

Finn, Ed. *On A Journalist's Life on the Left*. 2013. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's: Boulder Publications / Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, ISBN: 9781927099315. Paperback: 19.95 CAD. Pages: 252.

Reviewed By Michelle Weinroth

Dear Ed,

I have known you for more than two decades now, most notably as the legendary editor of the *CCPA Monitor*. But of late I was struck by the discovery that I scarcely knew you at all ... The thought came to me as I immersed myself in your recently published memoirs. I understood then that "Truth grows gradually in us, like a musician who plays a piece again and again until suddenly he hears it for the first time" (*Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michaels).

My discovery began with the cover illustration to your book. I pondered its composition. The graphic designer had clearly captured some key facets of your public countenance: the prolific Canadian journalist on the left, the man who produced reams of political and editorial commentaries for a host of newspapers from Corner Brook to Regina.

The picture of your writer's page, awash with maple leaves, and unfurling endlessly from the machine, recalls your voluminous output. Your *Monitor* never lapsed or failed to meet a deadline. You never had a dearth of ideas to publish, I am told, nor a writer's cramp -- no hiatuses in your publication record, just an endless flow. If the book's cover design omits your face, it leaves me with some lingering impressions: the two-finger typist, anchored to his twentieth-century machine; a man of daily discipline and verbal dexterity, untouched by Apple's blandishments, ably tapping out a bitter indictment of capitalism.

But not long after plunging into the first chapters of your book, I realized how this cover design reflected a mere outer appearance. There is more to you than journalistic virtuosity and phenomenal productivity. The finely wrought lines of your memoirs -- ever lucid and readable -- tell the story of another man whose modesty and candour, constancy of principle, literary penchant, and historical perspective come into full view. The photo on the back cover discloses some of these qualities: a gentle smile, radiating tenderness and compassion, but also firmness of conviction, crucial to your public trajectory. (There is nothing sentimental about your political writing, however passionately committed to humanity's fate.) In the background, a portrait of you hangs on the wall of your old office; it is a cartoon, and like all caricatures, it bears a faint likeness to your love of wit and satire, of verbal play and punning. Still, these photographic references, truthful as they are, amount to mere shadows of the person fleshed out in the pages of your extraordinary life story.

The title of your book, *A Journalist's Life on the Left*, reminds us that yours was a veritable odyssey -- a sequence of adventures and political storms, charged with the drama of industrial

action, of electoral campaigning at the helm of a newly born party (the Newfoundland Democratic Party), and of momentous activism alongside Tommy Douglas in the fight for Medicare. But if most epics tell the tale of crusading heroes, yours delivers a narrative more genuine for its modesty and ethical stance. Beyond an account of your successive posts, these memoirs retrace the genesis of your political awakening. It happened during a winter storm when, even in their distress, the abominably exploited loggers came to your rescue, as you came to theirs, turning activist overnight. It was then that you developed a political shrewdness that bolstered your unswerving critique of corruption.

These dimensions of your story spoke most directly to me, for they uncovered the man behind the legend, behind the Canadian monument on the left that you have become. Beneath your outward visage, I came to see the philosopher in you, and the agnostic wisdom you inherited. Plucked from school at an early age, subjected to arduous child labour at the printing 'mill,' and thrust by accident into the fire of class struggle, your radicalism did not sprout from a middle-class fling with Bohemian protest, but from the grit of adversity. Your class consciousness grew out of the grassroots of Corner Brook. You became the consummate 'organic intellectual.'

Yet, for a man whose early days were shaped by the mysteries of Catholicism and of creationist myth, your current values and beliefs exhibit a daring departure from home base, and a Darwinian awareness that our lives are circumscribed by chance and choice. At a tender age, you stood up to authority and risked the mortification of the flesh -- a painful public flogging. But, in this, you adapted repeatedly to unexpected circumstances and new challenges. Still, your religious background would seem to be the source of your constancy, your enduring faith in political salvation. If some see the advent of an environmental apocalypse as inexorable, you argue insistently that it may yet -- indeed, must -- be averted.

Two momentous events in Canadian labour history shaped and sharpened your left-wing politics: the 1958-9 Loggers' strike, in which Joey Smallwood -- the "self-professed socialist" turned "strike-breaker" -- introduced the "harshest and most blatantly anti-labour legislation ever enacted by a Canadian government"; and the 1962 battle for public health care in which you were recruited by the Canadian Labour Congress, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and Tommy Douglas to help counter a wave of anti-Medicare misinformation. If Joey Smallwood's vindictive political manoeuvres represented the turn-coat socialist whose allegiance lay with the interests of capital, Tommy Douglas embodied the genuine radical, devoted to the ideal of an egalitarian society. His social values still live in you, as does the motto on his grave: "Courage my friends, it is not too late to build a better world." Smallwood (the treacherous politician) and Tommy Douglas (the working-class hero) mark the poles of false and true socialism. Your preferred model is clear.

