

Rhetoric often has it that Leo XIII, in a grand, devil-may-care gesture, “threw open” the Archives to the world in 1881. It would be truer to say that a succession of scholars prised open the doors inch by inch, until, in the end, the only decent thing the Vatican could do was to put an end to the pretence.

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**The Government Party: Organising and financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-58.** REGINALD WHITAKER. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977. xxiv, 512 p. (Canadian Government Series) ISBN 0 8020 5401 3 bd. \$19.95 ISBN 0 8020 6320 9 pa. \$7.50.

Mackenzie King once wrote that “it is the little things that count for most in politics as in all else.” So too is Whitaker’s book made worthwhile by the little things, the jewels of anecdote and wit that give its narrative substance and spice. Otherwise, the story of the Natural Governing Party in its prime would be of interest only as an academic bed-time story.

The book is basically a history of the National Liberal Federation from its beginnings in 1930, as a response to what King called the Party’s “valley of humiliation” after the \$700,000 Beauharnois scandal, up to the pipeline debate and the 1957 election defeat. It concerns itself not only with the Party’s organization and finance, but also with its promotion and packaging, and by far the best sections of the book come from Whitaker’s liberal use of the diary of Norman Lambert, Secretary of the NLF in the 1930s and 1940s, which diary now rests in the Queen’s University Archives. Lambert provides both figures on advertising and lists of corporate sponsors, material indispensable for a party historian. The figures, as they say, are revealing.

Other gems include King’s relationship with Vincent Massey, first President of the NLF. One one occasion, King told Massey to stop making public pronouncements on Liberalism, lest he forfeit his claim to the London High Commissionership. He was annoyed as well by Massey’s courting of academics, and regarded Massey’s Port Hope Summer School of 1932 as a challenge to his own personal grasp on party policy. Sneering at Massey’s intellectuals (perhaps with some justice?), he wrote “Everything is a new discovery which fools proclaim from the housetops, & concerning which wise men have long known & been silent.”

But Massey delivered the funds and Lambert the revolution in organization and publicity, including a successful film about King made by and distributed in Paramount Theatres, and King won the 1935 election by a landslide. The extent of the NLF’s organization can be glimpsed in the fact that, in spite of the vote-splitting factor of the entrance of third parties into the race, and in spite of the fact that the Liberal share of the popular vote declined from 45.5% in 1930 to 44.9%, King won 173 seats, while Bennett dropped from 137 seats to 40.

Although Whitaker provides a lively chapter on advertising agencies, detailed sections on federal-provincial party relations and a solid conclusion, he recognizes that the material in the second half of the book can’t match the first:

Sad to say, there was no diary-writing Norman Lambert collecting funds in the postwar era; or, if there were, the records have not been made generously available to the interested researcher. It is a matter of some irony that the closer the Liberals came to financial affluence, the less one can say about the matter with confidence.

A pity, because the electoral practices that Whitaker chronicles are passing away with the proliferation of election expenses acts. The type of successful politics epitomized by the Liberal Party of Canada and its symbiotic relationship with the federal mandarinate is a politics that has perhaps had its day. Whether the future will offer a less damaging type is another question.

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**Promoters and Politicians: The North-Shore Railways in the History of Quebec, 1854-85.** BRIAN J. YOUNG. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ©1978. xiii, [v], 193 p. Maps ISBN 0 8020 5377 7 \$15.00.

In reading *Promoters and Politicians* those bored with the olympian scandals of twentieth century Quebec may turn to even greater titillations in the nineteenth century. The author describes his theme, in the introductory pages, as state interference in Quebec's economic life and the contribution of railways, especially the north shore railways, to the province's political and financial instability. The logical climax of the railway development mania and its concurrent corruption of nearly all political institutions in the province proves to be the sale of the railways, first to the provincial government, and later to private interests which ultimately leads to their incorporation into larger Canadian systems. In handling this complex issue, one must admire the author's skill in producing a text which sifts through a tangled web of themes and which creates a fluid series of chapters offering significant social comment by their content and documentary sources.

The author's penetrating insights are well illustrated, for instance, in his discussion of the influence and economic interests of the Roman Catholic church and clergy in the construction of the North Shore Railway. His careful linking of the interests of Sir Hugh Allan to railway construction in Quebec and the evolution of political events is an excellent piece of interpretation and illustrates the immense power private capital had on politics in the nineteenth century. Equally forceful is a pounding assemblage of facts regarding the corruption which reached into the highest circles of political life and which is shown in the chapter on the sale of the unified government railway—the Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Occidental—when even the assembled opposition of several of Premier Chapleau's Conservative members as well as the opposition Liberals proved unable to shame high officials out of unbridled, corrupt practices. In 1873 there had been no provincial debt yet by 1882, when the government sold its railway interests, the province was on the verge of financial collapse. The details of the complicity of nearly all major provincial political figures, and even some federal ones, in the rape of the provincial treasury for personal profit make Watergate seem tame.

There are several areas, however, which had they been discussed more extensively in this book would have made a greater impact on the reader. The entire area of the possible over-riding social and economic reasons for the construction of north shore railways, as opposed to their strictly economic viability, is not fully explored. This is, still a basic question of Canada's railway policy today. The social impact of railway construction on north shore communities is also very briefly passed over. Again, more comment could have been included concerning public reaction to the failure of the Jacques Cartier Bank, and its implications for the railways. In the section concerning the takeover of the various railways in 1874-1875 the author indicates that the government of Quebec found itself in a complex position regarding the issuing of contracts and patronage. However, it is not made clear whether or not the government of the day actually anticipated the political value of patronage which would arise with the acquisition of the railways.