

# The Eclipse of the NDP

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# The Eclipse of the NDP

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George Ehring and Wayne Roberts, *Giving Away A Miracle: Lost Dreams, Broken Promises and the Ontario NDP* (Oakville: Mosaic Press 1993).

Gerald Caplan, *Just Causes: Notes of an Unrepentant Socialist* (Toronto: ECW Press 1993).

Norman Penner, *From Protest to Power: Social Democracy in Canada, 1900-Present* (Toronto: James Lorimer 1992).

Keith Archer and Alan Whitehorn, *Canadian Trade Unions and the New Democratic Party* (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre 1993).

THE NDP APPEARS to be in its death throes, an expiring force in Canadian politics. It is intellectually bankrupt, financially broke, and reeling politically. Consider the coming and passing of 1994 — exactly a half century since the election of the Saskatchewan CCF as North America's first socialist government — with the absence of a major celebration. There has been a virtual lack of conscious acknowledgement of it. Contrast this relative silence to the conference, publications,<sup>1</sup> self-congratulatory back slapping, and commitment to ideological renewal which greeted the fiftieth anniversary of the Regina Manifesto in 1983. Although the party then only ruled in Manitoba, there was a strong sense that its fortunes were on the rise. As 1995 began it governed in three provinces including the two wealthiest in terms of per capita incomes. This sway over more than half of Canadians, however, appears temporary and tenuous. By the end of 1995 the party will have almost certainly lost Ontario, and British Columbia appears set to leave the fold soon after. Saskatchewan may gain a new distinction: the home of English North America's last social democratic government in this century.

<sup>1</sup>For example, J. William Brennan, ed., *"Building the Co-operative Commonwealth": Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina 1985).

The collapse of the NDP — winning only nine seats on less than seven per cent of the vote in the 1993 federal election — is as befuddling as it has been sudden. For decades the party argued that money influenced election outcomes; the party insisted on election expenses legislation as a condition of propping up the minority Liberals in the early 1970s. In the last election it spent more than in past campaigns. The result: its worse performance ever, a lower percentage of the vote than in the CCF's first or last outings in 1935 and 1958. To help pay down its campaign debts the party sold its Ottawa headquarters to Ukraine which will use it as its embassy. The election proved more than a setback; it was a critical, disastrous reversal from which the NDP may never recover. Just a few short years ago, the party stood at unprecedented heights atop public opinion polls; its leader was deemed better and more trusted than his rivals. Ed Broadbent mused during the 1988 election that Canada was headed for a bipolar party system with the Liberals fading. Although party activists took the 1988 "free trade" election to be a defeat, for it did not measure up to their inflated expectations, it will likely stand as the federal NDP's apogee: 43 seats and 20 per cent of the vote. Paradoxically, the party's remarkable and unexpected triumph in Ontario and its two solid provincial victories in the West, in 1990-91, contributed to the federal party's demise rather than its continued rise. The NDP proved to supporters, critics, and skeptics alike that it could govern. What relatively few appreciated was how much it would govern like the parties and politicians it replaced. This upshot begged nagging questions for its partisans: Is the NDP necessary? What purpose does it serve?

Like the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and its CCF forbears, the NDP had a discernibly weighty influence on the agenda of public policy. It truly is *The Party that Changed Canada*<sup>2</sup>; its legacy lingers, embedded in the national political culture even if it vanishes. In the development of the welfare state — from pensions and labour law to health care and housing — its program proposals had greater impact on the lives of ordinary folk than those of the Conservatives, even when the latter ruled. To be sure, NDP ideas and initiatives were often plagiarized and coopted by the Liberals, but this was testimony to the NDP's magnetic power. Not content to exert influence indirectly — as a third party sometimes holding the balance of parliamentary power — it pursued the actual levels of power — purposefully and passionately. As the other parties moved toward it in terms of policies, it moved toward them in terms of language and image. The centre of the political spectrum became crowded; party differences appeared ideologically less profound, often more focused on leaders' images and personalities than on clashing values and interests. As with the other parties, many NDP postures have been logically inadequate and impractical. In opposition, it never took the public debt seriously. It embraced as an article of faith the universality of programs such as day care, family allowances, and higher education even when they entail subsidizing the

<sup>2</sup>Lynn McDonald, *The Party that Changed Canada: The New Democratic Party Then and Now* (Toronto 1987).

wealthy. It also made some alarming claims about the FTA which were dishonest (for example, that Canadian hospitals would be privatized, bought up and operated by American firms). The point is not that other parties have been less deceitful; it is that the NDP lost its claim to being a different, morally superior, alternative.

