

## Review Essay

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*New Directions in Saskatchewan Public Policy.*

Regina, Canada: CPRC Press, University of Regina, 2011

David McGrane

*Remaining Loyal: Social Democracy in Quebec and Saskatchewan*

Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Eleanor D. Glor

David McGrane is an associate professor of political studies at St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Canada. Over the course of three years, he published two books on Saskatchewan and Quebec (Canadian provinces) social democratic politics in the (McGrane, 2011, 2014), a considerable accomplishment. This research on Saskatchewan and Quebec social democratic governments is important to students of public sector innovation because these provinces have often been the most innovative in Canada (see also, for example, Glor, 1997, 2002 in which I identify 159 innovations of the Saskatchewan government of 1971-82). This suggest ideology may be important to innovation.

McGrane's *Remaining Loyal: Social Democracy in Quebec and Saskatchewan* examines the ideology of social democratic parties and governments in Quebec and Saskatchewan. He argues (1) that the Saskatchewan Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and its successor, the New Democratic Party were and remain social democratic parties, and that the Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN) from 1963 and the Parti Québécois (PQ) from 1968 in Quebec were and are social democratic parties (page 64), (2) that the "third way" successors to the "traditional" social democratic parties in Quebec and Saskatchewan are social democratic parties; and (3) that while Quebec's political culture may not be consistently social democratic, Saskatchewan's political culture has been, although this may be in the process of changing (page 246). In making these assertions, McGrane takes on several of the major controversies in Canadian and social democratic politics in Canada and internationally.

McGrane's claims hinge on his **definition of social democracy**. He distinguishes between the Fabian theory and that of Eduard Bernstein, a German who spent time with the Fabians in the United Kingdom. His *first distinction* is between the Fabians' and Bernstein's definitions of social democracy. The key to this difference is his understanding of the Fabians' sense of evolution in history as being inevitable, gradual and irreversible and Bernstein's as not being inevitable, nor as having a fixed, final goal. McGrane adopts the latter perspective—social democracy is "the implementation of a certain set of principles by a group of determined reformers whose specific goals vary by time and place" (McGrane, 2014: 19)—and concludes

“Social democracy should not be seen as a fixed set of policies then, but rather a set of values” (p. 206).<sup>1</sup>

McGrane makes a *second distinction* between the Fabians and Bernstein, namely, their approach to democracy and rights. The Fabians favour democracy because it is a mechanism to achieve socialist reforms, but Bernstein understands democracy as both means and end: it is the means to achieve socialism and it is the form in which socialism will be achieved. Bernstein’s idea of democracy includes justice, defined as equality of rights including minority rights, and limits on the rule of the majority. He sees social democracy as the heir to liberalism but as adopting a higher ideal, because it guarantees civil, social and economic democracy.

Unlike in Europe, in Canada affiliation with the labour movement was not very important (pages 29-30), nor was class politics in the emergence of social democracy in Saskatchewan and Quebec. In fact, small farmers were a much more important political constituency in Saskatchewan. Even more important was the development of social movements that provided an acceptable context and legitimacy for government intervention in the economy after World War II. The economy, political institutions, and political agents were also important (page 165).<sup>2</sup>

McGrane adopts Bernstein’s sense of social democracy. This is a crucial point in his argument, because, although he sees both the Fabians and Bernstein as forming the foundation of traditional social democracy in the twentieth century, he also sees it being modified, as most clearly laid out by Crosland (1956). According to the Fabian definition, third way governments are not social democratic, but according to Bernstein’s and Crosland’s definitions, they are.

Using Bernstein’s and Crosland’s definitions, the CCF and NDP in Saskatchewan were undeniably social democratic. The most controversial aspect of McGrane’s **first claim**, that the CCF, NDP, RIN and PQ were and are social democratic is his assertion that the PQ and its predecessor, the RIN, were and are social democratic parties. The first reformist party in Quebec was the revamped Lesage Liberal Party of Quebec of the 1960s, which introduced the “Quiet Revolution”. Most of its reforms, such as public education, had already been introduced in other Canadian provinces, however, so the government was a laggard catching up rather than an innovator in the Canadian context. The Lesage era reforms were introduced by a reformist minority of cabinet ministers and public servants who later became members of the PQ. McGrane’s reasons for suggesting the RIN and the PQ were and are social democratic is that (1) they describe themselves this way, as McGrane demonstrates, and (2) they meet the criteria for both traditional and third way social democratic parties that he outlines. Many Quebecers do not think of the RIN or the PQ as social democratic parties, however, because this aspect of their policies is overshadowed by their being sovereignist. During its 19 years in power in Quebec,<sup>3</sup> the PQ conducted two referenda asking for agreement from the voters of Quebec to create

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of social democracy was also adopted by the third way New Democratic Party in Ontario, led by Andrea Horwath, in the Ontario election campaign of 2014, when it said “vote for our values”.

