Book Review: *Lipset's Agrarian Socialism: A Re-examination* Edited by David E. Smith

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Seymour Martin Lipset, rather famously associated with the concept of “American Exceptionalism” and renowned as one of the leading practitioners of political sociology in the United States, was better known in Canada for works that seemed to make little, if any, impression upon U.S. readers. First and foremost was his landmark study of the social democratic Co-operative Commonwealth Federation’s (CCF) rise to political power in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan—*Agrarian Socialism*. It is the stuff of legend in Canadian academic circles how a young PhD student—a Jewish leftist from New York no less—came to Saskatchewan in the mid 1940s both to study a successful socialist movement in one part of North America and, in so doing, discover why his own country was the only western industrialized society that had never produced a serious socialist movement. This 1950 publication—often referred to as the seminal work on political sociology in Saskatchewan and one of the most important works on the development of third parties in Canada—was then supplanted for a later generation of readers by Lipset’s equally famous (in Canada, that is) 1968 revision of *Agrarian Socialism*, by which time his youthful socialism had been replaced with a far more pragmatic world view. And then, 40 years later, as if to prove he had never stopped caring about Canada and the inherent value of comparative analysis, Lipset published his somewhat controversial (again, controversial primarily in Canadian academic circles) *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada*.

Given the importance of his work to several generations of Canadian sociologists, political scientists, and historians, it is hardly surprising that when the 2007 Canadian Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences (the overlapping meetings of every Learned Society and academic association in Canada) was held in Saskatoon, special panels were convened to discuss Lipset’s work—especially his work on Saskatchewan. This slender volume flows from two such panels—one composed of academics with expertise in Saskatchewan’s political culture, the other consisting of academics who shared that expertise, but had the added qualification of having held elective office in Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, the problem with conference proceedings is that the papers often come across better when presented orally, when audiences and copanelists can ask...
Lipset's sad, but completely understandable, inability to contribute on Saskatchewan may have come about because of Lipset's eventual disillusionment with the CCF experience. The contributors (as a graduate student) to the revised and expanded edition of *Agrarian Socialism* in 1968, comes across as a lament for the lost world of rural communities with rich associational lives that Lipset had documented in the 1940s; John Richards, one of the contributors, notes that the strictly agrarian nature of Saskatchewan's socialist movement; David Smith argues that Lipset (in 1950) did not fully understand the nature and impact of Canada's federal system on provincial politics; Allan Blakney, a former premier of Saskatchewan, clearly loved rereading *Agrarian Socialism* and still agrees with most of its conclusions, but feels that Lipset had not fully understood how strong the British Fabian and Labour tradition had been among Saskatchewan's radical leaders (as opposed to the farm-based, American leadership of comparable movements in Alberta and North Dakota—Lipset's favorite points of comparison). Janice MacKinnon's contribution on Saskatchewan's distinctiveness, as viewed from the perspective of an NDP cabinet minister in the globalizing 1990s, comes across as a lament for the lost world of rural communities with rich associational lives that Lipset had documented in the 1940s; John Richards, one of the contributors (as a graduate student) to the revised and expanded edition of *Agrarian Socialism* in 1968, also invokes de Toqueville in his essay, and suggests that Lipset's eventual disillusionment with the CCF experiment in Saskatchewan may have come about because of Lipset's sad, but completely understandable, inability to move beyond certain theoretical formulations of the state. And finally, there is Alan Cairns's rather idiosyncratic comparison of the work of Lipset on the CCF in Saskatchewan with that of C.B. MacPherson on the Social Credit movement in Alberta.

At the end of the day what we have is a series of well-written and fairly informative pieces on Lipset's Canadian work and on Saskatchewan in general. In fact, it is a pleasant read, unencumbered by much in the way of scholarly apparatus or theoretical formulations and jargon. Collectively these essays serve as a useful primer on Lipset's *Agrarian Socialism*, on its possible flaws, and on Lipset himself. If, however, readers are looking for a sustained critique of Lipset's work, something that goes beyond an "appreciation" of a great scholar's achievement, they will have to look elsewhere. Jim Mochoruk, Department of History, University of North Dakota.