To convince a wider audience beyond its core supporters that it was a practical and not a quixotic enterprise, the federal NDP adopted "responsible" postures. The party arguably misjudged what is "responsible" and "pragmatic." Constitutional reform was an issue of the 1980s and early 1990s that was manufactured by Conservatives and Liberals in Ottawa and Québec City. It was not reflective of the concerns or needs of the masses, but the NDP sided with its parliamentary adversaries to fight Brian Mulroney's alleged "enemies of Canada." Those turned out to be the majority of voters, the people whom the NDP aspired to attract but whom it repelled. Bob Rae, who had declared at the time of his election that "the real Constitution is the economy" soon turned this proposition on its head, arguing that the worst thing for the economy would be the failure of the Charlottetown Accord. The NDP — so keen to aid native leaders in their quest to entrench aboriginal self-government — failed to anticipate, and could not fathom, that a majority of natives would vote against it. Elijah Harper flouted party policy by obstructing the Meech Lake Accord. He was extolled nonetheless by party leaders and thinkers, such as Gerry Caplan in *Just Causes*, as a "courageous" hero. (170) Sensing the NDP's growing irrelevance, Harper defected to run for the Liberals. Similarly, keen to make gains in Québec, the federal NDP endorsed that province's constitutional demands. In addition to alienating many of its Western supporters, the NDP confused others by reversing its long held position on Senate abolition. For its efforts, it won a paltry 1.5 per cent of the Québec vote and 4.1 per cent of the Alberta vote in 1993, its worst showing ever in both provinces.

In the 1993 election, that party proffered Tommy Douglas' old position that the Liberals and Conservatives were Tweedledum and Tweedledee, that it was truly different. The claim rang hollow and the baton of third party protest in English Canada was passed on, unwittingly, to the Reform Party. Support for the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Discords proved disastrous detours from the traditions of Canadian social democracy, from ameliorating the conditions of the less fortunate and less privileged through the instrumentality of strong central government. In Québec provincial politics, the NDP banner was surrendered and lost to others, to the FLQ's Paul Rose, the convicted murderer of Pierre Laporte.

The party's rhetoric and subsequent behaviour produced yawning gaps. In Ontario, in opposition, the NDP chanted a simple mantra with respect to government deficits and the public debt: "Don't worry, we'll make the rich pay." Once in office, the government opened its eyes to what the financial press publishes daily: the rich and the bond rating agencies determine interest rates and, effectively, the marketability of the yet more bonds needed to refinance the debt. The NDP's analysis and prescriptions while in opposition proved faulty; the lie to them was exhibited in its

performance in office. The cabinet was not prepared to practise what it had preached. What did solemn talk of minimum and increased corporate taxes, higher minimum wages, and more social services produce? In the 1992-93 fiscal year, the NDP government collected less in corporate taxes than it did in gasoline and tobacco taxes combined. For 1994-95, it was projecting the highest ever expenditures to service the public debt (about \$8 billion, a whopping 14 per cent increase in one year). Its budget boasted that Ontario's corporate taxes and manufacturing wages (after adding health care costs) were *lower* than in the United States, and that the public service was to shrink in size.<sup>3</sup>

Such policy reversals did not resonate with the message party leaders preached in opposition and which members had embraced fervently at policy conventions. The gulf between leadership behaviour in office and party members' older, unrevised ideological image of the NDP became so wide that the party lost core supporters who felt betrayed or ignored. This was not the result of misadventure and misfortune for that implies bad luck. It was the product of miscalculation and mismanagement, of folly and design, of reliance on and gullibility in platitudes and shibboleths. For socialist puritans, like George Ehring and Wayne Roberts, it reflected a lack of leadership mettle.

What of the NDP's current plight and condition? How do the four studies reviewed here expand our appreciation of the Canadian social democratic impulse? Five of the six authors are Ontarians; much of their material is Ontario-related. This misleads somewhat in illuminating the party's historical and current base. The party failed to win a seat there in the 1993 election, and its popular vote there was less than its national average. Nevertheless, the NDP's performance in Ontario is critical to its prospects as a national, and not merely regional, force. As Ehring and Roberts note in *Giving Away A Miracle*, Ontario's wealth, size, industrial concentration, and diversity permits a better test case than, say, relatively poor and dependent Saskatchewan or Manitoba, to determine whether the NDP is able to alter fundamental economic, social, and ultimately political relations. (xii)

The short story line in *Giving Away A Miracle* is simple and straightforward: Bob Rae is a paranoid megalomaniac who is a snake in the pocket of the working class. The extended story line is structured around "ten deadly sins" which have trapped the NDP, shaping and determining its performance in office. The authors judge it an unqualified failure. Ehring and Roberts are backroom insiders who have toiled in the political trenches: managing local campaigns, canvassing households, debating at conventions. Both have worked for unions, although they hold their leaders in contempt: "The old fat cat cartoon capitalist had a pot belly and a cigar. Now those are the trademarks of the union leader." (35) They are permanent, leftist critics of the party. Their account, running back to 1970, is based largely on interviews, observations, and press reports. It is not so much a history, however,

<sup>3</sup>Ontario Budget, 5 May 1994, 14, 38, 97, and 113.

as an examination of the purported endemic problems which cripple the NDP and render it incapable of fulfilling the hopes and dreams of its supporters.

