

The CCF in Ottawa, Ontario, and the Maritimes

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Reviews/Revue

The CCF in Ottawa, Ontario, and the Maritimes

Third parties, and studies of third parties, appear by now to be a traditional part of the Canadian political and academic landscape. The persistent presence of the CCF/NDP and Social Credit in the West, Ontario, and more recently in Quebec, has been noted and investigated by a number of scholars. New sources and approaches, however, continue to offer further insights into this facet of Canadian political history. But while revising and clarifying our understanding of third parties in specific provinces and at the federal level, there continues to exist a substantial research void in terms of considerations of the fate of third parties in the Maritime region. Perhaps it could be argued that where nothing exists worthy of study, no study of any worth should be attempted. However, a limited third party orientation has persisted in a part of the Atlantic region, specifically Cape Breton, and an examination of its existence as well as a convincing explanation of the apparent general failure of Maritime third parties seems overdue.

The studies under consideration certainly do not rectify this neglect.¹ But their sources and approaches, and their outline of the general patterns of third party development and demise, point to a number of suggestions for analyzing the Maritime third party phenomenon. Walter Young's *The Anatomy of a Party* makes good use of the CCF Papers which were deposited at the Public Archives of Canada after the founding of the NDP. One of the first scholars allowed access to this collection, Young offers the authoritative history of the CCF at the national level. Canada's version of democratic socialism is shown as a coalition of discontented farmers, urban socialists, a sprinkling of labour unionists, and some very active League for Social Reconstruction intellectuals. Far from a coalition of equals, even as the CCF took shape in 1932 and 1933 the labour-urban socialist-intellectual elements played a dominant role. They set the tone and guided the party from its inception and, in view of their more "radical" and urban concerns, it is little wonder that several of the farm members of the original federation felt rather uncomfortable. Consequently, in 1934 the United Farmers of Ontario withdrew from the CCF to be followed by the United Farmers of Alberta in 1939. Despite these losses, the party entered a period of rapid growth during World War II as increasing labour union support and the attractiveness of CCF

1 W.D. Young, *The Anatomy of A Party: The National CCF 1932-1961* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969); G.L. Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF In Ontario* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Admittedly, the neglect has not been total. See for example G.A. Rawlyk, "The Farmer-Labour Movement and the Failure of Socialism in Nova Scotia", in L. LaPierre *et al.*, *Essays on the Left* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 31-41; Anthony MacKenzie, "The Rise and Fall Of The Farmer-Labour Party in Nova Scotia" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1969).

policies seemed to place it on the verge of electoral success. Such was not to be the case. Mackenzie King Liberalism's move to the left, coupled with CCF weaknesses and powerful attacks on it from both right and left, turned the tide. Success was achieved at the provincial level in Saskatchewan, but federally the party never was able to make the leap to major party status. It remained a minor party and witnessed a continuing erosion of its popular support. From a peak of 15.6% in the 1945 federal election, it gradually dropped to 9.5% in 1958. The Diefenbaker landslide represented the nadir of the party, yet it also made clear where the hard core of its support was located and what might be the best way to expand this very limited socialist bridgehead. The eight seats won in the 1958 debacle could all be considered urban or urban-wilderness constituencies where working class-labour votes carried the riding. Possibly the urban-labour orientation of the party, which always had been present but which had been concealed somewhat by the large number of farmer M.P.s sent to Ottawa by the Saskatchewan CCF, now could be more openly acknowledged. Indeed, the political activism of the recently formed Canadian Labour Congress soon merged with the CCF desire for a more successful electoral approach to end the party's lingering demise. A new vehicle of democratic socialism was formed — the New Democratic Party.

Throughout his study Young repeatedly returns to his major contention: namely, that one of the crucial CCF problems was its inability to resolve completely the question of whether it should function as a political movement or a political party. A party would have the immediate goal of political power and to achieve this end a "neglect or sacrifice of principle" is sometimes necessary. A movement, on the other hand, would aim at achieving changes in society and this could be done without necessarily winning power. Additionally, without the compromises forced by expedient electoral manoeuvring, the movement's principles "may always be kept pure" (p. 59). Hence, as a movement the CCF was a success since many of its suggested social and economic reforms were applied by the Conservative and Liberal parties. But as a political party, with the basic purpose of winning elections, it was a failure. Furthermore, what success the movement did enjoy was achieved "through the instrumentality of the party", while "the failure of the party was largely through the crippling effects of the movement" (p. 11). The movement-party conflict emerged when basic questions such as the nature of the CCF organization, the need to woo labour, and the relevance of the Regina Manifesto were debated. The party's revered leader, J. S. Woodsworth, could not see the need for a centralized party organization and national office. But the more pragmatic political views of major party figures such as M. J. Coldwell and David Lewis prevailed. Thus by the outbreak of World War II, the loose federation had been replaced by "a national CCF with provincial sections, joined in a federal structure" (p. 148). Like-

wise on other important issues, such as the forging of closer links with labour and the need for a muffling of the shrill-toned Manifesto, it was the party approach rather than the movement message which won out.

