ON 11 August 1931, the RCMP led a coordinated raid on the Toronto headquarters of the Communist Party of Canada and the private homes of several of the party’s key members, seizing large numbers of files, books, and other publications. Party leader Tim Buck was arrested under Section 98 of the Criminal Code for intention to carry out the act of sedition, and over the next few days related raids in both Ontario and British Columbia resulted in a series of further arrests, with eight men (including Buck) eventually brought to trial. The mass of print seized was never used at trial. It remained in the hands of the Attorney-General of Ontario, eventually entering the Public Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada) through the AGO’s institutional fonds (“Preliminary Inventory” 1, 25).

See Whitaker, Kealey, and Parnaby for a detailed account of the surveillance that led to the arrests and subsequent trial of the eight Communist leaders (119–23). Buck gives his account of the arrest and trial in his political memoir, Thirty Years (82–102).

Some of this seized text was referenced in a 1934 pamphlet produced by the Attorney-General of Ontario, Agents of Revolution (Price 8, see also Endicott 152).
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Within this seized material was a collection of pamphlets and periodicals, including Canadian publications and those obtained from radical organizations and other groups. The Canadian Labor Defense League (CLDL), a fledgling offshoot of the International Red Aid formed to support the legal defense of workers in Canadian courts, was certainly represented among these texts. Given the proximity of the group’s headquarters to those of the Communist Party, as well as references to correspondence with its leading members, it is likely that the CLDL’s publication, the Canadian Labor Defender, was found among the seized documents. In typical fashion, the Defender’s first response to the raids and arrests was rough but thorough. Although the cover for the September 1931 issue of the magazine is a thrice-repeated linocut image of a man gripping a set of prison bars against a background of a massed crowd brandishing CLDL banners, nearly every page inside is given over to the story of the Communist leaders, including Buck’s own account and responses from International Red groups in other countries (CLD 2.5: 5–6, 10).

Canadian Labor Defender September 1931, cover.
By the time of the October issue’s release, which bears a cover photomontage depicting the so-called “Kingston Eight,” the magazine is dominated by an intense scrutiny of the case.

The images of the accused and the slogans accompanying them mark the swift solidification of the ways in which the radical left represented itself in the period following the Communist trial. Most significantly, a short article by R. Curtis entitled “Section 98 of the Criminal Code” (CLD 2.6: 10) formally introduces and explains the law that would become the primary focus of the Canadian Labor Defense League’s publications and class organization as a whole in Canada for the next four years.

The Canadian Labor Defender, as part of a network of pamphlets and periodicals circulating in Canada during the Depression years, is a fascinating and under-examined example of radical print. The dialogic connection between pamphlets as texts with their own formal and rhetorical patterns and the assemblage found in the pages of the Defender and other
proletarian periodicals throws into relief the dense network of writers, artists, organizations, and labourers who worked to produce these forms of print and who hefted them as tools in an intensely focused agitational campaign. The Defender stands out as a location of intertextual and meta-textual critique on the role of pamphlet publishing in the campaign strategies of Canadian radical organizations in the 1930s. This essay will consider the Defender as a site for both bibliographic recuperation and network analysis of these groups, which together work to support a new critical assessment of the Canadian radical print produced alongside the periodical’s run. I will be looking specifically at a set of reviews of co-circulating periodicals and pamphlets published in the Defender through 1932 and 1933, which lays bare the agitational concerns of the CLDL and the proletarian movement suggested in its pages. Ultimately, the singular focus of the CLDL on protesting and repealing Section 98 became the undoing of the print-based network it projects: repeal of the law prefigured the collapse of the organization and the expiration of the Defender.

Background

The activities of the Communist Party of Canada, or at least their public face, were radically transformed by Prime Minister R. B. Bennett’s imposition of Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, which outlawed the Communist Party as a terrorist organization for purporting to advocate revolution based on Marxist economic principles. Although Section 98 works on the principle of unlawful assembly, criminalizing any association with an outlawed group (Petryshyn, “Class Conflict” 48–49), ranging from formal membership to mere possession of the group’s material, it operates most pointedly on the circulation of ideas within the public sphere: ideological, not physical, association is the true locus of criminality. Subsections (8) through (10) specifically address the production, distribution, sale, 

3 Section 98(1) states that

Any association, organization, society or corporation, whose professed purpose or one of whose purposes is to bring about any governmental, industrial or economic change within Canada by use of force, violence, terrorism, or physical injury to person or property, or by threats of such injury, or which teaches, advocates, advises or defends the use of force, violence, terrorism, or physical injury to person or property, or threats of such injury, in order to accomplish such change, or for any other purpose, or which shall by any means prosecute or pursue such purpose or professed purpose, or shall so teach, advocate, advise or defend, shall be an unlawful association. (R.S., 1927, c.146, s. 98)
and circulation of printed material. It is worth quoting these subsections in their entirety to emphasize the extreme specificity of the law:

(8) Any person who prints, publishes, edits, issues, circulates, sells, or offers for sale or distribution any book, newspaper, periodical, pamphlet, picture, paper, circular, card, letter, writing, print, publication or document of any kind, in which is taught, advocated, advised or defended, or who shall in any manner teach, advocate, or advise or defend the use, without authority of law, of force, violence, terrorism or physical injury to person or property, or threats of such injury, as a means of accomplishing any governmental, industrial or economic change, or otherwise, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for not more than twenty years.