The authors are familiar with much of the academic literature on the party, but they eschew footnotes and some rudimentary principles of scholarship in favour of a slapdash, shotgun, journalistic, and oft times muckraking style that is brash, irreverent, lively, and an easy read. Innuendo runs rampant. Robin Sears, the one time apparatchik in the Socialist International and functionary in the federal and Ontario NDP, is labelled Boy Stalin. (159) The authors live up to their prefatory promise: "we have tried to make readers suffer through as little theory as possible before getting to the gossip and anecdotes that make up most of this book." (xii) Most everybody who has been anybody in and around the party makes an appearance. Welcome are the texts of the Liberal-NDP Accord of 1985 (376-7) and the NDP's 1990 platform, "An Agenda for People." (277-9) They are measuring rods for the output of the governing parties. The minority Liberals were compelled to deliver on the modest agenda dictated for them by the NDP. The NDP, unfettered by the need to compromise with others, reneged on much of its winning platform. It jettisoned most of its as impractical, unwise, or unattainable — items such as public automobile insurance, an extra billion dollars in corporate tax revenues (they actually shrank), and an increase of the minimum wage to 60 per cent of the average industrial wage.

The book's first draft was written before the NDP's startling upset win of 1990. Ehring and Roberts set out originally to explain why the NDP was a chronic loser and why it had to change direction if it ever hoped to come to power. The "deadly sins" identified include: a lack of new ideas, a bureaucratic relationship with the labour movement, the absence of a "down-to-earth" economic plan; a hopelessly romantic view of heroic, victimized workers; intolerance of internal dissent (the NDP = the No Dissent Party); distrust of social movements; an inability to "connect" with the multicultural community; a wanting media strategy; and a misunderstanding of the Liberals. This is followed by a breezy and judgmental review of the party's performance dating back to Stephen Lewis's ascension to the leadership.

Despite the party's mortal shortcomings, the NDP *did* win and come to power. The authors recognize that it was "in the right place at the right time" (288) as the Liberals self-destructed. To come to terms with this new reality and the undermining of their thesis that the NDP is pathologically programmed to fail electorally, a new section was added. Although the book's title capitalizes on the NDP holding office, this section is but one-fifth the volume's length. It places the NDP government once again in the context of the "deadly sins." One is baffled by the analysis that the party is "Still Polishing the Labour Brass" (323) in light of the brass's position that the party had short-changed it in the free-trade election of 1988. (221) The NDP then directly assaulted organized labour with its "social contract," rolling back public sector wage settlements freely arrived at in collective bargaining. Many

unions disavowed and disaffiliated from the party. If this was the party kowtowing to labour, what would constitute tarnishing its brass?

The vituperative critique of the Rae government is so unrelentingly negative that it may unintentionally generate sympathy for it. Certainly the reversals, the litany of broken campaign pledges, the faux pas, and the petty scandals are all here — from Sunday shopping to casinos to ministerial lying and misbehaviour. The virginal standards demanded by Rae when in opposition — the implication that NDPers are innately ethically superior and devoid of the character flaws of Liberals and Conservatives — was self-righteous puffery and fluffery, pious nonsense exposed as such. The NDP came to be hoisted, properly, on its own petard. But there is no acknowledgement of anything the government has done that may merit some modest, if not unstinting, praise. Consider the NDP's salvaging of the Algoma steel plant and thousands of jobs in Sault Ste. Marie after the hard-headed business community gave up on it. Rather than allocating some credit to the Rae government for its perseverance and efforts on the workers' and city's behalf, this project is presented as a wasteful drain on the public treasury, a failed experiment in worker ownership. (330-1) Was it? Do the workers think so?

Ehring and Roberts are unperturbed by contradictions or by the need for some qualifications in their analyses. The party is described as oligarchic; the leadership is "hand-picked by the party establishment." (13) So how was Ehring elected a party vice-president? Rae is attacked for not talking about "class, gender, or race exploitation." (338) So why did he name eleven women to his cabinet of 26 and why did the NDP insist on employment equity and pay equity legislation? They condemn the NDP for failing to "connect" with multicultural and women's groups. So why did the government (foolishly) run job advertisements telling white males they need not apply? They lament that the party has not totally surrendered to social movements. The problem is that much of the public thinks it has done so. The pursuit of political correctness may thus result in political irrelevance and marginalization. The unconditional endorsement of social movements' objectives may lead to inevitable cross-pressures. In seeking to placate both environmentalists and forestry workers it is easy to alienate both and to dismay the broader public, as the NDP experience in British Columbia demonstrated. Politically it would make sense to cater to the women's movement and the labour movement if their leaders can deliver the majority of women's and workers' votes; the reality is that they cannot.

