

PERSPECTIVE

By Lawrence Kootnikoff

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1986, A giant of Canadian socialism died a quiet death in his home in Ottawa, after a long battle with cancer.

T.C. (Tommy) Douglas did not have the impact that Olof Palme and other European social democratic leaders had on the world scene, but this fiery, diminutive (5'5"), Baptist preacher is, perhaps, a more significant figure for North American socialists. He formed the first socialist government on the continent, in the province of Saskatchewan, in 1944, and later became the first national leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) of Canada.

Socially, culturally and politically, Canada has much in common with the United States. However, for more than fifty years a democratic socialist party has been government or official opposition in four of ten Canadian provinces and one territory, and has played an important role in national politics.

How is it that the NDP and its predecessor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), have managed to form government and become an accepted part of Canadian society, while across the border similar American attempts have withered and died?

To answer this question completely would require a book (several have been written), but much of the answer lies in the style, character, and contributions of Tommy Douglas.

Born in Falkirk, Scotland, in 1904, Douglas and his family came to Canada in 1910 and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1924 he decided to enter the Baptist ministry, and upon graduation from Brandon College in 1930 was posted to a church in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

Religion played no small part in the formation of Douglas' socialism. Through his studies he had been exposed to the social gospel, which was gaining adherents both in Canada and the United States. The social gospel held that Christianity was a social religion, and that to save a person you had to save them body and soul, in this world as well as the next. "Many fine Christian people," Douglas later said, "have taken the position that they should divorce themselves from the struggles and problems of society and concentrate upon their own spiritual growth and development. They forget that while the Kingdom of God means a new relationship between God and man, it also means a new relationship between man and his fellow man." Douglas came to look on socialism as no more than "applied Christianity." The social gospel was and is one of the most important strains of Canadian socialism, and as Clement Atlee said of the British Labour Party, it owes "more to Methodism than to Marx."

As the Great Depression gathered force in rural Saskatchewan, the young minister became active in relief work. He became increasingly committed to political action and in 1933 participated in the founding convention of the CCF in Regina, the provincial capital. In the 1935 federal election he ran for the constituency of Weyburn as the CCF candidate and won.

Social gospel

The pulpit has proved a good training ground for more than one politically inclined church minister, and this young MP was no exception. In a country noted for its orators, Douglas was one of the best. Today, in the age of the 30-second TV clip and packaged personalities, we forget what an important weapon the spoken word was for the politician of the pre-television age. As one of his biographers, Dale Lovick, puts it, "In the absence of television and movie theaters politics was

Tommy Douglas: NDP founder

a major source of entertainment. A political meeting, a public debate or a radio broadcast was a community event." Douglas thrived in this environment, and his mastery of it explains much of his success. His oratory and debating ability could sway the uncommitted and move and inspire the faithful. "Surely if we can produce in such abundance in order to destroy our enemies," he told an audience in 1943, "we can produce in equal abundance to provide food, clothing and shelter for our children. If we can keep people employed for the purpose of destroying human life, surely we can keep them employed for the purpose of enriching and enhancing human life."

Political leader

He served as a member of Parliament until 1944, when he returned to Saskatchewan to lead the provincial CCF to a stunning landslide victory, capturing 47 of 52 seats in the legislature. During the 17 years of Douglas-CCF government, Saskatchewan became known as the "social laboratory of North America."

Premier Douglas and the new government made medical, hospital and dental services free for all senior citizens and took over the cost of treatment for cancer, tuberculosis, mental illness and venereal diseases. In 1947 the CCF implemented the first universal hospitalization plan in Canada and in 1961 socialized all health care (the rest of Canada followed in 1969). The Trade Union Act, which made collective bargaining mandatory, was called by the UAW's Walter Reuther "the most progressive piece of legislation on the North American continent." Standards were established for workers' compensation, minimum wage levels and mandatory holidays. Co-operatives were encouraged, and rural electrification and development and publicly-run auto insurance were brought about by new "crown" (publicly owned) corporations. Sweeping education reforms were also carried out.

When in 1961 the decision was taken to bolster the sagging fortunes of the federal CCF by forming a new party in alliance with the Canadian Labour Congress, Premier Douglas seemed the natural choice for its leader. The New Democratic Party was trying to broaden its base with an updated, slightly watered down socialism, and Douglas had proven leadership abilities and had shown that he could put socialist ideas across in a simple, easily understood and non-threatening way.

