

Strategy for Canada

(First in a series by Jim Harding)

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COLONIAL MENTALITY REVOLUTION

When I went to public school in Regina a person who had travelled to the United States, even just to Montana or North Dakota, had more status among the students than someone who had been east or to the west coast.

Canada didn't really exist for us. We knew more about events in the (then) 49 states than in the 10 provinces. An anti-eastern attitude rooted in the depression had something to do with this attitude (Toronto financiers controlled farm mortgages then) but basically our colonial mentality was responsible. Post-war Canada was a primary market for U.S. capitalism and the attitudes of the first post-war generations reflected the boom mentality. A majority of my friends in public and high school talked openly about Canada becoming a part of the United States.

This colonial mentality is deeply rooted in Canadian culture, but it is more a social than a natural culture. The symbols of our colonialism are imposed, not grounded in the realities of our history. U.S. magazines, radio and TV programs (or specially prepared 'subsidiary programs') inject U.S. folklore and propaganda into Canada. It is mainly the mythology of an alienated urban society (much of it a romantic life). It is as often as not inappropriate to the practical lives of the Canadian people, all of whom have special local and regional characteristics. This social culture is basically middle class in its symbols and this further removes it from the realities of most Canadians.

It is the branch plant market place which generates the U.S. and Canadian cultures more than a common life and work style among the people. Canada as a branch plant satellite has a unique political economy (which I will later describe). The historical development of the country also has a unique character (e.g. French Canada). Our colonial mentality is strong since as a satellite we are ideologically, not only economically, integrated into the U.S. empire. But in the day-to-day lives of Canadians there is an explosive potential for revolutionary nationalism. As the United States becomes further and further isolated in the world this potential will escalate.

CHAUVINIST vs. REVOLUTIONARY

It is part of the rhetoric of the Canadian movement to be opposed to Chauvinism (both male and national). This is a healthy sentiment but it is necessary to understand the conditions that give rise to Chauvinism, not just to oppose it in principle.

National Chauvinism arises from a defensive posture. Chauvinism in Canada arises as a reaction to the American colonization of the country. As anti-Americanism grows here so does Canadian Chauvinism. It is not abstract anti-Americanism and Canadian Chauvinism. It is not abstract in that it comes from our own experience but that experience is far more colonial (we are a national nigger) than revolutionary thus far. Until there is struggle our Chauvinism will remain.

This Chauvinism must of course be challenged, but not with a leftist purism. We do not have to choose between a potentially conservative Chauvinism that stresses the symbols of Canada rather than the self-determination and quality of life of the people and a naive internationalism and humanism which opposes all forms of nationalism in principle. Both these are irrelevant to the task of building a liberation front in Canada. The thing is to challenge the Chauvinism in terms of its roots and its potential. It can be a stage towards revolutionary nationalism once the colonial mentality is replaced with an existential understanding of our historical experience as a people.

A militant form of nationalism is beginning to develop in Canada -- mainly among the young. It is militant because people are willing to struggle and take the necessary risks because of it. The value of self determination is central to this new militancy. It takes autonomous people to struggle for an autonomous land. As the libertarian ethic grows among youth in Canada, so too can a militant nationalism.

This is not the nationalism of the social democrats (New Democratic Party). Their nationalist rhetoric 'Canada must be socialist to be independent' plays only a minor

role in breaking up our colonial mentality but it remains of an academic, parliamentary variety. In a sense it is Chauvinist since symbolism and form, not personal commitment, lies behind it. Somehow new content (nationalism and bureaucratic socialism) and the same old forms (parliamentary politics, centralism, etc.) is going to provide freedom for the Canadian people. Analysts will show that this is not only a false position but a totally irrelevant one.

Chauvinist nationalism is not reactionary but it does not breed the belief that Canada can be independent without a radical movement -- without political struggle. Such belief, in effect, aids those who are daily building and managing the satellite political economy. A strategy for Canadians then must attempt to transform all chauvinism and nationalism into a militant form.

COLONIZATION . . . PAST AND PRESENT

Chauvinist forms of nationalism in Canada will be transformed into revolutionary nationalism through political struggle that is rooted in the understanding of Canadian history.

A strategy for Canada must therefore be both political and intellectual. The development of knowledge becomes a form of political action when it helps liberate people from their enslavement. It is historical knowledge which makes direct action into revolutionary struggle.

The orthodox and academic approaches to Canadian history do not take into account the struggles that have shaped our history so they do not have ideas that are relevant for the present struggle. Revolutionaries will have to start afresh -- using old historical information and uncovering the new -- but reinterpreting our history in terms of our colonization. The colonization of British North America to 1776 and of 'Canada' after that is the vital trend in our history. It is an understanding of this that can ultimately relate the Quebec movement, the youth and student movements and the regional movements of working people now developing in Canada. All are potentially revolutionary because they all have the seeds of an anti-imperialist sentiment.

