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**Review of *Social Policy and Social Justice: The NDP Government in Saskatchewan during the Blakeney Years* Edited by Jim Harding**

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**Social Policy and Social Justice: The NDP Government in Saskatchewan during the Blakeney Years.** Edited by Jim Harding. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1995. xi+484 pp. Tables, notes and index. \$29.95 paper (ISBN 0-88920-240-0).

Long a fixture on the Canadian political landscape, and best known outside province for a dogged defense of provincial rights in pursuit of its state entrepreneurial agenda, the three-term NDP government of Saskatchewan's Allan Blakeney (1979-1982) is beginning to attract a more critical and systematic attention, centered around the traditional paradox of populism on the Great Plains: the admixture of conservative community values with a more or less radical economic view. Jim Harding, a left NDP activist and Regina city Councilor as well as an academic sociologist—a narrow cross section of the social science community, exclusive of history and political science, is represented in this volume—is well situated to examine the “social justice” record of the Blakeney government, which future historians will almost certainly see as representing the zenith of social democratic activism in the late twentieth century prairie west. Predictably, some of the thorniest issues addressed relate to northern and aboriginal affairs, though Harding was apparently unsuccessful in soliciting a native perspective on the NDP, and, like many Saskatchewan leftists, has a one-dimensional critique of the NDP's controversial uranium mining policies, designed in part to modernize the aboriginal economy in the north. Premier Blakeney's fear of recreating ghetto-like conditions in the southern cities (substituting, in comparative terms, Northern Natives for Southern Blacks) was well known. That eventuality is to some extent coming to pass today in cities like Winnipeg and Regina, as the “Northern Vision” recedes in the face of market economics.

As can be read between the lines of several contributions, many of the advocacy groups and intellectuals who swirled about the Blakeney regime had the notion that the NDP was merely an electoral machine for enlightened experts: a sure recipe for political disillusionment. Corrections expert Ron Schmirl expresses surprise at the law and order bent of the NDP in power, as day care professional Judith Martin seems dismayed by the fact that relevant policies encompassed a wage subsidy for marginal workers but not a radical agenda for women's rights. Former associate deputy Minister of Labour, Bob Sass, provides a rather poignant glimpse at the Fabian model “Steps to Industrial Democracy” in nationalized industries in the 1970s, arguing that the government's vision was fatally limited by a view of

workers as consumers rather than “producers with rights and status in industry.” While the day care issue, among others, refused to go away, neither industrial democracy nor nationalized industries like the Potash Corporation survived the neo-conservative backlash of the 1980s in Saskatchewan, where a two-term Tory government (1982-1991) exploited many discontents.

The most theoretical metaphor in this book is appropriately provided by Jim Harding (author or co-author of six of its fifteen chapters), who reconceives the NDP “Welfare State” as a “Therapeutic State,” dispensing many medications for the incurable disease of late-twentieth century capitalism. Blakeney himself has stated that the future of social democracy in Saskatchewan is unclear. The Harding collection amplifies this point, and should help nip any romantic interpretation of the “golden age” of the Blakeney years in the bud. The NDP as such is still very much alive in Saskatchewan, but the legacy of alienation between its political cadre and the intelligentsia revealed in *Social Policy and Social Justice* suggests the need for more critical attention to the question of “how the people govern” under its quite unique regime. **Allen Seager**, *Department of History, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.*