

Socialism and Democracy in Alberta: Essays in Honour of Grant Notley

ed. Larry Pratt
Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1986,
237 pp.

Socialism and Democracy in Alberta is a most thought provoking collection of essays in honour of the late Grant Notley. Larry Pratt, the editor of this tribute to the former New Democratic Party leader, must be congratulated for welding the views of the ten diverse contributions into a coherent analysis of Notley's leadership of the party (1968-1984). Importantly, the book also provides a forum in which the future of the NDP is vigorously examined. Overall, the essayists agree that Notley saw the NDP as a party in the traditional sense, one that sought power. Their conclusions are instructive, however, in that they suggest that to achieve this, fundamental changes must be effected; the party must turn from Notley's espousal of traditional and rural Albertan values to the concerns and needs of urban society within a transformed provincial political culture.

Indeed the first four essays in this book touch upon this dilemma which all social democrats, including Grant Notley, must confront; that is whether or not the NDP should act like a traditional political party or a political movement. In *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF 1932-61*, Walter D. Young explains how members of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) were torn between those on the one hand who also desired power in order to bring about change by a CCF government and those on the other hand who also desired political reform by whatever party forming the government. Larry Pratt, Olenka Melnyk and Allan Tupper agree that Notley followed the former path. Pratt claims that the former NDP leader was a pragmatist who stressed organization as opposed to ideology and doctrine. He wanted a strong party machine so that even in opposition, the NDP would have "political clout." Notley's efforts in helping to transform the CCF into the NDP and later his work as a national party organizer in Alberta where he attempted to keep communists at bay while attracting the "liberal-minded" to the fold, must be viewed within that pragmatic content.

Olenka Melnyk agrees with Pratt's characterization of Notley, but laments the failure of the old doctrinaire CCF to lead the party to greater political success. For Melnyk, the two stars of this failed wing of the party were Nellie

Peterson and William Irvine. Yet, this essay about the inability of ideology to bring about the "New Jerusalem" vindicates Notley's approach to politics. The Alberta CCF alarmed voters with its demand for public ownership. By contrast, in Saskatchewan, the CCF emphasized social reform in education, welfare, farm security and labour legislation and was rewarded by success at the polls. Even throughout the rampant anti-communist campaigns in Canada following the Second World War, Peterson and Irvine failed to dampen their fiery ideological fervor. Consequently, they were labelled "Red" and CCF hopes for gaining ground in Alberta were lost. Not surprisingly, these doctrinaires were antithetical to Notley and his efforts at transforming the CCF into a more moderate NDP in 1961. Although a supporter of the radicals, Melnyk offers no examples of how ideological purity helped to improve society in Alberta. Indeed, Notley's approach to politics is supported through the example of the CCF in Saskatchewan.

In contrast to Melnyk and Pratt, Robin Hunter argues that Notley saw the NDP as a movement committed to social change. The argument is forced and not convincing. Hunter admits that Notley's friends in the CCF and later NDP were not from the radical left. A few examples of "sops" to the doctrinaire traditionalists such as his support of the nuclear disarmament movement does not prove that Notley embraced the ideologically pure wing of the party. As Hunter pointed out, Notley warned that "debate and education which are not tied into practical and political tasks can become substitutes for them, and become ends in themselves." The political wilderness is the destination of any party caught in that web. Indeed, Hunter explains that Notley's "sops" to the radical left were only complementary to his "parliamentary struggles," that is, his struggle for power and political clout.

Allan Tupper's article sides with those who saw Notley opting for power over idealism. Tupper blames Notley's political failure on his moderation which prevented him from distinguishing the NDP from the Tories under Peter Lougheed. Tupper concludes that the NDP must move to the left of the political spectrum to find success. By frequently intervening in the economy, the "strong-state" Tories forced the NDP to the defensive. Tupper argues that Notley believed Alberta should follow the moderate agrarian socialism of Tommy Douglas and Allan Blakeney of Saskatchewan. Notley thought the modern state could promote social justice and economic progress through planning.

