
BOOK REVIEW

Donald C. MacDonald, *The Happy Warrior: Political Memoirs*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1998, 440 pp., \$24.95

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No matter how hard authors try, most autobiographies end up rife with self-justifications and smoothed-over stories aimed at image-building. People who were/are engaged in political life especially fall victim to this need to resurrect their legacy through their own words.

A happy exception to this general, over-arching rule of thumb is *The Happy Warrior: Political Memoirs* by Donald C. MacDonald. MacDonald was the one-time leader of the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and NDP (New Democratic Party) in the province of Ontario. This memoir rises well above the typical after-the-fact self-promotion that plagues so many books by former politicians. MacDonald's effort provides in-depth insight into the political culture of Ontario, inner-workings of a political party on the rise, and glimpses at the awesome level of commitment required to represent issues that would not otherwise have been part of the public discourse.

Particularly striking is MacDonald's lack of invective or bitterness aimed at political opponents. He demonstrates genuine empathy for his counterparts of other political stripes, though sharply and energetically opposed to their policies.

Highly valuable is the chapter focusing on Northern Ontario. During MacDonald's tenure as leader of the Ontario CCF and NDP, the region was used as a place where resource extraction was virtually the sole aim of the southern-based provincial government.

An interesting trend of late, witnessed at the federal level of Canadian politics, has been

the tendency of former NDP leaders to stay aboard as "ordinary" MP's. MacDonald, albeit in a provincial context, may have initiated that trend. After his resignation as party leader in 1970, he stayed on after winning re-election in his home riding of York South. This book illustrates the ways in which MacDonald managed to continue contributing to society in different milieus without being perceived as threatening to the new generation of party leadership. He also added a measure of sense and equilibrium in the midst of the Waffle debate that could have rendered the Ontario NDP impotent.

One might well ask what is so redeeming about a political life that did not experience its ultimate objective - the holding of a legislative majority? The answer lies in the dignity and integrity that is found at MacDonald's core despite some very discouraging electoral results.