The authors offer some excellent insights into party-labour relations and the NDP's difficulty in selling its message among the working, non-unionized, poor. (33) The critique of the party's lack of "lunch bucket economics" comes up short, however, in vague and preachy prescriptions. Few McWorkers at McJobs carry lunch buckets. They call on the party "to develop common-sense, every-day notions of what the state can do to improve people's lives." (339) But the manifesto they wrote as party activists is positively other-worldly: an NDP government "will replace corporate ownership with social ownership of the major firms in the

manufacturing, resource, finance, transportation, and communications industries." How? Their manifesto "neatly avoided [!] a discussion of how the state would come to acquire these commanding heights of the economy." (123)

Gerry Caplan's *Just Causes* comes as a heuristic counterpoint, a welcome tonic, after digesting Ehring and Roberts. It offers insight into why he is part of the NDP establishment and one of its brain trusters, someone with genuine influence, just as their book offers insight into their comfortable role as party rebels. They expect to be and appear to relish being on the losing side in party tussles, uncomfortable in a party that must govern rather than merely agitate. Caplan, in contrast, is a skilled political operative, a general who has managed federal and provincial NDP campaigns. He has been close to and respectful of the Lewis family: David, Stephen, Michael, and Janet — a dynastic influence in the party running back to the 1930s. Caplan has also served beyond the political barricades: Brian Mulroney appointed him to co-chair a Task Force on Broadcasting Policy; then Bob Rae recruited him to co-chair a Royal Commission on Education.

*Just Causes* is drawn from over 500 columns written for the *Toronto Star* between 1985 and 1993. About one fifth of them appear here, organized in 17 short, thematic, sections with titles such as "Just Liberals," "The American Way," "Native Wrongs," "Women's Equality," and "Socialist Dreams and Nightmares." Well-written, lucid, humanistic, compassionate, they are bitterly and bitinglly critical of the excesses of capitalism and the oppression of imperialism. They are crafted, principled, coherent and intelligent, unlike much of the mush, fudge, and drivel of many columnists. At times, as in his eulogy to the CBC's Barbara Frum (235-7), Caplan is moving. He denounces racism and anti-Semitism, decries poverty amid privilege. He derides "jock capitalism" with its "dog-eat-dog, exploitation of-man-by-man system" (75, 113), and snipes at financial barons and interests. He does not care much for communism either but has less to say about it, presenting democratic socialism as a third way, a middle ground between two scourges. (242) He pines for a world where man's noblest, not his basest, instincts prevail, where harmony rather than conflict is the natural order of things. (244-5)

The NDP as such is not Caplan's primary concern, although he styles himself a "cheerleader" (235) for it. He offers a social democratic disposition vis-à-vis public affairs, one that accords with mainstream thinking in the NDP. The Manitoba NDP was in power during the first three years of his columns — presumably in a position to help usher in a prairie version of the New Jerusalem —but its accomplishments and its leader, Howard Pawley, go unmentioned. So too does Mike Harcourt's NDP in British Columbia; the sole reference to Roy Romanow's NDP regime in Saskatchewan is to label its policies as "neo-conservative." (245) So much for cheerleading. Once again, as with Ehring and Roberts, one is left with a feeling that social democrats are better at critiquing the status quo than at transforming it.



Caplan wrote his MA thesis on the Ontario CCF<sup>4</sup> and concluded that a socialist party would not win power in the province. When it happened, he welled up in tears and high hopes. A section of his book is devoted to the Rae phenomenon ("So This is Power," 33-48), but he is curiously silent about the government's performance after 1991. His presumption was that the new government, "a band of pretty ordinary folk" with few lawyers and "corporate leviathans" among them, would generate growth and distribute its benefits fairly. (35, 43) His expectations and those of many New Democrats — that the tax system would be radically altered (65) — failed to materialize. One senses that, like Stephen Lewis, he had a falling out with the Rae government but prefers not to publicize it, to maintain — at least on the surface — solidarity.