<sup>2</sup> McGrane emphasizes the role of cabinet, but I know that the Blakeney government placed a great deal of emphasis on its relationship with its party (chapter 1; page 160), to which Premier Blakeney reported annually on progress implementing the party’s political platforms.

<sup>3</sup> Premiers René Levesque 1976-85; Pierre-Marc Johnson 1985; Jacques Parizeau September 26, 1994–January 29, 1996; Lucien Bouchard, January 29, 1996–March 8, 2001; Bernard Landry, March 8, 2001–April 29, 2003; and Pauline Marois, September 19, 2012–April 23, 2014.

sovereignty association with Canada. A nationalistic tenor has existed in Quebec politics for a long time but the promotion of Quebec sovereignty (sometimes described as “sovereignty association”) has existed for the last two generations and has dominated the PQ reputation. Nonetheless, as McGrane demonstrates, PQ platforms and policies in government have been noticeably similar to those of the NDP in Saskatchewan; for example, new income security and social programs, augmented labour standards, and agricultural reforms such as income stabilization, marketing boards and crop insurance (McGrane, 2014: chapter 6; Glor, 1997, 2002).

The focus of controversy in McGrane’s **second claim** is concerned with whether the undeniably traditional CCF and NDP governments in Saskatchewan and the third way<sup>4</sup> governments in Saskatchewan were both social democratic. Some have accused the third way governments of helping to introduce neoliberalism (known as neoconservatism in the USA) (e.g. Harding, 1995; several authors in McGrane, 2011; Evans & Schmidt, ed., 2012).<sup>5</sup> As do many, McGrane describes **neoliberal** policies as emerging from Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*, which was published as social democratic governments were being elected in Europe and Saskatchewan in the mid-1940s. Neoliberalism’s policies have included a claim of strict fiscal discipline (but in reality large tax cuts and enormous deficits and debts), weakening of labour legislation and unions, deep cuts to corporate and individual taxes (especially for the wealthy), privatization of public enterprises, reduction of state intervention in the economy, high interest rates to control inflation, unrestricted free trade, off-loading of responsibilities to lower levels of government, work for welfare, valorizing of the traditional family, elimination of programs to support women’s equality, limited state involvement in civil society, and a lack of concern about income inequality. Social democratic policies introduced programs to reduce inequality of many sorts, especially economic inequality, the assuming of state responsibility for the political and social consequences of the market system, a state role in creating a vibrant civil society and developing a social role for citizens, and state sponsorship of cosmopolitanism and collective economic action.

Jointly with neoliberalism, the third way supports fiscal discipline, flexible labour markets and lower taxes, but also favours government efforts to attract private investment, create voluntary incentives to work, and more equal distribution of wealth through consumption taxes. These things are never cut and dried, but it should be noted that the Blakeney government, which McGrane (2014) defines as clearly “traditional” social democratic, also favoured attracting investment (through joint partnerships) and creating voluntary incentives to work. The third way favours stiffer environmental taxes and stiffer regulation and insists that globalization include expansion of human rights and transnational regulation while neoliberalism favours market-based and voluntary approaches to the environment and does not recognize the problems associated with globalization. The most significant difference between neoliberalism and the third way is their perceptions of human nature and equality. Neoliberals believe humans are infinitely acquisitive and desire to be totally free from coercion. While third way social democrats agree humans are acquisitive, they are also citizens who seek self-fulfilment in collective action: the state is a mechanism to improve themselves and society (McGrane, 2014: 26-29).

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<sup>4</sup> The term “third way” was first used to describe the Tony Blair Labour government in the United Kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> For example: Smith (page 122), Settee (p. 74), McLaughlin & DeLury (p. 240).

