

Studies in Canada's Recent History

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Studies in Canada's Recent History

Books published on Canada's development since 1939 tend to be long on biases and short on analysis. Accounts wildly contradict each other and authors resort to name calling and special pleading to argue their positions, hardly the stuff of solid historical scholarship. Yet, despite, or perhaps because of this, the books under review here make fascinating and often compelling reading.

The Forked Road: Canada 1939 - 1957 (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1976), the first of a two volume contribution by Donald Creighton to the Canadian Centenary series, is a veritable tour de force. In every respect vintage Creighton, the book offers what readers have come to expect from English Canada's senior historian. Creighton's philosophy of history is by now well known. Historical events, he explained in a 1968 interview, must be analyzed in terms of character and circumstance; the historian "seeks insights and understandings that cannot be gained through application of sociological rules and general applications".¹ It is not surprising, then, that *The Forked Road* owes little to the methodology of "the new history". Nor is it surprising that the book reads like a Greek drama with heroic and villainous characters, good and evil forces, tragic and comic circumstances. There is another component of Creighton's philosophy of history which is equally important in understanding his work. This feature was apparent to Conservative MP's as early as February 1956 when Creighton spoke at a Conservative Party luncheon in Ottawa. George Nowlan, who attended the function, described the historian's impact in prose that Creighton should appreciate:

Creighton is tall, thin, bald, homely and looks like a typical college prof . . . Ellen F[airclough] broke down and wept as he connected the spirit of Sir John with those of us today who were maintaining the tradition. C[reighton] is obviously not only a damn good writer but a damn good Tory as well.²

Creighton's toryism still runs rampant in *The Forked Road* and, while many will agree with his conclusions and enjoy his dramatic literary style, it is unfortunate that he substitutes conservative bias and passionate prose for concrete historical research and analysis.

The events of the Second World War and the Cold War, Creighton argues, presented Canadians with major choices concerning their domestic and

1 Cited in John S. Moir, ed., *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto, 1970), p. x.

2 George Nowlan to Miriam Nowlan, 22 February 1956, Nowlan Papers, Personal Letters, Acadia University.

foreign affairs. Social and economic forces alone, he warns, are not sufficient to explain Canada's development in these years (pp. 283 - 4). Canada's geographical position gained precedence in decision-making by default and the responsibility for this lies squarely on the shoulders of the federal Liberal Party, in particular its leaders, Mackenzie King and Louis St. Laurent, their henchmen, C. D. Howe and L. B. Pearson, "court favourites" such as J. W. Pickersgill and "the managerial civil service", "one of the 'divisions' of the Liberal army". This Liberal mafia steered the Canadian omnibus away from the high road leading to commonwealth cooperation, east-west economic integration and a lusty national sovereignty and recklessly drove down the fork in the road marked "Sinister Continentalism", resulting by 1957 in American domination of Canadian economic and military matters, a "triangle of relationships and obligations — novel and onerous in foreign affairs" and a disastrously impaired sovereignty. It was indeed a low road they charted. In eighteen years Canada, according to Creighton, had become "an undefined, nondescript, almost anonymous country", starting off "on a new career, with no very definite purpose in mind and not much idea of where it was going" (p. 131).

This is a clear and, some would argue, accurate statement of Canada's recent development, but Creighton provides little evidence that the alternatives he offers were either viable or desirable and, for the most part, he relies on character assassination to carry the thrust of his argument. He blames French Canadians for stripping Canada of important Commonwealth symbols such as the phrase "Dominion of Canada" and a distinctive flag incorporating the Union Jack; he also holds Quebec responsible for wrecking the potentially unifying policies advocated by the Rowell-Sirois and Massey Reports. These are scandalous accusations especially since he himself offers evidence that others in Canada agreed wholeheartedly with this course of events. Americans, of course, are the arch-villains of the piece and look the part. Bernard Baruch was "a rich, successful political promoter and manipulator", "an inordinately vain old man", who wrecked the U.N. Atomic Energy Commission (p. 136). Secretary of State Dean Acheson "had a hawk-like nose, beetling eyebrows, an aggressive chin" and was unmoved by the splendid ideal of the "Atlantic Community" (p. 168). General MacArthur was "a preposterous mixture of Genghis Khan and Louis XIV", who escalated the Korean War unnecessarily (pp. 205, 211). To describe the American rape of Canada, Creighton draws upon his considerable skill at historical analogy. American bases in Newfoundland, for example, were "sovereign political enclaves very much like the duodecimo principalities of the Holy Roman Empire" (p. 163). The most dastardly act of all, however, occurred when the United States bluffed Canadians into sharing the St. Lawrence Seaway, built on "a river of enormous historical and economic significance to Canada" (p. 242) —