He advocated nationalization of private power utilities, public development of the Athabasca tar sands and the creation of an integrated oil company. Yet, Tupper claims, by failing to formulate a coherent position on how to administer corporations in a mixed economy and by resting its public ownership policy on pragmatic "market failure" grounds, the NDP failed to differentiate itself from the Tory government. As a centralist in federal-provincial matters, Notley rejected the opinion of the majority in Alberta by deferring to the national interest during the National Energy Policy crisis in the early 1980s. Alone amongst Alberta legislators, he opposed the retaliatory measures of the Lougheed Tories. Through his moderate approach, Notley faced further problems because the Tories implemented many traditional NDP policies such as increased resource royalties, expanded public intervention in the oil and gas industry and a plan for economic diversification. To overcome this Notley legacy of failing to distinguish between the NDP and the Tories, Tupper urges the NDP to return to its socialist tradition.

Allan Tupper's article offers an appropriate hinge between those essays focusing on Grant Notley and his personal political approach and those contributions attempting to map a path for the NDP to follow in the future. As if answering Tupper's call for the NDP to differentiate itself from the dominant Tory party in Alberta, Ed Schaffer and Ron Chalmers provide guidance. For Ed Schaffer, Grant Notley's emphasis on planning would provide a desirable basis for an economic policy for the NDP. Arguing for diversification of the Alberta economy, Schaffer claims that Tories failed in that task in the 1970s because they believed that it could only occur through private enterprise. According to Schaffer, Notley understood that diversification would result only from government actions. To diversify, the government had to maximize its economic rents and then make a rational use of them through planning. Tied to private enterprise which is determined to maximize profits, the Tories could not accept a planning agency which wished to maximize the development of the province. Notley understood that need and called for the use of monies from the Alberta Heritage Trust Fund for that purpose and the establishment of a planning agency to undertake the task. Schaffer highlights Notley's lead in this economic sphere in the hope that the NDP of the present will follow the same path.

Through a diatribe against the anti-democratic policies and ideas of Peter Lougheed and the Tories, Ron Chalmers

encourages the NDP to be rigorously democratic. In his plea for the NDP to embrace proper procedure in the democratic process, the former executive assistant to a Social Credit leader places Notley and Chalmers' former boss, Robert Clark, on the same pedestal as championing of Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Chalmers blasts the Tories for their rejection of Opposition pleas to allow public hearings to help determine the structure, control and use of the fund. In the case of Syncrude and the Alberta Energy Corporation, the Tories have allowed private investors to make decisions that Notley believed elected legislators should make. Grant Notley's attempt to have a legislative committee study the issue of conflict of interest guidelines was rejected and his subsequent private members bill on the subject was defeated by the Tory majority. Chalmers wants the NDP to strengthen its ideological commitment to democracy and reject the tendency towards executive privilege. He advocates the NDP undertake an educational role in developing a desire within the electorate for more democracy. Chalmers' article is flawed in that he fails to define exactly what he means by "democracy" although he infers that "democracy" means open and free discussion by legislators of government activities with access to all relevant documentation.

While Chalmers wants more "democracy" within the legislature, Tom Pocklington calls for more intraparty democracy. Pocklington argues that it is important to strengthen the reality of intraparty democracy rather than the rhetoric and that the NDP in Alberta is well placed to take steps necessary to attain that goal. Intraparty democracy helps to mitigate the strong inducement for representatives of social democratic and labour parties to sell out to the haves and to forget the have-nots. Pocklington notes that there are limits, however. In effect, he wishes to see the rank-and-file have more control over party leaders without undermining the discretionary authority required by the latter. He suggests that intra-party democracy can be strengthened in the NDP by reminding leaders of party policy as a prerequisite to re-election. Delegates to conventions should be subsidized so that more than the wealthy can attend. Policy resolutions should be made as clear as possible because leaders vary from them in direct proportion to their vagueness. Finally, conventions should list priorities in policy. Through intraparty democracy, the party's leaders, whether in or out of government, remain responsive to the wishes of its members.

Turning away from process in the

political arena, the discuss the voters th to ensure political s premise for this fina that the monolithic Alberta is disinteg fertile political soil the urban centres looking back at Not claims he failed to groups in Alberta, petite bourgeoisie middle class. Look urges the NDP to white collar govern workers. Engelm Macpherson's theo least until 1947, w independent com Cherishing their were hostile toward tied interests such

political arena, the final three essays discuss the voters the NDP should target to ensure political success. The essential premise for this final group of articles is that the monolithic political culture of Alberta is disintegrating and that the fertile political soil for the NDP lies in the urban centres of the province. In looking back at Notley, Fred Engelmann claims he failed to capture two crucial groups in Alberta, the remnants of the petite bourgeoisie and the rising new middle class. Looking to the future, he urges the NDP to concentrate on the white collar government and services workers. Engelmann accepts C.B. Macpherson's theory that Alberta, at least until 1947, was a society of small independent community producers. Cherishing their own property, they were hostile towards the Eastern propertied interests such as the banks and