McGrane admits that the Roy Romanow NDP budget and social program-cutting third way government reduced income equality and moved away from policies introduced by traditional social democrats. He sees the third way as emerging in Saskatchewan because of its post-staples economy, the massive debts and deficits incurred by the previous Conservative government of 1982-91, federal government downloading, and a reduced need for augmented social programs, due to their existing already (McGrane, 2014: chapter 7). He also points to the third way emerging in Saskatchewan and Quebec due to globalization, increased mobility of capital, reduced trade barriers, and thereby the disempowerment of the social democratic form of the interventionist state (McGrane, 2014: 235). Moreover, he describes social democratic governments throughout Canada and worldwide as moving to the third way during the 1990s (McGrane, 2014: 247-8).

McGrane's major focus is whether the 1990s budget-cutting Romanow government was a truly social democratic government. Neither traditional nor third way social democrats in Saskatchewan believed social democracy would transform the capitalistic economic system, nor was it their goal to do so. Premier Romanow, who had a reputation as a right-wing social democrat within his party, was faced as he came into power in 1991 with an enormous deficit and a \$14 billion debt, entirely incurred following the NDP government of 1971-82 by Canada's first neoliberal government of 1981-1991. McGrane sees the political objectives of the CCF (1944-1962) and NDP (1971-82; 2001-2007) governments in Saskatchewan as being "traditional" social democratic and the Romanow government of 1991 to 2001 as being third way social democratic. Both CCF and NDP governments in Saskatchewan were economically Keynesian, paying their way as they went and only incurring deficits briefly, during recessionary times, which did occur, because of Saskatchewan's boom-bust economy. The social democratic parties were not formally affiliated with labour, as Labour governments in the UK were.

During Premier Romanow's first term, his government abolished programs introduced by Premier Blakeney's social democratic government (1971-82), closed hospitals, replaced universal programs with income-tested ones and increased taxes to pay for the deficit and the debt. The only areas his government did not cut substantially were social assistance and justice (McGrane, 2014: 184). The Romanow government was preoccupied with fiscal concerns during its first term, thereby succeeding in eliminating the deficit within four years, by 1995 (McGrane, 2014: 185). During its second term, it introduced some new social programs and returned others to their previously more generous levels but did not recreate most of the programs of the Blakeney government. Nonetheless, these changes created somewhat greater income equality, compared to the first Romanow government. According to McGrane's definitions, the Romanow government was third way. Critics described the government as neoliberal, similarly to critics of the Blair government in the UK.

While there was some debate within the PQ government in Quebec about whether it remained true to its social democratic roots during the 1990s, and some PQ members of the Legislative Assembly resigned over these issues, this did not become a major debate outside the party. The PQ faced similar fiscal challenges to those of the Romanow (and federal) governments during the mid and late 1990s, and addressed the issues similarly, by cutting programs and increasing taxes initially, and then increasing the generosity of programs once the deficit had been addressed. As may be obvious, Canada faced a severe recession during the 1990s. McGrane describes the PQ government as being third way during part of its 1990s

mandate, then returning to its more traditional social democratic roots once the fiscal situation had improved. Unlike the Saskatchewan government, the PQ did not fully eliminate its deficit.

McGrane's **third argument**, about whether Quebec's and Saskatchewan's political cultures are social democratic, is harder to parse than the two other issues. Besides political culture, he emphasizes the importance, for example, of Saskatchewan's staples-based economy and Canadian institutional arrangements, such as federalism and the first-past-the-post electoral system. Nonetheless, McGrane found that Quebec and Saskatchewan shared similar political cultures even before they developed social democratic parties. Political forerunners shared anti-party sentiments, democratic internal structures, and criticized monopolies and unequal wealth distribution. They supported unions, cooperatives, a generous welfare state, public ownership, progressive taxation, collectivism and provincial autonomy. They both had social democratic political cultures while they were in power. When social democrats were not in power, Quebec's political culture was less social democratic, but Saskatchewan's was still predominantly social democratic. McGrane indicates, however, that there is no empirical evidence in either Quebec or Saskatchewan that public opinion has moved away from social democracy, despite election of neoliberal governments (McGrane, 2014: 235), but wonders whether Saskatchewan could now be moving away from its social democratic political culture (McGrane, 2014: 246). The major differences in the Quebec and Saskatchewan political cultures McGrane sees as residing in Saskatchewan social democracy's origins in agrarian protest, western alienation and Protestant social gospel movements (I saw them this way as well [Glor, 1997, 2002]) and Quebec's in social (Roman) catholic groups and ethno-religious nationalism. Another difference was the emphasis in Quebec on employing social democracy to build national identity and societal solidarity (McGrane, 2014: 148). These cultural phenomena created path dependencies that led to predominant social democratic cultures (McGrane, 2014: 72-74). Interestingly, McGrane observes the dual role of agents in cabinets in transmitting political culture but also in reacting to external circumstances and creating ideological change (McGrane, 2014: 223).

