with a variety of offences, singling out Buck for the most serious charge of "incitement to riot," which carried a maximum sentence of fourteen years. The CLDL responded with a "Stop the Frame Up!" campaign, demanding a full, public inquiry into the riots, no secret trials or punishments, the rescinding of the indictment against Buck,

⁷*Tim Buck — Dauntless Leader of the Canadian Working Class* (Montreal n.d. [1933]).

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and political status for the Communist prisoners — including physical separation from the “hardened criminals” — and indeed “all jailed for working class activity.” Testifying at the trial of one of Kingston’s genuine hardcases, Buck grasped the chance to place on record that he had been shot at: in the CLDL’s hands, this became a claim that he had survived an assassination attempt by “guards of the Bennett government.” At Buck’s own trial, the judge found the main charge against him not proven but still gave him an additional nine months for “riotous destruction of property.” Meanwhile, several important sections of the labour movement were rallying behind the demand for an official inquiry. Veteran socialist John Buckley wrote to the Justice Department on behalf of the Toronto District Labour Council (TDLC): “[We] have every reason to know [Buck] personally and know that he would not make statements of that character without there was some justification, as physically he is inoffensive, and a gentleman in all his discourse.”⁸

CLDL efforts to wring every possible advantage from Buck’s persecution continued to receive the state’s unwitting assistance. Since the bottoming-out of the slump in the spring of 1933, a rise in working-class optimism and militancy (much of it led or channeled by the WUL) led to increasing demands for political action to mitigate the continuing asperities of the Great Depression. It also bred widespread agreement that the Tories were least likely to deliver what was needed; consequently, the Conservative Party suffered an electoral meltdown between 1933-1939. The anti-communist mood of the late 1920s and early 1930s was clearly softening. One sign of this was the decision taken early in 1933 by the recently installed workers’ town council in Blairmore, Alberta, to rename Main Street “Tim Buck Boulevard” and literally put Buck’s name in lights at either end.⁹

“Iron Heel” Bennett ignored such signs, telling a CLDL delegation in November 1933 that the Kingston prisoners would serve “every last five minutes of their sentences.”¹⁰ The Ontario government underlined the Tory threat to civil liberties, first by banning the Progressive Arts Club’s dramatization of the riot events, *Eight Men Speak*, then by charging Smith with sedition when he threatened to produce a pamphlet containing a detailed account of the “assassination” attempt. The entire case against Smith — a former Methodist minister — rested on the testimony of Toronto policemen, but their authority had been waning since the previous summer when thousands of Toronto workers had fought them in open-air battles over the communist-led unemployed councils’ right to agitate in public parks. Smith’s defence team was permitted to call Buck as its star witness, and he managed to blurt

⁸Canadian Labor Defence League, *Is Tim Buck a Political Prisoner, Or a Criminal?* (Toronto 1933); John Buckley to Minister of Justice, 5 August 1933, in *Report of the Royal Commission to Investigate the Penal System of Canada* (Ottawa 1938), 87. Like Buck, Buckley was an Englishman and railway shop craftsman.

⁹Gilbert Levine, ed., *Patrick Lenihan: From Irish Rebel to Founder of Canadian Public Sector Unionism* (St. John’s 1998), 85-90.

¹⁰Bennett, quoted in Petryshyn, “Class Conflicts and Civil Liberties,” 52.

out “I was shot at” before the judge ordered his rather disorderly removal. Ignoring instructions from the bench to convict, the jury found Smith innocent.¹¹

Smith’s trial gave the CLDL’s allegations more publicity than any number of performances of *Eight Men Speak* could have provided. Thereafter, it seems, Bennett awoke to the new reality. In June 1934, Sam Carr and Matt Popovic were the first of the Eight to be paroled, the others (with the exception of Buck and Cacic, who was deported) following over the next few months. Buck had to wait until late November to be freed — only a week after Bennett personally refused an appeal from Alice Buck to set his release date.¹² His release almost caught the Party napping. Buck, however, ever resourceful, managed to slip his guard and telephone the CLDL, giving the comrades an hour and a half to organize a welcoming party. Some frantic telephoning—including calls to two radio stations—brought a crowd of over 4,000 to Toronto’s Union Station. The tumult that greeted his appearance confirmed the party’s success in casting the mild-mannered machinist as an authentic working-class hero. He was carried aloft to begin a round of celebrations, hastily convened sessions of the restored Central Committee, and numerous speaking engagements, climaxing in an adoring 17,000 strong rally in Maple Leaf Gardens. Three weeks later an audience of 10,000 in the Montréal Stadium showed that Toronto’s joy was no flash-in-the-pan.¹³ As the CLDL hailed a victory for “mass pressure,” the CPC began to emerge from the underground.

Towards the Popular Front

Buck returned to a party that was in much better health than the one he had left. Now with some 6,000 members, it no longer had to rely on the willingness of a small number of cadres to move around the country in response to this emergency or that opportunity. Forced to operate through such front groups as the CLDL, Workers’ Ex-Servicemen’s League, Friends of the Soviet Union, unemployed councils, and Workers’ Sports Association, Communists had learned how (and how not) to build alliances. In many urban centres they were putting down roots that would enable them to play fuller community roles throughout the next dozen years.

¹¹ John Manley, “Starve, Be Damned!,” 477; Petryshyn, “Class Conflicts and Civil Liberties”; Oscar Ryan, *Tim Buck: A Conscience for Canada* (Toronto 1975), 163-82; A.E. Smith, *All My Life: An Autobiography* (Toronto 1977), 166-78.

¹² The unfortunate Cacic was immediately deported to fascist Yugoslavia.

¹³ William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds., *Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto 1977), 245-6; Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whittaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part I, 1933-34* (St. John’s 1993), 424; Kealey and Whittaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935* (St. John’s 1995), 24-6 (# 739, 9 January 1935). The remaining volumes in this series, all with the same editors and place of publication, are *Part III, 1936* (1996); *Part IV, 1937* (1997), and *Part V, 1938-39* (1997). They are henceforth cited as individual bulletins, with pagination as in the published volume.

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From the summer of 1933, the Party pioneered mass action against fascism and anti-semitism, and just weeks before Buck's release, a new bridge to middle-class sympathizers, the Canadian League Against War and Fascism (CLAWF), held its first national congress.¹⁴ The CPC even abandoned its traditional anti-electoralism and started to gain a foothold in municipal politics.¹⁵

Buck was the ideal person to consolidate this reorientation. Even as he spoke the right lines during the heyday of Class Against Class, he was not a sectarian by temperament. "Lord god," a militant remembered of his first sighting of Buck on the stump in 1930, "he was not my idea of a communist ... he looked to me like Reverend Tim Buck ... his language was beautiful. His delivery was out of this world, but you could tell that he was honest and sincere." Early in his Party career, the RCMP had detected his peculiar "art of making friends with all unionists, whether radical in politics or not."¹⁶ The Comintern's tactical turn towards Popular Fronts against fascism was all about making friends.

Exploiting the wave of sympathy that greeted his release, the Party immediately sent him on a gruelling coast-to-coast tour, to promote its new appeal for working-class unity. In January and early February, Buck criss-crossed central Canada, speaking in Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins, South Porcupine, Kirkland Lake, Rouyn, Ottawa, Montréal, Kitchener, Windsor, Hamilton, and Niagara Falls. After a second appearance in the capital he travelled to Winnipeg, spending a relatively leisurely three weeks laying the basis of his candidacy in the forthcoming federal election. He then by-passed Saskatchewan for a tour of the Alberta-British Columbia mining districts, taking in Drumheller, Wayne, Lethbridge, Blairmore, Coleman, and Michel, and British Columbia's main cities. By the time he reached BC, the RCMP reported, Buck was "thoroughly 'fed up' with the tour and the continual repetition of the same old material." His stock speech was certainly repetitive. It contained no hint of apology for the tacitly discarded Third Period line but, even as it insisted that capitalism continued to hurtle towards fascism, it conceded that the role of social reformism ("social fascism" was no longer for public use) had changed. Social democrats were now misguided but fundamentally decent reformists who understood the fascist threat and who could be drawn into an anti-fascist united front. The size and enthusiasm of *this* audience, he would note, when compared with the turnout at his *last* public appearance in the city, reflected the changed balance of class forces that had forced the release of the

¹⁴Levine, *Lenihan*, 91-2; Peter Hunter, *Which Side Are You On, Boys?: Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto 1988); *Proceedings of the First Canadian Congress Against War and Fascism*, Toronto, 6-7 October 1934.

¹⁵Stewart Smith informed the ECCI in 1935 that the party already possessed 80-90 municipal councillors and school board trustees. NA, CF, K 288, File 169, Comrade Clarke (Smith), Report to Meeting of Anglo-American Section, Communist International, 17 July 1935.

¹⁶Levine, *Lenihan*, 46; NA, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (hereafter CSIS), Public Access Files (hereafter PAF), Tim Buck (hereafter TBF), Report re "T. Buck — Workers' Party of Canada, Toronto," 29 November 1922.

