



# NDP DUCK

Lord Acton once said -- and political scientists love to quote him -- that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.

Lord Acton may have been right, but it hasn't got much to do with the lives of most of us, who haven't much power and wouldn't really mind being a little corrupted by a little of it. Lord Acton was a political scientist and so he missed the main point, which is that powerlessness corrupts, and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely.

There are lots of examples of this around in our daily lives -- when you feel absolutely powerless with respect to the economy, you shoplift at Eaton's -- but we normally don't think of political parties as being subjected to powerlessness. Even parties in opposition have some vestiges of power: there is still a Tory organization in Nova Scotia and a Liberal one in New Brunswick, and even though what they can offer is limited to promises, there is still power there. And because they still have some power, they have to take themselves seriously and look, at least occasionally, responsible.

But if you'd been around during September and October while the New Brunswick NDP flogged itself out of existence at conventions in Saint John and Fredericton, you could have seen the maxim working itself out as though Lord Acton had written the script. Or, better, as though Jonathan Swift, the Marquis de Sade, and Lord Acton had collaborated. With the final draft touched up -- for rhetoric and prose style -- by Dick Hatfield and Abbie Hoffman.

For years, the New Brunswick NDP has existed in a kind of political limbo shared only by such groups as the American Vegetarian Party or the Flat Earth Society. Regardless of the resurgence of the NDP in the West and even in Ontario, New Brunswick's party continued to be, by and large, the refuge of political malcontents who couldn't get far enough into the Grit or Tory establishments to get any graft.

NDP members who moved to New Brunswick from elsewhere generally gave up on the party within a few months. Some went into a kind of watchful crouch, looking for some opportunity to energize the party, remembering longingly the good old days in Winnipeg or Saskatoon. And the New Brunswick NDP ambled on, providing practice in public speaking for a few people with politician fantasies.

But recently, spurred on by the success of the national Waffle group, a number of New Brunswickers of the type usually referred to in the press as "troublemakers" decided that the time to revitalize and radicalize the NDP had come.

The party's old guard reacted predictably to this new putsch. When the provincial council endorsed the legalization of marijuana last winter, the provincial party leader J. Albert Richardson, who hadn't made the meeting because of a snowstorm, announced that the meeting was invalid because it was underattended, and that at a full meeting of the party such hair-brained notions would clearly be repudiated. Responsible voices were heard saying that of course the NDP was full of responsible, realistic citizens who would see that such proposals would only alienate the good voters of New Brunswick, and that in the long run cooler heads would prevail.

But underground, there were rumblings as the Waffle shifted left. There were rumours of a new manifesto, of an impending takeover. Eldon Richardson was, as he described it, "booted out" of his job as secretary of the Saint-John-Lancaster NDP Association by a cadre of irresponsible Trotskyite agitators.

But J. Albert Richardson was calm. Wait till the whole party meets in September, he said, we'll get things back on an even keel.

At the September meeting, the Waffle (out of respect for the feelings of James Laxer, another, related epithet might be more appropriate -- Fritter, perhaps) arrived with its



platform, a document with the same sort of attention to reality that you find in the publications of the Flat Earth Society. It called for the immediate common ownership, without compensation and under workers' control, of all major means of production, distribution and exchange, of all the media, of all large scale rented property; it called for immediate socialization of law and medicine, immediate rent controls, support of all workers' movements, the establishment of women's rights and the abolition of compulsory education. Ah, opined the political pundits, the NDP will rid itself of this kind of insane utopianism without much trouble and get on with the business of figuring out how to get hold of a little genuine power in New Brunswick.

But when the dust had settled, the vote was 41 to 40 with four abstentions (where but in the NDP can you imagine anyone abstaining on an issue like that?) and the Fritter manifesto was party policy. And the Labour delegates had walked out (they didn't even come back for the banquet, which proves they must have been serious).

But J. Albert Richardson does not surrender easily. We'll fight it, he said. It'll be repudiated. We'll hold another convention in October, he said, and this time the sensible elements will turn out.

And with the creative ingenuity which J. Albert Richardson fans have come to know and love, he pointed out that he himself knew of at least seven people who were not

contacted about the convention, and that constituted grounds to have the whole meeting declared unconstitutional.

As it turned out, however, the Fritters dominated the Fredericton meeting even more thoroughly than they had the Saint John one, and their whole slate of candidates was elected while Richardson and company grimly continued to call the first meeting unconstitutional and the second nonexistent.

By late October, then, the New Brunswick NDP had two duly elected leaders and a cemented position, along with the Prohibition Party and Action Canada, as cheerleaders on the sidelines of politics.

It's difficult to choose among a cast of characters as deserving of a Rubber Duck as the members of the New Brunswick New Democratic Party. Pat Callaghan, Fritter leader, who calls the new manifesto "realistic"? Albert Richardson, who can't muster more than 40 votes against the Fritter? Alastair Robertson, Fritter Party President and major author of the manifesto?

You can make your own choice. We're picking Pat Callaghan, as the most recently elected representative of the whole membership of the New Democratic Party in New Brunswick, and as the choice of the faction who have succeeded in making the party even more irrelevant to the situation of New Brunswick than it was before. Good luck at the next convention, Pat.

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