A widely coveted communicator within the labour movement, you denounced the betrayal of workers and the endorsement of imperialism. Recall your outrage at the CLC's (Donald MacDonald's) defense of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. If you never called yourself a socialist, your left-wing politics remain under Tommy Douglas's star. In this, your principled

but non-sectarian radicalism outflanks the politics of the NDP as we know it today. Ironically, at its inception, you were its first provincial leader.

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Against skepticism and complacency, your book pleads for humanity's survival, culminating in a rhetorical pitch of urgency:

I still believe that the corporations that are reshaping the world can be resisted. That we can reverse the downward slide into neo-Victorian squalor ... That's why I have spent the past 35 years of my life doing what I can to help re-create a compassionate and equitable society... With each passing day it becomes more urgent that new ways be found to curb this corporate power for the common good. It can be done, but not if we give up on the co-operative approach (196).

More than an autobiography, your memoirs are the crowning achievement of your public involvements; they form a political legacy, charged with a mission to educate the public through chronicles and critiques of our times. In brief, your tale of seemingly fortuitous adventures reaches a climax in the declamatory speech you gave at Memorial University upon accepting your honorary Doctor of Laws degree. This was your political ethic writ large: a discourse on cooperation in the struggle against corporate rule, a text sounded passionately to our graduating youth.

As your many editorials have shown, corporate rule (or profit-grinding capitalism, to be blunt) is embedded in the tissue of every crisis we face today; it is the disease imperiling our global world. This has been your central message; for countless times you decried our infested environment, our entrapment in the toxic grip of the pharmaceutical industry, and our subjection to a morally infected government, riddled with corruption and fraud.

Underlying this nationwide malaise, many progressives would say, is a rampant anemia in political thinking -- a feeble surrender to the Neo-Conservative fairytale of tax cuts and to the demonization of Medicare, so commonly seen as a bottomless pit of expenditures. But your advocacy of cooperation and your sustained struggle for universal health care are vital tonics for leftwing morale. In the face of ethical decrepitude, these ideals return us to the fundamental principles of our humanity: our desire for peaceable fellowship, for collaborative coexistence and shared wealth, and not least for optimum health in every aspect of terrestrial life. For only when the cancer of profit is excised, and when the blandishments of private property, individualism, and corporate rule finally dissolve, only then will Canadians turn from commodification to collaboration, from acquisitive desire to humanist care, and from complacency to political clairvoyance.

Many of your followers, including myself, are indebted to you for your inspiring deeds. But in reading your book, they will be ever more grateful for the courage and hope you will have instilled in them as they go forward into the storm.

Sincerely,

Michelle Weinroth

Harden, Joel D. 2013. *Quiet No More: New Political Activism in Canada and Around the Globe*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, ISBN: 9781459405073. Paperback: 22.95 CAD. Pages: 264.

Reviewed By William K. Carroll
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A self-declared exemplar of ‘movement relevant theory’, this book seeks to understand contemporary progressive activism through direct experience and in dialogue with activists. While keeping one’s political commitments in plain view, the point is to ‘help stimulate critical thought and activist experimentation’ (p. 209). Indeed, Joel Harden wrote the book in part to make theoretical and practical sense of his own activism. Thus, it reads in places as an autobiography/autoethnography of the author’s experiences over the past two decades in and around the student movement, movements for peace and global/climate justice, Occupy, Idle No More, and the labour movement (where he served as a researcher and then as Director of the Labour Education Department for the Canadian Labour Congress from 2005 to 2012). Eschewing academic ‘Social Movement Theory’, Harden has organized his analysis as a series of narratives based in direct access to grassroots movements and activists (a number of whom he interviewed). These stories draw the reader into the drama of activism and political contention.

The book’s six chapters transit through a survey of activism in North America (Chapter 1), analyses of recent shifts in green activism, Aboriginal militancy and international solidarity with Palestinians (Chapter 2), the development of grassroots activism in trade unions (Chapter 3), the relationship between left political parties and grassroots activism (Chapter 4), and a discussion of key theoretical issues in the new activism (Chapter 5), to a Conclusion that counsels activists to embrace anti-systemic ideas and bottom-up organizing practices while reaching out to broader publics in a ‘participatory radicalism’ that is ‘both inclusive and progressive’ (p. 229). Harden’s story-based approach to analysis mimics the story-based organizing he features in his well-researched case studies: the emphasis is less on abstract theory and political appeals and