

*Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics*, by Ivan Avakumovic. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978. Pp. 316.

*The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis*, by Norman Penner. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1977. Pp. 287.

During the last several years there has been an encouraging increase in the number of monographs and articles on the history of the labour and left movements in Canada. While much of the recent scholarship focuses on trade union struggles, several authors continue to concentrate on the important question of how the day-to-day class struggle is transformed into political parties and political strategies. The latest books of both Ivan Avakumovic and Norman Penner address themselves to this question.

Norman Penner's *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* is an important addition to the literature on Canadian socialism. The book covers the history of socialist ideas and movements from the beginnings of Canadian industrialization to the present. The groups and issues dealt with are not new: the Socialist Party of Canada, the Winnipeg General Strike, the Communist Party, the CCF/NDP, the New Left and the Québécois Left. But Penner's close analysis of the organizations and ideas of the Canadian Left reveals insights that more detailed monographs on these various groups have ignored.

Penner is at his best in his analysis of the pre-Russian Revolution Canadian Left and in his sections on the Canadian Communist Party. The early Canadian Left has been studied previously by Martin Robin and Ross McCormack, as well as others, as an interesting but marginal working-class phenomenon which required a degree of deradicalization and an infusion of middle-class radicals to give it respectability and a chance to take power. Penner, however, rejects the notion, often implied rather than directly stated, that the early Canadian socialist movement lacked intellectuals because it lacked the support of middle-class paid intellectuals which the CCF/NDP was, to a degree, to enjoy. While he regards the availability of such formal intellectuals as an asset to a movement, Penner asserts that the workers who led the early socialist parties were self-educated intellectuals, many of whom believed that educating the workers was the chief task of socialists. Though the Marxism of many of these worker-intellectuals was rigid, "their emphasis on education made

them stand out among their fellow-workers as exceptionally gifted people” (p. 43).

Penner maintains that socialism in Canada before the 1920s was a solely proletarian affair, with few middle-class people accepting socialist views or joining socialist organizations. As a result, internal pressures for compromise with the existing order were more muted in Canada than in Europe. Significantly, Penner places doubt on the traditional interpretation that British workers who emigrated to Canada brought with them moderate socialist views which caused a dilution in the militancy of Canadian socialism. The Socialist Party of Canada, led by British-born workers, refused to join the Second International because it accepted “non-socialist bodies particularly the British Labour Party” as members. Parties such as the BLP, it said, “practice openly the most shameless policy of fusion and compromises with capitalist parties” (p. 45). Penner also notes, quite correctly, that many of the American unions that had affiliates in Canada in the pre-1920 period were led not by business unionists à la Gompers but by members of the American Socialist Party. Further, he rejects the usual dichotomy drawn between the syndicalists or “direct-actionists” in the labour movement, on the one hand, and the “political actionists” on the other (p. 55). On the whole, Penner presents an image of Canada’s early socialist movement that is more radical than the traditional view but seems consonant with the militancy of the class struggle in that period as reflected in the number and character of strikes.

Penner’s sections on the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) are particularly interesting since the existing literature in the field consists on the one hand of uncritical hagiography issuing from the Party itself and, on the other, of Cold War diatribes such as Ivan Avakumovic’s *The Communist Party in Canada: A History*. Penner, a former Party member and son of Winnipeg’s outstanding and long-serving Communist alderman, Jake Penner, is sympathetic to many of the aims of the CPC and aware of its accomplishments, particularly in the organization of workers in Canada’s factories and mines. But he is also aware, both as a former insider and as a researcher, that the CPC has severe limitations as a vehicle for establishing socialism in Canada. The Party’s organizational structure followed the Soviet model slavishly and made no concessions to Canadian traditions and culture (p. 84). Worse, in the period of the Comintern, attempts by Party general secretary Tim Buck — a man whose autobiography the Party would not publish — to develop independently a Marxist analysis of Canada’s international position were crushed by Moscow (pp. 86-98).

