

BOOKS

Lesley Choyce

CONVENTIONAL EMOTIONS

By LOIS CORBET

Might as well get this right into the open: I like short stories. Always have, always will. They provide that nice break from development versus modernization theory, an escape from Marx versus Smith. And they are short enough to let you pretend that soon, you too will buckle up and read that two hundred pages for your next class.

But if they are good, and *Conventional Emotions* by Lesley Choyce is more than a good collection of short stories, they only make you want more, and more, until the book is finished and there just isn't any reason to pick up that development theory.

Conventional Emotions is almost like riding home after high school on the bus, sitting between your two favorite people in the world at the moment, reliving the Sunday drive to the States to pick up some American beer and some Tickled Pink, a Yankee version of Baby Duck, to drink because all the alcohol you bought in Canada on Saturday is gone.

Choyce's characters are those people on the bus, those crazies you went to school with, who swing from tree branches, who hate their teachers, who fall in love with their best friend's girl, and who go to school in Halifax.

And they are the people you see in your classes everyday, believing what their professors tell them, and trying to be like their profs by going down to the Public Gardens to ask an old man just what is his relationship between his sandwich and himself.

Mock chicken? says the old

Subscribe Today!

CANADIAN DIMENSION

Canada's Socialist News-Magazine

Canadian rate:
 Regular \$18.00
 Student/Parasitoid/Unemployed \$12.00
 Organizations \$25.00

8 Issues \$18.00
 8 Issues \$12.00
 8 Issues \$25.00

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 Prov/State _____
 Postal Code _____
 Total Enclosed _____

Canadian Dimension, 8th floor - 44 Princess Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 1K2

... trying to improve television is a futile activity, as long as our education system is allowed to continue falling apart at the expense of television.

Read.

By JOHN GUSHUE

(CUP) — Postman wrote this book during 1984, a year during which academics and media analysts were drawing a frenzy of connections between George Orwell's novel of the same name and the more frightening realities of modern society. Postman gives Orwell his due, but also notes the similarities between the often-compared *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* are not as simple as they appear to be.

Orwell devised a world where terror was imposed through the deprivation of pleasure. Huxley on the other hand, feared terror could be as easily created through the excessive supply of pleasure. And it is Postman's theory that

Huxley, not Orwell, may turn out to be right.

Postman — a respected New York critic and educator — is a prophet's prophet; he draws simple lines between Orwell and Huxley, to media seer Marshall McLuhan, introducing their warnings and predictions together before delivering an alarming message of his own.

Amusing Ourselves to Death
 By Neil Postman
 Viking

Simply put, Postman fears the methods of learning and communication are not only changing, but are radically deteriorating.

Perhaps the subtitle of the book best illustrates his point — 'Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business'. Drawing on the intellectual and historical property of centuries of civilization, Postman

makes elaborate and impressive attempts to show a society dependent on Eyewitness News, Johnny Carson and Miami Vice is a society going down the tubes.

One of the strengths of Postman's work is an extensive use of historical background. To prove that Americans of 200 years ago are of a society more passionate about learning, literacy and debate, he provides lengthy examples of the popularity of pamphlets, newspapers, journals and rousing public arguments in Ben Franklin's New England before discussing the death of same in today's media and culture.

Unlike many media critics, Postman doesn't take shots at the type of show that people watch; for him, trying to improve television is a futile activity, as long as our education system is allowed to continue falling apart at the expense of television.

Postman is not an obsessed

man, bent on wrecking television sets to cast out evil demons; rather, he offers his own writing as an example of the rhetoric and exposition that people are losing the ability (and desire) to contribute to others.

Postman is more critical of television reformers than of the people who churn out demographically-designed programming. A case in point: he agrees *Sesame Street*, the wunderkind of children's programming, is educational, but argues that what the show really teaches children is not so much how to learn, but how to

And, Postman argues, the television industry is adept at maintaining a child's addiction by maintaining a satisfactory level of child-like television for lifetime consumption. In other words, television hasn't grown up, and probably can't.

Postman is also a teacher's teacher; he is passionately concerned about education, and his arguments seem to carry more weight because of commitment to the quality of learning in our schools. While calling on teachers to not use television as a teaching

tool, he also advises everyone to remember the importance of reading in the learning process, and the importance of the printed medium in our culture.