The largest single concentration of Caplan's energy goes to skewering the Mulroney government. The Thatcher, Reagan, and Bush administrations are lambasted too, the latter judged as captains of an evil empire that is racist at home and a bully abroad. This formulation was articulated by the Waffle movement at the turn of the 1970s of which Caplan, like Ed Broadbent, was an early but only temporary member. (He helped to expel it.) Neither the United States nor its presidents appear as having done any good on any issue. (He calls for war crimes trials for Reagan and Henry Kissinger.) Mulroney's government is scorned as a subservient ideological "lapdog" to Washington. (91, 110) This begs the question of why Mulroney appointed Stephen Lewis — to whom Caplan dedicated his book on the Ontario CCF — as his United Nations ambassador. Can one imagine Reagan appointing a self-professed socialist in any post? Much in evidence is Caplan's concerns with the developing world: many columns devoted to South Africa and Central America with Viet Nam, Libya, Liberia, Indonesia, Iraq, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and even tiny Grenada also drawing some attention.

Caplan's positive reference point — like the NDP's over the past few decades — is Sweden. (15, 34, 76, 245) There are, however, cultural barriers to transplanting its experience: labour and capital there have operated in an institutionalized social partnership, working together to stabilize prices and wages. That has not been and is unlikely to become the Canadian or the NDP way, to constrain decentralized collective bargaining. Moreover, Sweden is currently in economic crisis. Sweden's new reality also plagues the NDP. Its prescriptions are suspect. Fraternal social democratic models — Sweden's and Germany's Social Democrats, British, Australian, and New Zealand Labour — have either flip-flopped on long-standing positions when in office or have had their influence curtailed, in some cases appearing more as near-permanent opposition forces. All this suggests that the current, declining, condition of social democracy in Canada is, in comparative light, more typical than it is exceptional.

<sup>4</sup>Published as Gerald L. Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF in Ontario* (Toronto 1973).

Like the NDP, Caplan did not, would not, could not, foresee the rise of the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois. Nor did he and the party anticipate the resiliency of Mulroney and the Liberals. In 1987, he wrote of the Conservatives' negligible chances of reelection and hinted at a potential NDP victory. "[We] are in the midst of a genuine historical revolution in Canadian politics ....," he proclaimed, "the NDP's future is open in a way that has never been true before." (12-3) Indeed, but it turned out to be an open downward spiral for the federal party after 1988. He predicted with great confidence, erroneously, that John Turner would be dumped before the 1988 election and that Jean Chrétien would capture Québec. (22) He also predicted that Canadians would reject NAFTA (112); in the 1993 election relatively few seemed moved by it compared to the FTA debate of 1988, much to the despair of NDP strategists. Like the NDP, he misdiagnosed times of relative plenty as times of exceptional woe and grief. Consider his analysis of Toronto in 1988 when the city's economy was hyperventilated, beset with a labour shortage, when Ontario's growth rate was exceeding that of any of the G-7 countries. He wrote of food banks, underfunded hospitals and universities, and alleged low-paid job ghettos for visible minorities. Would that the early 1990s, during the NDP's tenure, had been as mean and cruel to Toronto's schools, hospitals, racial minorities, and welfare recipients as the late 1980s.

One senses from Caplan's later columns, in 1993, tinges of sadness; there is a creeping pessimism replacing earlier buoyancy. This reflects well the contemporary, diseased, condition of the NDP. As the years pass, his columns will yellow and fade in their relevance to the ever evolving agenda of public affairs. Nevertheless they will retain their punchiness, emitting a strong and rich flavour of the issues, personalities, and times they report on and judge. That is a respectable legacy for any book.

Norman Penner's *From Protest to Power* is, unlike the two foregoing books, an academic study. As such it must sustain a more systematic and rigorous appraisal, one consistent with its scholarly veneer. Replete with footnotes and bibliography, it is, on the whole, workmanlike and competent, but it contains too many irksome lapses and errors. They go beyond the normal debatable interpretations of any study. He touches on the standard high points and personalities — the Winnipeg General Strike, J.S. Woodsworth and the Ginger Group, the Regina Manifesto, World War and Cold War, the Communists, organized labour and the birth of the NDP, Tommy Douglas and medicare, the Lewises and the Waffle, and the NDP's provincial successes in all the provinces but one west of Québec. There is a good sense of the melange of labour and socialist parties, factions, and tendencies which vied for support in the first quarter of the century. Penner properly recognizes British Labour as the spiritual force behind Canadian social democracy. His introductory chapter, however, ignores Canada except for cursory references on its first page and last sentence. Where is A.W. Puttee, editor of Winnipeg's labour newspaper, *The Voice*, who was elected in 1900 as an MP? The solitary

