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Review of *An Honourable Calling: Political Memoirs* by Allan Blakeney

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As NDP premier of his adopted province for eleven years, Allan Blakeney was one of the main combatants in the federal-provincial turf wars of the 1970s and early 1980s over resource development and taxation and the patriation of the Canadian constitution. Before entering active politics he spent a decade as a public servant in Saskatchewan. For four years he served as a cabinet minister responsible for, successively, three key departments (education, finance, and health), and seven years on the opposition benches (one as leader of the opposition). By the time he left active politics in 1988, Blakeney had devoted thirty-eight years of his life to the public affairs of Saskatchewan.

A Nova Scotian by birth, a Conservative by upbringing, a socialist by persuasion, a Saskatchewanian by choice, and a Canadian at heart, Blakeney's contribution to his party, province, and country has had few equals. His career stands as a reminder of a now largely vanished breed of men and women opting to devote a substantial part of their adult life to public service. His government's interventions in the economic marketplace with state-owned initiatives (most notably in the mineral and resource sectors with the creation of potash and oil and gas Crown corporations) speak to a now generally outmoded brand of socialism in Canada.

Attracted to Saskatchewan after completing his university studies at Dalhousie, in Nova Scotia, and at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, Blakeney joined the public service in "one of the most active social laboratories in Canada." At the forefront of the move in Canada to establish a universal and publicly funded medical insurance scheme, Saskatchewan attracted several bright, mostly young, social and economic reformers from across Canada and Britain after the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) (later the New Democratic Party) came to power in 1944. Working for the legendary premier Tommy Douglas was obviously one of the highlights of Blakeney's career; and being in at the birth of Saskatchewan's medicare scheme in 1962, following a bitter and divisive fight with the medical profession, stands in his mind as one of the greatest advances in Canadian public policy.
There are three small corrections to this otherwise admirable book. Lord Taylor (p. 60), who mediated the 1962 Doctor's Strike in Saskatchewan in 1962, was made a Life Peer not by Clement Attlee after the Second World War but by Harold Macmillan in 1958. Wilfrid Laurier (p. 96) was not yet a “sitting” prime minister when elected to parliament in 1896. And the International Development Research Centre (p. 221) is not an arm of the Canadian International Development Agency, but a separately constituted Crown corporation.

An Honourable Calling (a title that brings to mind one of the principal roots of Canadian socialism, the social gospel) covers a vast range of issues that dominated Canadian public affairs for the four decades following the Second World War. The Memoirs are an important contribution to the already considerable literature on that period.

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