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# Table of contents

1. Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF..... 1

## Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF

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**Abstract (Abstract):** Hall reviews "Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF" by F. Laurie Barron.

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**Full text:** Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF. F. LAURIE BARRON. Vancouver: UBC Press 1997. Pp. xix, 272, illus. \$65.00

One of the big and powerful ideas to emerge from the intellectual history of English-speaking Canada concerns the broad overlap between the genesis of socialism and conservatism in the society emerging from the losing side of the American Revolution. A generation ago Gad Horowitz, George Grant, and Charles Taylor argued this case with particular vigour. Nowhere was their theory more vividly illustrated than in Saskatchewan after the Second World War, the political domain within which Tommy Douglas and the CCF took power in 1944 and the nurturing ground for John Diefenbaker, the fatally flawed Red Tory hero of Grant's sublime tragedy, Lament for a Nation. If the political culture of Saskatchewan provides fertile geography for one of English-speaking Canada's greatest political paradoxes, Aboriginal affairs provides one of the most illustrative areas of policy and principle linking the historical traditions embodied by Douglas and Diefenbaker.

In Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF, University of Saskatchewan native studies professor F. Laurie Barron reports with attentive precision and measured judgment on what was probably the first provincial premier in post-Confederation Canada to afford Aboriginal peoples a large and significant place in his estimation of his own work responsibilities. As Barron demonstrates, by far the most sensitive and central question Premier Douglas faced in his sincere and persistent efforts to bring Native people more integrally into the political culture of his province and into a happier and more equitable relationship with education, health care, and gainful employment was how to handle the issue of citizenship. Would registered Indians be extended the franchise, and how might this legal transformation from wardship to citizenship affect Indian treaty rights, Indian exemptions from taxation, and prohibitions against Indian consumption of alcohol?

While all Douglas's finely honed social gospel instincts pointed him towards extending to adult Indians the provincial and federal vote as emblematic of his commitment to widened democracy, it took him all his years as premier - until 1960 - to address the fears, concerns, and distrust felt broadly and deeply in Indian country, where the extension of the franchise was widely perceived as 'the white man's edge of the wedge.' As it turned out, Douglas's work in the Indian country of Poundmaker and Piapot was partly preparing the ground for a similar move by the Diefenbaker regime. In its first flower of federal power, the Diefenbaker government also sought to make the extension of wider political rights to Indians a symbol of the larger sense of nationhood the prime minister hoped to advance in his Canadian Bill of Rights.

Indian resistance to receiving the franchise was particularly assertive in Saskatchewan. The suspicion, articulated forcefully by activists such as John Tootoosis, was that by accepting the vote and entering the legal boundaries of citizenship, the non-Aboriginal governments could rationalize downgrading or even terminating the treaties made in 1874, 1876, and 1906. At the conservative bedrock of this movement was the Queen Victoria Treaty Protection Association. Its president, William Joseph, sought to travel to Britain to put forth an argument that had emerged from the Indian country of Canada many times before and would emerge again in 1981, when First Nations peoples legally and politically challenged the patriation of the Constitution. Joseph

argued that treaties confirmed Crown recognition of Indian nationhood and that there could be no transfer of jurisdiction over Indians from Britain to Canada, or from the dominion to the provinces, without Indian consent. Not surprisingly, there is much more in this text that has a contemporary ring about it. Barron details, for instance, the game played between the Saskatchewan and Canadian governments, as the two levels of government attempted to pass the buck on who was responsible for providing services to Indians living off their reserves, or for administering to the needs of Confederation's most awkwardly placed and endemically neglected political constituency - the Metis. Certainly one of the most enduring political institutions from the Douglas years is the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, one of the organizational bastions of Indian politics in Canada until this day. It was kick started in 1946 with some funding and organizational help from the CCF. As a key player in the early stages of what was initially called the Union of Saskatchewan Indians, Douglas understood that he would need some sort of provincewide Indian organization to give his government's Native policies democratic legitimacy.

