

**NORTH AMERICAN
SOCIAL
DEMOCRACY
IN THE 1990S:
THE NDP IN
ONTARIO**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Few electoral results could match the promise of change that came with a victory by the New Democratic Party in Ontario on September 6, 1990. Yet even before completing its first term in office, much of the NDP's promise appears unfulfilled. At a time when NDP politicians and activists are busy blaming each other for problems in Ontario, it is not difficult to find unique reasons to explain why the government appears to be on the road to failure. But it is the conceit of social scientists to believe that they can come up with answers that are general enough in character so that the particular case they examine takes on larger meaning. That is my intent in this essay. Unique though it is, the Ontario NDP in office is also an example on which to base a broader understanding of what it means for a social democratic party to govern under strained economic and political circumstances.

The Ontario NDP's brand of democratic socialism generally favors a mixed economy, nationalism, and broad citizen

participation.¹ Its appeal to Ontario voters has fluctuated from a tantalizing high of 29 percent in 1975, when it was the largest opposition party with 38 seats, to levels closer to about 25 percent when it fell back to the position of third party. Electoral disappointment brought a new leader when Bob Rae, a noticeable participant in the House of Commons since 1979, defeated two other contenders in 1982. Under his leadership the party won 25 seats in 1985, putting it in a position to offer support to the Liberals who formed a minority government after the post-election defeat of the Conservatives by a vote of confidence. The Liberal government then called an election in 1987 which gave it a clear majority of 95 but reduced the NDP to 19 seats. By winning 74 seats in 1990, the NDP gained an unexpected victory. Its share of the popular vote reached 38 percent compared to 32 percent for the Liberals and 24 percent for the Conservatives; independents and other parties made up the remainder.

The NDP was the proverbial new broom because it brought to the legislature at Queen's Park a whole cast of untried actors. Fifty-seven of its 74 seats had been won by novices. Premier-elect Bob Rae, who had 27 ministries to fill, made his initial cabinet appointments by drawing on 14 with prior legislative experience. They were not much different than cabinet newcomers because all came from a pool of MPPs who lacked any governing experience.²

The election results attracted attention well beyond Ontario's borders because officeholding by a social democratic party in a large, highly industrialized province or state is unprecedented in North America. In comparison, earlier NDP victories in British Columbia and Manitoba, like those of the predecessor CCF in Saskatchewan, had drawn on the party's roots in agrarian protest and its support in less developed economies. The NDP's victory was even more notable because it occurred at a time when similar parties in Europe were in decline.³

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Although, as I shall go on to summarize, the new government quickly faced immense difficulties, it did enjoy a brief honeymoon. Four months later, in answer to a question about which party they would favor if an election were held that day, 60 percent of voters said they would support the NDP. But by mid-year a sharp decline had set in. Anticipated supporters had diminished to 33 percent by January, 1992, and to 21 percent by the following January with no signs of reversal.⁴ In two April, 1993, by-elections in metropolitan Toronto, the Progressive-Conservative candidate took a seat from the NDP, and the Liberals, in holding on to theirs, left the NDP candidate with only eight percent of the vote.⁵ Although the government does not have to call an election until 1995, it appears at this point in time that a minor miracle will be needed to head off devastating defeat in light of this sharply declining support, also manifested by the national NDP's poor showing in the 1993 federal election. Previous to that poll, the NDP had sent 9 Ontario MPs to Ottawa; after it, there were none.

This essay begins with a review of the government's pertinent experiences from the time it took office. It then considers reactions from significant interest groups ranging from those opposed to it from the outset to those making up its natural or traditional constituencies. The special conditions created by the Canadian system of federalism are treated separately in recognition of the pervasive ways in which it shapes and limits political initiatives. The essay concludes with an assessment that covers three themes: the effect of inexperience, or more precisely, of being first; the impact of a social democratic agenda; and the possibility of isolating general governing skills.

II. HOLDING OFFICE

Getting Started

When a political party wins office democratically, it is inevitably affected by precedents. Had it governed previously? Were its members experienced politicians? Did it have a pre-existing program that it was prepared to carry out? Were there adequate resources to realize its objectives? Could it take guidance from the experiences of its counterparts elsewhere? A natural assumption is that the greater number of these questions that can be answered affirmatively, the easier it is for a government to establish its authority and get its program underway. This is not to say that political

parties without any of the preceding advantages may not do extremely well just because they can bring a fresh perspective with new officeholders untainted by the repute of established politicians. Inexperience in itself, although not an inevitable handicap, alerts us to the potential for difficulties.

As incoming premier, Bob Rae faced the job of filling cabinet ministries. Of candidates available to him, only 23 percent could claim parliamentary experience. From that minority he picked Floyd Laughren for Treasury, David Cooke for Housing, Charles (Bud) Wildman for Native Affairs, Ruth Grier for Environment, and Shelly Martel for Northern Development. They would become core members of the policy and priorities committee, the first cabinet committee formed and one that would then serve as a kind of inner cabinet.⁶ The need for centralized authority as well as for central planning in the Cabinet Office arose from the broad scope of the NDP's policy objectives, coupled with uncertainty about the likely performance of many of the ministers.⁷ At the same time, it was a cabinet that worked with an ideologically-based model of decision-making through consensus.

Since Rae wanted to increase the recognition of women in the cabinet (eleven ultimately were appointed) and because different parts of the province expected to continue enjoying representation, appointments were given to people whose capabilities were largely unknown.⁸ Ministers had much to learn and even those with parliamentary experience had to unlearn the free-ranging habits derived from years in opposition. Ontario has generally practiced strong cabinet government and, commonly, backbenchers in the governing party have little opportunity to learn about governmental operations. For the opposition parties, all that has been required is that they criticize. They have no obligation to propose workable alternatives. The NDP's preceding accord with the governing Liberals had allowed them to press for some programs, but without any direct participation. These experiences contributed to Graham White's characterization of the newly victorious NDP as not only inexperienced but "staggeringly ignorant about the operation of the Ontario government."⁹ Although he applies the same judgment to the Ontario Liberals when they took office in 1985, he concludes that the NDP had special problems, beginning with the view held by those in charge of the transition that the experiences of the Liberals were simply irrelevant. Instead, he found that they asked, "who do we

know from our tribe who's done this before?" NDP insiders, not insiders to government, were to guide them. Advice came from many experienced politicians and administrators, to be sure, but none were knowledgeable about governing Ontario.

The first tasks that fell to the transition team were to get the machinery of office in place and running. That meant hiring executive assistants and communications assistants for all the new ministers. It could be assumed from the ways the transition team worked that these assistants had been hired by the premier's office and were responsible to it.¹⁰ The initial emphasis on central authority was reinforced by the request that all ministers' speeches be cleared with the premier's office. One result was an overburdened administration just at the time when it needed to be able to differentiate its priorities among various issues and demands.

Even the most thorough-going democracies must rely on a permanent bureaucracy to ensure the continuity of the state's functioning. But as Max Weber pointed out so presciently, the permanency that gives stability also gives a kind of power that no politician can easily overcome. White records the comment from one high-ranking member of the government a year after the election that "we've taken office, but we haven't taken power yet." According to White, the NDP's mistrust of the public service was grounded in ideology. Without necessarily doubting the partisan impartiality of the bureaucracy, there was a strong sense that it was an essentially conservative institution that would naturally try to impede major changes. Consequently, the Rae government placed only limited reliance on senior bureaucrats in the implementation of its policies.¹¹

Committed to a comprehensive policy agenda and the centralized control that this required, suspicious that the bureaucracy would impede that agenda, and believing in a consensual style of governing among ministers whose experiences and independent views could make them unwilling to compromise their conception of social democracy, the NDP government suffered through a painful start. At this point in any assessment of the NDP in office, it would be difficult to separate the effects of inexperience from those of ideology.