The NDP's fortunes in the '60s disappointed many. Despite high hopes, the new party has not been able to break out of third place on a national level, and Douglas himself suffered personal defeat twice in his own constituency. During the turbulent '60s the party, representing the "old left" of working-class social democrats, seemed unable to come to terms with the "new left" of students, youth and intellectuals.

Historically the CCF/NDP has faced the dilemma of trying to decide whether it is a social movement or an electoral party trying to win office. This, combined with left-right struggles and east-west disputes, caused much division within the party, yet Douglas always remained a unifying force. He was very much an old-fashioned grassroots politician, with a phenomenal memory for names and faces. With the NDP becoming more of a "party" concerned with electoral success, Douglas was still the prairie populist, whose gentle humor, self-deprecating wit, easy-going

smiling style and brilliant oratory won him the respect of his opponents and the adoration of his followers.

Tommy Douglas in many ways was democratic socialism in Canada. How important was his personal contribution?



The Democrat

T.C. Douglas campaigning for office

Canada's leading socialist, Douglas led and inspired his party.

Consider the facts: Douglas headed the first socialist government in North America. When he stepped down as leader that government was defeated. During his 10 years as a federal leader of the NDP his leadership was never seriously questioned, and by the time he stepped down in 1971 the party was firmly established on the national scene, whereas 10 years before many had wondered whether a party of the democratic left was viable in Canada.

While failing in his dream of forming a federal government and leading the NDP beyond third-party status, Douglas probably had more of an impact on national policy than most prime ministers. Many of the pioneering measures first adopted under his government in Saskatchewan later found their way across Canada, and the national system of universal Medicare will remain his enduring legacy.

"I learned long ago," he once said, "that you had to decide whether you were going to stand with the sheep, or with the fellow who was shearing them." This simple line could sum up Douglas' socialism. While more doctrinaire members of the Canadian left have criticized it as too simplistic and theoretically unsound, it should be understood that Douglas was never a theorist. He saw it as his role to define and popularize the party's message in terms average Canadians could understand.

Could Douglas, or someone like him, have succeeded in the United States? Perhaps. Certainly American socialists have much to learn from their Canadian counterparts. Douglas resembles many populist and non-socialist figures in American history. His socialism was pluralist and non-sectarian, something that American socialism must be if it is to succeed. Douglas and the CCF/NDP built a broad coalition of progressives and socialists in Canada, and progressives and socialists in the U.S. could look farther afield and find less relevant examples to emulate.

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ASHES AND DIAMONDS

By Alexander Cockburn

The total obliteration of the war by information, propaganda, commentaries, with camera-men in the first tanks and war reporters dying heroic deaths, the mish-mash of enlightened manipulation of public opinion and oblivious activity: all this is another expression for the withering of experience, the vacuum between men and their fate, in which their real fate lies. It is as if the reified, hardened, plaster-cast of events takes the place of events themselves. Men are reduced to walk-on parts in a monster documentary film that has no spectators, since the least of them has his bit to do on the screen.

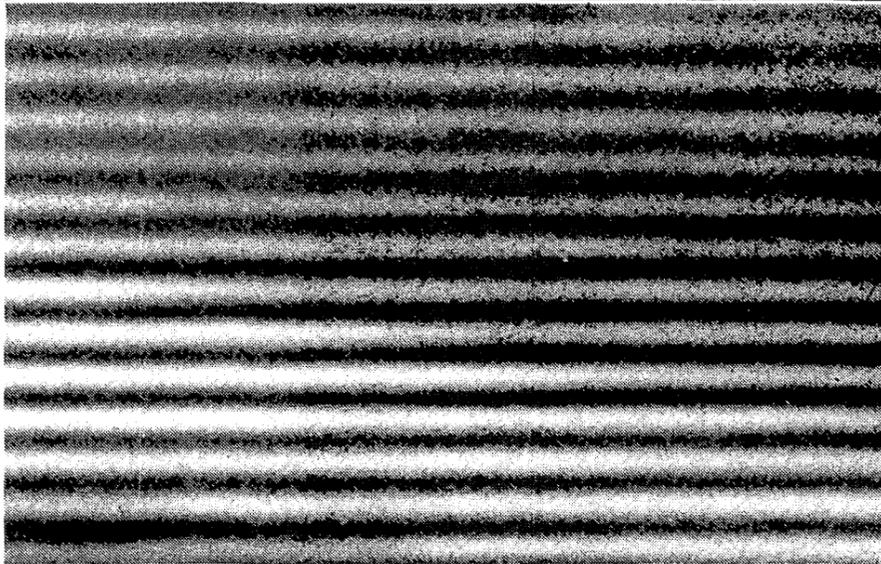
This was Theodor Adorno, writing in *Minima Moralia* about the phony war in 1939, but it seems as good a quotation as any to put at the top of a new column about the monster documentary film, played out on television and in the national press, from which none of us can escape.