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There is one area where I disagree with McGrane's assessment. He asserts that the Blakeney government did not make much progress in achieving substantive equality between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Saskatchewan. While I agree that substantive equality was not achieved, the Blakeney's government attempted more than any other, and came close to fulfilling the suggestions laid out by Mulvale and Englot (in McGrane, Ed., 2011; see also Glor, 1997; 2002). McGrane implies that the distinction between Status Indians, for which the federal government is constitutionally responsible, and non-Status and Metis people, for which the province is by default responsible, could have been ignored. In my opinion, the small Government of Saskatchewan would have ignored this legal distinction, held important by Status Indians (First Nations), at its peril, because it would have ignored fundamental agreements and because it would potentially have assumed enormous new responsibilities and costs (a useful paper could be done on what these costs might be). It did a considerable amount, nonetheless.

While McGrane seems to consider the PQ government's unique nation-to-nation agreements with Aboriginal communities (Mulvale and Englot, 2011: 199) a model for Saskatchewan, they were not implemented in either Quebec or Saskatchewan. Nonetheless, the Blakeney government created a government-to-nations relationship by assigning a minister to relate to Status Indians, actively undertook negotiations with the federal government and First

Nations organizations and governments to attempt to settle outstanding commitments to Status Indians (see also Bartlett, 1991) and created a Social Planning Secretariat in the Executive Council (the Premier's department) to develop policy. It set up a new department to provide better services in the north and it was setting up a new political and governance system in the north that would have empowered the predominantly (about seventy per cent) Aboriginal population. In keeping with the priorities identified by Aboriginal and Metis people, it created a post-secondary educational institution for Status Indians and another for non-Status Indians and Metis. It sought funding from the federal government for what is now called the First Nations University, but was turned down. It supported Status Indians in their attempts to secure from the federal government their rights by law. It offered provincial land in settlement of treaties. It sought to support and empower Aboriginal people by listening to what their priorities were and attempting to implement those priorities; for example, Aboriginal elders emphasized the need to improve education on reserves and keep Aboriginal children in school. Status Indians were moving readily and frequently between reserves and the Saskatchewan cities. McGrane does not mention the government's active attempts to create governance structures and to find means to create jobs through public institutions in the north, and to support improvements in education and health, and to train northerners. When the Blakeney government was defeated, a substantial number of projects were underway—some of them pilot projects with a view to making them provincial programs if they were successful, including a pilot in Regina to involve Aboriginal parents and families in the school system and aboriginally-run pilot preventive health programs in four areas. Aboriginal training programs had been set up and were running successfully within the universities, with provincial funding, to train aboriginal lawyers, social workers and teachers. Later, an aboriginal program was set up to train aboriginal doctors. The federal government had funded AMNSIS (Metis society) to build low-income housing; this housing was built in older neighbourhoods, and were designed to fit the architecture of the neighbourhoods (I lived in such a neighbourhood: in my opinion, they did a good job.) Aboriginal workers were trained in construction and built the houses. Besides this non-profit sector job creation model, a private-sector job creation model had also been created: an agreement was signed with the joint venture company given the rights to mine Cluff Lake that became the model for subsequent mines like Key Lake—fifty per cent of the people employed would be from northern Saskatchewan, and they would be trained for the work. Besides training-on-the-job, a new technical school was established in Prince Albert to train northerners. A foundation was being laid to empower Aboriginal people, create jobs for Aboriginal people, improve their capacity to compete, and improve their quality of life. Some of the people trained in these programs are now leaders in the Aboriginal community, others are providing better services to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan and Canada.