Promises, Promises

Any government that follows the British parliamentary model is bound to begin with a formal statement of agenda--the Speech from

the Throne--at the beginning of each session. When the first NDP Speech from the Throne was read at the opening of parliament on November 20, 1990, it left no doubt that the government was committed to making a profound change in the way Ontarians lived. How could it be otherwise? As the lieutenant-governor said in the words of the Rae government, "All of us in Ontario know that we are facing many challenges: an economy in recession; growing inequity; an environment where the air, land and water are increasingly polluted; and rising concern about Canada's future."¹² The NDP response to these problems revealed an explicit foundation in social democratic principles.¹³

Social democratic parties everywhere have a unique and explicit conception of what constitutes the "good life."¹⁴ Not for them the vague platitudes of other parties; instead, they overtly offer an ideology that states the rationale for their existence and the blueprint for their actions.¹⁵ Although the content of social democratic parties' ideology has varied by time and place, at a minimum it has demanded "a redistribution of economic goods and societal resources (such as education and access to culture) among classes and communities to make equality of opportunity a reality."¹⁶ Ontario voters may not have been expressing a commitment to social democracy when they used the 1990 election to reject the old parties, but those whom they elected knew exactly where they stood.

According to the principles enunciated in the NDP's Throne Speech, the bedrock value was fairness, and the new government pledged to present policies and programs that would dramatically change virtually every aspect of life that it found to be unfair. Goals included protection for workers in bankrupt industries, pay equity for women, an increased minimum wage, expanded educational opportunities, income stabilization for farmers, pension reform, increases in affordable housing, extended child care, revised social assistance, protection of women and children, parental leave, "a common pause day,"¹⁷ improved health and social services, a revised tax system, and changes in auto insurance. The health of the environment was conceived as another way to ensure a fairer society through such measures as recycling, clean water initiatives, encouragement of public transit, forest regeneration, and a moratorium on expanding nuclear power, all to culminate in an environmental bill of rights. The cultural diversity of the province was acknowledged by promises of new measures toward achieving aboriginal self-government,

promoting the rights of francophones as well as those of other cultural and racial minorities, and supporting the arts. The government promised to accomplish these goals by taking steps to ensure that those who governed would be bound by the highest levels of integrity, a reminder of the scandals that had helped bring down the previous Liberal government. The new government would also demonstrate its capacity for leadership by playing an active role in ongoing negotiations for constitutional change.

The two subsequent Throne Speeches reiterated this basic agenda, distinguished only by their mention of specific emphases or proposals.¹⁸ Even so, the third Throne Speech, delivered on April 13, 1993, had a different tenor, one whose grimness matched the sombre news about the economy. Now debt control emerged as the crucial goal, to be implemented through reduced government expenditures, new revenues from taxes and sales of public assets, and negotiation of new contracts with all agencies that rely on the province for funding.

Although listeners to the 1990 Throne Speech were cautioned against having too high expectations, what could be said about a government that raised them? Was this not a legislative agenda that could only cause frustration and discontent just because of all it set out? Even as sympathetic an observer as White concedes that part of the difficulty the new government faced arose from just how much the NDP wanted to accomplish.¹⁹

Obstacles

Two critical obstacles have restrained the NDP program: the budget deficit and lack of citizen support. Of the two, the deficit was the most far-reaching and general, affecting every program that needed provincial funds. From the outset there was some recognition that the province's coffers would not be adequate to meet all the NDP goals. The newly appointed treasurer, Floyd Laughren, who also serves as deputy premier, argued that campaign pledges like a \$400 million development fund for northern Ontario or 20,000 units of affordable housing to be built during each year of the government's term had no place in the first Throne Speech.²⁰ Still, the first budget, offered in April, 1991, remained expansionist. Justification for an estimated deficit of \$9.7 billion in the next fiscal year was premised on the argument that new spending was necessary to contain the worst effects of the recession.²¹

Worse was yet to come. A world-wide recession and structural changes in the economy kept the province's income at lower levels than anticipated by the NDP when it took office. By early 1993 Laughren could see signs of improvement, but of a different kind than followed previous recessions, and he held out little hope that the unemployed would soon find work. Yet his assessment was hailed as "the most optimistic Mr. Laughen has made since becoming Treasurer," according to reporters who heard him.²²

To a considerable degree the economic problems of the province have had little connection with the government's policies. Payment on existing debt and on social welfare have their own momentum. While the debt certainly increased under the NDP's deficit financing, the new government also inherited a free-spending lifestyle from its Liberal predecessor. Blame aside, the government estimated that it would take \$7.6 billion just to service its debt in fiscal 1993. Interest payments are predicted to take up more than half of all new spending for some years to come. At the same time, social welfare payments continue to increase in a pattern apparently immune even to improvements in the economy.²³

These grim facts provoked the gloomy 1993 Throne Speech and to talk of a social contract between the government and all those agencies and organizations that rely on the province for funding. They include hospitals, social service agencies, universities, school boards, and municipalities covering an estimated 900,000 workers and more than 8,000 employers. In essence, the social contract was understood to be a way of negotiating agreements among government, employers, and workers to share the costs of the recessionary economy. Since it offered the government a means of cutting about two billion dollars a year from its budget while promoting greater efficiency, it was clear from the outset that any agreement would involve cutbacks. Wage cuts, and freezes and layoffs would be offset by offers of improved retraining, portable pensions, expansion of collective bargaining and the right to strike. Although the fight for this goal was bitter, it was won. The Social Contract Act was enacted on July 7, 1993 by the NDP majority with opposition from only three NDP MPPs.²⁴

Although I consider the social contract to be a policy that followed from the financial obstacles confronting the Rae government, I also see it as a considerable achievement. With the Social Contract Act the NDP provided a new approach to funding and to

relations between the government and the public sector, while it retained a basically united caucus in the face of fierce opposition. It remains an ambiguous accomplishment, however, until we see whether the government is able to reconcile those union workers outraged by the policy. Still, it stands as a major example of how the deficit itself became an engine of change.

Cost to the government was not alone in sidetracking the agenda. Given all that was proposed, it is possible to attribute some failures simply to strategic retreat; that is, to knowing when it is politic to cut one's losses. But some failures need to be taken more seriously both because they were originally presented as issues of NDP principle and because their debate was the source of so much acrimony. One example is the so-called common pause day, presented as a means "to help strengthen family and community life while protecting small businesses and the rights of workers."²⁵ It revealed echoes of previous blue laws even though it was presented without any religious context as a way to support the needs of workers.²⁶ Viewed as an unwarranted concession to trade-union pressure, it had little support even among rank-and-file unionists who became among those most in favor of unrestricted Sunday shopping.²⁷ The first measure was introduced in greatly modified form, and virtually all restrictions were removed.²⁸