railways. This absence of class and dependence on the East meant that opposition in Alberta was unnecessary and as a result, elections became plebiscites. In the post-Leduc Alberta period, Engelmann follows the analysis of Alberta development proposed by Richards and Pratt in *Prairie Capitalism*. They claim that oil brought the rise of a new middle class divorced from populism. Yet, with nothing to stimulate opposition, one party dominance remained. The Tories under Peter Lougheed represented this new middle class and thus came to dominate the provincial political scene. Engelmann explains that Notley emerged from independent commodity producer stock, a group out of step with the new Alberta by the time he became leader. He failed to represent the dominant group of the quasi-party system in the seventies. Not

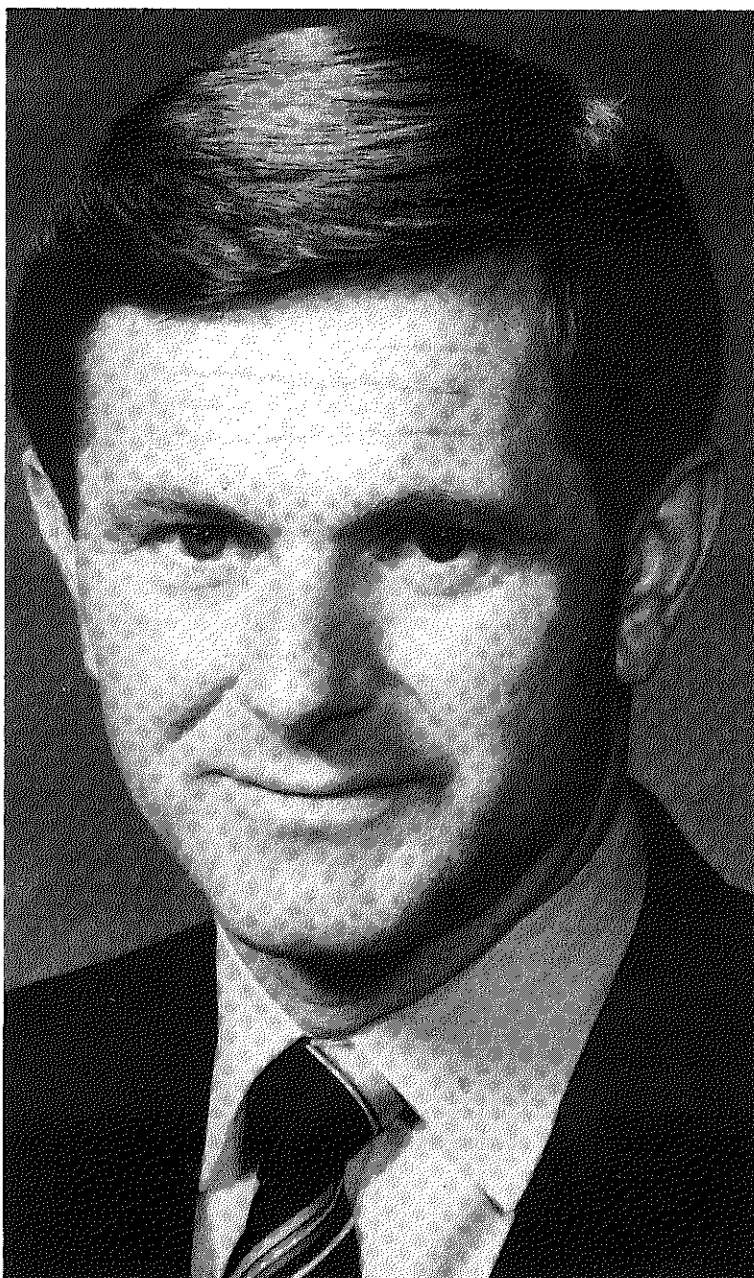
surprisingly, Notley failed in his election bids in Edmonton and sought a rural northern seat. As Alberta becomes more stable and settled, Engelmann argues that a true party system might emerge which would benefit the NDP if the party follows his suggestion.