Where did the CCF's Maritime wing stand on these basic questions? At least one provincial section, in New Brunswick, was in existence in 1933 since it telegraphed greetings to the party's Regina convention and took concrete form by 1934 as the New Brunswick Provincial Council of the CCF.² Because of the August 1938 affiliation of District 26 of the United Mine Workers with the CCF, a Nova Scotia section of the party was also formed. In the same year the *Maritime CCF Bulletin* called for "a 'revised version' of the Manifesto, which while not sacrificing any of our principles, can be more easily understood by the man in the street than the present 4,000 word document".³ Was this an indication that political pragmatism was emphasized here as well? One of the first fruitful results of direct affiliation between labour unions and the CCF occurred in Nova Scotia in the 1940 federal election when Clarie Gillis won Cape Breton South for the CCF. Gillis was to be extremely active in attempting to persuade his unionist counterparts in Ontario to follow the Cape Breton example. Holding his seat until 1957, he is identified by Young as playing a role in the wooing of labour and contributing to the reformulation of party policy leading up to the Winnipeg Declaration of 1956. Yet very little is known about the significance of his success in Cape Breton, his weight within the party, and what his career reveals concerning Maritime socialism. In the early 1950's, when the move was under-way to replace the Manifesto by an updated redraft of the party's program, the Nova Scotia CCF supported what was alleged by some of the purists within the party, such as Ernie Winch of British Columbia, to be a dangerous dilution of principle. Unlike the adverse reaction which the revision and replacement of the Manifesto provoked in some parts of Canada, at a Nova Scotia provincial executive meeting, in a letter from the provincial president, and in the *Maritime Commonwealth* it was stressed that the party must not be tied to "unchanging social dogma" but instead must make the necessary policy adaptations.⁴ Was the Nova Scotia CCF, and perhaps Maritime socialism in general, a moderate pragmatic wing within the national party, continually shunning the radical or doctrinaire?

If this was the case then the Maritime CCF possibly should have escaped some of the blunders and difficulties encountered by the Ontario CCF. The

2 See F.R. Scott, "The CCF Convention", *Canadian Forum*, XIII (1933), p. 447; Report of the Secretary Treasurer of the CCF's 1934 Convention, 15 July 1934, CCF Papers, Vol. 10, Public Archives of Canada.

3 *Maritime CCF Bulletin*, 1 March 1938, p. 2, CCF Papers, Vol. 34.

4 Minutes of the Nova Scotia CCF Provincial Executive Meeting, 24 February 1952, *ibid.*, Vol. 108; Don Nicholson to Lorne Ingle, 28 February 1952, *ibid.*; *Maritime Commonwealth*, 10 January 1952, n.p., *ibid.*

latter's traumas and triumphs are analyzed by Gerald Caplan as he attempts to uncover what might be the fundamental "Dilemma Of Canadian Socialism". In Ontario, Caplan points out, the CCF took shape as a loose coalition of the CCF Clubs, the United Farmers of Ontario, and a sparse labour representation. Very quickly the rivalry and suspicions of the various sections, and disagreement over the specific question of how best to cope with Communists within the party, split the Ontario CCF. Farmer representatives, such as Agnes Macphail, and spokesmen for the CCF Clubs, such as Elmore Philpott, seemed determined to purge the party of Communists while labour representatives opposed such a bloodletting. The battle was fought out at the Ontario provincial council level and eventually resulted in a UFO withdrawal from the CCF and the intervention of Woodsworth and the national executive to suspend and then reorganize the Ontario wing. Fighting among themselves left little time for effectively fighting elections and so the Ontario CCF wandered in the political wilderness until the "golden age" of the party's fortunes dawned during World War II. Spurred on by many of the same factors which facilitated the national CCF's rise to prominence at this time, the Ontario wing won 34 seats in the 1943 provincial election, capturing 32.4% of the popular vote and the position as major opposition party. In the next provincial election the heady optimism and enthusiasm created by these gains were not rewarded with the electoral success expected. Instead the party slumped to 8 seats and 22% of the vote, finishing a poor third behind the Liberals and triumphant Tories. This was not caused by any substantial loss of CCF voters but by the huge increase in the number of Liberal and Conservative voters who turned out. To Caplan, the aroused public determination to deny power to the socialists was the result not only of CCF organizational weaknesses and tactical blunders, such as E. B. Jolliffe's Gestapo accusations, but also due to the swing to the left of the old-line parties and, of crucial importance, a campaign of political vilification by well-financed saviours of democracy, as well as by opposing politicians, which rarely has been matched in Canadian history. While such champions of free enterprise as Montague A. Sanderson warned of the "Communist-CIO-CCF dictatorship" (p. 102), the Conservative Premier George Drew labelled the CCF "an anti-British, revolutionary, National Socialist party" (p. 129). The party thus was portrayed as "an ideology outside the mainstream of Canada's political culture", and even its most "conventionally respectable" leaders were pictured as "crypto-revolutionaries" (p. 198). Caplan's basic dilemma of Canada socialism now emerges. Apparently most Canadians were willing to accept this distorted presentation and viewed socialism "as an ideology designed to stifle their most precious basic aspirations". The CCF proved unable to challenge successfully this view and, as a result, "died a failure" (p. 200).