Automobile insurance reform became another casualty. The previous Liberal government had only recently passed no-fault insurance that recompensed accident victims according to fixed rates. Those affected could not sue for damages unless they had received serious injury. The NDP objected because giving up the right to sue also meant that some accident victims were left without adequate compensation.²⁹ Under the sponsorship of Peter Kormos, Minister of Consumer Affairs and Financial Institutions and a vocal critic of the Liberal bill while in opposition, it was expected that a new bill would have easy passage. Instead, Kormos became the focus of controversy and was quickly dropped from the cabinet in March, 1991. Ostensibly, Kormos fell from favor because he had appeared as a "Sunshine Boy" in a Toronto tabloid just when the government announced a move against sexism in advertising, but insiders refer to disagreement over the shape of automobile insurance changes,³⁰ with Kormos adamant in advocating the right of accident victims to

sue.³¹ After learning that the NDP plan to reinstate that right would lead to greatly increased premiums, the government reconsidered in expectation of otherwise outraging consumers.³²

The issue of pay equity for women was even closer to the NDP government's basic agenda. In fact, a pay equity law had already been introduced by the Liberal government in 1987 as part of the price of support from the NDP.³³ But it did not cover women who were employed in settings without sufficient male employees with whom to make direct comparisons, mainly those in the public sector. To expand coverage the NDP government proposed that comparisons between men and women could be based either on "proportion"--that is, average wages within a company--or on "proxy"--wages paid outside the company when its labor force is virtually all female. Instead of a 1995 deadline, as initially proposed, pay equity has been delayed until at least 1998 for publicly funded agencies. No deadline was set for other employers using the proxy method, and those with fewer than 10 employees are exempted altogether. Asked to justify the government's retreat, the Minister of Labour, Bob Mackenzie, answered that "financial constraint was the driving force."³⁴ As a result small business employers as well as the government itself had been spared.

Backtracking also occurred over the proposed Environmental Bill of Rights. Ruth Grier, appointed to her ministry after serving as the environmental critic in opposition, was expected to have a bill ready for passage during the government's first year.³⁵ Its delay is presumed to lie in the difficulty seen by affected civil servants in implementing a comprehensive bill. Grier, who no longer has the environment portfolio, came under sharp criticism for the policies she has implemented,³⁶ especially those involving waste disposal which have stimulated the kind of outcry now familiarly known as NIMBY.³⁷

The NDP's ambitious policy agenda, fueled by social democratic principles, would have produced a minor social revolution if fully implemented. That it has not is partly the result of stringent financial problems. But as my examples suggest, the government came to recognize other kinds of constraints stemming from the opposition their proposed measures aroused. Even business complaints could not be disregarded when, in a time of economic recession, new policies might lead to job losses. But it is questionable whether such pragmatism might ever be sufficient to win over

opponents or to offset criticism from those who feel the NDP has abandoned its principles.

The Moral Highground

The Liberal government under David Peterson had been bedeviled by accusations of impropriety and these contributed to its eventual defeat.³⁸ There were many who said, in effect, that the major reason for the NDP's success was disillusionment with the Liberals, as had occurred with the Conservatives before them, for presenting politics as usual. For the NDP, distinguishing itself from the old line parties was easy. It was not simply a matter of criticizing one's opponents and promising to do better. Rather, the whole rationale for the NDP's existence was rooted in a moral philosophy based on a sense of obligation to one's fellows that precluded engaging in dishonest practices. The means could not be separated from the ends. For some this moral philosophy resonated with the social gospel,³⁹ and it attracted to its leadership the talents of such clergymen as J.H. Woodsworth.⁴⁰ The promise of moral rectitude was, then, not some empty campaign promise but an integral part of the social democratic ideology in Canada.⁴¹

Yet it was not long before scandals touched the NDP. Since gaining power, these have been of two kinds: those related to the performance of government duties and those involving sexual misconduct. For example, Health Minister Evelyn Gigantes was forced to resign after disclosing confidential data about a patient. She was later reappointed housing minister. Community and Social Services Minister Zanana Akande came under attack for conflict of interest in failing to resign from two company directorships.⁴² Although she was initially excused by the premier for making an inadvertent misstep, she later resigned after it became known that she had overcharged her tenants in violation of housing laws. Northern Development Minister Shelly Martel admitted lying about access to confidential files on a physician, but with no apparent punishment. Solicitor-General Michael Farnan was dropped from the cabinet when it was discovered that his aides had lobbied a justice of the peace over parking tickets. Energy Minister Will Ferguson and Tourism Minister Peter North resigned over allegations of sexual improprieties. Similar charges were involved as well in the resignation of John Piper from the Premier's Office.

When NDP ministers became the subject of scrutiny because of their own shortcomings, it was met with shock by those who thought that the party was made up of a different brand of politician and with *Schadenfreude* by those pleased to repay the criticisms they had received when the NDP had been in opposition.⁴³ According to Hugh Thorburn, "they [the NDP] thought of themselves as the only honest people. This is obvious foolishness. They're a mixed bag, like any other party."⁴⁴

Attention to these activities by the media and by other opponents might be dismissed as simply a search for an audience or a form of partisan attack if the instances were not so numerous and if they were not of concern to NDP activists themselves. The premier's excuse, made to the NDP Provincial Council on November 29, 1992, was that "we are governing with a group of people, many of whom had never been in public office before, many of whom had never been in politics before."⁴⁵ Can even misfeasance be justified by lack of experience? In the common law, ignorance is not an excuse.

III. REACTIONS TO POLICIES

Enemies Confirmed

Unlike most broad-based political parties, a social democratic party tends to exist in a world of natural friends and enemies whose role is dictated by ideology rather than by shifting interests. Traditionally, enemies are defined by social class. However, in Canada almost as much as in the United States, "middle class" has become so ubiquitous that it is difficult to use as a means of distinguishing the special place of the working class. Still, wealth, by itself, remains an object of distrust, as do landlords, those with major assets to pass on to their heirs, large corporations, and anyone involved in the world of finance. It could be anticipated, then, that the NDP's victory would be greeted with wariness, if not outright suspicion, by many. The most formidable opponents were in the business community, ranging from large corporations with national or international operations to local and small businesses. Like bulls whipped to fury by the matador's cape, the first Throne Speech and the subsequent budget set off angry reactions to proposed legislation on labor, the environment, and government spending generally. Proposed changes in labor laws that would ease certification of new unions, prevent management from hiring or stepping in to do the work of strikers, or make directors of companies personally liable for workers' benefits

after bankruptcy led to a search for unified opposition by the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Mining Association of Canada, the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association, and various chambers of commerce throughout the province.⁴⁶ Perhaps most disturbing were threats to take business out of Ontario. Among the most prominent to issue warnings that it might move was the Hudson's Bay Company, Canada's largest retailer.⁴⁷

The aroused business community made sure that its message was spread by the mass media as well as by its own trade publications.⁴⁸ Following the inspiration of their opponents, some business critics even engaged in mass action. John McBride, a stockbroker turned mining company executive, and Loudon Owen, a lawyer, mobilized two rallies in Queen's Park and founded People Against the NDP Budget. Although it may not have taken to the streets, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Toronto followed this radical lead by urging its members to write letters of protest to the government.⁴⁹ Landlords and building contractors, as well, demonstrated against rent control legislation and burn in effigy the Housing Minister, David Cooke.⁵⁰

Relations have not improved over time. After the third Throne Speech, the president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce complained that instead of making the business climate more attractive as financial conditions continued to deteriorate, "all we get from the government is more regulation and the promise of higher taxes."⁵¹ The government's move to impose a social contract was initially viewed suspiciously by business, concerned that constraints on labor had been purchased with new concessions, including deferrals of wage increases, rather than the binding wage cuts that had been anticipated.⁵² Others, however, were pleased to see it as a genuine move to assert control over trade unions.⁵³