The nature and extent of the role played by the CCF in this enduring Indian institution was controversial throughout the Douglas years and it remains so today. For its Indian critics, the body served as an instrument to disguise non-Indian control and manipulation of Indian politics. Barron has some sympathy for this position. He acknowledges, for instance, that 'the CCF was itself a colonizing force of Native people.' The author stops short, however, of the interpretation offered by James Pitsula. According to Barron, Pitsula gives 'equal weight to the importance of non-Natives' in this interpretation of the founding of Saskatchewan's principal Indian organization. This view offends Barron and, he claims, others in Native studies because it fails to take into account the full extent of the role played by Native activists in charting the future of their own political institutions. Worse yet in Barron's eyes is Pitsula's alleged failure to see the post-Second World War surge of Indian political action within the context of the continuity of the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination, from the era of Big Bear, to the era of the League of Indians advanced after the First World War by Mohawk activist Fred Loft, to the era between the wars when men like the Reverend Ahab Spence, Andrew Paull, and, of course, John Tootosis kept the struggle alive against the aggressive opposition of the dominion government.

Other than his elaborate arguments with Pitsula and a quick, minor dispute with Murray Dobbin, Barron's text basically sticks to a narrative that does not draw on other interpretive frameworks illuminating the problem of the subversion of Aboriginal politics through various forms of indirect rule. I look in vain, for instance, for any reference to the works of Menno Boldt and Tony Long, who have framed their interpretation of the internal dynamics of colonization from within Aboriginal communities in the language of 'institutional assimilation.' Native American studies professor Jack Forbes also has a great deal to say on this subject, as does E. Palmer Patterson, Frank Tough, and Murray Dobbin. I was especially struck by the lack of any reference to the Marxist Metis historian, Howard Adams, and his often personal commentaries on the so-called comprador element, which, he argues, tends to perpetuate the old patterns of colonization by rewarding Native collaborators for doing the dirty work of maintaining the racial outlines of capitalist subjugation. Whatever one might think of this genre of analysis, it seems to me that Adams has an inescapable relationship to Barron's subject matter in that this significant Metis thinker came of age in Tommy Douglas's Saskatchewan. While Barron is obviously quite prepared to look at the relationship between class and caste in the context of the racism dividing Native people from Euro-Canadians - a perspective he develops, for instance, with good effect in his useful chapter on northern Saskatchewan - he is far less inclined to address forthrightly questions arising from the development of class differences within Aboriginal communities.

What clearly emerges from this text is a view of Douglas's Saskatchewan as a kind of laboratory for the development of that genre of public policy in Aboriginal affairs that basically has come to predominate as the prevailing motif of our own times. Barron advances this conclusion with a final contradiction of Pitsula, who is said to have overplayed his criticism of the CCF'S Aboriginal policies as essentially a prelude to Pierre Trudeau's white paper on Indian policy, which in 1969 called for the elimination of all legal and institutional

bastions of Indian special status. Barron contends that Douglas was not intent on assimilation, nor was the elimination of Indian reserves the ultimate aim of his political involvement with Indian country. Instead, Douglas played a role somewhat like that which the NDP is presently attempting, however halfheartedly, in addressing with treaty negotiations the long-festering Indian land question in British Columbia.

In a convergence of history that seems to vindicate Grant's views of the socialistic thrust of real conservatism in Canada, it is left largely to governing activists on the left of the political spectrum to try to make good to the First Nations on promises derived from the old British empire and, at the same time, to try to help modernize the way government services are delivered to Aboriginal peoples. The integrity of Douglas's effort to achieve a balance between the responsibilities that flow from history and the need to innovate politically in the present, I think, are strongly suggested in the text of the premier's speech cited by Barron. In 1958 Douglas told a group of chiefs assembled at Fort Qu'appelle, 'I want to begin by saying that I believe the central strong point of Indian life in Saskatchewan and in Canada lies in treaties which you have with the Great White Queen. Nothing we are suggesting to you is intended to weaken those treaties ... They were signed in good faith. They are to last as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow.'

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