Professor Caplan underlines the importance of Ontario's acceptance or

rejection in deciding the nation-wide fate of any political movement. At times this view through Ontario lenses tends to be rather misleading. For example, carried away by the extent of the CCF's 1945 federal and provincial disappointments in Ontario, his comment about the party's fate in Nova Scotia is that "Gillis hung on in Cape Breton" (p. 192). If increasing his margin of victory from 218 votes in 1940 to 6,057 votes in 1945 is considered "hanging on", then Gillis barely managed it. But in other ways there are some fascinating parallels between the CCF's Ontario and Maritime difficulties. It would appear that Maritime press commentary on the CCF was unsympathetic from the outset. In July of 1933, for example, the Halifax *Herald* and *Chronicle* were too caught up with the provincial election campaign then being waged even to bother commenting on the birth of the CCF. The Saint John *Telegraph Journal*, however, did offer an indirect comment on the CCF convention and its much maligned Manifesto. The *Telegraph Journal* felt that the discouraging picture of Russia presented by visitors recently returned from that Communistic state should be borne in mind "at the present time, because there appears to be a thinly disguised effort to establish a socialistic state in Canada". And it seemed quite clear, according to the editorial, that "Russia is the nearest approach to a system which some people apparently would like to see duplicated in Canada."⁵ When CCF members Douglas MacDonald, who first was elected in Cape Breton in a December, 1939, by-election, D. N. Brodie, and Donald MacDonald won seats in the 1941 Nova Scotia provincial election, they quickly were tarred as alien agitators. When Donald MacDonald had the temerity to argue that "the Saviour" likewise "had been called an agitator", a shocked Premier A. S. MacMillan deplored such sacrilegious comments. Apparently worried about the rising CCF strength in Nova Scotia, by 1945 MacMillan was directing some of his most outlandish barbs at the party. To him, socialism was a threat to labour unions, to credit unions, to individual initiative, to economic prosperity, and to social harmony since "it is the breeding ground of irresponsible agitators who thrive on hatred and set class against class". Since the CCF did not have "one particle of the religion you or I were brought up with", it was time "the people of Nova Scotia rose in their might and crushed this thing out of existence".⁶

In the face of this attack upon the Nova Scotia CCF as a basically alien ideology, it stalled like its Ontario counterpart. In the 1945 provincial election, one seat was lost and in succeeding elections the CCF slid steadily downward from its 1945 peak of 13.6% of the electorate. In New Brunswick the party peaked in the 1944 provincial election when it polled 11.7% of the total vote, although here its demise was quicker and more complete. It is interest-

5 Saint John *Telegraph Journal*, 25 July 1933, p. 4.

6 MacMillan's comments, as well as a brief discussion of the CCF's rise in Nova Scotia during World War II, are contained in G.N. Joudrey, "The Public Life of A.S. MacMillan" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1966), pp. 351-357.