Kingston prisoners. Solid foundations existed for the working-class unity needed to defend workers' rights from the deprivations of an increasingly desperate capitalist class. If Buck were bored, it did not show. Returning east in April, on a circuitous route via Calgary, Nordegg, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, and Edmonton, he spent May Day in Toronto before concluding his long march with a two-week tour of the Maritimes. In the space of six months, he had addressed a total audience of over 100,000. Even R.B. Bennett recognized that ex-Prisoner 2425 was now a man of political substance.¹⁷

Buck liked to see himself as an independent political thinker. Interviewed by the *Toronto Star* shortly after his release, he responded to a request for his personal political motto by (mis)quoting Georges Jacques Danton: "Audacity, audacity, still more audacity." (Ironically, the choice suggested caution and derivativeness rather than boldness; Buck had borrowed it from Lenin, who had borrowed it from Marx).¹⁸ In his *Reminiscences* Buck claimed credit for conceptualizing the Popular Front in Canada. The Party's new approach, he argued, stemmed from his determination to overcome the regrettable tension that existed between the CPC and the young Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and which had resulted from sectarian errors the Party had made *in his absence*. Buck immediately approached the CCF with an appeal for unity in the federal election — which the CCF duly rejected, as it would every Communist overture during the Popular Front.¹⁹

Buck's account is unreliable, to say the least. He may have been absent when the Party started to proclaim that the CCF was "social fascist," but he had often used that term to vilify the CCF's labourist antecedents. The CPC, moreover, prompted by the Comintern, had dropped the dogma of social fascism in the autumn of 1934, by which time, in any case, many Party members were working harmoniously with rank and file CCFers. Buck had a strange conception of what constituted bridge-building: the CCF failed to see any comradeship in his decision to contest A.A. Heaps' North Winnipeg seat in the federal election. Buck's unsatisfactory account of this decision failed to mention that it had been taken by the ECCI, an admission that would have compromised the Party's claims, then and later, to be fully

¹⁷RCMP Security Bulletin, #745, 20 February 1935, 112; #753, 18 April 1935, 235; and R.B. Bennett to Howard Robinson, 11 June 1935, quoted in Alvin Finkel, "Origins of the Welfare State in Canada," in Leo Panitch, ed., *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power* (Toronto 1977), 351.

¹⁸Labor Progressive Party, Toronto Constituency Committee, *This Man Tim Buck* (Toronto 1945). This pamphlet consisted of a celebratory cull of Buck's non-party newspaper clippings. Danton's actual words were: "De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours l'audace!" See *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, fourth edition, (Oxford 1992), 230. For their apprehension by Marx and Lenin, see Neil Harding, *Leninism* (Basingstoke and London 1996), 102.

¹⁹NA, CF, Reel 288, File 169, ECCI, Draft Proposals for the CP of Canada on the Federal Election Campaign, 8 February 1935.

independent: as Leslie Morris put it in 1939, “Tim Buck’s Party” “[sprang] from the loins of the great Canadian people ... carried on the traditions of the pioneers, of the heroes who dreamed in 1837 of a free, democratic and united Canada ... [and was] subject to no control other than the democratic will of its members.”²⁰ On numerous occasions Buck insisted that policy-making was never “a matter of dictation” and that the Russian comrades “were in no position to impose their will on us.” If Canadian policy closely resembled Soviet policy, he insisted, that was because “the logic of close unity and working together and thinking along the same lines ... very easily [got] to the point where you accept the majority decisions.” The Popular Front was a perfect example. The Seventh Congress “stated perfectly what [he] had been groping for” when he left Kingston.²¹

Buck did not hatch the idea of the Popular Front, but he did show some boldness in implementing it. Moscow’s call for new practices capable of mobilizing social forces whose primary identities were not proletarian or who did not (yet) aspire to a socialist future arrived with little guidance about some important practicalities. Should the Party continue to assert its vanguard role? What compromises, if any, would be acceptable to ensure middle-class participation? Even before the Seventh Congress, new Comintern president Georgi Dimitrov was hinting that national parties should have greater freedom to adapt the international line to national circumstances. Buck, it seems, was keen to exploit that freedom in working out how to achieve trade-union unity. By late 1934 the ECCI was suggesting that the CPC take note of what was happening in the United States, where the CPUSA was already dissolving its red unions into the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The WUL, however, had amassed some solid achievements in the previous two years, and the CPC (possibly with encouragement from Buck’s old RILU mentor A.S. Lozovsky, who was notably lukewarm about the Popular Front) argued that quite different Canadian conditions justified the WUL’s continued existence. Without seeking Comintern approval, in February it unilaterally announced that it would seek to achieve trade-union unity through an amalgamation of all Canada’s trade-union centres. The ECCI marked down this boldness, but gave the CPC its head for the time being. It was more concerned with reining in the excessively militant conception of the Popular Front evidenced in the Party’s first federal election manifesto. Leslie Morris, Canada’s ECCI representative, wrote on its behalf from Moscow, slating Buck’s statement that Canada was “ripe for Socialism” and that a “*revolutionary workers and farmers’ government alone can free the common people from hunger, reaction and wage slavery ... a Soviet Government.*” ECCI’s

²⁰Leslie Morris, *The Story of Tim Buck’s Party: 1922-1939* (Toronto 1939), 31.

²¹Beeching and Clarke, *Yours in the Struggle*, 257. For other examples of this mindset, see Irving Abella, “Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 203-4; Levine, *Lenihan*, 133-35.

view was that something much more achievable — such as a “Farmer-Labor Government” — had to be proposed as the immediate goal.²²

This warning may have contributed to the party’s cautious response to two manifestations of class struggle in BC. In June, the traditionally headstrong BC district leadership simultaneously launched a long-anticipated Waterfront Workers’ strike (Communist waterfront organizers had been preparing it for two years) and the Relief Camp Workers’ Union’s On-to-Ottawa Trek. The centre initially *opposed* the Trek, only rallying round it when it had become a (rather popular) *fait accompli*. The waterfront strike was another matter. After initially welcoming it, by early July Toronto was privately urging the BC district leadership to push for a quick settlement, apparently fearing that R.B. Bennett would seize on the two events as a pretext for calling off the federal election. It did not want to be held responsible for delivering Canada to fascism.²³

Buck’s moment of independence ended after Stewart Smith presented his report from the Seventh Congress to the Ninth Central Committee Plenum in November 1935. Smith’s domination of the Plenum may have been another silent warning to Buck not to take his leadership for granted. The most controversial feature of his speech was the order to liquidate the WUL and seek the best possible terms of entry for the red unions into the AFL. Buck left the unity process in the hands of the party’s leading industrial cadres, Tom Ewan and J.B. Salsberg, who implemented it with a dispatch that left much of the party rank and file dazed and confused. He did, however, personally intervene in 1936 when WUL president James Bryson McLachlan resigned from the Party over its “opportunist” handling of unity negotiations. Buck may have been genuinely sorry to see the Cape Breton veteran depart, if only because McLachlan, of all Canadian bolsheviks, had the strongest credentials for inclusion in the pantheon of popular-democratic heroes the Party was then busily constructing. On the other hand, as part of its drive for a less intransigent image and broader popular appeal, the Party had for some time been actively seeking to promote younger cadres over McLachlan.²⁴ Using loyalty

²²NA, CF, K289, File 174, Leslie Morris to Central Committee, CPC, 22 February 1935, emphasis in original, italics added; Leslie Morris to Dear Friends, 10, 28 March 1935; John Manley, “Moscow Rules? The ‘Red’ Union Experience in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1927-1936,” Paper presented to the Social Science History Association, 25th Anniversary Meeting, Pittsburgh, Pa., 26-29 October 2000. NA, CF, K288, File 169, J. Porter [Morris’ pseudonym], ECCI Memorandum on the Extension of the United Front in Canada, 7 July 1935, emphasis in original. Morris’ hostility to Buck was longstanding. See UT, RKC, Box 26, Tom Ewan to “Dear Samski” (Sam Carr), 12 July 1931. The ECCI entered the Seventh Congress undecided on the WUL’s future. See NA, Reel 289, File 176, “The Lessons of the Workers’ Struggles and the Tasks of the Communists in [the] Trade Unions and the Unemployed Movement,” ECCI, Draft Trade Union Resolution, 11 July 1935.

²³NA, R.B. Bennett Papers, 267494-5, Memo re “Party Policy,” 4 July 1935, enclosed with Sir Edward Beatty to R.B. Bennett, 25 July 1935.

²⁴NA, CF, Reel 22, File 180. William Findlay, Report from District # 1, May 1935.

to the international line as his trump card, Buck urged McLachlan to subject himself to self-criticism; or in other words recant. McLachlan, however, mistakenly believing that he was in step with the Comintern, quietly left the Party rather than join its "sad march to the right."²⁵

Canadianizing Communism

Buck knew that if the Party hoped to become more popular, it would have to learn the art of persuasion (at least in regard to non-Communists). His ethnicity undoubtedly helped sell the Party's new *Canadian* identity. Through the 1920s and early 1930s, the CPC had resolutely refused to identify with national aspirations, viewed patriotism as bourgeois ideology, and believed that if the workers had a country, that country was the Soviet Union. By 1933, however, without becoming any less adulatory towards the USSR, it was exploring Canadian radicalism's pre-bolshevik roots. This initiative was given added urgency by the Seventh Comintern Congress' slightly ironic directive to all member parties to embrace national radical traditions. Buck took up the theme with relish. On 4 July 1936, the day Section 98 was to be removed from the statute book, he urged to Canadians to celebrate the day as a victory for the "liberty-loving traditions of the Canadian people." Significantly, his appeal provided an early illustration of how the turn to the "people" incorporated a turn away from the language of class; its handful of references to workers, strikers, socialism, and class, was swamped by some 40 references to "the people," the "people's will," "people's united action" and the like.²⁶

Buck continued to make an astonishing number of personal appearances, often seeking out areas where the Party was weak. In one three week sojourn in Montréal during March 1936, for example, he addressed over twenty public meetings on subjects as varied as "The Communist Answer to the Jewish Problem in Canada," "Is Communism the Answer?" (which he debated with American New Dealer William Trufant Foster), and the recent Popular Front victory in Spain. He also embraced the new medium of radio with gusto; between 1936-39 radio listeners across Canada became familiar with his reassuring Suffolk burr.²⁷ He went wher-

²⁵David Frank and John Manley, "The Sad March to the Right: J.B. McLachlan's Resignation from the Communist Party of Canada, 1936," *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Fall 1992), 115-34. For continuing confusing surrounding trade union policy and the People's Front, see "Work in the Timmins Area (By Representative from District # 4)," in *Towards A Canadian People's Front*, pp. 170-172; NA, Finnish Organization of Canada Papers (hereafter FOCP), Vol. 16, File 32, George Sundquist to Secretary, Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union, Thunder Bay District (hereafter TBD), 28 November 1936.