and it might be added, of particular significance to Creighton, who apparently still has no objections to empires that are based on the St. Lawrence.

The Forked Road basically offers variations of the same themes presented in *Canada's First Century* (Toronto, 1970). Dramatic accounts of such events as the Hong Kong campaign, the Gouzenko affair and the Pipeline debate embellish the narrative, but Creighton adds little that is new in terms of research nor does he apply his literary talents to such events as the expulsion of Japanese Canadians from British Columbia, the Asbestos strike or the condition of native peoples. Federal and international events exclusively dominate the narrative. There is only a brief mention of the CCF victory in Saskatchewan, for example, while page after page is devoted to American imperial activities around the world. Creighton's chapters on social history are equally disappointing. Based on the statistically average Canadian, his descriptions convey none of the class or regional variations in the country. His social analysis is largely impressionistic, based on his own central Canadian, middle-class experiences. His assessment of the contribution of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to Canadian culture is appalling. Of the Italians he writes: "their advent renewed the polygot character of the Canadian population; but the effect of this foreign admixture was qualified by the annual increment of native-born Canadian babies and by immigration from Great Britain" (p. 244). *The Forked Road* is a bigoted and often unreliable account of Canada's recent history. It may well feed the latent prejudices of Canadians in the 1970s, but it will not be an enduring contribution to the understanding of our recent past, except as a primary source documenting the contradictions in, and paucity of, conservative thought in twentieth-century Canada.

Among the many sources Creighton conspicuously does not consult while spinning his tale is J. L. Granatstein's *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government 1939 - 45* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1975). Unlike Creighton, who relies almost exclusively on a narrow selection of secondary and printed sources, Granatstein consults a wide range of primary material recently opened to scholars in the archives of Canada, Britain and the United States.³ On the whole, Granatstein's "study of the public Mackenzie King during the war" is a careful, balanced analysis, every conclusion fortified with a mass of documentation. This academic veneer, however, should not obscure what is essentially an apology for Mackenzie King's wartime policies. Granatstein accepts uncritically King's goals of liberal ascendancy, national unity and welfare statism, and judges people and events, as did King, in relation to whether or not they served these ends.

Since Granatstein and Creighton differ so widely in their assessment of

3 All of these Archives were wonderfully cooperative, we are told, with the exception of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (p. x).

the King administration, it is not surprising that they come to opposite conclusions in their evaluation of issues and personalities of the war years. Whereas Creighton argues that decisions made during these years made Canada a colony of the United States, Granatstein, although admitting that policy decisions such as the Ogdensburg Agreement deserved “more careful consideration” (p. 128), concludes that the Second World War saw “semi-autonomy alter rapidly into genuine nationhood” (p. 424). King, according to Creighton, pursued “safe, cautious, niggardly middle-of-the-road” policies, “defined chiefly by negatives” (pp. 2, 6); Granatstein points out that King’s policy of delay and evasion brought about “virtually unanimous” support for the declaration of war in 1939, produced the least division and strife ethnically and made the Liberal Party an agency of national unity (p. viii). Creighton judges the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) as a “colonial agreement”, “an only too accurate reflection of the nature and outlook of King and his ministers” (p. 46); Granatstein concludes that the BCATP was “a ten-strike for the Liberal Government” (p. 59). While Creighton sees the King Cabinet as made up of “Provincial politicians, largely ignorant of the personalities and ways of world politics” (p. 46), Granatstein describes the wartime cabinet as “one of the strongest Cabinets Canada ever had — if not the strongest” (p. 107). Granatstein argues that Canada did not receive influence in the councils of war commensurate with its participation primarily because the United States and Britain preferred to concentrate power in their control (p. 294); Creighton, of course, blames King. Creighton eulogizes Ralston, describing him as “a selfless and devoted patriot who had never aspired to the premiership and was wholly incapable of conspiracy” (p. 95). Granatstein suggests that King should have removed Ralston from the cabinet in 1942 (p. 214).