(9) Any person who circulates or attempts to circulate or distribute any book, newspaper, periodical, pamphlet, picture, paper, circular, card, letter, writing, print, publication, or document of any kind, as described in this section by mailing the same or causing the same to be mailed or posted in any post office, letter box, or other mail receptacle in Canada, shall be guilty of an offence, and shall be liable to imprisonment for not more than twenty years.

(10) Any person who imports into Canada from any other country, or attempts to import by or through any means whatsoever, any book, newspaper, periodical, pamphlet, picture, paper, circular, card, letter, writing, print, publication or document of any kind as described in this section, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to imprisonment for not more than twenty years. (R.S., 1927, c.146, s. 98(8)–(10))

Section 98 has often been regarded as a tool of suppression against working-class organization, and indeed it falls into a pattern by which Bennett’s Conservative government manipulated a succession of existing federal laws during the Depression years to control unrest among the working and non-working population.4 It was first enacted as an Order-in-Council just

4 The radical union paper Workers’ Unity reports on Bennett’s invocation of the little-used Section 81 of the Criminal Code against “incitement to mutiny” (in fact an importation of the British Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797) against a Workers Alliance group’s appeal to Canadian military police “to refuse to shoot starving workers” (wu 1.1: 2). The article asserts that the Mutiny Act was used “to send Chartists and rebels of the day to Penal Settlements and to death” (wu 1.1:2), linking the plight of Canadian workers to those of the English Chartists and implicitly recalling such rallying points as the Peterloo Massacre. Later
two days after the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike ended in response to what was perceived as the opening shots of a class war in Canada. This Order was intended to take the place of similar, temporary provisions made valid by the War Measures Act, which had been repealed on 1 April 1919, immediately prior to the strike (Fidler 8). When introducing the proposed legal amendments, Solicitor-General Hugh Guthrie framed the strike, and particularly the role of labour organizers and radical groups, as “an organized, concerted, and sustained effort to spread false and pernicious doctrines, designed in the first instance to cause dissatisfaction amongst His Majesty’s subjects, to set class against class, to hamper, injure, or destroy the public service, and designed in the ultimate end to subvert constituted authority and to overturn government itself” (quoted in Fidler 8–9).

The law was not used to prosecute anyone involved in the Winnipeg strike; it was put on the books as what Richard Fidler terms “preventative, anticipatory legislation” (11). After a period of dormancy, the law was formally added to the Criminal Code in 1927 but was not put into action until July 1931, less than a month after a delegation of workers protesting for farm and unemployment emergency relief reached Ottawa (Buck 69–75). Thus tested, Section 98 was used again to justify the “mass arrest” of workers during a demonstration in Toronto, 1 August 1931 (wu 1.2: 2). The big payoff, however, came with the 11 August raid on the offices and the homes of Communist Party members, leading to perhaps the most significant Canadian political trial of the interwar period. Fidler characterizes the raid and Section 98 arrests as a “strategy ... apparently [intended] to carry out what in contemporary terms would be called a ‘surgical’ assault on the Communists, limited in scope but with devastating effect” (32). Certainly, this show of state action sent a clear message to the public at large, but it also handed a propaganda coup to the Communist Party and its subgroups that was perhaps more influential on potential radicals than open party activity could have been. The injustice done to the “Kingston Eight” stands as the galvanizing event of the Canadian left during the 1930s, while the use of Section 98 against workers’ organization created an all-purpose villain out of “Millionaire” Bennett and fueled a decade-long propaganda drive.

issues of Unity comment on other “anti-working class laws” (Unity 5.7: 2) such as sections 41 and 42 of the Immigration Act 1919, which gave the government increased powers to deport political activists (“Canada in the Making” np) and vagrancy laws. The War Measures Act (1914) also had continued influence on the surveillance of immigrant groups falling into the category of “enemy aliens,” many of whom were active in communist, socialist, and trade union movements.
The Communist Party continued to be active from the underground during its period of illegality through what Alan Filewod identifies as a “complex of roles and positions” tying together “an alliance of mass organizations” (106). Indeed, the paratextual elements of the Defender, as well as the pamphlets it reviews—such as notices, subscription blanks, lists of recommended reading, and other advertisements—show an epicentre of print coming from a group of radical organizations clustered within shouting distance of each other on the east side of Toronto’s downtown. Historian Ian McKay identifies this alliance of associated groups (among which the CLDL was probably the largest) as a significant extension of the party’s influence into more “unofficial” quarters (158). This assessment is supported by a contemporary RCMP officer monitoring radical activity in Quebec, who commented that it would be “unwise” to measure the influence of revolutionary agitation by membership in the Communist Party alone, “as the majority of the sympathizers are members of affiliated organizations who are continuously carrying on revolutionary propaganda” (quoted in Kealey and Whitaker 1: 47). Indeed, unofficially, A.E. Smith, the General-Secretary of the CLDL, himself acknowledged the relationship between the organization and the Communist Party: “It is noticeable that when A.E. Smith is speaking in public he denies indignantly that the Canadian Labour Defence League [sic] is controlled by the Communists. In private he is apparently less guarded and admits the association between the Canadian Labour Defence League [sic] and the Communist Party of Canada” (Kealey and Whitaker 1: 185). This so-called “private” observation, however, is made explicit in the CLDL texts not by direct reference to Communism but by a shared form of ideological language and rhetorical address, as observed in the pages of the Defender and other periodicals.