²⁶William Findlay, "Regarding British Traditions," *The Worker*, 10 June 1933; Tim Buck, *Celebrate the Repeal of Section 98!*, brochure, 4 July 1936. As the party's role in building the unions of the Committee for Industrial Organization demonstrated, the discursive turn away from class did not preclude continued engagement in class struggle.

²⁷For the programme of talks, see *RCMP Security Bulletin*, # 792, 5 February 1936, 68.

ever there was an audience, whether it was one of businessmen or Christians. The congregation of an Anglican church in North Toronto heard his views on “The Principles of Communism in Relation to the Ideals of Jesus.” Though the Roman Catholic Church did not open its doors to Buck, he appealed directly to Roman Catholics to acknowledge the common ground between the CPC programme and recent papal encyclicals preaching social justice. He did not confine himself to proselytizing a narrow Party line. A packed and mainly middle-class People’s Forum audience in Montréal’s American Presbyterian Church heard him expound on penal reform “from the point of view of the inmate.” Here, after stressing that only a socialist society could eradicate criminality, he acknowledged the need for immediate reforms, including abolition of the most repressive aspects of the regime and the installation of a system based on prisoners’ rights rather than on privileges. More surprisingly, he added (in a passage the RCMP omitted from its report of the meeting), that to soften discipline without providing prisoners with a serious “training in social responsibility” would only encourage their licentiousness.²⁸

Buck’s rhetorical mode was as important as what he said. He jealously guarded his reputation as “a gentleman in all his discourse.” When applied to each other by Anglo-Celtic proletarians, the term “gentleman” denotes qualities of honour, integrity, and respectability. As we have seen, even in the abrasive moment of *Class Against Class*, his tone and style were not “typically” communist. During the Popular Front years, the only group he lacerated were the Trotskyists; after he returned from Moscow in late 1936, the Party declared all-out political war on Trotsky, Trotskyism, and “Trotskyites.”²⁹ Otherwise, unlike an irreconcilable like Malcolm Bruce, who would draw in unwary hecklers to set them up for a rhetorical sucker punch and ritual pummeling, Buck preferred to leave his critics with their dignity intact. He liked to demonstrate that Communists were “reasoning people.” When he and Stanley Ryerson addressed an 1837 centenary rally in Massey Hall, he delivered the scholarly treatise, leaving the traditional intellectual to add a “nasty and sarcastic” coda attacking provincial premier Mitchell Hepburn.³⁰ Buck’s

²⁸“Tim Buck Meeting Packed But Quiet,” *Daily Clarion*, 23 November 1936, and the RCMP’s report of the same date, NA, CSIS PAF, TBF, 23 November 1936.

²⁹NA, CF, Reel K-290, File 183, Leslie Morris, “Trotsky’s Defenders and Their Purpose,” undated; NA, CF, Reel K-290, File 183, Leslie Morris, “The Role of the Canadian Party in Exposing Counter-Revolutionary Trotskyism,” 21 December 1936; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Lenin Memorial Meeting,” 24 January 1937.

³⁰NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Communist Party of Canada — Vancouver, B.C.,” 14 May 1937; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Meeting Under Auspices of CPC, Toronto, April 18, 1937,” 19 April 1937. For Communists as “reasoning people,” see NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Communist Meeting — Melville, Saskatchewan,” 25 July 1936; Ted Allan, “Delegates Proven Capable Canadians,” *Daily Clarion*, 12 October 1937; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Communist Party — Winnipeg, Tim Buck’s Meeting and Meeting at the Auditorium,” 12 March 1937 (and compare with “Buck Asks Joint Drive on Foes,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 March 1937).

good-humoured response to a questioner at one Montréal meeting was well appreciated. Inquiring into how Buck managed to be so finely suited and booted, his questioner managed to raise the ubiquitous question of “Moscow Gold.” Buck replied that his income was the standard party rate of sixteen dollars a week; which, he pointed out, had to provide for himself, his wife, and his two children. As for his shoes, they had been donated by some sympathetic shoemakers, while his suit (and here one can imagine him winking at the audience) was a gift from “a bunch of revolutionary tailors in Montreal.” Buck’s self-image, then, was of an ordinary family-man, with no airs and graces, sustained by his people. According to hagiographer Oscar Ryan, Buck’s clothes “were sometimes a friend’s used garments.” It may be, however, that the more frequently he addressed bourgeois audiences, the more he strived for sartorial distinction.³¹

During an intensive, week-long tour of Saskatchewan in July 1936, Buck’s mainly open-air meetings were so successful that RCMP Assistant Commissioner S.T. Wood asked the provincial Attorney-General to apply some gentle pressure to the editor of the *Regina Daily Star*, to ensure that “a little more care [be observed] in reporting attendances at such gatherings.” At one rural meeting the paper had recorded an audience of 2,000 when the real figure, so the Force’s Crane Valley detachment had assured Wood, was only 500. Even more troubling to the RCMP than the numbers turning out to see and hear Buck was the fact that many were “Canadians”; worse still, some were the “better class” of Canadians.³² Though the RCMP insisted on attributing this phenomenon entirely to Buck’s curiosity value, some new listeners, as in Calgary, where “all kinds of business people were donating so much a month to the Party They were sympathisers privately but they never openly connected with the radical movement,” were personally drawn to and identified with Buck.³³ He was praised from some surprising quarters in terms that went beyond simple politeness. J.M. Turner, Reconstruction Party mayor of Melville, Saskatchewan, declared that, while “ignorant of Mr. Buck’s work and

³¹For Buck and Moscow Gold, see NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re “Time Buck — Communist Party of Canada, Mass Meeting, Montreal,” 15 February 1937; “Minister Introducing Tim Buck is Heckled,” *Globe and Mail*, 13 September 1937. Oscar Ryan, *Tim Buck: A Conscience for Canada* (Toronto 1975), 184. For the party’s new emphasis on respectability, see Peter Hunter, *Which Side Were You On, Boys? Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto 1988), 46-7; Victoria Post, “Suggestions for Work Amongst Women,” *Discussion*, #5 (1937).

³²“T. Buck Speaks at Communist Picnic,” *Regina Daily Star*, 20 July 1936; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Assistant Commissioner S.T. Wood to Attorney-General of Saskatchewan, 27 July 1936.

³³Levine, *Lenihan*, 106, 119. For the growing attraction of humanitarian anti-fascism to the middle class, see Manley, “Introduction,” Kealey and Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part V. 1938-1939*, (St. John’s, 1997) 11-12; “British, Red Flags March Side By Side” and “Clergyman Call It Duty of Workers To Organize,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 May 1937; “Relief Food Ship to Spain,” editorial, *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 September 1938.

possibly not agreeing with him in his views," it was "an honour and a pleasure to be on the same platform" as someone so clearly "working for his fellow men." An Anglican minister declared Buck a "godly" man, a "dear brother who is a martyr to the cause of freedom ... a man on fire to help his fellow man, cost what it may."³⁴

The shift from class to people was facilitated by the emergence of anti-fascism as the CPC's core activity following the onset of the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1936. Buck travelled to Europe shortly after the Generals' Revolt, and with CLAWF secretary A.A. MacLeod visited the early battlefronts, met with the Republican government, and took part in the conference which decided to set up the International Brigades. Though he subsequently exaggerated his role in the solidarity campaign (MacLeod and Norman Bethune were, respectively, its key organizational and symbolic figures), he spoke articulately and often about the Spanish cause, often launching addresses with the clenched-fist salute and the Republican slogan, "*No Pasaran!*" "All Friends of Democracy" had a stake in Spain's fate. The war, he told Party members, had made all sorts of people realize that they "fear Fascism even more than they hate Socialism. We must show them that this can all be achieved in orderly progression." If this hinted at a possible socialist core to the Aid Spain movement, Buck generally emphasized its universal, moral dimension. His emotional, evangelical, and sometimes explicitly Christianized discourse set the tone for the entire campaign. With a scattering of personal pronouns, he told his fellow Canadians that they should consider it a matter of national honour to join the "great crusade" (a reference to the atrocities of Franco's Moorish — black, Islamic — Legion?) to aid their Spanish "brothers and sisters," save Spain from a "Hitler-like fate of ... extermination and oppression," and save civilization itself from a return to savagery and bestiality. "We Canadians," he stated, "have done something, but not enough by far ... we Canadians have made only the first few small steps towards the fulfilment of our sacred obligations ... I am convinced that our Canadian people are willing and ready to exert the supreme effort so vitally necessary." Buck, the RCMP observed, was using Spain to "[project] himself into the role of spokesman for the Canadian people."³⁵

³⁴NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "The Communist Party of Canada, Sturgis, Saskatchewan, Tim Buck's Tour," 21 July 1936; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "Communist Meeting — Melville, Saskatchewan," 25 July 1936; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "CP Activities in the County of Norfolk, Ontario," 31 March 1939; "Minister Introducing Tim Buck Is Heckled," *Globe and Mail*, 13 September 1937 (Buck added this encomium to his clippings collection. See *This Man Tim Buck*); NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF. *Fall Program of the Church of the Ascension, North Toronto, Anglican (Independent) flier* [1937]. An earlier guest speaker at this church had been the Reverend Ben Spence, probably the best known CCF supporter of the People's Front, who delivered "The Truth from the Popular Front in Spain."

³⁵NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Flier, "Defend Democracy in Spain — Tim Buck's Message From War Front," 3 October 1936; *RCMP Security Bulletin # 839*, 13 January 1937, 35; # 862, 30 June 1937, 275.