Granatstein provides more evidence than does Creighton to support his conclusions and makes a good case for assessing King’s administration in terms of policies rather than personalities. Professional King-haters will find *Canada’s War* difficult to swallow especially because it is so amply documented. If for nothing else, Granatstein is to be congratulated for raising the level of analysis above name-calling and it is to be hoped that his critics will maintain the standard. Nonetheless, many readers will question the author’s conclusion that “because King combined his conscription balancing act with a progressive policy on social welfare questions”, and kept the Liberal Party in office after the war, national unity was maintained (p. viii). It might be as easily concluded that because King set the Liberal Party up as the party of national unity, forcing other national parties to appear as representatives of regional or ethnic interests, he destroyed the integrity of the federal political system and sowed the seeds for its ineffectiveness in the second half of the twentieth century. The view that only the Liberal Party could hold the nation together is one that should be challenged, for if

this assumption is indeed true perhaps national unity is only a figment of the imagination of the Liberal party, an ideal to be abandoned for other more important priorities.

Because of Granatstein's sympathies with King's policies, *Canada's War*, on occasion, lapses into little more than a documented version of the King diaries. Granatstein accepts unchallenged, for example, King's statement that Ralston nearly cracked under the strain of the Conscription crisis (p. 242). He also shares King's narrow judgement of Maritime politicians and cites without comment King's view that, because they supported conscription, Ralston, Macdonald and Ilsley had "the kind of attitude toward Britain that Fielding and others of the Maritimes have had" (p. 214). Surely more important in analyzing the attitudes they took is the fact that Macdonald and Ralston were defence ministers. It is also worth noting that these ministers owed their views as much to their business and political careers before entering the cabinet as they did to their Nova Scotia origins. The Maritimers may well have led the conservative faction in the cabinet, but they were only the most able proponents of a widely held English Canadian point of view, as the plebiscite of 1942 confirmed. While *Canada's War* is a useful analysis of Liberal Party gyrations during the Second World War, the author is too much concerned with the super-structure and not enough with the base of wartime events. Still Granatstein has accomplished something of great importance in this book; he has at last provided King with the reassurance he so desperately sought in his lifetime. Perhaps now his tortured spirit can rest in peace.

A new spirit stalking the land these days is that of the last Conservative Prime Minister, John George Diefenbaker. Dr. Creighton promises a sequel to *The Forked Road* which will deal in part with Diefenbaker's administration. Useful grist for his mill are four volumes of resource material: two volumes of Diefenbaker's memoirs and two volumes of Stursberg's 'living history' interviews with those closely associated with the Diefenbaker administration.⁴ It is fitting that Diefenbaker has two fat tomes all to himself (and a third in the making) while his cabinet ministers and other prominent figures must share space with colleagues who often offer contradictory evidence on the same page. Somehow this division of pulp appropriately reflects the "Diefenbaker Years", when 'the chief' dominated the media.