Canadian reference in the first chapter is to O.D. Skelton's Harvard PhD thesis, a theoretical critique of socialism that devotes less than a page to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Penner refers to some excellent primary sources — newspapers, *Hansard*, party archives — but they play second fiddle, overwhelmed by secondary sources. The overall result is more like gruel than steak. There is little in the book that is new, but this may be unfair commentary for novelty appears to be beyond the book's modest objectives. Whereas other overview studies such as Desmond Morton's<sup>6</sup> may be similarly judged, Penner lacks Morton's finesse and more graceful writing style. His narrative is less than half the length of Ivan Avakumovic's meatier, more detailed, and precise study.<sup>7</sup> Nor does his study have the fluidity, depth, and richness of archival material evident in Walter Young's account.<sup>8</sup> Short on flair and imagination, the book is at points tediously redundant, sometimes inconsistent: 1933 is given as the year of the CCF's birth at least five times (v, vi, 32, 35, 36), only to be followed by the assertion that it happened in 1932. (53) On one page (68) there is reference to the CCF's Executive Committee while on the very next (69) to its Executive Council. Which is it? (The former). Such sloppiness detracts from credibility. One chapter begins with "At the turn of the century, twenty-five years after Confederation ..." (38), but arithmetic produces 33 years. These flaws are compounded by questions of grasp and interpretation: while there is some good material on the Saskatchewan CCF's outlook in the 1940s and its agitation for federal equalization grants, old age pensions, and new federal-provincial fiscal arrangements (114), it is inaccurate to assert that Saskatchewan "forced [my emphasis] the federal government and the other provinces to make [medicare] a shared-cost program." (56)

Much of Penner's quantitative data are not well-presented, dissected, or accurate. The table reporting the results of BC's six most recent provincial elections has at least three errors. (127) The table reporting Manitoba elections shows, erroneously, the NDP winning a majority of seats in 1969 (123) when it only won a minority of them, something his narrative misses altogether. Penner's problem with numbers extends, unfortunately, beyond proof-reading. He makes much, too much, of vote totals. The effect is misleading. Consider his assertion that the BC NDP "has continued to increase its popular support in every election since its defeat in 1975." (131) Yes, it has, because BC constantly gains population. What he does not point out, although the data in his table do, is that the NDP's winning 41 per cent of the 1991 vote was the lowest percentage it has won in any election after 1975, quite a different picture from the one he paints.

<sup>5</sup>O.D. Skelton, *Socialism: A Critical Analysis* (Boston 1911).

<sup>6</sup>Desmond Morton, *Social Democracy in Canada* (Toronto 1977).

<sup>7</sup>Ivan Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto 1978).

<sup>8</sup>Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61* (Toronto 1969).

David Lewis serves as a revealing and contrasting symbol of the party and the various authors' relationship to it. In Caplan's book, he is revered. (10-1) In Ehring and Roberts' account he is repeatedly presented as "a notorious red-baiter who loved to root communists out of the party." (6, 11-2, 25) In Penner's study, Lewis appears as a communist booster, an enthusiast of the Soviet Union's planned social economy. (83, 86) Why this focus? Penner exaggerates the CCF's "praise of the socialism of the Soviet Union." (87) Roosevelt's New Deal and Britain's Beveridge Report — authored by a Liberal peer — rather the Stalin's five year plans, were more in the way of exemplars. Penner's perspective may reflect something of his political socialization and evolution. He was born the son of long-time Winnipeg Communist alderman Jacob Penner, in the same year as the Canadian Communist Party. Like many comrades and fellow travellers in the 1950s, he left the CP after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. His family drifted into the NDP: his son ran for the party in the 1970s, his brother served as Howard Pawley's Attorney General in the 1980s.

There is already a dated and fanciful quality to Penner's book despite its historical spine. The notions that social democracy in Canada "now has more support and status than ever before" and that "the opposition to it is more hysterical, more venomous, and more heavily financed" than in the past (vii, 145-6) makes 1992 — when these sentiments were expressed — seem ancient. By 1993, the NDP disappeared from the Alberta legislature and the federal NDP was confronted more by indifference than opposition. It managed to eke out 15 per cent or more of the vote in only 48 of the country's 295 constituencies.

A virtue of Penner's account is that it reminds us of what Canadian social democracy stood for in its formative years. After World War I, Woodsworth's social policy agenda included social security covering unemployment, health, shelter, old age pensions, and free public education. His economic policy provided for the "socialization" of railways, telegraphs, mines, electric power, banks and insurance companies. He called for the "progressive socialization" of large manufacturing and commercial institutions, with compensation, and the expropriation of unused land. (48) The NDP secured most of its welfare state objectives by the late 1960s; on economic policy it refined earlier thinking. Sweden, its social democratic model state, has never had as much public ownership as Canada has had under Liberal and Conservative regimes. The Swedes, Germans, and others determined long ago that "functional socialism"<sup>9</sup> does not require nationalization. Regulatory and strategic governmental intervention may accomplish more in terms of growth, equity, efficiency, and redistribution. Is Alberta a more socialist society than Québec because its telephone system is publicly owned, because it has owned an airline and a trust company, and it has a de facto provincial bank in its Treasury Branches? The CCF wanted constitutional reform, too, but it sought the strengthen-