The whole health-care community was another source of opposition. Because the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) guarantees health care to all residents, it is a major drain on the provincial budget. As economic conditions worsened, the previous Liberal government had tried to introduce economies by banning extra billings by physicians. Medical doctors responded with a strike in 1986 and a subsequent court challenge to the policy that the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) decided to drop in 1990. Those experiences led the OMA to entertain some conciliatory exchanges

with the NDP.⁵⁴ But amicable relations did not last long once the new NDP government in 1991 introduced limits on payments to medical specialists billing more than \$400,000 in a year. By 1993 the government had moved to cap payments to general practitioners.⁵⁵ Despite talk of a "war" between medical doctors and the government,⁵⁶ and the filing of legal complaints against the government,⁵⁷ the Ontario Medical Association did ratify pay caps, perhaps sweetened by restrictions on medical practice by doctors coming into the province.⁵⁸ The Social Contract Act left room for less compromise with other health-care employers, however. These included the Ontario Hospital Association, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Ontario Nursing Home Association, and the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors.⁵⁹

Among the constituencies that social democrats see themselves representing and protecting are all those oppressed by the more privileged. Since oppressors may include those who advocate enforcement of the status quo, this can extend to the police insofar as they uphold established authority. Premier Rae, a lawyer who had dealt with the civil liberties of those on picket lines and in other demonstrations, knew from first-hand experience about confrontations with the police. So, when the government introduced new regulations on the use of force, in particular on procedures to follow when police officers unholstered their weapons, hostility between the police and the government came into the open. Both groups saw their actions as political, and each questioned the other's legitimacy. According to one police leader, militant actions by the police had public support because "the feeling we are getting is that the citizens of this country and throughout the province want Bob Rae and his government out of there."⁶⁰

Although social democracy has had a strong attraction to academics and journalists, in Canada its working-class base has also provoked a sense that it is a party of philistines unmindful of the benefits of high culture. These views were augmented when the Art Gallery of Ontario, unquestionably the premier art museum in Canada, had its budget cut. Forced to close its doors for seven months, the Gallery reopened in the face of a government-sponsored report proposing that it raise much more of its own money and become more broadly appealing. The art critic for the *Globe and Mail* could not control his spleen in attacking the minister responsible, Karen Haslam, as the "Great Girl Guide." He condemned the task

force report as unrealistic for both advocating greater provincial funding when it was unlikely to be forthcoming and expecting new audiences to be discovered when a "huge, well-moneyed, art-starved, conversion-ready constituency has never been proved to exist in Ontario, or anywhere."⁶¹

Friends Betrayed

Just as a social democratic party has natural enemies, it also has natural friends. Traditionally these have been workers, especially those organized into trade unions; in western Canada, it included farmers with some extension to Ontario as well;⁶² the poor and dispossessed and those who work on their behalf; advocates of gender-based rights for women and, more recently, gays and lesbians; and environmentalists. All these groups were important in working for the NDP's victory and all anticipated that they would be rewarded by sympathetic legislation. Complaints followed soon after the election, expressed with the strong bitterness that comes from a sense of betrayal. For example, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty demonstrated against the government in April, 1991, with placards that read "You Promised" to protest the elimination of food banks. According to one of the protestors, "before they were elected the NDP said, 'If only we have a chance we will be different from the rest. But if they let us down, I think a traitor is worse than an enemy and they'll be treated accordingly.'"⁶³ Slowness or other failures in responding to these constituencies have ensured that their criticisms continue.

Nowhere is the tension between social democratic parties and their "natural" and, ideally, most loyal constituents more evident than in government relations with labor. This has been exacerbated by worldwide changes, creating a heterogeneous work force with lowered rates of unionization and with competing interests.⁶⁴ So, in Sweden, when union leaders argued for wage restraints to counter inflation and structural unemployment, they aroused opposition from the rank-and-file, especially in particular sectors.⁶⁵ For example, Swedish metalworkers argued that it would take a reduced public sector to stimulate industrial competitiveness and employment. Ontario public sector workers may have anticipated this tension at the outset, at least as suggested by Bill Keuhnbaum, a leader in the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, when he said "the NDP is going to be our employer, and employers are employers.

The New Democrats are going to screw us sometimes. It happened in Saskatchewan, it happened in Manitoba, it happened in B.C.”⁶⁶

The government was clear in signalling its commitment to organized labor and its intention to overhaul Ontario’s labor laws by appointing a former organizer for the United Steelworkers of America, Robert (Bob) Mackenzie, to be Minister of Labour. Almost the first fears evoked from the business community were, in fact, ones over labor control of the NDP.⁶⁷ But it was not long before those involved in the trade-union movement would themselves become wary of how far the government would go in keeping its election pledges. Union representative Bickerton, for example, urged union members to keep pressing the government not to give in to business opposition.⁶⁸ Joe Maloney, vice-president of the Construction Trades Council, representing all the construction unions in Ontario, argued from an opposing position when he disputed the government’s promise to make union locals more independent of their international headquarters.⁶⁹ Whatever the final views of both sides, some amendments to the Ontario Labour Relations Act were passed, taking effect on January 1, 1993, and further ones were to come.

But union dissatisfactions persisted. One manifestation was a vote by the Oshawa local of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) to cut its ties with the NDP. The break was attributed to “right wingers” in the local—skilled craftsmen whose incomes had allowed them to become landlords and supporters of the Reform Party. Participants denied these characterizations but did admit to opposition to the government’s proposals for employment equity. At a time when General Motors was threatening large-scale layoffs, women and minorities were now seen as competitors for scarce jobs.⁷⁰ Initially it appeared that the actions by the Oshawa local reflected conditions specific to its environment.⁷¹ It soon became evident, however, that grievances were not confined to Oshawa and, once the Social Contract Act was final, the national CAW made its move. Although retaining its membership in the provincial NDP, the CAW pledged to work only for the federal NDP in the election then imminent and against all MPPs who had voted for the social contract.⁷² In addition, the national president of the CAW, Buzz Hargrove, resigned from the Premier’s Council on Economic Renewal, as did Sid Ryan, Ontario president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).⁷³

Trade-union opposition to the NDP was galvanized by the social contract negotiations even though, in the private sector, only

the CAW was initially willing to go as far as it did.⁷⁴ Labor remained divided at the November, 1993, convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL). Most adamant were those directly affected by the legislation--members of the CUPE, who had earlier broken their ties with the Ontario NDP.⁷⁵ Some private sector unions walked out of the convention rather than vote for a break with the Rae government, but Julie Davis, secretary-treasurer of the OFL, indicated her intention of resigning as president of the Ontario NDP.⁷⁶ Bob White, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, addressed the convention with conciliatory words for those who disagreed with the vote at the same time that he attacked the social contract as "anti-worker" and "anti-union," thereby confirming that Premier Rae deserved to be criticized.⁷⁷

The NDP is unlike mass-based parties that have large paid staff and a reliance on supporters mainly at elections, and then primarily in their capacity as voters. Instead, like other social democratic parties, the NDP needs an active and committed membership base to spread its message and keep enthusiasm high on virtually a year-round basis. Along with all the trappings of an established political party, the NDP retains some of the features historically associated with social movements, including an emphasis on ideology and on the ideological commitment of its members. This, in turn, makes the party much more prone to internal ideological disputes than is typical of the older parties. The election of an NDP government did not alter these characteristics; it simply increased the opportunities for dispute to arise.⁷⁸