On page one of his first volume, Diefenbaker reveals the influence of a Creightonian philosophy of history: "It is my conviction that a man is the end

4 *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker* (2 vols., Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1975, 1976); Peter Stursberg, *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained, 1956-62* and *Diefenbaker: Leadership Lost, 1962-7* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1975, 1976).

product of his ancestors, proximate and remote, that he is endowed at birth with a heritage of character, but that this character may be influenced by fortuitous circumstances". In fact, the *Memoirs* are written in part to demonstrate the author's unswerving devotion to progressive conservative values and specifically to answer critics like Peter Newman, who, in *Renegade in Power* (Toronto, 1963), described Diefenbaker as having "compromised so many convictions during six years of power that he no longer seemed to have any clear idea himself of the kind of future he was offering his followers" (p. xv).⁵ Consequently, statements of his "beliefs" are inserted throughout the pages of volume one to reassure his readers that he has, and had, convictions. It might be argued that it was the mixture of populism and conservatism which accounts for the compromises that Newman perceived in Diefenbaker's administration, but Diefenbaker obviously does not consider these contradictions a problem.

Following what might loosely be termed a chronological framework, Diefenbaker, in his first volume, describes episodes from his childhood and his early career, up to his election as leader of the Conservative Party in 1956. The narrative is sprinkled with puns, jokes, jabs at the Trudeau government, digressions on the creed, quotes from Burke and Lincoln and other miscellaneous Diefenbakiana. The ingredients necessary for creating a legend are carefully included: the discrimination he suffered because of a German surname, the hardships endured on a Saskatchewan homestead, the close-knit family life and Baptist upbringing, his conviction at age eight that he would one day be Prime Minister of Canada, the election of 1911 which made him a Conservative, the inspiration provided by three Nova Scotia-born teachers, the sympathy of judge and jury at his first murder trial, the cases fought for the poor and oppressed. Of course, a hero must be human and the reader is made privy to the facts that young John disgraced his mother by appearing at a public function as a filthy urchin, that he fell from the stage when he received his university degree, that he stepped into a wastepaper basket when presenting his first case, and that he has difficulty feeling at ease with women. Perhaps the key to understanding his whole career can be found in a statement about being lost in Edinburgh during the First World War: "I have a chronic disposition never to ask directions. I do not like to admit that I do not know my way" (p. 88).

A main purpose of the memoirs is to see record straight and the author — often using hindsight — valiantly argues that he was on the right side of important issues. Diefenbaker is also not above indulging in the good

5 Christina McCall Newman tells us that Diefenbaker is still so offended by Peter Newman's book that he has it written into his contract with Macmillan that Newman is not to receive an advance copy of any of the three projected volumes of the memoirs (*Saturday Night*, November, 1976, p. 34).

New Testament sport of separating the sheep from the goats. His list of sheep in volume one includes Ian Mackenzie, C. D. Howe, Paul Martin, T. C. Douglas and Clarrie Gillis. Jack Anderson and Arthur Pearson, his campaign managers, receive special mention as do Dave Walker, Bill Brunt, Mel Jack, Gordon Churchill, Alistair Grosart and Leslie Frost. The goats are led by Jimmy Gardiner, closely followed by Grattan O'Leary, Leon Balcer and Grant Dexter. Volume two adds a considerable number to the black list, and no doubt the third volume will lengthen the list considerably. More useful to the historian than the identification of friends and foes are Diefenbaker's reminiscences concerning political life in the first half of the twentieth century. His stories about the antics of colleagues on Parliament Hill in the 1940s and on the campaign trail are often told with humour and insight.

Volume two covers Diefenbaker's years in office and he concentrates on topics that readers expect to find in a Prime Minister's political memoirs: the attainment of party leadership, the nature of party organization, election campaigns, the creation of the cabinet, daily routine, the processes of determining government policy and an assessment of successes and failures. A large part of the volume is devoted to what he perceives to be the positive accomplishments of his government. He is particularly satisfied with his foreign policy initiatives emphasizing especially his world tour of 1958, his address to the UN General Assembly on 26 September 1960, in answer to Khrushchev's charge of imperialism against the Western nations, and his role in the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961. He leaves the impression that he is trying to compete with Pearson whose reputation in foreign affairs he feels has been overrated. He notes proudly that he was on a first-name basis with Eisenhower who "consulted" him on important matters, and that they were "as close as the nearest phone" (p. 157). If Nixon had won the American election of 1960, he maintains, "the course of Canadian-United States relations would have been a happier one" (p. 165). Kennedy, he suggests, did not understand Canada and did not like Khrushchev because the Soviet leader called him 'boy'. Sometimes small and trivial matters determine attitudes in international affairs, Diefenbaker concludes (p. 161). Diefenbaker does feel in retrospect that he should have done more to encourage Commonwealth solidarity. "Had I remained Prime Minister following the election of 1963, Canada would have launched a major initiative on Commonwealth and international economic questions What I had in mind was a series of positive actions that would permit Britain to achieve a major part of her economic objectives without disturbing the existing pattern of Commonwealth relationships" (p. 200). This statement seems rather vague, a trait not uncommon to Conservative musings on the Commonwealth.

