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Review of *The Diefenbaker Legacy: Canadian Politics, Law and Society Since 1957* Edited by D.C. Story and R. Bruce Shepard

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The Diefenbaker Legacy: Canadian Politics, Law and Society Since 1957. Edited by D.C. Story and R. Bruce Shepard. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998. x+170 pp. Notes, photos. C\$15.00 paper (ISBN 0-88977-091-3).

John Diefenbaker, Canada's Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963, remarked during his last campaigns as Conservative Party leader, "Everybody

is against me but the people." The comment, though a quintessential expression of his populism (lightly laced with a touch of paranoia), was not altogether inaccurate. Even after his defeat, Diefenbaker enjoyed folk-hero status with many of those he called "average Canadians," but continued, largely, to be dismissed as an incompetent failure by the country's political, academic, and journalistic elites. Denis Smith's 1995 biography, *Rogue Tory*, was the first balanced, albeit critical, examination of Diefenbaker's career. This new collection of essays, a number from a younger generation of scholars, carries forward the work of re-assessing Diefenbaker's career and his enduring impact.

The essays span a number of areas: Canadian-American relations, security issues, Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights, and several essentially domestic issues. The latter tend to reinforce earlier judgements about Diefenbaker's uncertain leadership; among these, a piece by Patrick H. Brennan on Diefenbaker's relations with the media brings together some interesting evidence, though not all readers will necessarily draw from it the same conclusions Brennan does.

Prevailing criticisms of Diefenbaker have emphasized issues of personality and temperament: erratic behavior, indecision, his difficulties trusting and working with other people. They have also spoken to values and attitudes: his populism, his suspicion of the bureaucracy and Canadian corporate elites, his preoccupation with the interests of the country's underdeveloped regions, his perceived lack of sympathy with the aspirations of Quebec, and his antipathy to official bilingualism and multiculturalism. Many of these stemmed directly from his experience, man and boy, living on the Canadian prairies, but they placed him, it has been claimed, outside the political mainstream and alienated him from central Canada with its large population and attendant political power.

Three essays dealing with political leadership address some of these phenomena in ways that speak directly to Diefenbaker's prairie origins and experience. Richard Sigurdson, in "One Canada and the Legacy of Unhyphenated Canadianism," emphasizes the egalitarianism informing Diefenbaker's conception of Canadian nationality, which simultaneously rejected notions of special status for any province as well as policies promoting multiculturalism. Sigurdson notes that such egalitarianism is a deeply rooted part of prairie political culture.

A complementary point is made by David Stewart who, in writing of Diefenbaker's legacy to the Conservative Party, emphasizes his populism. Populism, often seen as an American phenomenon in Canadian politics, is

most significant on the prairies (on both sides of the border) where it was a manifestation of feelings of exclusion from the real centers of power. So fully did Diefenbaker reflect this perspective in his person and his government, Stewart rightly observes, that the Conservatives became and remained the dominant party on the prairies for thirty years after Diefenbaker's fall.

Yet another paper, by Patrick Kyba and Wendy Green-Finlay, surveys and assesses the Diefenbaker government's record. What is striking about their inventory is how much of Diefenbaker's policy initiatives dealt with regional inequalities generally, prairie issues in particular, and agricultural policy above all. These particular essays make the case that much of Diefenbaker's impact is best understood through an appreciation of the reciprocal influences operating between the man and the region; with others in this collection, they contribute to what should be an on-going re-examination of Diefenbaker and his legacy. **William Neville**, *Department of Politics, University of Manitoba*.