The CLDL first appears in the print record in 1927—the same year Section 98 was officially affixed to the Criminal Code—with the publication of its constitution, as noted by bibliographer Peter Weinrich (104). The organization remained relatively quiet until 1929, when it was taken under the auspices of the Communist Party and began a more direct recruitment campaign, as indicated by the pamphlet, “Why there should be a defense league in Canada and why you should join it” (Weinrich 109). Indeed, the declared purpose of the CLDL was to unite a collective membership “for the defense and support of the agricultural workers, regardless of their political and industrial affiliations, race, colour, or nationality, who were persecuted on account of their activity in class interests of the industrial and agricultural workers” (CLDL, “Constitution” np). The CLDL dramatically increased the number of its publications through the first half of the
1930s, as arrests and prosecutions of Communist Party associates, as well as of striking and protesting workers, jumped under Section 98 (see Weinrich 113–43). Historian Jaroslav Petryshyn notes that between 1931 and 1933, the CLDL distributed five million pieces of its publications, including pamphlets and manifestos (“A. E. Smith” 211), although Petryshyn bases his publication numbers on figures from a CLDL convention report in 1933, which may be inflated. Ian McKay notes that the CPC “made truly amazing gains in influence through the Canadian Labor Defence [sic] League” (162); however, despite the power of this formation, the CLDL showed a decline in membership following the 1936 repeal of Section 98 as the CPC was restored to lawful status and moved toward a new focus on Popular Front strategizing (Petryshyn, “A. E. Smith” 248–49). Aside from a single World War Two–era pamphlet protesting the reinstatement of the War Measures Act, the CLDL ceased to publish after 1936 (Weinrich 151–52). Although Petryshyn acknowledges the CLDL as the CPC’s “most successful ‘front’ organization” (“A. E. Smith” 88), whose print tactics reached a “sophisticated level of operation” (“A. E. Smith” 214), it is clear that the existence and work of the League was tied directly to the political and legal challenges to Section 98. The CLDL itself was under heavy state surveillance during this period; as RCMP Security Bulletins for the early Depression years show, CLDL meetings, activities, and members were a regular feature of field agents’ reports (see Kealey and Whitaker, vols. 1 and 2). The organization reached its apex of influence in relation to the trial and subsequent public debates surrounding the Kingston Eight, references to which filled the pages of nearly every publication it produced.

On the part of the CLDL, the decision to begin publishing a monthly paper was made at an “emergency defense conference” organized in Hamilton in April 1930, soon after the League’s relaunch as an arm of the Communist Party (Petryshyn, “A. E. Smith” 121, referencing CLD 1.1: 8). The Canadian Labor Defender launched in mimeo in May 1930, leading a sustained print campaign by the CLDL to defend the rights of workers and to arm the disadvantaged with basic knowledge of rights and court procedures. Following the arrest and conviction of the Kingston Eight, Section 98 became the focal point of these campaigns.

5 Weinrich’s bibliographic entry notes an earlier version of the Defender, also numbering 1.1, launching in February 1930, also in mimeo, before being re-started in May of that year (412). I have not been able to locate any copy or further reference of this shadowy first periodical.
Strategic bibliography

The Defender highlights the CLDL’s strategic use of periodical and newspaper print to support and further its more tactical pamphlet campaigns against Section 98. Bart Vautour, commenting on the role of the law in the production and staging of the agitprop drama Eight Men Speak—itself a touchstone for radical culture in 1930s Canada, complete with a character personifying the CLDL (Ryan et al. 27)—zeroes in on the challenge to Section 98 as the driving force for both political and artistic response to the suppression of the public voice of working-class organizations (127). Leading this challenge was the CLDL, which initially sprang from a similar group in the United States. The International Labour Defense (this U.S.-based parent organization) launched public campaigns in support of supposed anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, as well as the Scottsboro Boys, eight black youths accused of raping two white women in Alabama. The Canadian Labor Defender, based in Toronto but with circulation in several major cities, was first patterned after papers produced by the International Labor Defense. The periodical developed a more uniquely Canadian sensibility early in its run as it published (heavily biased) political, critical, literary, and artistic materials from key figures in the Canadian radical network, participating in the cultural nationalism observed by critics of the left and Canadian literary modernism (see Irvine 33, Rifkind 81–83, and Mason 70–72). Indeed, immediately following the August 1931 arrests and raids, the Defender flooded its pages with Canadian content, moving from a fairly even mix of Soviet-European-American-Canadian coverage to 100 percent Canadian material in its September and October issues (save one article in October).