The drive to Canadianize peaked in 1937-38. In 1937 the Party commemorated the centenary of Canada's thwarted bourgeois revolution (an event, it argued, treated to a conspiracy of silence by "official" Canada) by publishing Stanley Ryerson's *1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy*. Ryerson's revisionist reading of the struggle against the "Family Compact" drew clear parallels with the *new* Canadian people's struggle against the "New Family Compact" (or "50 economic big-shots") of monopoly capitalists who formed the core of Canadian fascism; it thus contextualized in Canadian terms the Comintern's ultra-pluralist conception of the Popular Front as a *bloc* open to all but a tiny minority of citizens.³⁶ Buck, popularizing Ryerson's raw material in numerous speeches and articles, extended the Canadian democratic narrative backwards in time and space, laying claim to the political legacy of the French Revolution and Paris Commune and an even longer English *Christian* lineage. In his 1938 Christmas message to the nation, for example, he embraced the "village priest" John Ball, a leader of the 1381 Peasant's Revolt, as the first of many Christians who had given their lives for the common people and who deserved to be viewed as the anti-fascists of their day. The main aim of the Party's memorandum, *Towards Democratic Unity in Canada*, submitted by Buck to the Royal (Rowell-Sirois) Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations in 1938, was Canada's "democratic national unification" as a modern welfare state.³⁷

Even as Buck reached out beyond the working class, his personal support among proletarians grew, not least because he never forgot that he was the leader of a workers' party; a party, moreover, which never modified its name to, say, "Labour-Progressive" — though it often sweetened its local electoral interventions with that term — or ceased to proclaim that its ultimate goal was socialism. His appearance at the end of one open-air rally against slum conditions in Toronto prompted a spontaneous chorus of "The Internationale!" Buck knew how to work a working-class audience. Speaking to a meeting of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' Union in Sudbury, he casually let slip that his next engagement was at the *élite* Canadian Club of Montréal, then slipped in the punchline: "I'll have to

³⁶Stanley Ryerson, *1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy* (Montréal, 1937). Ryerson explicitly set forth its contemporary political lessons by dedicating the book to the Canadian volunteers in Spain. The RCMP considered his history a "rather insidious interpretation." "CP Endeavours to Revive Spirit of 1837 Rebellion," *RCMP Security Bulletin #859*, 10 June 1937, 238-39.

³⁷"Christian Ideals — And the World Today, A Christmas Message by Tim Buck," *Daily Clarion*, 24 December 1938. Emphasis added. The party also tried to incorporate Robert Burns into its Anglo-Celtic democratic lineage. See John Gregory, "Shall Brothers Be for A' That" and John C. Mortimer, "To Rabbie Burns," *Daily Clarion*, 25 January 1938. For the CPGB's efforts to take possession of Britain's national-democratic tradition through "mass spectacle," see Mick Wallis, "Heirs to the Pageant: Mass Spectacle and the Popular Front," in Andy Croft, ed., *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain* (London 1998), 48-67.

examine my conscience." All through a meeting in Melville, Saskatchewan, he traded badinage with the audience while swigging theatrically from a glass of beer. Brandishing his ticket-of-leave, he described it as his "dog licence" and boasted that he and his comrades treated it with all the respect it deserved. If these devices were coded signals to the Party's traditional supporters that he had not abandoned his principles, Buck knew when to let his moderate demeanour slip, and when the occasion demanded it he was capable of giving a more fiery performance. At an election meeting in Vancouver in 1937, Buck, a local paper reported, sensing that his listeners disapproved of the "mildness" of his rhetoric, adopted a more aggressive tone and won them round. To a Montréal questioner who remarked on his "liberal" ideas, he tersely replied: "I am no Liberal."³⁸

From Popular Front to Democratic Front

If veterans felt that their party was in safe hands, they knew that it was changing. While it continued to play a disproportionately large industrial role, notably in building the CIO unions, industrial work was no longer all-important; and it was arguably of lesser importance than anti-fascism, unquestionably the most glamorous and bourgeois-friendly aspect of the Party's political reorientation. Another profound shift occurred in the realm of electoral politics. When Buck introduced the party's 1935 federal election manifesto, he disclaimed any illusions in "gradualism" or the "possibility of winning socialism through parliamentary manoeuvres." The point of the election was to produce revolutionary tribunes: a "dozen revolutionary MPs travelling the country organizing the workers to fight for [the party] program would change the face of the labour movement."³⁹ Thereafter, however, the Party realized that open participation in the "natural" political activity of most Canadians was the key to naturalizing itself. Buck dropped his reservations, and the Party settled in for the long haul, by open and exclusively parliamentary means, towards the achievement of the full "socialist" democracy of the 1936 "Stalin Constitution." To facilitate its electoral turn, the Party started to de-bolshevize, replacing neighbourhood and workplace cells (ironically, just as it was having some success in organizing the latter) with larger, electorally oriented units eventually known as clubs.⁴⁰

³⁸*RCMP Security Bulletin*, #812, 24 June 1936, 266; "Tim Buck Cheered By Market Crowd," *Montréal Gazette*, 31 July 1936; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "Communist Meeting — Melville, Saskatchewan," 25 July 1936; NAC, CSIS, PAF, TBF, "Transcript of Notes Taken of Speeches made by Tim Buck and others at Communist meeting," Sudbury, Ontario, 28 February 1937; NAC, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report on "Buck, T., May Day Toronto, Ontario, 1937"; "Toronto's Biggest May Day Sees 50,000 Demonstrators," *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 May 1937 and *Vancouver News-Herald*, 14 May 1937.

³⁹Tim Buck, "Introduction," CPC Dominion Election Committee, *The Communist Election Program — A Program for A Better Life* (Toronto n.d. [1935]).

⁴⁰De-bolshevization was a faltering process, which remained unfinished on the eve of World War II. See John Manley, "'Communists Love Canada!': The Popular Front and the

From 1935-37 Buck conceived the Popular Front as a militant coalition of the less privileged, led by the organized working class. Despite the Liberal landslide in 1935, he insisted that the 900,000 plus Canadians who had voted Communist, Reconstruction, Social Credit, or CCF were the basis for a Farmer-Labour party, based on the CCF.⁴¹ The CCF, however, though it would have found little to object to in the new, explicitly reformist Party programme adopted at the Eighth National Convention in October 1937 (and according to the *Daily Clarion*, penned by Buck), calling for a "Living Wage for All Who Work by Hand and Brain," "Social Security for All," a "Just Taxation Policy [to] Make the Rich Pay," and world peace, steadfastly refused to entertain any notion of a Popular Front, arguing that it could not trust the Communists — and Buck personally — until they gave a more satisfactory explanation for their shift from Class Against Class. While Buck waited (in vain) for the CCF to respond, the ECCI told the Canadians that "reaction" was "crystallizing" more rapidly than unity and urged it to let the progressive movement "unfold" naturally, from province to province, varying its tactics according to local conditions.⁴² In a last effort to win over the CCF leadership, Buck announced that if the CCF would make itself a genuine Farmer-Labour party, the Party would no longer insist on its right of affiliation. At the same time, he appealed in quite militant terms directly to the CCF rank and file, arguing that a "united front of the working class" was still the key to defeating fascism. While many rank and file CCFers agreed, many others felt that the Communists' willingness to concede so much of their socialist doctrine made them untrustworthy partners.⁴³ Buck was already offering alliances with any group — socialist or non-socialist — that could be considered "progressive." In the 1937 Ontario provincial election, the Party had Stewart Smith abandon his candidacy in Toronto Bellwoods, to allow a free run to Arthur Roebuck, who with David Croll, had recently resigned from Mitchell Hepburn's cabinet, in protest of Hepburn's anti-CIO stance. Buck's readiness to embrace Social Credit in the West (having earlier written it off as at least proto-fascist) and his call for "progressive" Liberals such as Roebuck, Croll, T. Duff Pattullo,

Re-Making of the Communist Party of Canada, 1933-1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, forthcoming 2002; Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto 1989), 137-38.

⁴¹Tim Buck, "The General Elections," in *Towards a Canadian People's Front* (Toronto 1935), 76-92. Ivan Avakumovic argues that the CPC did miserably in 1935, but an overall quadrupling of its national vote seems a creditable result for a party that was still illegal and not yet organized on an electoral basis. See Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975), 93-5.

⁴²Tim Buck, "Arise, Canada! United, Strong and Bountiful," CPC Draft to the 8th National Convention, *Daily Clarion*, 31 July 1937; NA, CF, Reel K-291, file 187, "Resolution of CI on Work of CPC, draft, 13 August 1937.

⁴³Tim Buck and Norman Freed, *Unity Will Win! To the Members of the CCF* (Toronto 1937); Mark Stone, "Communist Tactics Undergo a Change," *New Commonwealth*, 18 December 1937.

and W.L. Mackenzie King to form and lead a "Democratic Front" of the "The People Against Monopoly" only strengthened the CCF's view that Communists were opportunists who spread reformist illusions inimical to real socialism.⁴⁴

Electoralism fed a general tendency in Popular Front politics to dilute and downplay the Party's own political agenda. Buck drew the leadership's attention to this tendency in April 1938. Shortly after he identified the problem, however, Saskatchewan leaders announced that for the foreseeable future the Party did not intend "to work for Communism ... because ... that is partisan work and will divide the people."⁴⁵ Another consequence of the electoral turn was increasing opportunism in industrial work. Questioned about the French CP's increasingly hostile attitude towards industrial militancy, Buck declared that preservation of the 1935 Franco-Soviet Pact justified the French Party's stance. This position had domestic implications. Some trade-union cadres were already criticising the leadership for discouraging industrial militancy (as it had earlier discouraged public criticism of "progressive" CIO and TLC bureaucrats). During 1938 the Party made a "Canadian Wagner Act" its primary industrial objective, which it hoped to achieve through state action. From this perspective, workplace struggle was seen as an obstacle, and the Party sometimes denigrated it as mere "syndicalism."⁴⁶

Buck joined the Party's increasingly effective push to establish a base in municipal politics. For all his growing popularity, however, he failed in four successive attempts between 1936 and 1939 to win a seat on the upper tier of Toronto government, the Board of Control (BOC). Buck had run for this particular office before his imprisonment, but why he chose to fight at this particular level in the later 1930s is not entirely clear. Although there was no federal election on the horizon (he planned to run in Hamilton East in 1939), his comrades James Litterick and J.B. Salsberg had demonstrated in the Manitoba and Ontario elections of 1936 and 1937 that provincial success was eminently possible.⁴⁷ Buck may not have wished to be tagged as a provincial politician. Few provincial seats, in any case,

⁴⁴Tim Buck, "General Secretary's Report," in *A Democratic Front for Canada* (Toronto 1938), 9-41.