One source of complaint has been the party's left wing. For example, Ehring and Roberts find the origins of the party's current distress to lie in the earlier rejection of its Waffle wing and its continuing efforts to become a middle-of-the-road party. Former Waffle leader and economist Mel Watkins has also reiterated the need to return to a socialist agenda.⁷⁹

Similar arguments about principle, but usually made in more specific policy terms, have come from caucus members. Mel Swart, a long-serving former MPP from Welland and former party president, attacked the Premier for abandoning principles by backtracking on Sunday shopping, privatization of utilities, auto insurance, and by introducing casino gambling.⁸⁰ Auto insurance was also the

issue of contention for MPP Peter Kormos,⁸¹ while MPP Dennis Drainville's repugnance for gambling was the stimulus for him to leave the caucus and sit as an independent.⁸²

As an ideological party, the NDP has also embraced a more centralized structure united by beliefs and organization. But neither ideology nor bureaucracy were able to staunch criticisms across federal jurisdictions when NDP federal MPs in Ottawa surveyed what their counterparts were doing in Queen's Park. The most newsworthy of these internal disputes involved Windsor MP Steven Langdon, whose denunciation of Premier Rae initially led his leader to drop him as the party's financial critic.⁸³ Later, his criticisms seemed less important than the possibility he might be able to retain a seat for the federal NDP party (he did not), and so he was welcomed back.⁸⁴

Equally biting were the criticisms of party workers, including those who were active because of their affiliation with a related organization like a labor union or social action group, or those who devoted themselves to the party's business at the riding level. One example that illustrates a number of these strains comes from the Toronto riding of St. George-St. David when a seat was opened for a by-election. The riding has a sizable gay and lesbian population that is politically active and makes up an influential part of the NDP's riding association. Because the association felt that the government had not lived up to its promises to the gay and lesbian community, it refused to nominate a candidate. The provincial party organization responded by appointing a candidate who, while openly gay, divided the riding because he was not a local choice.⁸⁵

I have presented reactions to the NDP government's policies in simplified form, as coming from friends and enemies. On the whole, the two categories have not been very different. Enemies have not become friends; friends have remained, if not enemies, at least so disgruntled that their support could not be counted on.

IV. FEDERALISM

Probably the most distinctive feature of Canadian political experience is the way it remains permeated by federalism. Responsibilities divided between levels of government, although constitutionally specified, have been continuously reshaped, partly as a result of judicial interpretations, but more significantly because of ongoing social changes that alter their importance--and costliness.

Most telling for the NDP has been the way the federal government under Brian Mulroney redefined its willingness to share costs. In 1989, that is, before the NDP took office in Ontario, the federal government placed a limit on the amount paid to provinces under cost-sharing programs. One of the most brutal cutbacks for provincial coffers in a time of high unemployment became the federal share of unemployment insurance.⁸⁶ Social assistance, health care, and post-secondary education were exactly the programs that the Conservative government felt needed limits and that social democratic governments believe should be bolstered.⁸⁷ In a sense, then, the disputes became partisan. Partisanship was clearly one reason Premier Rae gave for Ontario's situation when he accused the province's Conservative MPs of not adequately representing Ontario's interests.⁸⁸ But the disagreements between Queen's Park and Ottawa were also just as fundamentally clashes over different interpretations of federalism. The federal government was exercising prerogatives through its financial powers that, in the past, had been manifested through the courts to successfully restrain third parties in the provinces from putting into practice policies judged to exceed, if not their formal authority, then at least their legitimacy.

Within the federal system, Ontario has had a special place. It is the site of the federal government in Ottawa and is the most populous and most prosperous province, a status it has enjoyed since Confederation. These factors have made for a strong sense that the identity of Ontario and of Canada are somehow interchangeable.⁸⁹ This most recent economic crisis has struck the industrial heartland of Ontario with unusual ferocity so that its ability even to be a willing "cash cow" is gone. Premier Rae both acknowledged Ontario's past position and rejected its continued feasibility when he said:

Ontario has for decades been the part of Canada that dared not speak its name. The country was based on the premise that everyone else could speak ill of us in Ontario and at the same time this inherently wealthy place would continue to bankroll Canada.⁹⁰

In blaming the federal government for Ontario's woes, Provincial Treasurer Laughren used the example of social assistance, of which the federal government paid about half up until 1990, while less than 29 percent was expected in 1993. At the same time, Ontario taxpayers

contributed about half the expenditure on social assistance in other provinces.⁹¹

Money is a powerful, direct link between provinces and the federal government, and also an indirect one through trade policies. By the time the NDP had formed the provincial government, bitter battles over the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States had already been fought and lost. The NDP had been most unequivocal in its opposition both nationally and in Ontario, as had the provincial government.⁹² A second opportunity for debate over trade came with the introduction of enabling legislation for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992. Once again the NDP took an opposing position, and once more it lost. The Ontario NDP government's position remains that both FTA and NAFTA were mistaken and both have cost Ontario dearly in manufacturing jobs.⁹³ In the case of NAFTA, Premier Rae was outspoken in questioning the value of joining with a country (Mexico) that did not even enjoy the same democratic freedoms.⁹⁴ Yet even complaints from a province with the centrality of Ontario could not overcome ideologically-based partisan divisions.

Constitution-making has been a central preoccupation of Canada for about the past twenty-five years.⁹⁵ The Ontario NDP became an actor in that drama in the period, known as the Canada Round, that followed the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990.⁹⁶ The Round began with broad public consultation and ended with the Charlottetown Accord, a statement of intention about constitutional change that was drafted by politicians and government officials and which became the subject of an advisory referendum in October, 1992. We recall from the first Throne Speech that the NDP government had promised to take an active role in these constitutional negotiations. When Premier Rae arrived at the Charlottetown conference, he was prepared with "a well-defined program for the process. Instead of playing Ontario's traditional honest-broker role, Rae came with his own constitutional priorities--aboriginal self-government and the social charter."⁹⁷ Both issues were critical to the kinds of policies the NDP wished to enact in Ontario, and the conference gave Premier Rae a national forum in which to argue the party's agenda. He was met by an equally determined group of provinces; namely, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New-

foundland. The latter were all committed to Senate reform through a triple-E Senate (elected, equal, and effective). As a result, the dispute became one in which Ontario faced those provinces whose principal agenda was premised on finding ways to limit the power of central Canada, including Ontario as well as Quebec.⁹⁸

According to Russell "both Ottawa and Quebec preferred to let Ontario do the 'dirty work' of seeing how far the other provinces could be pushed to accommodate Quebec,"⁹⁹ and Premier Rae obliged by his willingness to take on the issue.¹⁰⁰ In playing a leadership role, Premier Rae may have intended to further NDP objectives; instead, he was forced to act as the defender of Ontario's interests.

Federalism helped make for constitutional crises and ensured that it would attract politicians to what was the most dramatic game in town. From the outset the NDP intended to be actively involved, and the Premier's subsequent behavior was consistent.¹⁰¹ The government favored the final Accord and, before the referendum, commissioned public opinion polls which initially suggested that a majority agreed with its position. When support slipped, further energy went toward efforts at mobilization, although, in the end, affirmative votes exceeded negative ones by only .2 percentage points.¹⁰² One assessment of this period by a knowledgeable observer whom I interviewed was that Premier Rae had devoted undue resources to the Canada Round of constitution-making. Critical attention was diverted from financial problems, so that, when the size of the deficit was fully acknowledged, the problems represented were appreciably worse than they might have been with earlier intervention.