The publication history of the Canadian Labor Defender shows at least five incarnations of the text. These various versions can be somewhat difficult to parse, as several numbers are missing from the record and the numbering itself can be inconsistent. In general, the successive phases can be identified as follows:

May 1930 to March 1931

The first version of the Defender is a monthly mimeographed newsletter, printed single-sided on letter-sized paper (quarto), and stapled along the right edge. Priced at 10 cents, the issues vary between twelve and seventeen pages. The front page features a typed list of contents and is illustrated with a hand-drawn masthead and a hand-drawn version of the U.S. Labor Defense organization’s logo (a hand waving a cloth from between prison
This logo appears in some fashion on most of the CLDL publications, and photographs of a later CLDL convention show it prominently. Sharing a common, although not universal, practice with Communist-affiliated papers, the Defender frequently launches or debuts format changes in its May issues (compare Workers’ Unity, The Worker, Workers’ Bulletin, Daily Clarion); in doing so, it emphasizes the ideological significance of May Day in its periodicity.

6 This logo appears on the U.S. organization's print material as early as 1925, the date of that group’s founding conference (see "Labor Defense: Manifesto, Resolutions, Constitution," Chicago: International Labor Defense, 1925).

7 Frank Love gives an account of this convention in the August 1933 Defender, describing the image as “a picture, backed by electric lights, showing a prison window and a toil-worn hand waving a red handkerchief to the assembled delegates in revolutionary greeting” (CLDL 4.6: 4). Given that most CLDL publications are strictly black and white, and as most of the Defender’s run is available on microfilm only, this is the only piece of evidence I have seen indicating the waving cloth is meant to be red, signifying Communistic ties.
May 1931 to November 1931

After a month’s absence, the Defender appears in a more professional format, as a printed and illustrated monthly tabloid journal (roughly in quarto). In this version, the paper now bears a full-page cover illustration, with a separate contents page, and double-sided printing. The pages conform to printing sheet layout with consistent numbering (usually sixteen pages), running headers, and two-column text. There are a few other notable technical advances, including reproduction of photographs and rendering headlines, section heads, and body text all in distinct type. The price remains 10 cents, although advertising appears for the first time.

December 1931 to May 1933

With growing circulation numbers and its new primary focus on Canadian material, the Defender switches to a broadsheet format, indicating the format change with a note on the front page (CLD 2.8: 1). The paper is now eight pages, and priced at 5 cents. This price is in line with other

Canadian Labor Defender November 1931, cover.
Communist-affiliated papers of the period, such as Workers’ Unity and the Worker, although it is still more than mass-market dailies like the Toronto Star, which was priced at 2 cents in 1932 (“History of the Toronto Star” np). This format shift shows a greater concern with intertextuality and promotion of other CLDL print materials: the December 1931 issue contains the first notice of forthcoming pamphlets (CLD 2.8: 6), and the regular “Reviews” column debuts in the following issue (CLD 3.9: 7). The lag time between notices and reviews raises the question of availability: it is not clear how long pamphlets and especially periodicals would be available for sale before or after their cover dates. The Defender’s reviews in this period often come at least a month after the reviewed issue’s publication date, suggesting that the reviews are not focused on promoting sale of current issues but on directing attention toward future, ongoing circulation. At the very least, timeliness and novelty are not the core concerns of these proletarian periodicals.

*Canadian Labor Defender* December 1931, cover.
Assembly Lines

August 1933 to June 1934

Once again, the paper skips an issue and then reappears with a format change, showing a return to a magazine-style pulp tabloid. The paper is twelve pages, roughly in quarto (30 cm by 23 cm), and staple bound; it is priced at 5 cents. The front cover displays a linocut masthead above a captioned photograph, with a list of contents running down the left. This cover appearance is inconsistent through this version of the paper: later issues keep the masthead and photographs but omit the contents in favour of more images or a cover article. The last two issues in this format have detailed and well-produced full-page linocut covers. (The cover for the May 1934 issue is especially striking.) Inside, the paper continues to show high-level printing, with a mix of column layouts, multiple heading styles, and typefaces (including pull quotes and block quotes), a running header,

8 Where I am able to give actual dimensions, these are based on my own measurements of hard copies of the Defender, examined at Library and Archives Canada.
set-off boxes and borders, and an abundance of photographic images and other illustrations. There are, however, a number of errors and typos throughout the text. Advertising continues to be present, although advertisements are small and text-only and dispersed throughout the paper.

March 1935 to October 1935

In its last stage, the Defender appears as a polished monthly magazine with strong graphic elements. Significantly, the “Canadian” is dropped from the periodical’s title, although it styles itself “Canada’s Leading Labor Pictorial” (CLD 5.9: 2). The paper is again in tabloid format (quarto: 31 cm by 23.8 cm), staple-bound, and generally twenty pages in length. It is priced at 5 cents, produced on smooth, almost glossy paper, contrasting its earlier use of pulp paper. It heavily features photographs, including portraits of the Kingston Eight following their release and snapshots of other activities across Canada. However, the magazine also contains pictorial layouts and print content from other countries, presumably obtained through foreign branches of the International Red Aid. The March 1935 issue shows very graphic and disturbing images of Southern U.S. lynchings of African-Americans (CLD 5.9: 5), murdered Chinese Communist workers (CLD 5.9: 6), as well as pictures of beaten Canadian workers, injured in confrontations with the police (CLD 5.9: 9). These images, while connecting the Defender to its U.S. antecedent, seem to be deliberately provocative, particularly in the brutal and dehumanized display of non-white bodies. The content is also far more international in scope, turning toward the fight against the spread of Fascism in Europe and the propagandistic “successes” of the USSR.