The final chapters deal with the domestic achievements of Diefenbaker's administration: resource development, the agricultural program, concessions

to Quebec and efforts to combat unemployment and regional disparity. Diefenbaker enunciates a lofty statement of his political principles: "My goal was to break down the barriers of region and race, not in the interest of cultural homogenization — anything but that — but to create a strong, independent and viable nation" (p. 296). Many of the policies he cites undoubtedly were designed to contribute to this purpose but despite an able marshalling of evidence for the defence — a skill at which the author is reputedly adept — most readers will be left with a feeling that only one side of the case has been heard. If so much well-meaning legislation was produced, why was it that Canada seemed to many less strong, independent and viable in 1962 than it was in 1957? Diefenbaker does not answer this question, except to imply that Liberals, journalists and enemies in his own party obstructed his good intentions. There is nothing in his account to suggest that he recognizes the bankruptcy of his own political philosophy and of the political framework in which he operated. To achieve the goals to which he aspired required more than pious platitudes, good intentions, a reformed Parliamentary system or patch-work legislation. The creation of a strong, viable and independent nation demanded policies that would be unthinkable to Diefenbaker and to the majority of Canadians he governed. That he still clings to his goals says much for the tenacity of his nineteenth-century idealism, but little for his political good sense. Characters may have imparted the fatal blows to his national dream but they were only vehicles of circumstances well beyond control — at least Diefenbaker's control. In the final analysis, Diefenbaker's *Memoirs* are profoundly disappointing. They convey no evidence that Canada was led by a statesman when he was in office and only confirm that he was and is a politician — and often a petty one at that.

Stursberg's volumes are a useful and necessary complement to the Diefenbaker memoirs. Rigidly chronological in their organization, they convey a feeling for the sequence of events and for the controversy that raged during the Diefenbaker years which is missing in the memoirs. Stursberg, a journalist and experienced interviewer, skillfully juxtaposes excerpts from taped interviews with a wide range of MP's, government aides and political hacks to weave a surprisingly comprehensive picture of the Diefenbaker years. Stursberg asked those interviewed what they considered to be the positive results of the Conservative administration. The responses cover most of the areas discussed in Diefenbaker's memoirs and document the wide-ranging concerns that faced the federal government in those years. J. W. Pickersgill concludes that "the only thing they did was two dams" (p. 224), while Pierre Sevigny asserts that "Diefenbaker did more for Canada in more fields of endeavour than had been done by the previous government in twenty-two years of power" (p. 225). From the evidence provided here, it would seem likely that future historians will fall somewhere between these two extreme viewpoints in their assessment of the Conservative Party's years in office.

Much in the Stursberg books contradicts or sheds light on issues dealt with in the Diefenbaker memoirs. Sevigny relates how he tricked both Diefenbaker and Duplessis into cooperation and claims that the Prime Minister developed the One Canada slogan in Winnipeg in 1958, somewhat later than “the chief” suggests. Tommy Douglas tells us of his initiative in securing federal support for the South Saskatchewan Dam, an aspect of the project Diefenbaker neglected to mention. Dick Bell does not remember the high level of debate that Diefenbaker claims to have stimulated in the caucus; rather “caucuses became John Diefenbaker telling of his readings from Mackenzie King . . . who had become . . . John’s great Hero” (p. 103). All agree that there were too many cabinet and caucus meetings, although opinions differ as to why the Diefenbaker government became “rule by meetings”. Fleming probably is closest to the truth when he speculates that Diefenbaker was trying to copy John A. Macdonald and Mackenzie King who had reputations for procrastination and political longevity. Also obvious is the fact that the government was dealing with matters on which no broadly based Conservative party could ever be expected to reach a consensus.