In a time of economic distress and with a Conservative government in Ottawa ideologically committed to lowered expenditures, Ontario got the bitter taste of federalism's constraints in ways unparalleled since the Great Depression. The election of a federal Liberal government in September, 1993, promised some relief since it had pledged to prime the pump in order to increase employment. But just what, in fact, it will be able to accomplish is not clear. Premier Rae quickly took an anxious measure of Prime Minister Chrétien's proposals for infrastructure spending and for a threatened freeze on transfer payments.¹⁰³ When the federal government went ahead with its cap on transfers for social assistance and education, the NDP government saw no alternative but to cut programs.¹⁰⁴ At the

moment, it appears that a Liberal government in Ottawa will be no more supportive than a Conservative one.

V. CONCLUSION: ASSESSING THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Without yet completing its first term, the NDP government has attempted so much, aroused so much feeling, and confronted so many difficulties that an assessment does not seem premature. Here I ask about the factors that appear to have contributed to its difficulties. Do they stem from being first? Are they the result of a social democratic agenda? Or are they due to weak governing skills? To the extent that all these factors appear to play a part, we will see whether it is possible to assign each a greater or lesser significance. An assessment of past performance also becomes a means for looking into the future. By asking whether the factors that contributed to the NDP's current difficulties could be transformed, we can make some guesses about what the future may hold for the NDP in Ontario as well as for social democracy in North America.

Being First

It is often thought that those who do things first, regardless of the setting or enterprise, are bolder and more inventive than those that follow, and therefore are destined to be successful. This idea is enshrined in the saying that the early bird catches the worm. But like all folk wisdom, an opposing truth is also present. Thorstein Veblen observed how Imperial Germany came to thrive economically *because* it was late to industrialize. It learned from the successes and failures of those countries that had industrialized earlier not only to catch up with them, but even to exceed their output.¹⁰⁵ Alexander Gerschenkron applies this same perspective in attributing the greater success of third world countries that were slow to modernize.¹⁰⁶ The cachet of being first may then turn out to be diminished by the speed with which latecomers catch up and outdo their predecessors.

I introduce the perils of being first as an alternative to the view that it was inexperience that burdened the NDP. White and other academics close to the NDP to whom I have spoken have put lack of experience in the role of the prime culprit preventing the NDP government from getting off to a good start.¹⁰⁷ Clearly many problems followed from their inexperience, as I pointed out earlier under **Getting Started**. But I now argue that we can gain additional

understanding by looking at the way the NDP's victory in Ontario made it unique. Ontario is like no other province in Canada. The experience of governing such a province by a social democratic party had never before occurred in Canada. To find comparable precedents, one would have to look outside of North America to countries whose experiences, population, and institutions are far too different to provide helpful guidelines.

Support for this perspective on uniqueness comes from White's argument about the problems associated with differences in scale.¹⁰⁸ That Ontario's size, wealth, industrial makeup, and population placed it in a category distinct from that of other provinces was, in fact, quickly grasped by some participants. It is relevant that comments like "Manitoba is very interesting, but it's like Guelph," became frequent in meetings of the transition team.¹⁰⁹ Even so, the Rae government gave former Manitoba ministerial staff important positions in its own administration, while even NDP Ontarians came into the government without understanding its complexities. The problem of being the first social democratic government in a highly industrialized economy means that there are no models available. But because a social democratic government is by nature highly interventionist, its commitment to change and its active constituents ensure that it will not proceed slowly or cautiously. What follows are the unanticipated, and often undesirable, consequences of its own actions. Unlike inexperience, which can be overcome by learning, the problems of being first have no solution.

Social Democracy

The view of the CCF as a social movement rather than a traditional political party could be extended to the NDP.¹¹⁰ It is a characterization congenial to some activists like the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, Bob White,¹¹¹ although there are political scientists inside the party who find it objectionable because it implies to them a lack of political astuteness that would disqualify their party for office.¹¹² Yet it continues to have merit for describing, among other things, how the NDP represents a way of life--an unlikely description of the Liberal or Conservative parties. National NDP leader Audrey McLaughlin captured her party's uniqueness when she noted that it represents "an approach that puts people before profit, communities before corporations and the needs of tomorrow's children before the power of today's vested interests."¹¹³

Intrinsic to the social democratic agenda espoused by the NDP is an underlying philosophy that contains a blueprint for remaking society. That is its ideology. Having an ideology gives clarity and direction to a party, but knowing where that ideology will lead once it is put into action is quite a different matter. In order to capture some of the latter ambiguities I focus on how ideology is related to leadership, to policy, and to representation; all pose fundamental dilemmas.

Whitehorn, writing about the national NDP party, argues that an emphasis on the personal qualities of leadership leads to a weakening of ideology.¹¹⁴ This assessment reflects particular experiences at the time of Ed Broadbent's leadership when he and "the academic left" were at odds. But it also speaks more fundamentally to a social democratic preference for leadership that is collective and consensual. That style of decision-making exists in tandem with an emphasis on centralized organization. It is from these two contradictory preferences that the first set of dilemmas arise.

The requirements of holding office, let alone governing, shape the way leaders behave. A parliamentary system of government is built on individual leaders who speak for their party, who can patch over differences within their caucus, and who bear responsibility for what is done in the party's name. These characteristics are accentuated through modern ways of campaigning for office which require that parliamentary leaders also be popular ones. To reconcile these features with governing, collective decision-making was initially described as the rule within the Ontario NDP.¹¹⁵ At the same time White noted how power was centralized in the Premier's office because of uncertainty about many of the ministerial appointees.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, Premier Rae has been the focus of blame for those dissatisfied with government actions, although they were unsuccessful in convincing the party's provincial council to agree to an early review of his leadership. In other words, party members, both for and against, were acknowledging the centrality of their leader.¹¹⁷ At the council meeting, it was observed that "[t]he Rae loyalists were in a feisty (*sic*) mood and clearly wouldn't stand for any criticism of their leader on this day."¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, journalists interpret the Premier's remarks and those of senior public servants as pointing to a strong leader, one whose mark is on every important issue.¹¹⁹ For those on the left who dislike the policy positions taken by the NDP, the fault

lies in the Premier's abandonment of ideology. To those on the right, the problem lies in his refusal to abandon ideology.

Clearly, ideology plays a role in Premier Rae's leadership, but what remains disputable is whether it does so in ways compatible with social democratic beliefs about how the ideal leader should behave. We could even debate whether the NDP's emphasis on strong central government could be achieved without strong leadership. In any case, the signs are that the current government remains committed to centralized authority. In some sense, exercising power in a province rather than nationally is the real source of incompatibility between the NDP's ideology and leadership. The need for central authority to carry out social democratic goals was reflected in the role Premier Rae played in the constitutional negotiations, where his arguments for a strong central Canada reflected traditional Ontario thinking that the province, or at least Ontario and Quebec, were synonymous with Canada. Floyd Laughren's opposition to the Meech Lake Accord on the grounds that it would weaken the central government is an even stronger example of this perspective.¹²⁰

The relations between ideology and policy making are just as complex. For labor activists, intentions to reduce the deficit and cut back salaries of public service workers sound like a C/conservative agenda.¹²¹ Buzz Hargrove, president of the CAW, is one of the party's ideological critics who points to specific programs that should have been adopted to "challenge the power of capital," including public auto insurance (Hargrove records his own regret at not standing up for that measure), reduced tuition for university students, and the use of public moneys to buy Canadian products and services.¹²² Among academic critics, Chorney sees the deficit as a political issue, not primarily an economic one. As such, the deficit should not be used as an impediment to government spending.¹²³ The argument that deficit reduction is good because it "is taking the money out of the hands of foreign tycoons and money managers--Ontario lenders--who drive expensive cars and vote Republican" would only strike them as perverse.¹²⁴ Proposals by NDP theorists in general are viewed by critics as unusable because they fail to consider "operable strategies" that a government could, in fact, carry out.¹²⁵