At the height of its run, the Defender actively engaged with other periodical and pamphlet texts in its reviews section. These reviews offer one of the only contemporary commentaries on Canadian radical print, and—along with lists of current and prospective publications—they have also been invaluable sources of bibliographic detail for the work of recuperating and recording this network of nearly lost texts. As well, the centrality of the CLDL and the Defender itself offer an unusual insider view of the publication network. From 1930 to 1935, in line with the core period of the Defender’s publication, the CLDL published forty-one pamphlets out of the 510 catalogued by Peter Weinrich. Pamphlet reviews begin appearing in the paper in January 1932 and ran regularly until May 1933; following the format change detailed above, they reappeared briefly in the March 1934 and April 1934 issues, after which they were permanently discontinued. I have noted twenty-three reviews, of which ten are for the CLDL’s own.
publications. For comparison, although the CLDL published only 8 percent of radical publications in this period, those publications were the focus of almost half of the reviews. Without question, the Defender was used by the CLDL as a mechanism for promotion and dissemination as well as a site for critical assessment. For 1932, out of seventy-two pamphlets recorded by Weinrich, the Defender reviews thirteen, with another six reviews of newspapers (both radical and reactionary, as in the review for The Commonwealth). With one exception, all reviews are of Canadian texts, all but two of which are published in Toronto.9 Although this is certainly a selective sample, it is not a bad range of coverage, especially considering problems with timeliness and the fuzzy legality of some of the potentially

9 The only non-Canadian material reviewed is a Soviet film, Road to Life, showing in Toronto. It is not clear if the film, a “talkie,” is dubbed or subtitled in English (CLD 5.2: 9). No other audiovisual or performance texts appear in the reviews column.
review-worthy publications. Notably missing are non-Anglo publications, particularly those in Yiddish and eastern European languages. Petryshyn notes that “ethnic organizations provided the major source of membership and financial support for the CLDL” (“A.E. Smith” 138). However, the publications surveyed by the organization’s reviews do not reflect this audience, even though the fight against deportation and the Immigration Act represents another major element in the CLDL’s print campaign, tied into Section 98 measures. This absence speaks to the difficulty of accurately surveying the Canadian proletarian publishing network; in terms of writers, the Defender may be monolingual, but its polyglot audience read and produced materials inaccessible to the reviewers and not represented here.

Critical (re)assessments: the Defender reviews

Periodical studies has lately taken a networked turn, although as Scholes and Wulfman’s appreciation of “Ezra Pound, Founder of Modern Periodical Studies” (1) makes clear, considerations of interconnected producers, venues, readers, commentators, and financial supporters have always been an integral part of the field. Scholes and Wulfman take Pound as the central node of a network of modernist little magazines; a consideration of radical print networks might do better to eschew such individualist orientations, although the modes of connection in terms of social relations and mise-en-page are still valid ways of tracing that network. Indeed, Scholes and Wulfman’s prescribed method for “how to study a modern magazine,” particularly the connection of implied readerships to actual circulation and the detailed content analysis including advertising and other para-texts, suggests a plan for network analysis (144–48). In many ways, the Communist Party is the absent centre of the radical network suggested by the Defender and its co-circulating texts, with the CLDL only partially superimposed over it.

Like the Young Worker and Masses, which it reviews in depth, the Defender circulated in what Candida Rifkind calls a “complementary circuit to political pamphlets, rather than periodicals,” organizing “a different kind of public” (46). However, whereas Masses itself is frequently cited—at least by writers, critics, and memoirists of Canada’s literary Left—the Defender is rarely employed as a resource, even among labour historians. The Defender shares with its co-circulating publications a sense of immediacy and presents itself as another direct alternative to the capitalist press and mass-market periodicals. Rifkind and Jody Mason discuss Masses (and Rifkind the Young Worker as well) in conjunction with middlebrow magazines, which they identify as seeking out overlapping readerships.
However, Mason conflates the terms “mass market,” “mass consumer,” and “popular,” leaving out another potential competitor to leftist periodicals: pulp magazines (54–55). Mason does include more ephemeral labour and jobless papers among the “small press,” even stretching to include the *Daily Clarion* as more than a party organ of the Communist Party based on its inclusion of cultural issues and literary works (56). Rifkind and Mason both draw a distinction between the left-leaning *Canadian Forum* and the radical *Masses* with material markers such as price, format, circulation numbers, and length of publication period as key indicators. On that count, the *Defender*, like *Masses*, is certainly among the small press, but its cultural concerns are entwined with its ideological concerns and political strategies. Writers for *Masses* critique the *Canadian Forum* on the grounds of its false cultural dialogue and conciliatory reformism, as noted by Rifkind: style is a marker of political affiliation, such that “a manifestary rhetoric distinguishes the position of the revolutionary left from the social democratic left” (51). This polemical style carries over into the *Defender* as well, unsurprisingly, as it shared a number of writers with *Masses*, including Oscar Ryan, Joe Wallace, Stanley Ryerson, and Frank Love. Looking at the periodicals as performing mirrored critical functions, “*Masses* sets itself up as both a cultural dialogue within a Communist framework and an authentic counterpublic sphere, a true forum for the masses, because it dares to take positions once the debate has ended” (Rifkind 51), while the *Defender* addresses *Masses* as a co-locuter in a campaign of cultural and legalistic agitprop. Elsewhere, I have discussed the tension between the educational and mobilization functions of agitprop, which oscillates between a potentially creative form of discourse and a practical, didactic tool of political organization (Hasenbank). This tension is enacted and elaborated in the *Defender*’s assessments of the cildl’s print publications as well as those of other related groups. This tension extends even to the formal components of the *Defender* in the assemblage of components that both compete with and reinforce each other on the page.

