

Strong advice for a feeble socialist government

by Doug Saunders

When Ontarians voted NDP in 1990, little titters of naughty delight were heard from polling stations around the province. People felt like they had done something real bad but kinda fun — like the time they let the pit bull into the principal's office, but on a larger scale.

Then, for everyone, there was an interminable period of drop-jawed, eyebrows-up anticipation — for some, there was a dread-filled anticipation of unionized hordes, corporate taxes, free universities, free housing, free hospitals, free child care and big, smelly industries fleeing to warmer climes. For others, there was a glee-filled anticipation of those very same things.

And then — nothing. No revolution, no dictatorship of the office cleaners, no massive flight of capital. Rent stayed high, the recession continued to do its thing, the rich still got richer and the poor poorer. Spring came, dad got laid off and NDP was just another word for The Government. Everyone — even those who voted Tory — was disappointed.

Into this disheartening scenario steps Daniel Drache, a political scientist at York's Glendon campus. Drache and 13 of his colleagues have assembled *Getting on Track*, a guidebook to what's wrong with Ontario and how a well-heeled horde of socialists should go about fixing it.

BOOK

**Getting On Track:
 Social Democratic Strategies for Ontario**
 written by Daniel Drache
 McGill-Queen's University Press
 237 pages, \$18.95

And I mean well-heeled. This is not a two-page pamphlet which reads: "Nationalize the industries and banks, set up workers' councils, tax the churches and make the Bronfmans shovel the sidewalks" — as appealing as that sounds.

Drache and company have accepted two sad little premises. The first is that NDP is just another word for The Government, and a government built by 150 years of corporate scoundrels at that. The best we can hope for is a government which will minimize the damage done by the current round of corporate scoundrels. This premise is the cornerstone of traditional social democracy.

Their second premise is that the NDP won't even be able to do what social democrats have traditionally done — acted as a people's hand on the levers of power — because most of the levers of power aren't even at hand anymore. Whether you call it the internationalizing of trade, the global mobility of capital or the transnational revolution, it means that governments can't control big business anymore because big business



Sure, Ontario Premier Bob Rae is cute. But, how well does he listen? • photo by Mok Sharma

can move itself elsewhere, just like that.

This means the Ontario NDP needs to be very innovative, very bold. They haven't. They've responded to the recession by cutting spending, contrary to the left's best advice; they've spent hundreds of millions bolstering 'dinosaur' industries like de Havilland and Algoma; they've been painfully slow to bring in much-needed changes to labour laws; they haven't even considered a big investment in education, training and research to help us keep pace with the world economy —

in fact, they've cut back in these areas.

Getting on Track is an apt title, then. And most (but not all) of the 14 political scientists, economists and labour researchers agree on what track the NDP should follow.

Buzzing around that track is the word "competitiveness," which became the mantra of mandarins in the 1990s the way "full employment" did in the 1930s.

The local Koran of competitiveness is a hefty report called *Competing in the New Global Economy*, written in 1988 by David Peterson's Premier's Council. When it appeared, it was considered pretty radical for a Liberal party publication. It contradicted the bottom-line line of most governments in Canada and the US, who keep saying that the only way to survive in the increasingly competitive international jungle is to produce goods as cheaply as possible.

Instead, the report called on Ontario to spend some money on an industrial strategy — specifically, one which would help us develop the businesses that bring in the most money (usually high-tech, brains-over-brawn type industries), and do whatever we can to keep them here. Competitiveness, then, would mean competing to have the richest businesses instead of competing to make the cheapest stuff.

It sounds good because it's better than the free-market alternative — but that's not saying much. A slap sounds good when you're expecting a punch, but it still ain't no kiss.

Ontario should go all the way, most of *Getting on Track's* authors say, by moving beyond individual businesses and developing entire sectors of the economy — and not

simply by throwing gobs of dough in their direction, either, but by looking at the way things happen on the shop (or office) floor and trying to make them happen better, faster and with more flexibility.

Which means *restructuring* — another word with an insidious buzz. In the neo-liberal lexicon, restructuring means layoffs, plant closures, wage cuts, replacing full-timers with temps and whatever else you can do to make your business lean and mean. Drache and his colleagues are hip to this; they call for tough labour legislation to protect workers against this damn-the-torpedoes approach to upping the margins.

In a pithy and potent paper, John O'Grady explains how Ontario's outdated labour laws can be replaced with ones which allow entire sectors to be unionized, all at once, through the courts — so your McJob can at least have a McUnion.

The social-democratic approach to business restructuring is markedly different from the popular cost-cutting one — especially since it calls for increased costs. More training and education, more research and development, more flexible and high-tech workplaces, more money spent on the links between suppliers and manufacturers. The authors each have their own way of getting all this restructuring going — ranging from a development bank funded through pension funds, to an employers' payroll training tax, to welfare-based training strategies.

Other authors explain how we can avoid turning into Mexico North if that other kind of restructuring prevails — through improved employment and pay equity (so our country's increasingly bold class lines at least don't fall across gender and race lines), more vigorous labour protection, more dynamic forms of social assistance.