In following Engelmann, Gurston Dacks argues that in Alberta the political consensus is breaking up and is being replaced by the politics of fragmentation and fear of economic decline. Thus, over the long run, this change will improve the competitive position of the NDP. In the short run, it will impose a more marginal existence on the party. Dacks points out that class, while important, has not been the crucial political dimension in terms of which Albertans have been divided. Rather, there has been a dominant commodity interest which underlines the political consen-

sus that is directed against those outside Alberta. In Alberta, the political struggle is with the East. Dacks says that the "conjunction of this perceived community of interest with the alienation Albertans have felt against central Canada has produced decades of single party dominance in Alberta. This consensus is breaking down because of the loss of confidence in one or two commodities which have traditionally integrated Alberta society, like agriculture and oil and gas." Dacks encourages the NDP to address the problems of the various interest groups in the province from single parents and Natives, to public servants and farmers, to jar them from the political consensus. He notes that the alienation against Ottawa and central Canada will endure but it cannot hold the Alberta consensus itself. Thus, Dacks offers hope that the Alberta wilderness can be escaped if social democrats are active in responding to the specific and tangible grievances felt increasingly by Albertans.

In a final essay, Garth Stevenson encourages the NDP to look to the working class and "middle class" as the party's natural constituents in the future. He criticizes the NDP under Notley for having left aside the cities in order to pursue a populist mirage. The legacy of agrarian populism has weighed heavily as seen in the virtual "beatification" of William Irvine, whose name is carried by the provincial headquarters and whose portrait hangs in the NDP legislative offices. Stevenson regrets that the party has failed to adapt to the rapidly changing society of Alberta. He argues that the NDP should meet the future by viewing itself primarily as a party of the working class, meaning the party that includes construction workers, transportation workers, oilfield workers, miners, clerical sales workers and service workers. If properly defined, he points out that the working class outnumbered farmers ten to one. In addition, there is support for the party among some elements of the middle class who have always favoured the NDP such as those involved in the social sciences, religion, the teaching profession and the arts. Indeed, one reason for the move towards the NDP from the CCF was to attract more middle class voters. In English-speaking Canada, support has come from the educated, salary-earning new middle class, particularly those working outside the profit-oriented sector of the economy. Even the small businessperson is looked upon as a possible supporter. Stevenson feels that the NDP has difficulty relating to the working class in Alberta because that class has little sense of solidarity. He feels, however, that by providing an alterna-

Grant Notley photo courtesy of Alberta NDP



tive for the working class, the NDP will succeed electorally.

Attempting to develop a blueprint for the future electoral success of the NDP, this book provides an excellent analysis of Grant Notley's leadership and of the political culture of Alberta. The contributors, however, fail to resolve the struggle between those in the party who favour ideology and those who seek power; yet the majority clearly want the NDP to act more like a traditional party in the Canadian context. As a result, this book is more concerned with how to obtain power than with any vision the NDP might have of Alberta in the future. Nevertheless, this collection of essays is essential reading for anyone interested in Alberta politics and for any party seeking to govern the province.

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People and Place — Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes

edited by **Larry McCann**
Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1987, 263 pp.

People and Place is a collection of essays written by faculty members of Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick as part of a project on small town life, sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The editor, Larry McCann, writes that the project was the faculty's "opportunity to learn about ourselves." The book can be seen as the attempt of a group of thoughtful people to reveal the deeper meaning of the place in which their lives and work are rooted. If taken as such, the book has an immediate appeal for anyone interested in the Maritimes' "regional identity."

This exercise in self-knowledge gets off to a bad start with William Godfrey's essay on "James Glenie and the Politics of Sunbury County." Loyalist themes are undeveloped and remain a mere setting for a parochial political thesis which is interesting only for specialists.

Perhaps the collection should have started closer to home; this is suggested by the more satisfying quality of Dean Jobb's essay, "Sackville Promotes a Railway: The Politics of the New Brunswick and P.E.I. Railway, 1872-1866." A photograph by Thaddeus Holownia shows one of Sackville's foundries built

near the main track while a map on the next page illustrates the story: the rivalry between Sackville and Amherst to become the centre of an economic corridor between Prince Edward Island and the major port of Saint John. If you are unfamiliar with the history of the region, this essay is worth reading if only for the way Jobb portrays the diverse resource-based economy of Sackville as it took on a new manufacturing base under the direction of an energetic group of well-established local entrepreneurs. The purpose of building a railway to P.E.I. was to promote economic growth and the whole town was delighted by the shrewd political manoeuvring which successfully brought it to completion.