⁴⁵NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "Communist Party of Canada, Regina, Saskatchewan," 1 June 1938.

⁴⁶The ambiguous impact of the Popular Front on the party's industrial policy has still to be thoroughly investigated. For some preliminary comments, see my introduction to Kealey and Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins Depression Years, Part IV, 1937*, (St. John's, 1997) 10-19.

⁴⁷Litterick won a Winnipeg seat. Salsberg failed by a whisker to be returned in Toronto, and would probably have won had the CCF bowed to considerable pressure from the Toronto labour movement (and even from some of its own members) and withdrawn its candidate, Harry Simon. See, "New Voice, Protests Shouted When Communist Hits Conservatives," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 February 1937; James Litterick, *Whither Manitoba?* Speech delivered in the Manitoba Legislature, 24 February 1937; "CCF Spite Candidate, Tragedy for Labor," *Daily Clarion*, 7 October 1937.

carried the symbolic cachet of an office that, as CCFer James Simpson had recently demonstrated, could be a stepping-stone to the mayoralty of English Canada's first city. Buck possibly wanted to underline the seriousness of the Party's commitment to local politics. In any event, he increased his vote steadily in the city-wide election, from 20,975 to 31,342 in 1937 and 44,148 in 1938, when he lost by one place and only 287 votes. Going into the 1939 election, moreover, the Party boasted two sitting aldermen, Salsberg in Ward 4 and Stewart Smith in Ward 5, whose re-elections were endorsed by the city's biggest-circulation daily, the *Star*. Buck was widely expected to win, but despite polling a record 45,112 votes he fell from fifth to sixth place (in a field of nine) and missed election by over 4,000 votes.⁴⁸ What had happened?

In all his Popular Front electoral campaigns Buck tried to play the game. One of the rules was that municipal politics were non-political. Though Buck would occasionally drop hints of his national celebrity, he invariably emphasized the theme of civic progress and his personal grasp of local priorities.⁴⁹ Nothing could have been more mundane or more essential than one of the central issues of the 1939 campaign: whether to construct a new sewage treatment and incineration plant to serve working-class South Toronto. This would ensure that residents would not see the beaches spoiled and their property-values lowered by the pumping of raw sewage into Lake Ontario, but would be served by a facility at least the equal of that which deodorized "aristocratic" North Toronto. Buck insisted that he was the only man who could be guaranteed to deliver the goods. His propaganda argued that the issue was fundamentally one of justice and fair play. His campaign team underlined his populist appeal by drawing on mass culture, inviting audiences to sing an adaptation of the "Heigh-ho" song from the previous year's Walt Disney hit *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The final verse ran:

Heigh-ho, Tim Buck,
 Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, good luck,
 For there's work and bread
 On the road ahead
 Good luck, Tim Buck!⁵⁰

⁴⁸RCMP Security Bulletin # 878, 10 December 1937, 478. Toronto municipal elections were sometimes held in December and sometimes in January.

⁴⁹Elect Tim Buck Committee, *A Practical Program of Municipal Reform* (Toronto n.d. [1938?]); "Toronto Voters Sing: Heigh-Ho, Tim Buck," *Daily Clarion*, 29 December 1938.

⁵⁰See, *Daily Clarion*, 26, 29 November, 2, 15, 23 December 1938; "Sold For Taxes!," advertisement, *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 December 1938; "Sewage Plant Not Needed," editorial, *Globe and Mail*, 26 December 1938; NA, CSIS, PAF, Part 1, RCMP, Report re "Public Meeting at Massey Hall in Support of Tim Buck's Candidature for Toronto Board of Control," 2 December 1938.



"Manitoba MLA and WUL head, James Litterick, Tim Buck, and Lenin School Graduate, Sam Carr," *Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library*, University of Toronto, Kenny Collection, Ms Coll 179, Box 636/#60.

The prospect of a Buck victory concentrated the minds of his political rivals on the right. A coalition of business, industrial and veterans' groups, the Roman Catholic Church, and the *Toronto Telegram* and *Globe and Mail*, manifestly well-funded (mainly, the Party claimed, by the International Nickel Corporation), mobilized around an anyone-but-Buck platform. Even the *Star* refused to extend its endorsement of Salsberg and Smith to Buck, arguing that while they had proved themselves outstanding public servants, so had all the BOC incumbents; Buck's undoubted qualifications did not justify changing a winning team. The anti-Buck forces showed none of his reticence about bringing partisanship to the foreground. Using copious newspaper advertising and radio broadcasts, they whipped up a full-blooded red scare, urging the electorate not to be taken in by Buck's reformist pretensions. Making much of his recent return from the Soviet Union (his second trip that year), they declared that nothing less was at stake than the "defence of Candianism" against "an insidious but powerful enemy." One member of the coalition, the Canadian Corps Association, called for electors to "vote against all Communist candidates and give an emphatic 'No' to Moscow."⁵¹

The last throw in the campaign was an eve-of-election broadcast by Roman Catholic priest Father Charles Lanphier, a fiercely anti-communist *Telegram* columnist and host of a weekly Sunday noontime radio broadcast. Political broadcasts were not permitted during the final 24 hours of the campaign, and Lanphier's broadcasts were supposed to be devoted to devotional matters. Instead, he issued a last minute call to arms against communism. Flaying Buck's claim that there were many parallels between the 1931 papal encyclical *De Quadragesimo Anno* and *The Communist Manifesto*, he told Catholic voters that a Buck victory would open the door to Canadian "Christians [being] butchered by the millions and made [the] pitiable, miserable, heart-rending spectacles that Russia and Spain have offered to a horrified world." He ended with an ecumenical call to Catholics and every "good" Protestant and Jew to turn out in their masses and "give Red Russia a thunderous response."⁵² The following day, Toronto electors celebrated the New Year by turning out in record numbers. Buck's result we know. The red-baiting campaign had other victims. In the Party's Ward 4 stronghold, alderman Joe Salsberg and school board trustee John Weir also lost despite increasing their votes. Only Ontario

⁵¹"The Price of Freedom," Canadian Corps Association (hereafter CCA) advertisement, *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 December 1938. "Principles and Ideals," CCA advertisement, *Toronto Daily Star*, 31 December 1938; "Hebrew Paper on Right Track," editorial, *Globe and Mail*, 24 December 1938; "The Corps Has A Plan," editorial, *Globe and Mail*, 27 December 1938.

⁵²"Priest Claims City Reds' Powerhouse," *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 January 1939. Buck had claimed that the philosophy and aims of *The Communist Manifesto* were essentially identical with those of Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical. See "General Secretary's Report to the Thirteenth Dominion Executive Committee Session, June 1938," in CPC, *A Democratic Front for Canada* (Toronto 1938), 35.

party secretary Stewart Smith, re-elected for the second time in Ward 5, survived in the city.⁵³

The defeat was clearly a personal setback. The *Star*, easily the least anti-Buck of Toronto's dailies, declared the red scare groundless and commended the high quality of Buck's campaign, but concluded that Buck had milked the protest vote dry and was unlikely ever to do so well again.⁵⁴ According to an RCMP informant, the Party was stunned, the audience at one debriefing "[acting] like ... people who had lost everything they had ever owned." A lugubrious review of the campaign by Central Committee member Norman Freed seemed to bear out this account. Freed named no names, but by complementing Buck's arguments about nefarious external forces with a list of the *Party's* shortcomings, including a failure adequately to mobilize the LRA, underestimation of the opposition, over-confidence and continuing "sectarian mistakes" that made the right's charges of "Moscow control" credible, he seemed to point the finger of responsibility squarely at the general secretary.⁵⁵ Buck disagreed, claiming that the right's victory would prove short-lived and pyrrhic. In a momentary lapse in moderation, he announced that the highjacking of the election by "sinister subversive" forces had made his vote very much a vote for communism.⁵⁶

The Cult of Personality

Buck's 45,000 votes were surely not 45,000 votes for communism, but a substantial number *were* votes for Buck and the Popular Front politics he personified. Despite attempts by anti-communists such as Ontario Conservative Party deputy leader George Drew to drive home the red-baiting attack, his stature and the CPC's growing respectability survived the fall-out from the election.⁵⁷ That summer, a rumour circulated to the effect that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, on their first Dominion tour, had not only granted Buck an audience, but had accepted a copy of the CPC platform and thereby "legalized all activities and propaganda in the interest of the Communist Party in Canada." If this rumour were true, a Saskatchewan RCMP officer wrote to Ottawa, it would surely "give a moral influence to the

⁵³RCMP Security Bulletin (Intelligence Summary # 1), January to March 1939, 373-77. Elsewhere in Ontario's leading urban centres, labour-left candidates had mixed fortunes. There were gains in Windsor, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, and Timmins, but no progress in Sudbury and significant losses in Oshawa.

⁵⁴"Monday's Heavy Poll," *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 January 1939.