<sup>9</sup>Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, *Reclaiming the Canadian Economy: A Swedish Approach through Functional Socialism* (Toronto 1970).

ing of the federal government's power, not its diminution. It called for the abolition of the Senate, not its empowerment and provincialization. (56, 59) Woodsworth always stressed that the "co-operative commonwealth" or socialism could only be built from the centre, by Ottawa. (134-6)

A thematic thread in Penner's history is that the CCF-NDP has become more conservative over time. He notes the hesitation to use the terms "socialist" or "social democratic" in campaign materials. (135) Do Liberals, Conservatives, and Reformers use "capitalist" in theirs, and does that make them less pro-capitalist? Like many authors, Penner attaches a great significance to the tone and language of the Regina Manifesto: the CCF would not rest content until it had "eradicated capitalism." (88) No doubt the party was more radical in the 1930s, but so were the times. It is always instructive to be mindful of the Manifesto's context: an exceptional era of doubt, despair, and depression. Conservative organizations like the United Farmers of Manitoba were critical of capitalism too. Unlike sister organizations in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, the UFM rejected affiliation with the CCF, thinking it too radical, but it nonetheless declared that "the present economic crisis is due to the inherent unsoundness in the capitalist system."<sup>10</sup> Remember too who the party's leaders were: social gossellers more in harmony with Methodism than Marxism. Thus, in the context of 1933, the Manifesto was not as sweepingly revolutionary as it appeared later. It was, after all, Frank Underhill, that "most Shavian of Fabians" according to Frank Scott, who drafted the Manifesto,<sup>11</sup> who later came around to supporting Mackenzie King. Somewhat similarly, but inversely, the Waffle's "radical" program — Canadianizing the union movement, opposition to free trade with the US, and endorsing self-determination for Québec (103) — became mainstream thinking within and well beyond the NDP, hardly revolutionary fare. These ideas are as consistent with the temper of politics in the 1980s and 1990s as the Regina Manifesto was with the mood of the 1930s.

Penner's best, most thoughtful, chapter is his last: "Socialism Then and Now." It briefly offers some critical perspectives on what social democracy might stand for today. He refers to *Social Democracy Without Illusions*.<sup>12</sup> Must social democrats, asks Allan Blakeney, mindlessly defend all manufacturing jobs? Henry Milner suggests embracing the market system and the credo of profit maximization. (139) Has the NDP become obsolete? For Penner the answer is "No": the looming challenges are responding to the de-industrialization fostered by the FTA, recognizing Québec's right to self-determination, and extending that right to aboriginals. (147) What is not apparent is what makes this new agenda an exclusively socialist

<sup>10</sup> *Canadian Forum*, vol. 12, 1932, 124.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959), 258, 264.

<sup>12</sup> John Richards, Larry Pratt, and Robert D. Cairns, eds., *Social Democracy Without Illusions: Renewal of the Canadian Left* (Toronto 1991).

one. Do not some Liberals, Conservatives, and indeed Reformers support one or all of these positions?

Penner astutely differentiates between winning office and "capturing power." (141) He cites British Labourite Richard Crossman's address to the 1956 CCF Convention. It still rings true today: the policy gains of social democratic parties, whether achieved in or outside government, have contributed, paradoxically, to the consolidation and advancement of capitalism. They have done so by raising living standards through higher minimum wages and via social programs which increase public consumption and demand. Thus employment and industrial growth are stimulated. (90, 141) From this perspective one may conclude that Canadian social democracy has been a powerful force for social advancement as well as capitalism. Its partisans have much to celebrate. They may bemoan, however, that the attainment of social democratic objectives has not meant the popular embrace, at the national level, of the social democratic party.

Keith Archer and Alan Whitehorn's booklet (its text is 20 pages) is focused and specific, reflective of the behavioural persuasion in political science. Rich with precise data, tight in its analysis, it is disciplined in a way that the other studies reviewed here are not. In examining organized labour's role in the NDP, they offer a survey conducted at the federal party's 1987 convention. They conclude that the party is not controlled by organized labour, although the union movement is a significant lobby within the party. (19) They look for sociological and ideological differences between union delegates (who usually make up 20-30 per cent of all delegates) and other delegates (most of whom are constituency representatives). They found that delegates' subjective self-images were consistent with objective reality: unionists were more likely to see themselves as working class whereas non-unionists were more likely to have middle or upper middle class self-images. Unsurprisingly and in corroboration, unionists as a group were less educated and more likely held blue-collar jobs, while other delegates tended to be very well educated, many of them professionals. As an antidote to Penner's accurate observation that the NDP shuns the "socialist" or "social democratic" label in its propaganda, earlier survey studies reported on by Archer and Whitehorn reveal that over three-quarters of NDPers nevertheless chose one of these two labels to describe themselves when offered a list that includes terms such as "social gospel," "liberal," "marxist," "reformer," "ecologist," and "populist." (10) Non-unionist NDPers were more likely to choose "socialist" than the unionists; the latter were almost three times as likely to prefer calling themselves "social democrats" to "socialist." (11) Similarly, when offered a left-right scale for self-placement, union delegates collectively did not place themselves as far to the left as the other delegates.

