

A response to Herman Rosenfeld's review of *Red Flags*

Clarifying key points from recent critiques

[David Camfield](#) / January 25, 2026 / 4 min read

SOCIALISM



The following article is a response to “[Contested legacies, possible futures](#)” by Herman Rosenfeld, published in *Canadian Dimension* on January 5, 2026.

I thank Herman Rosenfeld for writing his [long review](#) of my [Red Flags: A Reckoning with Communism for the Future of the Left](#) in an appreciative and comradely tone in spite of what he rightly calls his “substantial disagreements” with some of its arguments. Rather than engage with those disagreements, I’d like to clarify a few points, particularly regarding certain views that Rosenfeld mistakenly imputes to me.

The main thrust of *Red Flags*’ analysis of the USSR from 1928-1991, China from 1949 until the end of the 1970s, and Cuba from 1959 to the present is that these “Actually Existing Socialist” (AES) countries were class societies in which the central political bureaucracy of the party-state was a ruling class that exploited the direct producers. Rosenfeld gives short shrift to the book’s crucial argument that AES countries were class societies that were not in transition toward communism, focusing instead on the secondary argument about how to characterize their socio-economic nature (in my view, a kind of state capitalism, in which the logic of capital operates in a distorted way).

With respect to my reflections in the book on the prospects for engaging a transition to communism in the future, Rosenfeld insists on my hostility to the political party as a vehicle for socialist politics. This is a misrepresentation. In the book’s brief concluding discussion of “a few essential elements of a viable communist politics for our time,” I contend that breaking with capitalism and starting a transition to a classless and stateless society of freedom (communism) remains possible in our time and advocate practising “communist politics.” However, I explicitly refrain from any attempt to outline what such a politics should look like. And nowhere do I “eschew all forms of electoral participation” by socialists. Nor do I advance any argument against the importance of “even explicitly socialist political parties.”

For the record, I wish socialist forces in Canada were strong enough that it would be worthwhile running candidates in elections to at least help ongoing efforts to build working class power in workplaces and communities and popularize socialist politics. And as I have [written elsewhere](#):

[E]ven reformist parties are sometimes part of the process through which the working class develops as a political force. For that reason, it’s a mistake for radicals who support working class struggle to refuse to ever get involved in parties that don’t share all our ideas. Anarchist socialists take that stand. Most Marxist socialists, myself included, don’t. We believe that it’s important to learn from and try to influence important political experiences that large numbers of worker activists are going through.

On another important issue for the left today, Rosenfeld maintains that “calling opposition to NATO ‘anti-NATO neo-campism’ is particularly problematic.” It would indeed be a serious problem if *Red Flags* equated all opposition to NATO with anti-NATO neo-campism. However, the book just doesn’t make this conflation. It devotes a single page to discussion of the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” kind of opposition to NATO because many Marxist-Leninists today adopt this stance.

Further, I have to say that I am puzzled by the reviewer’s discussion of the Marxist-Leninist popular front strategy in positive terms. Rosenfeld refers to “encouraging working class resistance to speed-up and wage controls during the Second World War in the face of government enforced anti-strike laws, supposedly to support the war effort.” In fact, it is well-documented by historians that after the rulers of Nazi Germany broke their alliance with Stalin’s government and invaded the USSR in 1941 Communist Parties in the US and Canada became uncritical supporters of their governments and *actively opposed* strikes and workers’ resistance to employers’ efforts to intensify their work. These parties even supported the racist wartime internment of people of Japanese heritage. This orientation was the result of these parties’ application of the popular front strategy, central to which is the idea of building an alliance that encompasses a so-called “progressive” wing of the capitalist class—supposedly represented at the time by FDR and “New Deal” Democrats in the US and Mackenzie King’s Liberals in Canada.

And finally, for the record, rather than referring to Gramsci “as a Stalinist” as Rosenfeld claims, the book very briefly mentions him as one of a number of “thinkers and currents lacking a radical systematic critique of Stalinism [that] also have ideas that can contribute to a communist politics for our time.”

David Camfield is a professor in the Labour Studies Program and the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Manitoba.