



Recent Publications and Documents

RENÉ LÉVESQUE, MEMOIRS, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1986, 368 p.

The publication of reminiscences by politicians stirs public curiosity about what parliaments and political parties do. René Lévesque's *Memoirs* opens with recent history: his departure from public life, the internal crisis and defeat of the Parti québécois. He describes the atmosphere of a government approaching defeat, and the reader can detect the wounds he suffered, even though he does not try to settle scores or wallow in indiscretion. He brings to bear his earlier experience as a talented journalist, knowing how to praise and how to pass judgement. Memoirs are traditionally expected to contain both a wealth of personal recollection and a smattering of impressions of an era. The author of these Memoirs is an exceptionally well-placed witness and he analyses with intensity the microcosm that is Quebec society.

As a politician, René Lévesque played an influential role in that society. His memoirs are an invaluable record. Over and above the personal destiny of one man, the interest of this book lies in the author's depiction of Quebec history, his account of a society shaking off the straitjacket of its traditions to join, almost overnight, the modern world. The «Quiet Revolution» was the break that finally allowed Quebec to open up to the twentieth century. For Lévesque, the emergence of the idea of sovereignty-association, and the creation of the Parti québécois, both resulted from the impetus that galvanized the politically aware during the 1960s. The importance of that time and its profound significance lie in the sense of something being painfully shattered is represented for Lévesque by his split with the Liberal Party which rejected his views. He then endured a similar sense of rejection when the people of Quebec voted No in his referendum.

Lévesque's attachment to the ideals of the Quiet Revolution explain why he had such difficulty with the synthesizing of different currents within the Parti québécois: hardliners vs compromisers, *caribous* vs *étapistes*. In the *Memoirs* he discusses the plans of action defined by the Parti, the gambles it took and the successes it achieved. He argues for the major policies his government introduced. The reader discovers a pragmatist who can describe the controversial Bill 101 as a «legislative crutch» while insisting that was it was nonetheless absolutely necessary. He defends his position on federal-provincial relations and goes into detail on the patriation of the Constitution. René Lévesque's *Memoirs* are not just a record of crisis, victory, and defeat: they blaze with true political commitment.

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THE PARTY THAT CHANGED CANADA: THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY, THEN AND NOW, Lynn McDonald, M.P., Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, 1987, 265 p.

Commentators on the Canadian political scene have applied a variety of labels to the party system. For some, the extended periods of Liberal governments led them to conclude that Canada has a one party dominant system. Others recognize that the Conservative party, both in and out of government, has made a significant contribution to Canada's party system and have preferred to describe Canada as a two party system. Analysts unsatisfied with these two categories have variously described our party system as a two party plus or multi party system.

Lynn McDonald, in her *The Party That Changed Canada*, would no doubt assert that Canada has a fully

developed three party system. It is Lynn McDonald's central thesis, as the title claims, that the NDP (and its forerunner the CCF) has had a profound impact on shaping the political, the social, and economic affairs of Canada, even though it has never formed either the government or the official opposition at the national level.

According to McDonald, programs such as medicare, old age pensions, job creation and unemployment insurance, civil rights legislation, and cultural entities including the CBC, trace their origins to the CCF, not the parties which were in power when these measures were introduced. In fact, McDonald claims these programs, which have indeed "changed Canada", were resisted by the implementors and adopted only because cynical Liberal and Conservative prime ministers saw the electoral capital. These claims are the most contentious parts of McDonald's book and will certainly not go unchallenged by studious readers.

The book is easy to read and is not bogged down in unnecessary detail. The author's style and the organization of the chapters carry the reader quickly through the origins of the CCF on the Canadian prairies and moves quickly into its lengthy "list" of accomplishments as an opposition party. Although many of the passages are long on rhetoric there is a generous supply of documentation to buttress the author's claims.

The third chapter (Virtue Is Its Own Reward?) outlines the several explanations for the CCF/NDP's failure to gain the necessary votes to form the national government. McDonald disposes of the many traditional arguments which purport to explain the electoral failures of the CCF/NDP. Arguments such as the NDP is not far enough to the left; it is too far to the left; it is dominated by organized labour, etc., are examined and found wanting. McDonald devotes a lot of attention

to the media and argues that the Canadian media has not given the CCF/NDP fair coverage. Although she admits that flagrant bias is rare (p. 103) she argues that the media in general over-simplifies the NDP messages and all too often portrays the NDP as fiscally irresponsible. In response, McDonald outlines the fiscal successes of NDP provincial governments, with Saskatchewan shown as the model. McDonald's closing criticism of the media centers on television, which she sees as a numbing experience which contributes to a sense of powerlessness and helplessness in the minds of Canadians.