The reality of governing in a capitalist economy subjects social democratic policy proposals to a difficult test: can they be enacted as long as the governing party is enmeshed in a larger environment, made up of other governments (already discussed from the perspec-

tive of federalism) and of organized interests like international capitalists and stock markets? Because of the way modern government is financed, a governing party must borrow capital on the local or international market, and any negative reaction from those markets is likely to increase public indebtedness. Shortly after taking office, Premier Rae and Treasurer Laughlin travelled to New York to reassure Wall Street that "We're Not Wacko."¹²⁶ Despite the magnitude of its debt, Ontario has managed to retain a high bond rating. Although Moody downgraded Ontario's credit rating from Aaa (the highest) to Aa2 (the middle of the next level) in May, 1991, it reports favorably on the government's efforts to control debt, particularly as a result of the Social Contract Act.¹²⁷ But the reduction in rating hurt, just as did word that Dominion Bond Rating Service threatened to downgrade all ten provinces, especially since it is estimated that 70 percent of Ontario's debt is sold to foreigners.¹²⁸

Perhaps most troublesome of all is the relation between ideology and the representation of interests. Those who argue from the perspective of a changed world economy see social democratic parties' problems rooted in their nature as an outdated phase of industrial capitalism. Consequently, they say that important contemporary issues cannot be solved through traditional policies of social welfare and taxation or those based on accommodating a shrinking working class.¹²⁹ The acquisition of support from new social movements made up of women, minorities, and environmentalists still does not offer much of a solution. According to McCallum

[t]he very nature of the NDP is to be a coalition of a small number of special interest groups. So long as it remains true to its nature, it functions like a 'zero-sum game.' What one interest group yields is taken up by another special interest group. There is no sense within the NDP of policy for the country as a whole, independent of special interest groups allied to the party.¹³⁰

The allegation that the NDP must be a party of special interests in order to remain true to its ideological underpinnings is supported by others in the party. Dave Gotthilf, a pollster for the NDP, observes that

[t]here's been a perception in the NDP that somehow electoral success would come by moving to the centre, by trying to appear moderate and respectable and middle class. I've tried to persuade my NDP clients across the country that they're better off positioning themselves as viscerally populist, very much talking the language of class. Language like 'Make the rich pay' plays very well with NDP constituencies, particularly since there has been a very dramatic shift in the electorate's own perceptions. Middle-class voters who might historically have identified their own economic self-interest with people who were ahead of them started to see that in the past ten years they'd been screwed.¹³¹

In fact, the 1990 NDP campaign followed this advice with concentrated attacks on the Liberal government. There were many promises made but little emphasis on how they would be accomplished. Dick Proctor, a leading figure in the 1990 campaign, admitted that "[t]here was no expectation that Bob would be premier so we tried to be all things to all people."¹³²

As I have already pointed out, the NDP's relations with organized labor have been especially troubled. Gerald Caplan, former national secretary of the NDP, has tried to put the best face on it by arguing, on the one hand, that trade unions have never controlled the party, and, on the other, that when they criticize the party they are acting in the interests of their members.¹³³ Deborah Bourque, a vice president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, while acknowledging that many on the left want to leave the NDP, emphasizes the larger purpose of social change to be realized through building a movement that can ensure that rank-and-file members can influence electoral politics.¹³⁴ Clearly, there is a limit to how far disputes can go before they sever the links between the NDP and organized labor. Ross McClellan, policy advisor to Premier Rae, stated the inevitable: "Buzz Hargrove can jump up and down all he wants, but if the labor movement lets the party go out of its hand, it will be repeating the mistake of the left in the United States. At the end of the day, you get nothing."¹³⁵

But what about the party itself? It cannot abandon its close relations with labor or with other, newer social movements without

losing core supporters who endorse its ideology. But it will always find it difficult to govern whenever it allows this core to define its priorities and its day-to-day policies. It is in this sense that social democracy as an ideology poses irreconcilable dilemmas. Faced with the demands of governing through acknowledged leaders who legislate and administer a policy agenda that serves all who live under their jurisdiction, regardless of partisanship, it is inevitable that ideology will be compromised. These tensions were illustrated when the government recently forgave old loans to Chrysler Canada Ltd. in order to ensure the operation of a third shift. The government's policy, made at the same time that Chrysler Canada announced record profits, offended the union leadership, which felt the loan was unnecessary.¹³⁶ The position of activist supporters of social democracy is that "newly elected NDP governments will always have to make their peace with capital. What matters is the terms of the peace--to what extent the NDP sacrifices the needs of its supporters in order to maintain business confidence."¹³⁷ Some compromises, then, raise the danger that the NDP, while holding office, may no longer be recognized as a party of social democracy.

Governing Skills

Finally, we can ask: are there skills in governing that can be separated from any programmatic agenda? We look for these in exemplary experiences and avoidable gaffes that might be useful guidelines for any party taking office. In general, governing skills can be demonstrated through efficiency in administration and efficacy in relation to issues.

An efficient administration was a stated goal for the new NDP government from the outset. Efforts in this direction, some of which were referred to earlier, included centralized authority in the Office of the Premier, the creation of strong cabinet committees, and activation of the Treasury Board.¹³⁸ Yet Loreto, who makes a quite sympathetic judgment about administrative organization, still asks "whether substantial reforms should have been undertaken at the outset of the government's first term."¹³⁹ He predicted that the already prominent fiscal crisis would overwhelm the capacity of the government to respond to the demands that changes would generate, particularly those that required stakeholder consultation and workforce impact.¹⁴⁰ One result of this predictable administrative overload is direct intervention by Premier Rae in departmental business. His

excuse is that "if you ever want to get anything done, and you ever actually want to try to turn the aircraft carrier [a telling description of the public bureaucracy] half a millimeter to the left or to the right, you sometimes have to drive it."¹⁴¹

As part of the government's administrative change, there was also an incorporation of the NDP's emphasis on a consensual style of decision-making, a requirement that strains whatever benefits might come from centralization. White reveals that "in a remarkable departure from past Ontario experience, in which the Premier's Office and the Cabinet Office put together the Speech from the Throne, every item incorporated into the November [1990] Throne Speech was thrashed out either in full cabinet or in the Policy and Priorities Committee."¹⁴² The achievement of consensus becomes a time-consuming and unwieldy process that is as likely to lead to a compromised solution as to one consistent with the principles that generated a policy. That is, holding to a social democratic ideology does not guarantee either agreement among party officeholders or consistency in policy decisions. The irony is that ideology carries with it enough symbolic baggage so that disputes about the proper course of action that remains truest to the party's ideals will arise with disturbing regularity.¹⁴³ The one recourse to secure consensus under these circumstances is through coercive means, a course of action that runs counter to social democratic ideology itself.