Haiti, before and after

Remember Haiti, which gave way in the headlines to the Philippines, which gave way to Nicaragua, which gave way to Libya, which gave way to Chernobyl and what the types from the Atomic Energy Forum like to call a "nuclear event." Baby Doc fled, the people danced in the streets and pundits heaped praise on President Reagan for his masterly supervision of the shift to freedom in that Caribbean nation.

After a tactful pause, during which the network news teams headed for home, the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince announced on March 27 that it was supplying \$384,000 worth of riot-control equipment to the new government, to "give the Haitian army the ability to respond to internal security emergencies without having to resort to the use of clubs or infantry weapons," thus demonstrating—though no fresh proofs are needed—the humane disposition of the Reagan administration, which knew, as we shall shortly see, that heavy weapons needed to quell uppity Haitians were sent in illegally from the U.S. under the supervision of the CIA 15 years ago.

Since Haiti was now officially "free," U.S. journalists and television crews began to give the country a wide berth, just as they mostly had when it was officially a "dungeon." Journalists will seek any excuse not to go to a country. "It's the one place where Reagan managed to do the right thing," a network correspondent remarked to me with satisfaction about El Salvador, seeking to explain why he had not bothered to go there for several months. When I pointed out that the killer gangs otherwise known as the Salvadoran armed forces are rampaging through the countryside destroy-



ing all in their path, that there is great labor militancy, and that Duarte is fast losing support of his own political base, the correspondent said placidly that he was not aware of such developments, but that El Salvador seemed to be "over," so far as exciting and career-enhancing journalism was concerned.

But amazingly, the news blackout on Haiti was not impenetrable. A team from the CBS documentary show *57th Street* found its way there and on April 30 aired an excellent bit of reporting, produced by my sister-in-law Leslie Cockburn with Jane Wallace. Speaking with uncommon frankness was Butch Ashton, a U.S. businessman who made millions under Duvalier on his own account and also for U.S. firms—such as TRW and GTE—that hired him for his connections and local know-how. Having stated flatly that the Tontons Macoutes were first trained by U.S. Marines in 1961 and 1962, Ashton was confronted with the following profile of his business methods, ripely symbolic of U.S. corporate activity in the region: starting in 1975 Ashton leased land from peasants on which to grow limes for export to the U.S. When the leases expired last year and peasants asked for higher rents, Tontons Macoutes took them off to prison and tortured them until they saw the error of their ways. So, Jane Wallace asked him, did he have Tontons Macoutes on his payroll? Ashton replied with defiant ambiguity, "Never. There have been people...the mayor of the area, who happened to be a Tontons Macoute and is a leader of the area, was, in fact, on—not on the payroll, but he was on a consultant basis for security in the fields...."

But now of course the Tontons are an ancient nightmare (even though most of the hardcore 20,000 still have their weapons and none has been placed on trial), so who is keeping order in the new Haiti? To whom are those riot-control weapons going? Answer: the shock troops known as the Leopards, who were trained by James Byers

and his Miami-based firm Aerotrade, which took the job in 1971 during the U.S. ban on direct military assistance to Haiti. Byers told *57th Street* that the CIA knew all about his mission and supervised contracts for the heavy arms—.30 cal and .50 cal machine guns, 20mm rapid fire cannons—imported into Haiti at the time. "What is happening now," he said, "is that the Leopards...are taking the place of the Tontons Macoutes." The regime hasn't changed, said Honorate of the Haitian Center for Human Rights, "only Duvalier is absent." And the tactics of brutality and intimidation? "I think they are going to worsen."

Nuclear partners

I don't know why people are surprised at the Soviet Union's reluctance to give details of the disaster at Chernobyl. Stalin took 10 days to acknowledge the German invasion in 1941. The Soviets will presumably be grateful to the U.S. networks for their remarkable tact in keeping off the air as far as was possible active and articulate opponents of nuclear power. No one seemed very keen either to broadcast unwelcome calculations of the consequences upon Chernobyl and kindred communities of just one nuclear missile.