Penner's sections on the CCF/NDP are weaker than his treatment of the early Left, the Communists and the New Left. But unlike many Marxists, Penner recognizes that social democracy is an inevitable trend in the working-class movement and that the far Left's attempts to dismiss it by smearing its leaders as class collaborationist are self-delusion. Social democracy cannot be transcended if its left-wing opponents fail to recognize its attraction to large segments of the working class (pp. 244-45). Particularly apt is his criticism of Gary Teeple's rather juvenile ad hominem attack on the CCF/NDP in the otherwise important collection, *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*.

While Norman Penner provides an insightful and readable overview of the history of the Canadian Left, Ivan Avakumovic's history of the CCF/NDP is dry and superficial. The intention of this book is unclear. Several studies of the CCF and the NDP already exist; just what this work is supposed to add to the existing literature is difficult to discern. Perhaps Avakumovic, though he is working mainly from primary sources, intends only to draw together the materials available in other secondary accounts so as to present a history in one volume of Canada's social democratic parties. Unless some fresh perspectives are provided, this does not seem to be a worthy project. And Avakumovic is short on synthesis.

Avakumovic's conclusions about the early socialist movement are somewhat different than Penner's. He asserts that the British workers *were* more moderate than the East European emigrants and expresses his own preference for existing Western institutions by noting the "... Britons' *awareness* [my emphasis] of the advantages of representative government" (p. 15). While Penner pays tribute to the worker-intellectuals of the early socialist movement, Avakumovic sees these people as a brake on the development of a socialist movement:

... the socialist pioneers operated on the fringe of Canadian society. They were lacking in formal education, scattered across the Dominion, and divided both in ethnic background and in their experience of life and work in the New World. Their previous exposure to competing forms of radicalism in Europe or North America also complicated the task of creating a viable socialist movement in a Canadian setting. (p. 281)

Overall, Avakumovic's treatment of the early socialists is cursory and dismissive. The CCFers are congratulated because they made "democratic socialism understandable" to people unimpressed "by shrill radical agitators and turgid Marxist propagandists." Yet the actual content of the CCF's socialism is poorly analysed by Avakumovic. He does not, for

example, deal with the party-movement dichotomy raised by Walter Young in *Anatomy of a Party*, nor does he suggest any evolution or devolution of the party's views on socialism.

The discussion of the NDP in office in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia is a particular disappointment. The assessment of these governments' performance is shallow and replete with vague, unelaborated comments such as this one about NDP civil service appointments.

Some were NDP hacks being rewarded for their loyalty during the years out in the political wilderness. Others were hired for their professional qualifications. Others again were young university graduates who were strong NDP supporters. Some of them had useful skills; others were a major disappointment to those who had hired them on high salaries. (p. 254)

McClelland & Stewart's copy editors have done a poor job in removing non sequiturs and awkwardly constructed sentences from the book. There is no need for tangled sentences such as: "The belief that the NDP was on the march and about to win new victories also influenced anti-socialist politicians by making them less determined to oppose some of the policies in the NDP program" (p. 241).

It may simply be that, for the moment, there is nothing new to say about the CCF-NDP. Studies of the provincial parties, particularly in office, would be enlightening. Avakumovic's attempt to cover everything results in a book that is vague and unoriginal. The comparison with Penner is notable.

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*The Japanese Canadians: A Dream of Riches*, by the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project. [Vancouver:] The Japanese Canadian Centennial Project, 1978. Pp. 190; *illus.*; cloth \$17.00, paper \$13.00.

There is a long tradition in British Columbia of centennials and, now, bicentennials, stimulating the publication of books. In 1977 members of the Japanese community participated in this tradition by celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Manzo Nagano, the first Japanese immigrant to Canada. Among the means used to mark this event was a travelling exhibit of photographs honouring the *Issei* (the first-generation immigrants) and showing the history of the Japanese in Canada. *The*