Volume two of Stursberg’s chronicles is preoccupied with crises: the second minority Diefenbaker government, the Cuban crisis, the nuclear issue, plots and counterplots over party leadership, the Munsinger affair and the 1963 and 1965 elections. The most obvious generalization that emerges from reading this volume is that the Conservative MP’s in 1962-63 were under too great a strain in dealing with truly divisive problems to carry on any responsible activity and could be forgiven anything they did or did not do. Continuous cabinet meetings over arming the Bomarc’s with nuclear missiles failed to resolve that thorny issue in the fall and winter of 1962-63 and the government was reduced to inaction while Conservatives fought among themselves. Stursberg’s book is somewhat unclear here — primarily because the participants are confused or holding back information. Patrick Nicholson’s book, *Vision and Indecision* (Toronto, Longman’s, 1968) provides a clearer, although probably more biased, account of the behind-the-scenes activities.

Stursberg presents what is essentially a sympathetic view of Diefenbaker and a positive picture of his government’s achievements. With the exception of a few obviously partisan comments, most of those interviewed are remarkably restrained in their assessment of Diefenbaker. Clearly, this is not the last word on the Conservative administration and future graduate students should have as much fun ferreting out the fortunes of Diefenbaker and his merry men and women as they are now having with King’s diaries. A far more useful quest, of course, would be to discover what was actually happening in the boardrooms, bedrooms and backstreets of the nation. For what we are offered in all the books considered here is too much character and not enough circumstance. Nonetheless, these books will assist future historians in pro-

viding the balanced, detached analysis of the stage on which the actors play their curious roles. They all amply document regional and class differences, the impact of industrialism, the clash of ideologies and the overload of nineteenth-century political institutions which are the major forces and tensions in these years of rapid change and which explain why Canada's leaders performed their roles so badly.

MARG CONRAD

Recent New Brunswick Political Historiography: Views from the Academy and the Back Room

Ten years ago anyone searching for published material on post-Confederation New Brunswick political history was exploring virtually uncharted territory. Only Katherine MacNaughton's much underrated *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick 1784-1900* (Fredericton, 1947), the second volumes of James Hannay's *History of New Brunswick* (Saint John, 1909) and Robert Rumilly's *Histoire des Acadiens* (Ottawa, 1955), and Hugh Thorburn's landmark study of *Politics in New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1961) stood out as patches of cleared land in the otherwise virgin landscape. Between these works and the primary documents all that existed was a handful of scholarly articles and a small collection of graduate history theses in the Harriet Irving Library at the University of New Brunswick. Since 1970, however, and particularly since the refounding of *Acadiensis* in 1972, the pace of both research and writing has quickened markedly. As elsewhere in Canada local and regional history has become not only a legitimate pursuit but a fashionable one as well. Not only have graduate theses and scholarly articles proliferated but a number of books, dealing in whole or in part with post-Confederation New Brunswick political history, have recently been published.

Interestingly, it was the memoirs of a back room politician rather than the scholarly study of an academic which became the first wave in this tide of recent works dealing with New Brunswick politics. In its portrayal of the author's involvement in the events which led to the stunning victory of Hugh John Flemming's Progressive Conservatives in 1952, Dalton Camp's *Gentlemen, Players and Politicians* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1970) combined perception, wit, knowledge, compassion, an unforgettable cast of characters, elegant use of language, vivid detail and just enough partisan rancour to produce a Proustian "remembrance of things past" that is both fascinating and thought-provoking. Here we see politics not as an awesome struggle of great principles or in the cold type of election returns but as an intense and demanding human activity with the capacity to draw out both the