



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.

Michèle Marcadier.
Political Advisor, AIPLF,
Paris

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