⁵⁵Norman Freed, "The Toronto Municipal Elections: Some Lessons," *Party Builder*, February 1939.

⁵⁶Tim Buck, "45,000 Votes for Tim Buck," *Daily Clarion*, 4 January 1939.

⁵⁷NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "CP Activities in Municipal Elections, Toronto," 6 January 1939; "Buck Denies Russia Hired or Paid Him," *Toronto Telegram*, 23 January 1939. Buck threatened to sue if Drew repeated his "defamatory libel" that he had been bought and paid for by the Soviet Union.



"Tim Buck, Norman Freed (Toronto alderman, 1944-1950), Montréal agitator, Annie Buller, and Canadian Labour Defense Secretary, A.E. Smith," *Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library*, University of Toronto, Kenny Collection, Ms Coll 179, Box 636/#154.

Communist Party and be an inducement to many to join.”⁵⁸ While the rumour was not true, it said much about the CPC’s changing image that an officer of the state (even a rather credulous one) believed it might have been.

Buck retained a charismatic appeal that sometimes transcended political affiliation. “We don’t need a party,” one prospective recruit told Jack Scott: “All we need is Tim Buck to tell us what to do and then go out and do it.”⁵⁹ This had not happened by accident: the Party had consciously constructed a Stalinesque personality cult around him. By 1937 he could not be mentioned in the party press without at least one adulatory comment: he was the “foremost,” the “most outstanding” working-class leader in Canada; he was one of “the most popular of Canadian labour men ... known from coast to coast as a tireless champion of labour’s right, a courageous fighter” His photograph or portrait gazed patriarchally down on the membership at all major party conferences, usually side by side with those of Lenin and Stalin or, in more imaginative Popular Front *tableaux* (in which the hammer and sickle shared space with the maple leaf and the beaver), as the inheritor of Mackenzie and Papineau. A *Daily Clarion* artist depicted him leading Canada (represented as a young family) towards the shining future envisaged by the 1937 party programme. *Clarion* journalist Ted Allan, observing the rapt faces of the audience listening to a “radiant and happy” leader at the opening of the 1937 convention, was reminded of the adulation — based on implicit trust rather than “blind devotion” — he had seen the women of Madrid display towards *la Pasionaria*.⁶⁰ YCL branches were named or renamed for Buck, and paeans of praise to “our

⁵⁸NA, CSIS, PAF, File 96-A-00111, TBF, Report re “Communist Activities Rothermere, Saskatchewan,” 8 July 1939. The idea of a regal audience for Canada’s leading Communist was not entirely far-fetched. Only a few months before, a member of the British aristocracy, Katharine, Duchess of Atholl, shared platforms and happily hob-nobbed with Communists when she spoke at meetings under the auspices of the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy (hereafter CLPD). For the “Red” Duchess’s tour, see “Edward LaPierre to the editor,” *Montreal Gazette*, 15 September 1938; “Katharine Atholl to the editor,” *Montréal Gazette*, 19 September 1938; NA, CSIS, PAF, Canadian League for Peace and Democracy File (hereafter CLPDF), various newspaper clippings, for example “Scots Duchess Has Courage of Her Convictions,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, 30 September 1938; “R.C.S. Kaulbach to the editor,” *Halifax Herald*, 1 October 1938; NA, Hazen Sise Papers, Vol. 35, File 22, Brochure for Lecture by Her Grace, the Duchess of Atholl, Eaton Auditorium, Toronto, 14 September [1938].

⁵⁹NA, CSIS, PAF, File 96-A-00078, M.J.S [Mitch Sago] Educational Organizational Department to All [Manitoba] Party Branch Executives, 17 May 1939; Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life. Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927-1985* (St. John’s 1988), 38, 50-51.

⁶⁰*RCMP Security Bulletin # 792*, 5 February 1936, 68; “Arise Canada! United, Strong and Bountiful, Eleven Million Canadians Can Make Our Rich Country a Land of Peace, Joy and Plenty,” CPC Draft to the 8th National Convention, *Daily Clarion*, 31 July 1937 (a compositing oversight seem to have left Buck gazing at the past — empty factories, evictions,

beloved leader” in Party publications sometimes thanked him for political gifts usually attributed to the Party. Toronto’s large Ward 4 section “pledged” that its members would seek to build on the advances made “under the leadership of Comrade Buck ... by increasing their efforts and working with continued loyalty and devotion to Tim Buck and the District Executive ... at the pace set by Comrade Buck.”⁶¹ The phrase “Tim Buck’s Party,” first heard in 1937, made the leader a brand name. Shortly before publication of the first official history of the Party in 1939, its working title was changed from *A Short History of the Communist Party of Canada* to the somewhat less marxist *The Story of Tim Buck’s Party, 1922-39*; published “to commemorate the Seventeenth Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of Canada” (what was historic about the *seventeenth* anniversary?), it added little biographical substance to its predecessors but privileged the foundation of the legal party in 1922, when Buck first joined the central committee.⁶²

Buck’s preeminence was underlined on all major party occasions. Not only the Jimmy (and Jenny) Higginses were expected to display awe-tinged admiration. Leading Winnipeg communists Jacob Penner, Annie Buller, and James Litterick, MLA, had purely decorative roles when they shared a platform with Buck in the Walker Theatre in 1939. The audience, too, was asked to remain silent for the half-hour section of Buck’s speech which was to be broadcast live over Station CJRC, trailing the party’s programme for the election it expected Mackenzie King to call some time that year. When Buck returned from Moscow (his regular visits to “Mecca” were another source of his mystique) in April 1938, a cluster of leading comrades queued to pay tribute at the “welcome home” rally in Massey Hall. An RCMP witness found the obsequious tone of the reception repugnant. The “extravagant praise” of organization secretary Sam Carr, he noted, was “so totally out of place ... at times [it] approached the maudlin stage.”⁶³

One thing the Party did not try to do was represent Buck as an original theoretician. He was never described in the way that he, himself, described CPUSA

war, hunger); Ted Allan, “Communism Good News Grandson of 1837 Rebel Declares at Convention,” *Daily Clarion*, 11 October 1937; “Record Crowd at CP Convention Opening,” *Daily Clarion*, 9 October 1937. For a recent study of the Stalin cult, see Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton 2000), 59-106.

⁶¹NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, ‘O’ Division, Toronto, Report re “Young Communist League — Toronto, General,” 28 March 1939; “Ward 4 Pays Tribute to Comrade Buck,” *Party Builder*, December 1938. Compare J.[A] McPherson (Alberta), “We Thank the Party,” *Party Builder*, February 1939.

⁶²NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, ‘D’ Division, Report re “Communist Party of Canada Meeting — Winnipeg, Manitoba,” 26 April 1939; Morris, *The Story of Tim Buck’s Party*, 9-11.

⁶³NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, ‘O’ Division, Toronto Report re “Communist Party of Canada Meeting at Massey Hall, 19 April 1938,” 21 April 1938; speech to CPC central committee, reported in *RCMP Security Bulletin*, # 890, 3 May 1938, 137-138.

general secretary Earl Browder, as an intellectual genius with analytical powers “equal to ... [any] you can get from any of the university professors who wait until everything has happened before they could give you the explanation.”⁶⁴ Buck’s intellectual skills were more modest: he was a “brilliant interpreter of political currents.” He exhibited these skills in a series of pamphlets, including original works (such as his 1939 pamphlet on federal Finance Minister Charles Dunning’s budget, which was plainly designed to suggest mastery of bourgeois economics) and reprints of all his key speeches. These pamphlets probably formed the basic course of marxist knowledge for most rank and file members and cadre. Used as templates for the speakers’ notes that the centre issued to all Party spokespersons, they often gave CPC speakers a sheen of omniscience. Speakers who swept away audiences in the summer of 1938 with their apparent mastery of international relations and the Party line on the fate of Nikolai Bukharin — “the so-called theoretician of the Right-Trotskyist bloc” was part of an “International crime ring” that had been engaged in “opposition and counter-revolutionary movements” since 1917 — had Buck’s *War in Europe* to thank.⁶⁵

In later years, however, Buck tried to forget all about that particular publication. Indeed, he denied its existence. In one of the most curious passages in his *Reminiscences*, Buck claimed to have engaged in a minor act of defiance by refusing to write a pamphlet on Bukharin’s show trial, which he had attended in winter 1937-38. Buck felt that the guilty verdict was correct, but the very fact that Bukharin, of all people, had been engaged in a conspiracy against the Soviet state left him wondering whether “something was radically wrong” in the workers’ paradise. Back home in Toronto, he could not give vent to these concerns, but he hinted at them by refusing to write the pamphlet, a breach of discipline that provoked criticism and, from some quarters, lasting suspicion. Buck may have given an accurate rendition of his feelings, but within weeks of his return Party members were reading *War in Europe* and may even have been reading another pamphlet, co-authored by Buck and CPGB Central Committee member Robin Page Arnot (it was published by the CPGB), which had the somewhat unambiguous title *Fascist Agents Exposed in the Moscow Trials*. Both publications defended the faultless character of Soviet justice and excoriated Bukharin’s perfidy. None of this is mentioned in *Yours In the Struggle*. Did Buck’s memory fail him? Did he lie? Did the Party publish *War in Europe* over his head? A reasonable inference from

⁶⁴Buck, “The General Elections,” in *Towards a Canadian People’s Front*, 76-92.