Both the 'American Revolution' and 'Canada's Confederation' have been mystified and the history surrounding these developments distorted. The left has been affected by this ignorance as much as any group. U.S. radicals rarely show an understanding of the so-called American Revolution. Instead of realizing that a domestic elite won militarily over a foreign elite -- replacing a mercantilist economy with a national capitalist (and ultimately imperialist) one -- they often imply that their revolution was for national liberation. That is the way U.S. history is taught and such confusion and ignorance is one price citizens of the main imperialist nation in the world have to pay.

In Canada, because of our colonial mentality (and ignorance) the left still tends to think in terms of a formal concept of "Canada" (i.e. in terms of the ideology of the nation state). There are specific reasons for this. The militant left in Canada has come from a narrow, a typical background and has (as yet) only had limited political experience. Our colonial mentality will only be broken when radicals come to know the contradictions of Canadian society in a personal way. So far there has been very little real political struggle for the new left. All of us were indoctrinated (e.g. in schools) with the ideology of the nation state. The rhetoric of our movement has thus far stayed abstracted from Canadian realities. Our radicalism is thus more academic than existential. We 'know' more, in an academic sense, about the Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions than about our own history. Such is a poor beginning and footing for making our own revolution.

The typical view of the American Revolution and Canada's Confederation is rooted in a formal political ideology. It goes something like this: The Americans defeated the British colonialists and established an independent, free nation. The founding fathers of Canada met and established an independent, free nation. A military struggle was required in the U.S. case but diplomacy worked in the second. In both cases freedom was equated with the creation of a nation state.

The political and economic forces behind these formalities are usually ignored. Rather than events like the Boston Tea Party being fundamental to the American Revolution it was restrictions placed on New England trappers and traders by the Quebec Act of 1774. The conflict between the American and British elites over markets was brought to a head by this act. Both the English-French and English-American conflicts were at play at the same time. This shows how the dialectics of colonization, not formal events, shaped the history of North America.

The British mercantilist (and later 'free trade') system lost control of the territory south of the 49th parallel but regained it in the north. (The French had already been colonized). The creation of the United States constituted a break from European colonialism and the beginning of American imperialism. The imperialism included the genocide of the native population, the black slave trade and military and economic expansion into the southern and Pacific hemispheres. After 1776 the U.S. empire spread until today it controls about 60 per cent of the world wealth.

The formation of Canada parallels the decline of the British Empire. Canada -- as a co-ordinated military and political system -- was formed partly as a defensive move against the expanding U.S. system and partly to further the colonization of the Northwest.

The colonization of North America is not something that ended with the growth of national political forms (the BNA Act). The form of colonization has simply changed. The new political forms often facilitated the new colonization. (The BNA Act gives the provinces control over natural resources. Such facilitates the north-south process of continentalism). French Canada was colonized, mainly militarily. After North America was divided into the remains of the British Empire and the beginnings of the American Empire the forms of colonization were further changed. The northwest was colonized through land settlement and Indian reserves, both with the help of the RCMP and the military. The struggles for self-determination by the native people in 1869 and 1885 symbolize the resistance to the colonization of the northwest. In this effect, Louis Riel was one of the few revolutionary nationalists in our history.

The colonization by the United States has varied, being mainly economic but always ready militarily (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, etc. -- Canada?).

Since the last war the U.S. empire has begun to expand northward. Its southern and pacific expansion has been maximized and Canada constitutes a new frontier. The added fact that the United States is facing growing opposition from its other colonies and satellites makes Canada vital for extracting scarce resources (water, oil, etc.) Continentalism -- Canada as a geographic and corporate branch plant -- is then the newest dynamic of U.S. imperialism.

Canadians have been colonized continually. The native and French Canadian struggle for self-determination symbolizes the resistance to this but the total population has also suffered. The federal-provincial political party system and the ideology of the nation state specific to this system has diverted consciousness from this fact of continued colonization, but the people -- in their economic dependency and in their colonial mentality -- nevertheless prove it.

Once our formal idea of Canada is demystified through a study of the colonization of North America, revolutionaries will be in a position to initiate national liberation politics. This form of politics will be aimed at exposing how the regional political economies reflect our continued colonization. The regional cultural make-up of the people and their potential concern with self determination (controlling their own lives in a cooperative way) will be the basis of a resistance movement. Once awareness struggles of self determination replaces the ideology of the nation state the Canadian people can begin to see through the liberal rhetoric which presently functions to integrate Canada into the U.S. empire.