A final point—McGrane does not discuss the challenges improving conditions for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, because of divided jurisdiction, low initial education levels, and the critical attitudes of some people toward such efforts. In other words, these were not popular moves on the part of the government, did not win them many votes, and could have lost them votes. The efforts had to be handled carefully at the political level and were being done in collaboration with Aboriginal people and their organizations. There was no instant solution to the challenges assumed. Because of its commitment, the Blakeney government had good relations with Aboriginal people, and it had set the political, social, economic and governmental foundation for significant improvement. Such efforts took time, as they were being built with the Aboriginal leadership, not imposed, and what could be successful approaches was being

determined (some of the pilots worked well, others did not). In my opinion, programs run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people worked the best. Some Aboriginal leaders at the time look back on the Blakeney era as the best one ever.<sup>6</sup> During six years working with the Blakeney government, four of them in central agencies, where I had regular contact with elected officials, and two working with Aboriginal people and programs (another two with the Devine government), I never once heard expressed the motivations for its actions suggested by McGrane, when he said: “As opposed to mutual recognition between two nations, the Blakeney government’s policies to aid Aboriginals were motivated by its desire to avoid the social problems caused by the emergence of Aboriginal ghettos within Saskatchewan’s major cities and the need to cultivate a positive relationship with Aboriginal communities in the northern parts of the province, where natural resource exploration was accelerating” (McGrane, 2014: 153). I think this is a misreading of Mr. Blakeney’s chapter in my book (Glor, 1997), and a misreading of the government’s intent. The low-income areas of Regina, Saskatchewan and Prince Albert were not Aboriginal ghettos in the 1970s. I lived in the low-income area of Regina, as did the Premier, as did many non-Aboriginal low income and middle class people, as did some Aboriginal people, some of whom were low income and some of whom were not. While this area was predominantly low income, it was also an old, central area, with, therefore, a desirable location from which I for one could walk to work and my family could have one car.

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McGrane presents his two cases (Quebec, Saskatchewan) of two types each of social democratic party (traditional, third way) in a straightforward, clear, believable manner. He provides detailed descriptions of the program cuts and improvements of the Quebec government, and in particular the Romanow and Calvert governments in Saskatchewan, and does a careful analysis of their women’s policies, concluding the Saskatchewan and Quebec social democratic governments consistently followed a liberal-feminist policy, not a radical-feminist policy (McGrane, 2015: 193-7). Although I must admit it has not until now been clear to me that third wave governments were truly social democratic, I think he makes a convincing argument that they are. On the other hand, when I read *New Directions in Saskatchewan Public Policy*, and saw several authors arguing convincingly that the Romanow and Calvert governments were not social democratic but rather neoliberal, and that they broadened and deepened the Saskatchewan government’s neoliberal policies (although with some limitations), I was not so sure.

Two interesting aspects of this edited 2011 book are each chapter’s inclusion of recommendations on how the current government of Saskatchewan should proceed and its inclusion of two chapters on Aboriginal policy. This is refreshing and encouraging. Many of the issues have existed for a long time, yet these old problems remain, and have not been solved, nor even for the most part further addressed since the Blakeney government: the needs for more and better education for Aboriginal people, more and better services for the elderly, a provincial day care program, and support for the family farm. There are new challenges as well, such as the enormous increase in the cost of housing in major cities, costs which had been kept under control during the Blakeney government through government purchase of land banks around the major cities, and so on. Some authors suggest the Blakeney government’s policies were the best so far and we should go back to traditional social democratic government; for example, by expanding

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<sup>6</sup> I was a public servant in this government, and have been in touch with some of the leaders since then.

the home care program set up by Blakeney. Others are new ideas and address new areas of concern. The chapter on the need for more immigration because of lack of people to fill jobs is a particularly interesting one, in an area of Canada that has not seen a large amount of recent immigration. The commitment by the Lorne Calvert government to expand immigration in parallel with developing Aboriginal people for the workforce indicates that this job was certainly not finished: Bohdan Kordan indicates it was not, however, pursued effectively. For example, while new policies to encouraging immigration were put in place in the 1990s, and some more immigrants came to Saskatchewan, retention of immigrants and local youth who have been educated in Saskatchewan, remain problems. *New Directions* gives a sense of what the challenges are now. These would provide interesting comparisons with Howard Leeson's two edited books (2001, 2008) covering the NDP governments of the 1990s and 2000s; books on the Devine government (Baron and Jackson, 1991; Biggs and Stobbe, 1991; Pitsula and Rasmussen, 1990; supported by Laxer, 1989); the Blakeney years (Glor, 1997, 2002; Gruending, 1990; Harding, 1995); Al Johnson's (2004) book on the Douglas government, and biographies of leaders. They would also make good companion pieces for a course on political institutions, politics, policy and public administration in Saskatchewan: We are fortunate they have been well documented.

### About the Author

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