⁶⁵UT, RKC, Box 29, CPC, Organization Education Department, circular “For the Attention of May Day Speakers,” 23 April 1938; UT, RKC, Box 38, CPC, Organization Education Department, “Begin a Broad Mass Agitation To Increase Assistance to Spain In Her Hour of Trial,” Notes for the Assistance of Speakers, May 1938; Tim Buck, *Dunning’s Budget — What Does It Mean To You?* (Toronto 1939).

the omission of the two pamphlets from a list of Buck's major writings is that he retained to the last a cavalier attitude towards the falsification of History.⁶⁶

Buck was right about one thing: he was not every leading comrade's favourite. The RCMP reported sporadic but persistent complaints about his inadequacies. Buck, it was said, was "politically threadbare," "not the strongest member of the Political Buro" and something "of a figurehead." He had also let organizational matters slip.⁶⁷ He and his supporters were also accused of maintaining his prestige by factional methods, including the manipulation of public opinion. One example was a bogus story allegedly planted by Sam Carr in the *Globe* a few days before Buck was due to arrive in Canada with a Spanish government delegation in late 1936. The report, which predicted that Buck would be arrested the moment he crossed the Canadian-US border, was allegedly designed to "cause a little flutter among the rank and file of the Party." Moreover, as soon as the Spanish Republicans left Canada, Buck planned to "step into the limelight all dripping blood and bullets fresh from the Spanish revolution."⁶⁸ Though Buck's traducers were never directly identified, there were hints that they included such heir-apparents as Stewart Smith, Leslie Morris, and Norman Freed (all of them Lenin School graduates who had served as the party's ECCI representative). The RCMP, indulging in an early form of Kremlinology, interpreted Smith's brisk salutation and notably brief speech at the April 1938 Massey Hall rally and Freed's blunt critique of the 1938 election campaign as signs of a potential challenge. Smith's later autobiographical reflections on Buck's supposed lack of political foresight and theoretical acumen suggest that, at least in his case, the RCMP's speculations may have been well-founded.⁶⁹

The RCMP concluded that much of the hostile gossip came from people who had been "outmanoeuvred in inside party politics by the astute little Tim."⁷⁰ Factional manoeuvring, however, counted for less than the genuine personal

⁶⁶Tim Buck, *War In Europe* (Toronto 1938) 17-24; Tim Buck and Robin Page Arnot, *Fascist Agents Exposed in the Moscow Trials* (London 1938), 9-12. Beeching and Clarke, *Yours In the Struggle*, 387-89, 407-8. The party leadership brought up these omissions as potential embarrassments when Beeching and Clarke went ahead with the unofficial publication of *Yours in the Struggle* in 1977. See Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 263-64.

⁶⁷NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Fragment of unidentified report, 31 January 1938; NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "Tim Buck," 3 May 1939. For very similar, contemporaneous comments about William Z. Foster, see Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton 1994), 287-87.

⁶⁸NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, RCMP 'E' Division, British Columbia, Report re "Timothy Buck — Communist," 6 November 1936; "Tim Buck Now In Europe. Outlawed From Canada," *The Globe*, 30 October 1936.

⁶⁹Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolskas: My Years in the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto 1993), 131.

⁷⁰NA, CSIS, TBF, 'O' Division, Toronto, Report re "Communist Party of Canada Meeting at Massey Hall, 19 April 1938," 21 April 1938.

warmth many Party members felt towards Buck. A Toronto RCMP witness mused on the fact that the open convertible carrying Buck, his wife Alice, and the Reverend Ben Spence to the 1937 May Day demonstration in Queen's Park was "the only [automobile] in the entire parade that seemed to receive any applause." Later that evening, a *Daily Star* correspondent was convinced by the authenticity of the standing ovation Buck received when he was introduced as "a hero of Canada" to the main labour rally in Maple Leaf Gardens. According to Jack Scott, while Buck shared the generally patronizing attitude of the Party leadership towards the salt of the earth "Jimmy Higginnes," unlike some other leading comrades (Stewart Smith had an olympian detachment that came close to contempt) he could never be accused of having lost contact with the rank and file. He was one of the "real good mixers" in the Party: "[he] mingled with people, talked to them. He was a great guy at a party." Respect for his human qualities may help explain why, at a time when the moral probity of leading party members was falling under the microscope of the Central Control Commission, the entire party turned a blind eye to the break-up of his marriage, which continued to be offered to the public as a model of respectability.⁷¹ So high was Buck's standing, especially among Anglo-Saxon rank and filers and "certain foreign elements," one senior RCMP officer concluded in May 1939, that his demotion would destabilize the party.⁷²

Canada's War

At that moment, the worsening international situation — symbolized by Munich, the disbanding of the International Brigades, and impending defeat of the Spanish Loyalists — increasingly dominated political debate on the Canadian left. As in most things, Party members and sympathisers looked to Buck for guidance. And, as usual, Buck looked east. Throughout the Popular Front years, he applauded the USSR's "positive peace" policy and the role it gave to Canada, as a "senior member" of the "British Commonwealth," as the "living link" between the USSR, Britain, and the "democratic people" of the United States. While this formulation had some success among non-party intellectuals, it had none at all with the British and Canadian governments.⁷³

⁷¹Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 51-2; David Frank and Don McGillivray, eds., *George MacEachern, An Autobiography: The Story of a Cape Breton Labour Radical* (Sydney, Nova Scotia 1987), 98. In 1938-39 the CPC's new Central Control Commission launched a purge on hierarchy and bureaucracy, and leading officials were highly sensitive to being charged with these offences. See the exchange between William Lawson and Paul Phillips, *Party Builder*, December 1938, January 1939; and NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Part 3, Questionnaire, On the Life and Activities of Leading Party Functionaries, 23 July 1938.

⁷²NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Superintendent W. Munday to Commissioner, 3 May 1939.

⁷³"Tim Buck Urges Action To Prevent Repeat of '33," *Saint John Citizen*, 13 September 1938; "Canada's Part In Shaping World Policy," *Daily Clarion*, 15 December 1938; Tim Buck, "Seventeen Years of Party Program," *Party Builder*, February 1939; NA, Hazen Sise

As war loomed ever closer, the CPC had considerable difficulty in coming up with a coherent line, and came under increasing pressure to clarify where it would stand if war broke out. Having already established through its involvement in Spain that it was prepared to fight to defend democracy and defeat fascism, it continued to call for a “peace front” of the democratic powers to resist fascism — by force of arms, if necessary. At the same time, however, characterizing this resistance as a “police action” to preempt war, it opposed Canadian rearmament and conscription on the grounds that such policies served the interests of Canada’s “50 economic big-shots.” The Party’s position was complicated further by its pursuit of a Democratic Front led by Mackenzie King. Communist support for King (whose progressivism seemed to have been exhausted by the repeal of Section 98) was stretched almost to breaking point in the summer of 1937 by his order-in-council applying the Foreign Enlistment Act to the Spanish Civil War, effectively declaring Canada’s neutrality and making criminals of Canadian volunteers for Spain. Somehow, the Party contrived to lay the blame for this act not on King but on a devil’s alliance of Downing Street and Cardinal J.M.R. Villeneuve. Following the contemporary line of the British CP, Buck insisted that the real villains were the “reactionary Chamberlain government” or “Britains’s ruling clique,” expressions that suggested that the true interests and instincts of the British — and Canadian — people were being flouted by an alien conspiracy. Buck could not bring himself to abandon all hope in King, even though the only argument he could muster in the latter’s favour was that Canada’s monopoly capitalists did not like him. He responded to growing rank and file criticism of King’s coat-tailing of Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement policy by agreeing that some criticism was justified but “should not be overdone,” or it would strengthen Canadian “reaction.”⁷⁴ After furious Communist denunciation of Mackenzie King’s endorsement of the Munich Agreement, Buck, in abject desperation, transferred his hopes to Franklin D. Roosevelt! Even then, it was not until the spring of 1939 that he finally ended his unrequited courtship. Finding new hope in William Herridge’s New Democracy movement and, curiously, Manitoba premier John Bracken, he called for a new, progressive coalition to oppose both main parties in the anticipated general election.⁷⁵

Buck chose that precise moment to simplify the Party’s position on war and peace and reassert its dedication to the cause of democracy, anti-fascism, and Canadian independence. In February, he rejected the notion that the world was

Papers, Vol. 35, File 22, transcripts of CBC radio broadcasts by Professor Herbert S. Stewart of Dalhousie University, 27 February 1938, and *Winnipeg Free Press* managing editor George V. Ferguson, 6 March 1938.

⁷⁴*RCMP Security Bulletin*, #866, 5 August 1937, 318; #890, 3 May 1938, 138, 144-45.

⁷⁵*RCMP Security Bulletin*, #902, 11 October 1938, 296-97, 300; #903, 21 October 1938, 316; Tim Buck, “The West and the Federal Election,” Speech delivered at the Walker Theatre, Winnipeg, broadcast over Station CJRC, 25 April 1939.

divided into competing sets of "imperialist bandits" and reiterated that the key struggle lay between "the camp of democracy and the camp of fascism." Such anti-fascist simplicity, however, did not chime with the signals just beginning to emanate from Moscow that Stalin's patience with France, Britain, and the United States was wearing thin. In April, Buck conceded that the war *would* be a classic imperialist struggle, but still insisted that the qualitative difference between fascist and democratic imperialism ruled out any analogy between 1914 and 1939. The CPC, he pledged, would help bring the war to a "speedy and victorious conclusion."⁷⁶ His professions of loyalty were probably genuine. In late August, they survived even the dagger-blow of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. On the day King took Canada into the war, 4 September, Buck was guest-of-honour at the annual picnic of the pro-CPC Independent Mutual Benefit Federation in Delhi, Ontario. "This," he told a polyglot audience of Anglo-Celts, Hungarians, Poles, Germans, and Belgians, "is our war." He urged them all to "sink their differences and strive together for one objective, the defeat of Nazism and Fascism, and to give their all for the cause of Democracy, to save civilization." As the RCMP's man on the spot noted, every reference to crushing Nazism was warmly applauded.⁷⁷

Party members joined the queues at the recruiting stations through September and October, unaware that Toronto had received word from Moscow that "it wasn't our war any more." Amazingly, it took at least a month from the reception of this news (in late September) for the leadership to declare that the Party was now officially neutral. Buck's reminiscences of these events probably underestimate the leadership's acute confusion. He claimed that the Polburo issued its neutrality bulletin on 14 October, but Central Committee member Beckie Buhay was plainly unaware of the new line as late as 26 October; the RCMP's estimate of early November seems more accurate. It was symptomatic of Buck's authority that the Party announced its new line as a pamphlet, *The People Want Peace*, under Buck's name. Writing from the underground, where the party had voluntarily descended (it was not declared illegal until June 1940), Buck admitted that the Party had been mistaken in the "first weeks of the war in creating the illusion that this could be 'a different kind of war'." Now, thankfully, it was "all the stronger ... in [its] firm adherence to the truth," which was that the war was not a "just war" but "a criminal war ... a predatory imperialist war against the true interests of the masses of people of all countries ... guilt [for which] rests equally upon the shoulders of the imperialists of Berlin, London and Paris." Buck pledged to fight for Canadian independence and the interests of the people against Canada's ("our own") leaders,

⁷⁶Tim Buck, "Seventeen Years of Party Progress," *Party Builder*, February 1939; Buck, "Two Camps: Peace Front and the Warmongers," *Daily Clarion*, 21 April 1939.