The intersection of writers, artists, organizations, and campaigns in the *Defender*’s reviews’ section illustrates what Michael Denning terms “movement culture”; undercutting depictions of leftist movements as inward-focusing echo chambers, he claims that the power of any movement “lies in its ability to sustain, inspire, and console its adherents” (67). Denning identifies the interconnected networks of the leftist cultural front of the United States, which comprised the Communist Party, industrial unions, craft unions, fraternal benefit groups such as the International Workers Order, workers’ schools, recreation programs, John Reed societies, and
artistic groups, as a source of “solidarity and self-affirmation” for both workers and artists (67). The network of publications—both magazines and papers—aid societies, ethnic associations, unions, unemployed groups, and women’s auxiliaries indicated by the contents and paratext of the Defender, and its co-circulating texts suggest an attempt to foster a Canadian version of such a movement culture. The reviews of Masses in the Defender—three in a year—represent an appeal for a cultural movement to rise among the proletariat in tandem with the political and legal movements fostered by the Communist Party and the CLDL.

The first coverage of Masses appears in April 1932 with a review by “E.C.S.” This is, I suspect, Ed Cecil-Smith, a key figure in the Progressive Arts Club and one of the editors of Masses itself. (The reviews in the Defender are generally signed only with initials and, in a couple of instances, pseudonymous last names; I have not yet been able to link most of them to identifiable figures.) As such, this is less of a critical review than a restatement of the necessary position of art in the proletarian struggle: “For many years the Canadian working class have continued their struggle without any great aid from intellectuals, artists and writers” (CLD 3.12: 7).

Further comments on pricing and audience confirm the target readership as one of low-waged workers (or the unemployed). Masses is emphasized as a rallying point for working artists, as opposed to bourgeois patronage or other forms of paid work: the review posits an ideologically cloaked mark against selling out. More pointedly, the review reflects on the intersection of the two periodicals, stating “Some of the names of participating artists are already well known to readers of the Defender and other working-class papers” (CLD 3.12: 7), suggesting a significant overlap in the audience for both periodicals.

The second review of Masses comes in the Defender’s July 1932 issue. The review by “J.S.” (possibly John Slate, a regular byline in the paper through 1932) marks a second stage of publication for Masses, showing “a considerable improvement in both content and make-up” in its third issue (June 1932), with praise especially for the artwork and range of artists (CLD 3.15: 7). Woodcuts and linocuts are apparently to be taken as markers of ideological significance, as “The magazine is undoubtedly approaching much closer to the requirements of a militant cultural magazine” (CLD 3.15: 7). The reviewer notes the new feature, “Criticism and Self-Criticism,” in which readers of Masses and writers from the Progressive Arts Club review the magazine’s contents, following the Defender’s own pattern in this same column. Graphic arts now in place, J.S. calls for more stories, especially those featuring Canadian workers and farmers, perhaps sensitive to the
perceived lack of a Canadian proletarian literature expressed by academic and middlebrow commenters in other print venues.

The final consideration of Masses is in the one-year review of its March/April issue, again by J.S., in the May 1933 number of the Defender (CLD 4.5: 7). One year in and at the height of its production run, J.S. commends Masses for “becoming an important cultural expression for the revolutionary movement in Canada” (CLD 4.5: 7). The review also acts as a call for contributions, transmitted here by two layers of editors. In its contents, Masses is deemed to be a “well-balanced production,” perhaps coming to be seen by Defender reviewers as a key supplement to the drier working-class papers also reviewed as well as an outlet for those “dissatisfied with decaying bourgeois culture” (CLD 4.5: 7).