Economist Harold Chorney, in an essay which should be nailed onto a few Bay Street foreheads, explains why a \$9.7 billion deficit is no big deal for Ontario and how a larger deficit can actually become an index of impending economic growth.

And in the most radical essay in what is really a rather moderate book, Sam Gindin and David Robertson reject the whole premise of competitiveness and call for an industrial strategy geared toward serving communities rather than the global economy.

None of this will transform Ontario overnight into an oasis of equality and prosperity, but it would come a lot closer to what we voted for. Let's hope Rae puts it on his summer reading list.

Exposing political roots of cancer epidemic

by Tim Doucette

One in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic is an anthology of essays and poetry that exposes the political roots of the worsening cancer epidemic in the words of women who have responded to their diagnoses with anger and activism.

The one in three of the title refers to the number of women living in North America today who will be diagnosed as having some form of cancer. Of that third of the female population, two out of three will die of the disease; half of those diagnosed with cancer will die within five years.

Put another way, the next time you walk down a street, chances are that in nearly eight out of ten of the houses you pass there will be at least one person who has or will have cancer.

It's not surprising that women should be on the cutting edge of cancer activism. Having been marginalized by the male-dominated medical establishment, women have less of a stake in maintaining the status quo. Also, at least in the American health-care-for-profit system, women, especially women of colour, receive sub-standard care because of their relatively low economic status.

But perhaps the strongest catalyst for action is the statistics on breast cancer. Although it strikes one in nine women and represents 14% of all reported cancers (28% of reported cancers suffered by women), breast cancer receives only 4% of cancer research dollars.

Not that many of the women in *1 in 3* put much faith in the research establishment. Most treatments currently available are, at best, ineffective, others only cause cancers to spread and some cause new cancers to grow.

Mammograms, aside from having a high failure rate, may cause more cancers than they detect. As Judith Brady puts it, "The heavy use of radiation seems more closely linked to the eradication of hospital debt than to the eradication of cancer."

If we want to prevent cancers, we must address the environmental —

BOOK

1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic
 edited by Judy Brady
 published by Cleiss Press
 260 pages, \$10.95 paper

which is to say, political — causes of the disease. A 1984 study for the Louisiana state legislature concluded that "many, if not most, cancers are preventable."

An estimated 90% of all cancers are caused by human-made carcinogens, up from 80% in 1964. Half the US population is exposed daily to levels of benzene higher than the "safe level" recognized by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The government-owned nuclear plant in Hanford, Washington has released enough radiation to make it as dangerous as Chernobyl, much of it in massive, deliberate "experimental doses."

Yet when we hear about cancer in the mass media, the most radical advice we are offered is to not smoke and eat more vegetables.

Certainly, there are ways of reducing one's cancer risk at the personal level, smoking and diet being two obvious controls. But the writers in *1 in 3* are unwilling to take the burden of blame for their own victimization, whether from corporate

apologists with their scientifically "safe levels" of contamination or New Age pseudo-mystics blathering about "cancer personalities."

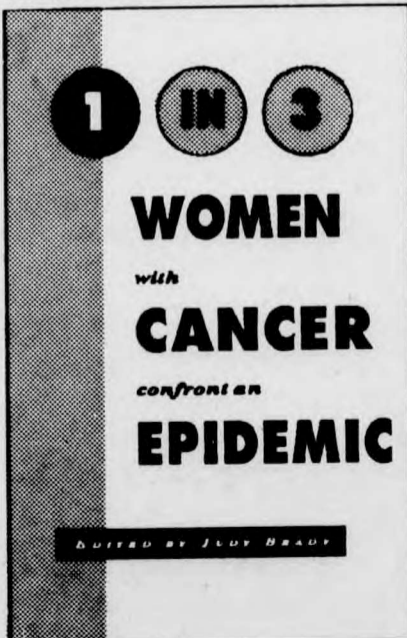
For one thing, habits are largely socially constructed: was it really *your* idea to smoke or eat hamburgers every other day? For another, the main carcinogens in cigarettes and beef do not come from the tobacco or the meat as such, but from industrial additives and pollutants that in many ways cannot be avoided no matter what your "lifestyle."

In addition, risks taken at the individual level are exacerbated by immune systems already overwhelmed by what Jackie Winnow calls "invisible violence."

Personal choices are also shaped by access to information. You're not likely to know much about the animal fat connection to breast cancer because, as Susan Rennie has documented, "this information has not been made public because of the influence of special interest groups (nutritionists and physicians with ties to the meat and dairy lobbies), and the conservative leadership of the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute."

One of the main goals of the anti-cancer movement has to be education. Of the 140,000 toxic waste dumps identified in the US, why are 60 per cent in Black or Hispanic neighbourhoods? Why has cancer gone from causing 4 per cent of US deaths in 1900 to 23 per cent today, threatening to overtake heart disease as the number one killer? Why, with more than a trillion dollars spent on research and treatment since President Nixon declared "war on cancer" in 1971 has nothing been done about real prevention?

Dozens of women address these and many other questions in *1 in 3*, each in her own way. The connection between the personal and the political is made throughout. The importance of all people, female and male, healthy and not, standing up against the institutionalized violence the cancer epidemic represents, comes across loud and clear.



POP

W E A K L Y

NEXT WEDNESDAY