⁷⁷NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, Report re "Tim Buck (Communist Party of Canada), Delhi, Ontario," 5 September 1939; Palmer, *Jack Scott*, 55-6; Laurel Sefton MacDowell, 'Remember Kirkland Lake!': *The History and Effects of the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners' Strike, 1941-42* (Toronto 1983), 54; Beeching and Clarke, *Yours in the Struggle*, 286-89.

who were the enthusiastic stooges of the imperialists.⁷⁸ Thus, a period that began with Buck going off to prison seemed likely to end with a similar journey.

Conclusions

The common experience of the CPC's sister parties shows that the Popular Front had greater intrinsic appeal than any previous Party "line": its political message that the proletariat would have a greater chance of coming to power if it drew behind its vanguard a significant section of the bourgeoisie, especially of the intelligentsia, made far greater sense than the preceding line of Class Against Class, which invited hostility even from the organized sections of the working class. The CPC was already growing when Tim Buck resumed his active leadership in 1934, and would have continued to grow if someone else had led it through the Popular Front years. It made impressive advances, ending the 1930s as an identifiably Canadian party with somewhere between 16-18,000 members (a figure that compared favourably with that of the "Anglo-Saxon" CPGB and CPUSA), including a significant minority of bourgeois members, and a substantial periphery of sympathers; it also had a growing electoral base in working-class neighbourhoods and, thanks to its still-unmatched efforts, an unprecedented degree of influence in the labour unions. Yet, while the Popular Front was set down by the ECCI and applied from country to country with relatively little real variation, Buck's peculiar sympathy for the new approach and his personal example in opening out to potential allies contributed significantly to making the Party a respectable, if incompletely integrated, part of the national body politic, while consolidating his own position as its only labour statesman. In the process, however, the CPC lost any connection to revolutionary politics. What its "fight against sectarianism" actually meant was a tacit revision of the Marxist theory of the state; the relegation of the working-class to the Popular Front chorus; the promotion of trade-union bureaucracy; the spread of illusions in capitalist democracy; and its own transformation into a reformist organization to the right of the CCF. While someone other than Buck would have happily figure-headed this apparently bold shift to the right — the grumbling about his inadequacies as leader contained no political critique — he did more than anyone to facilitate it. Personal charm helped convince new sympathisers that the Party had changed. Backed up by an armoury of nudges, winks, and verbal ambiguity, that same charm probably did much to convince the intransigents that the Party still belonged to them.

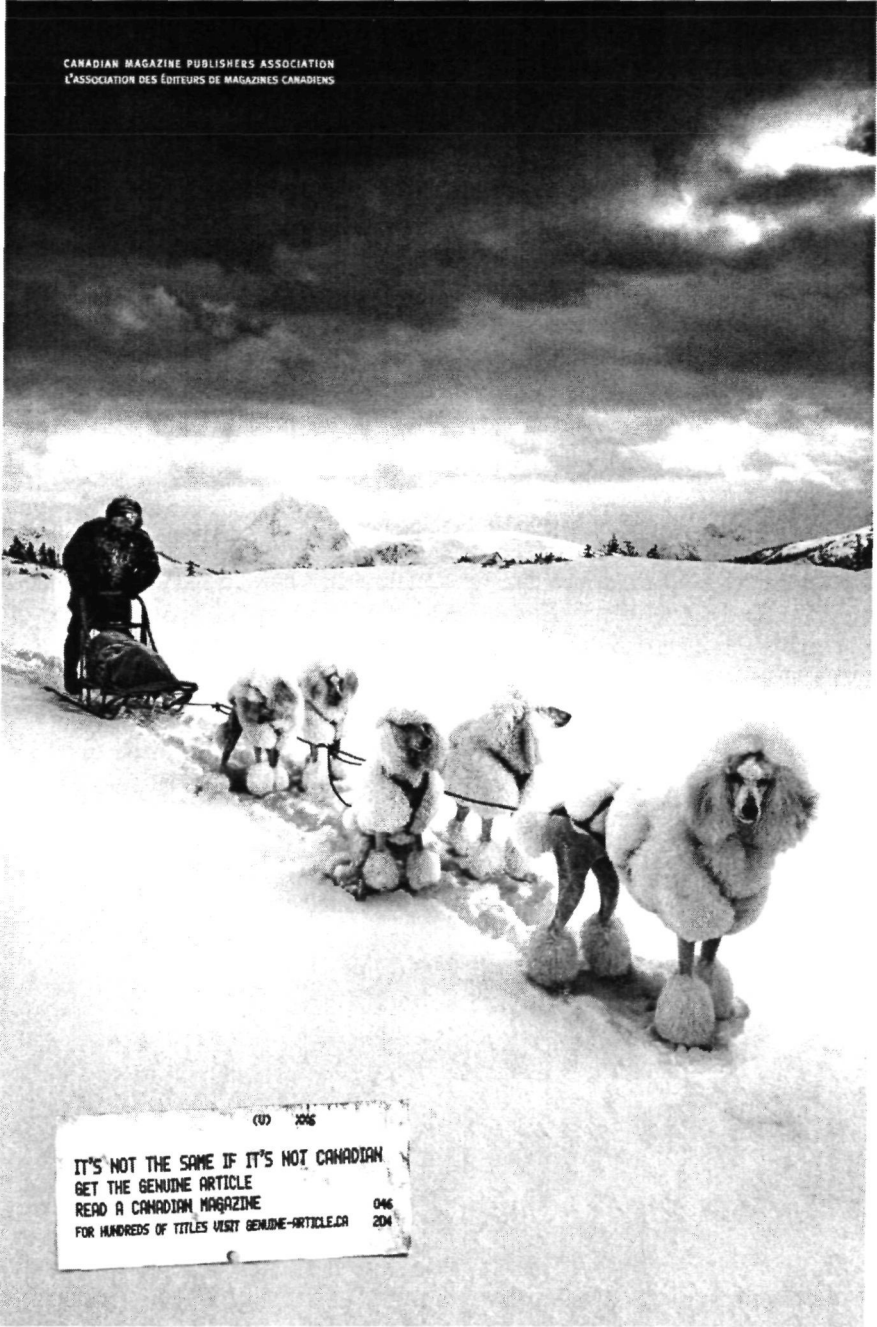
⁷⁸NA, CSIS, File 9-A-00012, Part 4, *Kanadsky Gudok*, 26 September 1939 (translation); NA, CSIS, PAF, TBF, 'E' Division, Report re "The Communist Party of Canada, Vancouver, B.C.," 11 October 1939; "Beckie Buhay to the editor," *Evening News* (New Glasgow), 26 October 1939; Tim Buck, *The People Want Peace* (Montreal 1939), and Tim Buck, *Finland and the Soviet Union* (Montreal 1939).

Conformism, however, rather than boldness informed Buck's actions. Standing foursquare with Stalinism on every key aspect of Popular Front politics, he remained Moscow's man. One of the paradoxes of the Popular Front was that the Canadianization of the Party went along with the completion of its subordination to the political will of the Comintern, which itself was now an auxiliary of the Stalinist CPSU, utterly devoted to its defence, concerned little with world revolution and not at all with the domestic interests of a single, small Party. Buck, as we have seen, did not like to acknowledge this relationship. He may even have convinced himself that the international and national Party lines really did coincide by magic and that he was a genuinely independent political leader. The same delusion — and the same disregard for historical truth — was evident in his last act of solidarity with the Comintern/CPSU before the CPC disappeared once again into the uncertainty of the underground. In justifying the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Buck had a case. Communists needed little convincing that the western allies' belated, reluctant, and possibly duplicitous overtures to Moscow fully justified the Soviet Union's *realpolitik*. The Party's sudden discovery, however, of moral equivalence between the capitalist democracies and the fascist powers was a political disaster, not least because it so swiftly and facilely overturned five years of mass political education representing Germany, Italy, and Japan as a threat to "civilization" itself. The Party had a hard enough time holding the line for its new "truth" among its members; tens of thousands of sympathisers and potential members, seeing their acceptance of the CPC as an independent Canadian party exposed as gullibility, were not convinced. Many may well have resolved not to be fooled again.⁷⁹ Though Buck would come storming back in 1942, in the early weeks of the war he may have planted the seeds of his Party's long postwar decline.

I wish to thank the journal's editor and its anonymous reviewers, one of whom saved me from an egregious factual error, for their helpful suggestions. I would also like to thank the Canadian High Commission, London, for the Faculty Research Award that funded the archival research on which this article is based.

⁷⁹Morley Callaghan, "Little Marxist, What Now?," *Saturday Night*, 16 September 1939.

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