The successful trajectory of Masses as portrayed in the Defender is somewhat disingenuous: certainly the magazine aspired to speak for and to the “masses” and was promoted as doing so in these reviews, but it never reached beyond “little” status in terms of circulation, readership, and legacy in Canadian print as a whole. Mason notes with some skepticism Masses’s own claim that it stood as “the leading cultural magazine in Canada” (Masses March/April 1934: 3), surpassing the Canadian Forum’s circulation (around nineteen hundred in 1929) (Mason 55). Certainly, that this report on the magazine’s supposed pinnacle came in what turned out to be its last issue is an indicator of Masses’s enduring precarity. Nonetheless, the bias of this puffed-up success story does not extend so smoothly to the Defender’s self-criticism. In perhaps the slyest example of its reinvention of the monthly periodical as a site of open ideological self-justification, the Defender reviews itself in a June 1932 piece by “R.C.” The article reflects on different stages of publication history, “from a mimeographed magazine, then a small printed magazine, to its present form” as “an attractive illustrated monthly journal,” which follows the pattern laid out above (CLD 3.14: 7). The reviewer’s preferred terms—“magazine” and “journal” rather than “paper”—demonstrate the claim to cultural status the Defender makes for itself and its companion publications. The shortcomings R.C. notes include the limited coverage of CLDL organizational matters and a lack of news correspondents. In truth, the paper is largely made up of editorials and reprinted material, much like the other Canadian working-class papers among which it circulated. More difficult to justify is the ideological/artistic criticism leveled at the Defender: “Some workers have made the criticism, in the west, that the drawings are too sketchy and fantastic, not bold or serious enough” (CLD 3.14: 7). There is an implicit value system governing the appropriateness of artistic forms to a proletarian movement,
although this is not spelled out in the reviews themselves. This criticism is the second oblique reference to regional tensions in the reviews, although here the West is figured as more militant, whereas in the later review of the Alberta Hunger March pamphlet, the western branches of the CLDL are seen as less focused on core message and less well-organized (see CLD 4.3–4: 7).

This review and others of CLDL pamphlets show a central concern with circulation numbers, which are perceived by the reviewers and editors as a tangible measure of the campaign's reach. There is, however, no sense of secondary circulation routes or the ways in which the texts might be read and shared: numbers are directly connected to impact. This is made very clear in another internally focused review published in the May 1933 issue of the Defender, again initialled J.S. The reviewed pamphlet, 14,000,000 Fighters Against Terror, is written by A.E. Smith and Beckie Buhay, leading organizers of the CLDL, and published by the CLDL itself. The text reflects on the growth and emergence of the CLDL within Canada, as well as on the international stage—this pamphlet is a report from World Congress—while the review praises it for the “popular style” of its writing (CLD 4.5: 7). Taken together, the pamphlet and review serve to telescope between these levels, from top-level direction to the general reader. However, the attentiveness of the reader, and the limited power of the CLDL’s campaigns, is much more strongly questioned in an article printed directly next to this review. “Agitation and Education,” also by Buhay, identifies educational and agitational work as a key weakness of the CLDL:

As a rule (and this applies very aptly to Canada) the agitation was very general in its character. All strata of the working masses are approached in the same manner: the language used is often complicated and above the heads of the workers: we have not developed the ability to concentrate upon small, daily events of interest to the workers and to connect these with the general struggle. (CLD 4.5: 7)

As well as showing little self-awareness concerning the use of both “strata” and “masses” to describe Canadian workers, this is particularly damning self-criticism, as legal education and agitational campaigns against legal repression are the very reasons for the CLDL’s functioning. We might take this as a signal of the organization’s overall anxieties. There is some evidence, based on RCMP surveillance, that the CLDL was not doing well in terms of finances or attendance: a field bulletin from September 1933 baldly states “C.L.D.L. Hard Up” (Kealey and Whitaker 1: 33). Even during this
period, which arguably marks its greatest influence, the distance between
the organization’s projected status and its actual impact remains suspect.

The CLDL’s concern with its agitprop strategy is made clearer by com-
paring its self-criticism with reviews of two Communist Party organs, the
Worker and the Young Worker. The Worker’s format shift from four to six
pages was the basis of a major subscription drive through most of 1932;
the fruits of that campaign are reviewed in the November 1932 issue of the
Defender in W. Sydney’s assessment of the “6-page Worker” (CLD 3.11: 7).
The review emphasizes the symbolic status of a six-page paper, which is
put forth as indicative of a particular cultural capital and the strength of
the radical movement. However, the endurance of the paper, which was
in circulation from 1922, making it venerable by radical print standards,
is not remarked upon as part of its status. The reviewer seems to suggest
that the Worker’s press strategy is one of progressive increase, going from
a four-page weekly to a six-page weekly, with a six-page biweekly on the
horizon, leading to the ultimate goal of a six-page daily. The Worker would
not in fact achieve this until its 1936 relaunch as the Daily Clarion, when
the Communist Party regained its legality (Weinrich 421). These material
questions do not merit review, although the inclusion of “lighter features”
lacking in “our press,” including serialized stories and illustrations, is of
particular note (CLD 3.11: 7). In its expansion, Sydney claims that “‘The
Worker’ is assuming its rightful role to be not only a propagandist, but
a leader of the working class” (CLD 3.11: 7), suggesting the need for both
cultural and polemical elements in a true proletarian press.