A particularly insightful part of this study is its comparative analysis of the attitudes of NDPers, Liberals, and Conservatives. It contrasts responses to policy issues based on parallel surveys conducted of delegates to the 1983 Conservative and the 1984 Liberal leadership conventions, the ones that selected Brian Mulroney

and John Turner respectively. (12-3) The findings here are illuminating, testing and confirming what for many are casual, educated hunches. The eight issues analyzed are: continentalism, corporate power, privatization, social security, bilingualism, civil rights, moralism, and foreign policy hawkishness. The attitudinal discontinuities between union and non-union NDP delegates were remarkably narrow. They paled in contrast to the gaps between NDP attitudes collectively and those of Liberals and Conservatives. Consider, for example, the issue of privatization: on an ascending 6 point scale, non-unionist NDPers scored a low of .17, unionist NDPers .37, Liberals 2.21, and Conservatives 4. (13) On this and all the other issues, except corporate power, the union delegates were more "rightist" or "centrist" than other NDP delegates. The one issue on which the NDP unionists were closer to the Liberals than they were to the NDP constituency delegates was on bilingualism — the latter were the most pro-bilingual, followed by the Liberals.

Given the current dilapidated condition of the NDP, the substantial attitudinal breaks between NDPers on the one hand and the older parties' delegates on the other, are arresting and suggestive. On all issues, save civil liberties, the Liberals come across as being in the centre, between the NDP and the Conservatives. One suspects, reasonably, that Reformers would be further to the right than the Conservatives. The centrism of the Liberals is no new discovery, an old chestnut in Canadian political history and a source of pride to Liberal partisans. Nevertheless it helps to explain yet again why the Liberals have been, by far, the most successful party in national politics in this century. When NDPers or their potential supporters fear a rising right, conservatism, or Conservative hegemony, many of them will be swayed as strategic voters to the Liberal banner as occurred in 1988 and 1993. This is logical behaviour for, as Archer and Whitehorn's data demonstrate, the Liberals are closer to them ideologically.

Will the NDP wither away as did Social Credit and the Communists, and before them, the Progressives? Not likely. Some faithful followers — however shrunken their ranks — will continue to bask in the party's legacy and proclaim its contemporary relevance. The NDP has been too significant a force, too recently, to pass into sudden or permanent retirement. The party's provincial prospects, however, continue to be decidedly brighter than its federal ones. The key to its election successes has been its positioning rather than its posturing. As an ideologically-driven party, members take their debates and resolutions seriously. As their Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and BC victories of the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated, however, the party did not win because of its platforms but in spite of them. The NDP was elected primarily by default because the governing parties lost the public's confidence in their stewardship. By perseverance and longevity, the NDP generated a measure of grudging acceptance of itself even by traditional doubters. It occasionally became situated as the provincial government in waiting, as the most credible, available alternative to a discredited regime. That is the lesson of the Pawley, Rae, Harcourt, and Romanow triumphs. Since at least the 1970s, it

has been past glories that have sustained the party, not its agendas for the future. Its signature policy is defending medicare, but this does not galvanize voters when the other parties do not dedicate themselves to eliminating it.

Ironically, the secession of Québec might undermine the Liberals as the successful brokerage party in Canadian politics. They and the NDP would continue to compete on the left, but the Liberals would have no Trudeau or Chrétien to trump the NDP on the national unity issue. The strength of the Liberal Party in English Canada — an uneasy amalgam of business and welfare liberals — is also its potential Achilles heel. A more sharply focused left-right dynamic in English Canada's new national politics, as in Britain and the US, might aid the NDP. Yet the 1993 obliteration of Alberta's NDP — in a situation where it was strategically well positioned as the official opposition — demonstrated that Liberals might still win the battle.

Perhaps the NDP will survive, and perhaps it will even succeed electorally, but what will it do in office? Imitate Bob Rae's government? After decades of describing Liberals and Conservatives as being in mock combat, both agents of big business, the Ontario NDP was seduced and captured by a business agenda too. It openly courted business while in office but did not win it over. In the process it neglected and lost much of its traditional constituency. If elections could really change things, they would probably be illegal and prohibited.





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