One of the central premises of the NDP's social democratic philosophy is that the state ought to play an activist role in social and economic affairs. Many Canadian social democrats view, almost with a sense of envy, the successes of social democratic parties in European countries and point to these countries as models for the NDP to follow. McDonald examines these countries too, and attributes the successes of social democratic parties to high levels of unionization and long histories of participation within the political system. Comparison between social democratic parties in Europe and elsewhere and Canada is a difficult venture at best and McDonald does not give enough attention to the differences in political culture and historical development which distinguish Canada from Europe.

Perhaps the most thoughtful chapter is Chapter 6, where McDonald "demystifies" the budget and outlines the NDP's economic program. McDonald shows that not only are Canadian social programs affordable, but when compared to tax exemptions and subsidies to the corporate world, there is room for improvement and expansion.

Unlike many books written about politics in Canada, McDonald's is not written for the political junkie who seeks insight into processes and personality. McDonald's book seems to be pitched to the electorate at large. The book will probably find its biggest readership among the rank and file. New Democrats will use its arguments to try to convince the undecided voter to cast their ballot for the NDP.

Public opinion polls indicate that the NDP has gained considerable ground as a political party. The party, which is comparatively younger than the Liberals and the Conservatives still has a long way to

go before it can form a national government. If the optimism which permeates McDonald's book translates into seats in the House of Commons, there may be more opportunities for the NDP to change Canada in the coming years.

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THE CASE OF VALENTINE SHORTIS: A TRUE STORY OF CRIME AND POLITICS IN CANADA, Martin L. Friedland, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 324 p.

Many of the books reviewed in these pages are of interest to parliamentarians, but often it is unlikely that MPs will be able to find time to read them. The busy politician is swamped with paper, and reading time is at a premium, so the recommendation to pick up a copy of *The Case of Valentine Shortis* is not made lightly. The vote on capital punishment makes the subject topical, and Valentine Shortis is an entertaining read. It also raises fundamental questions which deserve an answer from all MPs and Senators who have to decide on the life and death question. Martin Friedland tells a true story of crime, the legal system, old style politics, and genuine mystery.

In 1895 Valentine Shortis was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. The cabinet of Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell considered commutation but on two occasions their votes resulted in a tie. The Crown was without the advice of Ministers! The hot potato passed directly to Lord Aberdeen the Governor General who, it is suggested, was strongly influenced by the advice of his wife. Aberdeen ordered the death sentence commuted "to life imprisonment for life as a criminal lunatic, or otherwise as may be found most fitting". A political whirlwind had been set loose.

Only ten years earlier Louis Riel had been hanged after a similar plea. Earlier in the year of Shortis' trial, Amedée Chatelle was hanged, again after an unsuccessful petition for commutation. Was there one sentence for French-Canadians like Riel and Chatelle and another for an Irishman like Shortis? Why did the wife of the Governor General display such an intense interest in the case? Why did the Irish Catholic John

Costigan, Minister of Fisheries, call on the Governor General?

Capital punishment cases are ultimately resolved politically. Politicians are lobbied. In some cases there are attempts at bribery. Political alliances are strained, sometimes destroyed. All of this happened in the Shortis case. The Cabinet deliberated for days on end. The Shortis case was debated in the House of Commons, and became an election issue, mixed in as it was with the racial and religious disputes of the Manitoba School election of 1896. The case touches many of the questions presently being debated in Canada. The interpretation of the law by the politicians and then by the Courts; the problem of equal justice for rich and poor; the attitude of the state towards convicted persons and questions of rehabilitation.

After imprisonment for over forty-two years Valentine Shortis was released from prison in 1937, "a stranger in a strange land". He was permitted to join the militia, and by all accounts led a satisfactory life. But his release was again a political issue. He died in Toronto in 1941. Although buried in an unmarked grave, he left a significant mark in Canadian political, legal and penal life. The case involved five Prime Ministers, from Bowell to King, and other public figures whose careers spanned over 150 years, ending with Hon. J. C. McRuer.

Writes Friedland, "Justice may in theory be blind, but in practice she has altogether too human a perspective. The result of the trial, the commutation, the ... release, may all have been influenced by the slip of a draughtsman's pen in preparing the criminal code, ... the reaction of the press, the cry of popular opinion, the vulnerability of the government, a mother's tears, a father's wealth, the continuing interest of Lady Aberdeen and her friendship with prominent politicians and much more."

For those Members of the House of Commons who may have the opportunity to draft a capital punishment bill in committee, for those who will vote on that bill, *The Case of Valentine Shortis* is an important and entertaining book. It should be on the "must read list" for every MP, Senator, and staffer on the Hill.

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