As a historical slice of regional life this essay is fascinating, but the reader is left startled by this image of a booming economic life which is a stark contrast to the ghost town Sackville is today. At least part of the meaning of the Maritimes — part of the mystery of the region as a whole — is focused by what happened in Sackville.

The very next essay by McCann and Burnett takes us further down what became the Inter-Colonial Railroad to New Glasgow, Nova Scotia which, during the same period, was transforming itself into a major industrial area. Another Holownia photo shows the steel plant in Trenton (along with New Glasgow, Stellarton, and Westville, these Pictou County "towns" constitute the industrial core of northern Nova Scotia) and a few pages later there are a couple of panoramic maps of New Glasgow. These maps are less informative than the map in Jobb's essay. Nevertheless, we get a visual sense of how steel and coal changed the character of the communities. The authors provide a scholarly argument that the North American rags-to-riches stories of this age were the exception to the rule in New Glasgow where a closed, traditional social hierarchy kept "things" the same even as the economy was quickly changing. However, we never get a broader politico-economic perspective on why New Glasgow never fulfilled its potential of the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps I should be satisfied with these two competent, sometimes lively accounts of Sackville and New Glasgow life, and not take seriously the editor's claim to some degree of self-knowledge. After all, as the editor writes, the authors are a "truly multidisciplinary lot" and a synthetic historical perspective is very hard to achieve. Still, I was struck by the way the collection as a whole managed to evade the phenomenon which could be the most obvious unifying theme — Confederation. This is the event ingrained in the conscious-

ness of many Maritimers and it explains a great deal about the place and the people who live here.

Maritimers are haunted by memories of the "Golden Age," which they believe characterized life in the region immediately before Confederation. According to the myth, Confederation was something we were manipulated into; it destroyed a whole way of life and the economy based on that life, and led the region into the doom and gloom of the twentieth century. (Perhaps the most accessible way for other Canadians to understand this belief is to view the National Film Board's evocative video, *Empty Harbours, Empty Dreams*.) No doubt the authors in this book cannot swallow this myth whole. Still, they cannot start to "learn about ourselves" without confronting the basic truth conveyed by the myth and its influence on the region's consciousness.

This evasion reveals the ambiguity of the book's apparent leading theme. The opening sentence of the editor's preface reiterates its subtitle — "the Maritimes is a region of small towns." The authors are supposed to have "recognized the significance of this fact," but either as an assumption or a leading theme "this fact" is nonsense. Rhyme off some of the major station stops on the railway — Moncton, Sackville, Amherst, Truro, New Glasgow and Sydney. Only Sackville can really be considered a small town, and in Jobb's essay we see that town struggling to become a large manufacturing centre; in the twentieth century it lapsed back, forever, into being a small town. In general, these railway stops signified one basic fact: the Maritime economy was changing in the late nineteenth century from the traditional fishing (or "land and sea" which captures the interaction focused in the shipping industry) to the newer industrial and manufacturing bases. This meant a shift from small town to urban life. McCann writes that "the essays group themselves quite naturally into three major themes: casting the pattern; the temporary of traditional society; and contemporary small town life." Yet the 1870s and 1880s around which the first group of essays generally revolve was the time when the traditional pattern was being broken; this time was really the "passing of traditional society."

In sum, the politico-economic themes raised in the Sackville and New Glasgow essays are not developed or complemented by the others even though economists DeBenedetti and Price write about contemporary economic trends in the Maritimes. In an atrociously jargon-ridden and mathematically obscure text, which is com-

plemented by nine statistical tables, the authors seem to want to prove all the horrible things ever said about the "dismal science." They draw the breathtaking conclusion "that towns moderately dependent on the service sector grew, and that towns highly dependent on the 'smokestack' and primary industries suffered decline." The social scientists who dominate the third section do as good a job of stifling any sign of life as decades of bureaucratically inspired mega-projects in the Maritimes have done.

The same sort of puerile "objectivity" is behind the essay "Obligations for Care in Small Towns" by Storm, Storm and Strike-Schurman who conclude, for example, that "the consensus appears to

be that children should have their needs of their elderly parents met. This is the idea of the enlightened self-interest which provide. Patrick ... "Weekly Newspaper ... least readable, but ... imaginative, eclectic ... Maritime journalism ...

A welcome change from Ross' story of "The Pictou Island." In a manner Ross traces ... from the arrival of a ... that of the Highland ... his essay resides in ... and ability to synthesize ... fully in a clear narrative ... easily sizes up the ...