Postman is just as concerned about the future of a society that relies on television advertising and newscasts for the information on which to make important decision, such as that for a presidential election. Ronald Reagan is admired as the Great Communicator, not for his ability to administer or govern. (Reagan himself seems like a prophet: Postman uses a 1966 quote of Reagan's —

"Politics is just like show business" — to illustrate the spectator sport of the American democratic process.)

Is television so dangerous? Yes, and no. Postman seems to conclude. He fears the prominence of television as a deciding factor in so many features of Western society, from decision-making to cultural policy. "No medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are," Postman writes. It is comprehension and independence that we could use more of, and not another banal TV show.

Plus ça change. . .

By RICHARD HOWARD

How big can government grow and how much should government control? These are the main questions posed in David Stockman's book, *The Triumph of Politics*.

Stockman, the director of the Office of Management and Budget under the Reagan Administration until his unseemly demise in 1984, argues that American government is inextricably linked to every facet of the U.S. economy. He paints a grim picture of the workings of American bureaucracy. Tariffs, subsidies, import restrictions and private interest groups all stifle and distort the free market system.

The Triumph of Politics
 By David Stockman
 Harper and Row
 1985

Why is this so? For Stockman the triumph of politics is essentially over economics and common sense. Government follows a single entry bookkeeping mentality. Every single interest group, union, and depressed area clamours for handouts while simultaneously demanding less government intervention and lower taxes.

Stockman cites two glaring examples of government waste. The first is Social Security, a demographic time bomb which threatens to drain every cent of future tax revenue unless drastic changes are made. The second is military spending which under the direction of Caspar Weinberger ('Cap the Shovel'), topped 1.46 trillion dollars over a three year period.

This is where supply-side economics falls flat on its face. The main tenet of supply-side theory was that a decrease in the marginal tax rate would stimulate overall economic activity. People would work more because they were taxed less and business would invest more because after tax profits would be higher. It was



even suggested that people and business would work so much harder that government would be able to recoup more revenue from the increased economic activity than they lost from the original cut in taxes. Such utopian views of fiscal policy have an intuitively appealing quality.

However any tax cut must be matched by an equal cut in government spending. This turned out to be impossible to achieve. Everyone wanted the tax cut, but no one felt inclined to hand over their share of the social security blanket. The result was that with lower tax rates and higher government spending, the deficit ballooned to over \$200 billion as government scrambled to borrow the difference.

With the military a simple fudging of data allowed for the continuation of lavish 'spending banquets'. This was all achieved at the President's expense. As Stockman writes, Weinberger, a Harvard-trained cabinet officer, turned presidential meetings into the intellectual equivalent of *Sesame Street*, using cartoons to illustrate his points to the President.

Ultimately, Stockman blames both Reagan — his inability to effectively delegate responsibility, and the self-seeking interests of congressmen and senators for the failure of supply-side economics. The paltry tax cuts that, eventually did get enacted came too late and were eroded by inflation. Government subsidies were never altered and 'pork barrel' politics remained alive and intact. Supply side economics failed because while internally logical, it could never be successfully grafted onto the American economy. Stockman, disillusioned with the entire decision making process, jumped off the boat of fiscal conservatism to seek solace in the arms of Liberal (Keynesian) Democrats.

The Triumph of Politics is an excellent description of American bureaucracy and the mentality of those who pull the strings. Stockman is a man with formidable intellectual powers and this fact is not lost on the reader. It merely serves to sustain the old adage — the more things change, the more they stay the same.

All wet

... The perfect political mentality — that of a football coach, combining the will to win with the belief that the game is important."

— Eugene McCarthy

By PAT SAVAGE

In *The Rainmaker*, Keith Davey has chosen to tell us very little about the history of the Liberal Party over the past 25 years. This is disappointing because Davey has been around so long and done so much, that we expect more of him.