ing that in Nova Scotia the federal CCF decline was slightly less severe than the provincial decline. As well, since Professor Caplan concludes with the optimistic pronouncement that the NDP is making progress in overcoming the CCF's "vexing dilemma" and that the future of the Ontario NDP "is not yet closed" (p. 200), it might be pointed out that the federal NDP has undergone a limited recovery in Nova Scotia while in the 1970 provincial election the provincial NDP won 6.7% of the popular vote and two Cape Breton seats. Federally indeed, in two of the last three elections the NDP appears to be not only gaining strength but emerging as more than a Cape Breton phenomenon. In the 1965, 1968, and 1972 federal elections, when the party won respectively 9.1, 6.7, and 12.0% of the total vote, this support by no means was confined to Cape Breton. In 1965 Cape Breton contributed 34.7% of the NDP vote while the mainland contribution was 65.3%. In 1968, however, 51.5% came from Breton while the mainland provided only 48.5%. But in 1972 the mainland ridings yielded 59.0% while Cape Breton contributed 41.0%. Possibly there is reason for equal optimism about the NDP prospects in Nova Scotia.

Present day optimism, nevertheless, should not be allowed to obscure the very limited success of third parties, particularly the CCF, in the Maritimes. This electoral failure could be quickly explained as the result of such various factors as the region's "rigid traditionalism", the lack of a substantial urban base, the adjustments made by the two major parties, the lack of politically militant labour unions in many areas, and the Liberal and Conservative co-optation of labour leaders especially in New Brunswick. But is this a sufficient explanation? The context within which the Maritime CCF operated is fairly obvious but what of its mode of operation?⁸ By clearly delineating the way in which the party functioned, Young has offered an excellent examination of the national CCF, while Caplan has pinpointed the Ontario CCF's unsuccessful response to the damaging charges levelled against it. In order to understand the nature of the Maritime CCF's response to the alien image thrust upon it, possibly the nature of the Maritime CCF itself must first be understood. Has socialism in the Maritimes been assumed such a total failure that the most logical vantage point of investigation has been neglected? The

7 These figures are based on the election results contained in J.M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power* (Scarborough, 1968), pp. 396-397, 418-419; Canada, *Twenty-Seventh General Election 1965 Report Of The Chief Electoral Officer* (Ottawa, 1966), pp. xx, 1042-1043; Canada, *Twenty-Eighth General Election 1968 Report Of The Chief Electoral Officer* (Ottawa, 1969), pp. xx, 946-947; Canada, *Twenty-Ninth General Election 1972 Report Of The Chief Electoral Officer* (Ottawa, 1973), pp. xix, 1177-1178.

8 The soon to be published study by Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steel-workers: Trade Unions in Cape Breton*, might be a step in the right direction since, apparently, it will examine the history of the CCF and NDP in Nova Scotia.

party organization, its major participants, and the tone and content of its electoral appeals may, in the final analysis, be the real key to a fuller comprehension of its fate.

W. G. GODFREY

THREE BOOKS ON NOVA SCOTIA'S ECONOMY

Three volumes make up the "Atlantic Provinces Studies" series, which the Social Science Research Council of Canada devised in 1959.¹ The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council had asked the SSRCC to do something about research on their domain and funds came from the Canada Council and from other government bodies. Why only three Studies in thirteen years? Were there no funds for more? Were Atlantic social scientists so involved in contract research that they had little time for "fundamental studies of their own choosing" (Graham, p. ix)? Or, as other Canadians sometimes suspect, do the conditions in Atlantic universities simply discourage serious research? The reviewer can only record his puzzlement, and his regret that more work has not appeared.

Time has done strange things to the three books. All three authors draw their material from the fifties and very early sixties. George's observations cover the period 1946-62. Graham's account of fiscal arrangements really ends in 1963, and its emphasis is on the 1950's, when Nova Scotia was experimenting with "foundation programmes" in education and with other devices for financing roads and health. Sears, perhaps, has suffered most. Though his work was published in 1972, it is based on field research which ended in 1961. Only the authors, or their graduate students, can tell us whether the descriptions of a distant reality still apply. This question is important, because to prescribe for Nova Scotia's economic ills we must correctly perceive its present economic and social reality.

Graham's work is the most varied and ambitious. Besides describing and appraising the fiscal relations between Nova Scotia and its municipalities, he offers a sketch of Nova Scotia's economic development and an explanation of its poverty. With respect to growth and poverty various waves of opinion have passed over professional economists in the past decade, waves which have undermined the foundations of Graham's edifice, though they have not yet destroyed them. Graham thinks that Nova Scotia is poor because it has poor natural resources and because it uses all inputs rather badly. No one

¹ John F. Graham, *Fiscal Adjustment and Economic Development: a Case Study of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1963); Roy E. George, *A Leader and a Laggard: Manufacturing Industry in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1970); John T. Sears, *Institutional Financing of Small Business in Nova Scotia* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972).