Perfect executioners

For every diamond there's a hill of ashes. "If—repeat, if—President Reagan should order another attack on Libya," said Dan Rather excitedly on April 22, "how would it compare with last week's raid?" CBS's "Defense" correspondent David Martin then gave a rapt commercial for a new object of joy and defense appropriations, courtesy of General Dynamics, in the non-nuclear Land Attack Tomahawk missile, homing in on the taxpayer at \$3 million per warhead. "Unveiling a weapon which several defense officials say 'has obvious applications to a Libyan scenario,' the Pentagon today released pictures of a submarine-launched Tomahawk cruise missile destroying an aircraft parked 400 miles away. The unmanned cruise missile arrived directly overhead and detonates with split-second timing." While Martin was talking, CBS viewers were blessed with a Defense Department film clip that, unsurprisingly, showed a missile exploding over a plane with split-second timing. That's what Defense Department film clips are for, though why CBS should use them is another question.

This item contained, in compact 60-second form, almost everything that is wrong with network news: grovelling complicity with the Reagan administration, flackery for the Pentagon, insensate ignorance. The Tomahawk is guided in its ultimate stage by "terrain correlation," which matches that landscape ahead of the missile with a stored map inside it, but when the landscape is flat and featureless like, say, Libya, there is insufficient data for matching and the missile goes astray. Final targeting is achieved by DSMAC, or digital scene matching. The missile takes a

TV picture of the designated target area that is then laid over a pre-stored photograph; when the two match, the warhead explodes. The trouble with this system, highly reminiscent of both network reporting and the workings of Ronald Reagan's brain, is that the slightest change in the landscape after the pre-stored photograph has been taken—smoke, a shift in plane positions on a tarmac, etc.—and the Tomahawk missile goes astray and explodes elsewhere with results unfortunate for anyone in the vicinity. In other words, the weapon is a dog, and thus highly esteemed by peace-loving military Keynesians who prefer expensive weapons that don't work. Not so great if you happen to be Khadafy's daughter, but who ever made an omelette without breaking eggs.

And what about the bombing raids on Tripoli and Benghazi, hailed by the Pentagon and its network accomplices as virtually perfect in execution, barring unfortunate and unforeseen impacts on civilian neighborhoods, small children, old people, animals and kindred North African impedimenta? From the military point of view (as from the political), the raid was a disaster. Of 24 F-111s leaving Britain, 13 actually managed to enter the air space over Tripoli and of these only eight managed to release their bombs, and these 90 bombs came close to only two out of the five targets. So much for the Air Force. The U.S. Navy, with two aircraft carriers carrying 90 planes each, managed to bring somewhere between 12 and 16 A-6s over the area, most of whose bombs landed nearly two miles from their targets. The rest of their 180 planes were either defending their aircraft carriers or shooting at the entirely futile SAM-5 missile sites, thus proving the truth of the proposition that an aircraft carrier, at \$5 billion (\$20 billion if you include the escorting flotilla) exists very expensively to defend itself.

This is the kind of data that David Martin and his colleagues do not seem too interested in, preferring as they do to run exciting Defense Department footage of bombs plunging through the night sky toward Khadafy's family.

Local shell game

If there's one outfit more craven than network news, it's local news. At noon, a couple of days after the Libyan bombing, about 100 students at the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan held a demonstration to protest the raid. The local NBC affiliate showed up and did interviews with the participants who explained that they did not particularly like Khadafy, but did not like reprisal bombing either. The TV team was then approached by two conservative students who asked whether they could "give the other side of the story." The NBC affiliate then interviewed these two lengthily. The five o'clock news had the main demonstrators and the two conservatives. By six o'clock, the main demonstration had disappeared, except as a crowd background to an interview with the conservatives, with the anchorman announcing that protesters at Ann Arbor had demonstrated against the bombing of Libya, "but not Khadafy's terrorism." By 11 p.m. the entire story had disappeared, to be replaced by a submissive interview with a professor on the same campus called Raymond Tanter, who used to be on Reagan's National Security Council.

But the story had a sequel. When the furious organizers of the demonstration called up to complain about their misrepresentation as catspaws of Khadafy, the TV people were arrogant, as all journalists are unless in the presence of people they deem to be more powerful than themselves. But the organizers persisted and finally won an on-air retraction. Moral: don't take the news lying down. ■

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