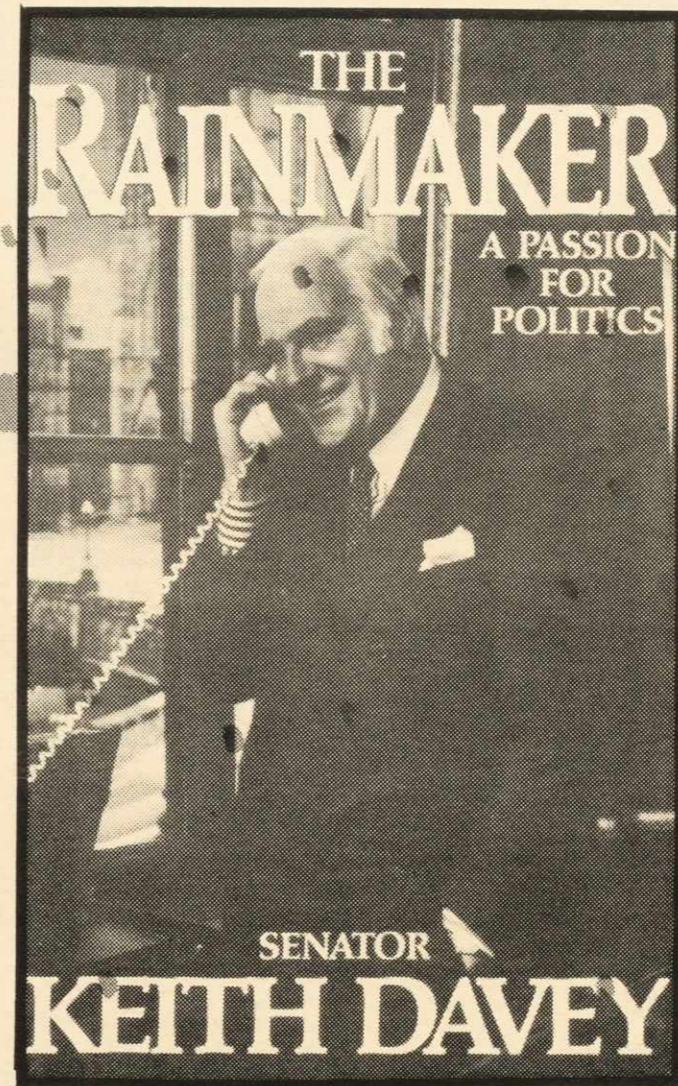
Director of the Liberal Party from 1961-65 and then appointed as liberal senator, Davey has been intimately involved in the running of seven of the past nine liberal campaigns. He has served three different Liberal prime ministers, and survived two of them to go on and manage future campaigns. In the Liberal Party, Keith Davey is the Mr. Fix-it.

So when *The Rainmaker* reads like Jean Chretien's *Straight From the Heart*, a selection of anecdotes lacking analysis or thought, Davey has fallen short of his mark.

For example, Davey describes a 1964 meeting between the Liberals and the NDP to discuss a possible merger. "There was much agreement about policies, programs and directions, but equally much disagreement about political philosophies and the practicality of such a merger." That is all Davey, one of the Liberal Party's main strategists at the time, has to say about the possible merger of two of the three major political parties in Canada!

The 1963 election, when Pearson was first elected prime minister is also skated over quickly. The most divisive issue of the 1963 election was whether Canada should accept American nuclear weapons on her soil.

The Conservative Party under John Diefenbaker said no. Pearson reversed the Liberal position of the past and decided that if elected, a Liberal government would allow nuclear warheads to



be placed on American guided missiles already on Canadian soil.

This decision is seen by many to be of great importance in Canadian history. George Grant went on to write book about what this decision represented for Canada because they have seen the rouged face of power."

Davey's comments on the situation refer only to the profitability of such a move. "It was

Subscribe to:
Broadside

A feminist monthly newspaper providing analysis of politics, arts, updates, comment and humour.

\$16./10 issues

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ CODE _____

Broadside,
 PO Box 494, Station P,
 Toronto, Ontario M5S 2T1

The Rainmaker
 By Senator Keith Davey
 Stoddart Publishing Co.
 1986



New Maritimes

Subscribe today!

AN INDEPENDENT REGIONAL MONTHLY REPORTING ON POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES FROM A CRITICAL LEFT POINT OF VIEW.

Yes, I want to receive New Maritimes. Please put me on your subscription list for the next year. Enclosed find my cheque or money order for \$15.

Name _____
 Address _____
 Postal Code _____

Make cheque or money order payable to New Maritimes and mail to:
 New Maritimes
 Enfield, Hanis County
 N.S. B0N 1N0