The Defender’s review of the Young Worker further reveals the implicit
criteria for valuable proletarian periodicals. The review by “R. K. G.” in the
January/February 1933 issue indicates that the Young Worker is the only
paper aimed at working-class youth, although some (for example, Unity)
have on occasion included pages for children and youth. Like the Worker,
this is another long-running periodical—launched in 1924, and carried
on as the Young Communist after 1936 (Weinrich 408, 422)—and as such
the review is less about the paper’s current incarnation and more of an
opportunity to highlight the intervention of the Young Communist League
as a whole. Indeed, most of these reviews are really platforms for editorial-
izing or gesturing toward other radical organizations: the columns, taken
in total, ultimately function as a network survey. The reviewer focuses on
the issue of jailed protestors covered in the issue at hand and critiques
other working-class papers for failing to adequately cover the youth prob-
lems and struggle: “As the lone expression of the working class youth, far
greater attention should be paid to its life and development” (CLD 4.1–2: 7),
Although, in turn, the review also critiques the Young Worker for its lack of attention to defense issues, which is of course the CLDL’s pet cause, as well as the absence of “lighter material,” that is, artistic and cultural content. Altogether, the reviews posit a print strategy in the form of a distributed network of periodicals, each with particular functions and cultural commitments, both complementary and mutually reinforcing, leading toward the creation of a total proletarian movement.

Reviews were dropped from the Defender’s August 1933 issue. At this point, the paper was a twelve-page magazine, and it took full advantage of this larger size and more polished format. Like other tabloid-style proletarian papers, notably Unity, the centre spread at pages 6 and 7 was given greater prominence as a space for dominant and immediate campaign issues: as such, the “Reviews” column’s typical spot on page 7 was displaced. The new format, debuted in this issue after a two-month hiatus in publication of the Defender, marks a change in presentation as decided by CLDL convention and relayed in a signed editorial by Oscar Ryan: the Defender defends itself as “‘tak[ing] a chance’” on increasing the amount of material, “in the belief that our readers will respond more enthusiastically to an improved and bigger magazine, with better pictures and more articles” (CLD 4.6: 2). Ryan claims the publication is basing these changes on “letters of advice and criticism received from our readers in many parts of the country,” striving “to provide more colorful articles, to avoid duplicating what appears in other working-class papers, and to approach our subjects in a more lively manner, always bearing in mind the defense angle of our paper” (CLD 4.6: 2). However, the perennial conflict between reader desire for “lighter” cultural material and the organization’s push for “serious material” remains unresolved. The reviews resurfaced for two issues in March and April 1934, with a significantly different format and style, and then disappeared completely for the rest of the paper’s run.

Apertures and Shutters

Denning links the lasting success of the American cultural front of the 1930s to its cultural relationship to federal government agencies and projects as well as to mass cultural industries; through these channels, it helped reshape the culture of the United States beyond the scope of avant-garde artists and labour movement organizers. By drawing out the shape of a potentially similar movement culture in Canada based on the publication network suggested in both the content and paratext of materials such as the Canadian Labor Defender, it is possible to extend the reach of periodical studies. Certainly, the magazine has proved an invaluable resource for
solving bibliographical problems by indirect means, verifying details of otherwise unrecorded texts and unsettling received knowledge about others. Further, by creating the possibility of constructing a non-linear narrative about these texts with unexpected reinforcements between them, the periodical presents itself as a tool for reassembling the organizational and critical relationships embedded in the *Defender*, as well as other associated periodicals and non-book texts. However, the network so suggested also marks the limits of its own influence. While Denning projects a long legacy of American radical movement culture, the hostility of the Canadian state to such forms of textual production, and the consequent focusing of the public debate on the issue of its criminalization under Section 98, was a significant barrier to the widespread growth of the proletarian movement in this crucial period of dissatisfaction. When the public may have been most receptive to ideas of radical refusal and social change, the aperture of the CIDL’s work was shuttered.

Looking at the *Defender* as a branch of the CIDL’s overall strategic campaign, it is hard not to see the later format changes as a response to Buhay’s criticism and other commentary like it. Certainly, the earlier version of the *Defender* is more lively and interesting than issues that follow; although more clearly and graphically organized, subsequent issues read much more like a functionary bulletin than a readerly magazine. In many ways, this shift prefigures the CIDL’s demise after the repeal of Section 98: having built itself rigidly on a single-issue campaign, it was unable to move from a position of legal antagonism to a broader set of concerns. The network envisioned by the reviews column may more accurately be considered as a pseudo-network, invested in representing itself as a larger, more influential network of organizations and publications. The *Defender*’s assessment of the CIDL’s publications and co-circulating texts operates from a position of revolutionary idealism, projecting a public and a movement before it could properly be said to exist and in this hailing attempting to create the necessary conditions for it to exist. So remains the value and the problem of the Section 98 campaign as a central issue overall: the 1936 repeal of the law can be framed as a victory for the CIDL, but it is also the boundary for a movement drawn so completely around a single issue. For a more lasting impression of working-class culture and desires, I suspect we must turn to other genres of print, and other assemblages of styles and voices than agitprop: there is another movement gathering in the spaces it excludes.
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