Several subsequent attempts have been made to improve the central administration, including a revamping of the Premier's Office. That office has suffered from losing the political skills of David Agnew when he departed to become secretary of the cabinet and from the fallout associated with John Piper's resignation as communications director for improperly leaking police records to the press.¹⁴⁴ More drastic was Premier Rae's effort to give a "clear message to the public that we want government to work more efficiently" by downsizing ministries.¹⁴⁵ The shift from 28 to 20 ministries and from 25 ministers to an inner cabinet of 20 represented a consolidation of separate activities relating to finance, education, and municipal affairs, and an increase of responsibilities for Ministers Laughren in finance, Cook in education, and Lankin in economic development and trade. The effect of these changes is still to be seen.

One further administrative problem, encountered from the outset, concerned relations with the public bureaucracy. Party functionaries and officeholders alike worried that governing accord-

ing to an NDP agenda would be compromised by the actions of bureaucrats.¹⁴⁶ Mutual suspicions contributed to early administrative inefficiencies. Meanwhile, moves to replace top ministry officials with loyal NDPers, although helping to make the public service more smoothly responsive to governmental directives, have also led to attacks on the government, most hyperbolically by opposition politicians. For example, to Liberal Leader Lyn McLeod these moves represent "the most blatant, the most widespread politicization of the Ontario civil service that we have ever seen."¹⁴⁷

When I began this discussion of governing skills, I suggested that one sign would be "efficacy in relation to issues." This was a rather oblique way to refer to an ability to produce desired results without specifying the content of the issues involved. That is, I want to introduce general characteristics of issues that underlie policy making. One example that I commented on in the section on **Promises, Promises** was the sheer number of issues that the government pledged to confront. An insider like White was one who also observed that the government had taken on too many issues.¹⁴⁸ A rationale given for this cafeteria list of promises was their initial inclusion in the campaign when there was little expectation of becoming the government. Then, when the Throne Speech was written by following a model of consensus, there was relatively little that could be dropped without antagonizing some cabinet member or the interest groups they represented.

The alternative, to find a small number of issues on which to concentrate, giving them priority in time, has an intrinsic attractiveness. This is often not possible, however, as circumstances thrust issues on to the agenda. For the NDP government, in fact, it was not only the jammed program that was a problem but the emergence of a single issue, the financial crisis, that brought it greatest trouble. Swift cites a one-liner to the effect that "taking over at Queen's Park was like being a teenager who got the keys to the family car only to find it was an Edsel."¹⁴⁹ In the latter part of the current session, the government is trying to follow a more modest legislative agenda.¹⁵⁰ If this becomes a successful tactic, it may give the government the kind of breathing spell it needs.

Once the economy became the most pressing issue, the government looked for solutions that eventually led it to propose a social contract. Constituents, especially those making up core NDP supporters, had not been prepared for the severity of the financial crisis

or for the steps that the government eventually felt were necessary to deal with it. Could the subsequent turmoil have been avoided? Looking at examples of social contracts in Britain, Germany, Australia, Finland, Norway, and Ireland, most appear to have failed, although Australians may have been the most successful. Simon Wilson, an economic policy adviser with the Trades-Union Congress in London, England, attributes the relative success of the Australian experience to clarity in objectives, mutual benefits, and a clear time frame.¹⁵¹ From the perspective of political philosophy, Frank Cunningham asks how the premier's social contract measures up. At the time he wrote, he acknowledged that while strong critics would give the premier an "F," he was inclined to assign a "C." As a professor, he offers guidance to achieve an "A" grade: strive for freely-given consent, take opposition proposals seriously, and educate voters about alternatives that they could then choose in an election.¹⁵² My own inclination has been to see the Social Contract Act as at least a partial success, though it was probably bought at a very high price.

Finally, there are issues that could be avoided. They are ones that use up scarce resources without providing any benefits. It is here that I would place the excessive attention to the constitutional debates. The events were certainly critical for Ontario but they did not require the investment they received, nor was there any commensurate pay off.

If one agrees that there are governing skills, it is difficult to say at this point that the NDP as a government has demonstrated high levels of either efficiency or efficacy. Yet, coupled with the problems associated with being first, I am willing to admit that only hindsight makes us wise. Now we may feel secure in arguing that the government could have behaved differently; it was not necessarily that clear at the time.

Lessons From the Past

If the amount of coverage required by a topic is a criterion of its importance, then social democracy itself would appear to be the most serious obstacle affecting the success of the NDP government. I did not begin expecting that social democracy would play this role, but I have been persuaded by the sheer amount of evidence accumulated. From the review in this section as well as from preceding discussions of particular policies and of reactions from supporters and oppo-

nents, it seems that the weakness of a social democratic agenda lies at least as much in the disappointments it brings to supporters as in the consequences of outright opposition. Since the future of the NDP, like that of any social democratic party, depends primarily on its ability to mobilize its natural constituencies, their disillusionment with the party in office has serious implications for its future.

A year after the NDP took office, critics from the social democratic left were already taking issue with "the attitude that the Left has nowhere else to go politically."¹⁵³ Speaking on their behalf, Langille cautioned the government to "remember Saskatchewan," where, in the 1982 election, the incumbent NDP government under Alan Blakeney was defeated because "the social movements campaigned only for their own issues." He reminded it of the energy brought by "left-wing activists and intellectuals" and warned that they could become a "negative influence" if they "join the chorus of media critics who deplore the seeming ineptitude of the NDP government."¹⁵⁴ Underlying these words is the argument that social democracy and the NDP are not synonymous. Even though left-wing critics admit that things could be worse if the NDP were out of office, they see one advantage: "if the old line parties were in power it would be easier to mobilize the grassroots membership."¹⁵⁵

Although I believe that these kinds of criticism from the left are quite mistaken, in the sense that social democracy as a movement for change would be worse off without the NDP, their tenor has important implications. For the NDP, damned from all sides no matter what the course of action, it suggests that there is no solution in social democratic ideals alone.

One alternative might be for the NDP to focus on grievances, to mobilize not only its most committed supporters, but also its ideological soulmates on the left as well as a broader spectrum of the electorate. It would appear to be easy to select suitable grievances when we hear Canadians in general complain that there are not enough services from government, but that they are already over-taxed, while, in any case, government is inefficient. Yet finding a focus for these grievances is difficult. If the rich are blamed for major ills, one quickly exhausts the small number of identifiably wealthy individuals and moves to a larger stratum of voters who feel that they are not really rich but have the same grievances as everyone else. If large corporations are blamed, this soon makes many people, includ-

ing trade unionists, uneasy because it is these same corporations that are the major employers. And since corporations are often highly mobile, while there is little taste for large-scale nationalization of industries even in the NDP, this too seems a limited strategy. The United States remains a convenient scapegoat, but Ontario's dependence on it for trade and financial markets constrains its utility.

Since the public has already provided a ready-made issue by the way it blames government, there may be some way that the NDP could benefit from this through the pursuit of good government. Although it may be too late to choose this path during its first term, the possibilities were present at the outset of the NDP's victory as I suggested in the discussion of **Being First** and of **Governing Skills**. But even if it is now precluded in Ontario, it is a path that could be available to other social democratic parties. Honest and efficient government is a promise and an arena for action that can cut across ideological barriers and still be consistent with social democratic ideals. Desmond Morton's poignant assessment is that "more than any other party in Canada, the New Democrats want to make things better for ordinary, powerless Canadians. That gives the party its durable charm. The party's misfortune is to know its noble goals better than it knows how to reach them."¹⁵⁶ The cultivation of governing skills may make the difference.

There is no doubt that the NDP's greatest misfortune was to be elected in a time of economic recession. If the economy expands in the near future, the party may be able to improve its prospects. Other avenues for raising its standing with the electorate are less apparent.

NOTES

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