

gentlemen, players & politicians

GENTLEMEN, PLAYERS AND POLITICIANS

MicClelland and Stewart;
346 pgs.; \$10.00

Reviewed by David R. Jonah

No greater authority than the Globe and Mail described Maritime politics once, as something very dark and deep much the same as a Maritimer's religion and rum. Dalton Camp in his backroom politics diary, *Gentlemen, Players and Politicians* (McClelland and Stewart 1970) paints a very smokey but poignant picture of Maritime politics leading us behind the scenes where political decisions and careers are made and unmade.

I'm not particularly fond of the book, for it is hard to attach any sentiment to a book on raw political power and the manipulations of men necessary to effect peace, order and good government. It is not a book that will go down in history as changing the Canadian political scene for years to come or the local political climate for any distance in the future. Either because it offers little; other than a glance at Dalton Camp and his rather interesting life and the character he encountered on his journey to fame as the man who toppled "the Chief" in 67. This book recounts how it all started.

"Here is Dalton's World and Welcome to IT would have been a much more apt if not accurate title for the diary discourse.

Camp is a man of mystery and intrigue because he has survived and for no other reason. To survive in a world of power brokers as a tool of their interests and to live long enough politically and morally to record it, is indeed an accomplishment in itself, not to be lightly tossed aside. He has said that he bears no grudge, no malice, no conceit, in writing his memoirs other than presenting a picture of what it's like near the power center. Very interesting.

However Camp himself must realize that if his account is true, free of malice, grudges or conceits, as he says it is, then that book and its sequel will bar him from being near the power center ever again, despite his not too distant relation with Robert Stanfield. He's

going to have enough trouble remaining at the power control center himself let alone protect the kiss-and-tell-Camp.

Assuming that the book is accurate, it is of great interest to anyone of this region let alone those closely attached to politics. The men who are presently forming the government downtown will find it required reading, in fact if one were to check closely one could find a good script for the proceedings now under way downtown where the political beneficiaries of the Camp era are now acting out their roles set down in the book. For instance Hugh John Flemming who frustrated Camp with his slow speaking deciding manner is still down there refusing to make up his mind on anything. He has never had to decide anything that couldn't be put off and he easily can see no reason to change all that now. Flemming was from Juniper Carleton County while the present Tory wonderboy is from Carleton county out of Hartland.

Hatfield to be fair has no problem making up his mind at all, however deciding what to decide on first must be a problem. The political rumor mills are generating lots about our new bachelor premier much the same as what they generating lots about our bachelor Prime Minister. He's difficult to work for because he doesn't trust no one to do anything, since he's sure they will do it wrong. His god-father Hugh John did all the governing himself when he was premier and Hatfield, so they say is following his lead. But as Camp has said in his book the Conservative Party is full of wise sages and wits such as Ev Chalmers, a local practising doctor who in the best tradition of a witch doctor curses his patients well with a very vitrolic tongue. Camp gives an insight into the wisdom of Chalmers mind by quoting him at length on his opinions of 1950 Liberal Health care in the province.

"Chalmers, was a doctor's doctor and a man's man. Profanity was with him a compulsion; four-letter words were the punctuation in his speech, employed as adverbs, adjectives, nouns and working verbs. He swore before his wife and children, nurses, patients and colleagues, who listened enthralled at this striking exhibition of the electrifying versatility of the lesser words in the

English language.

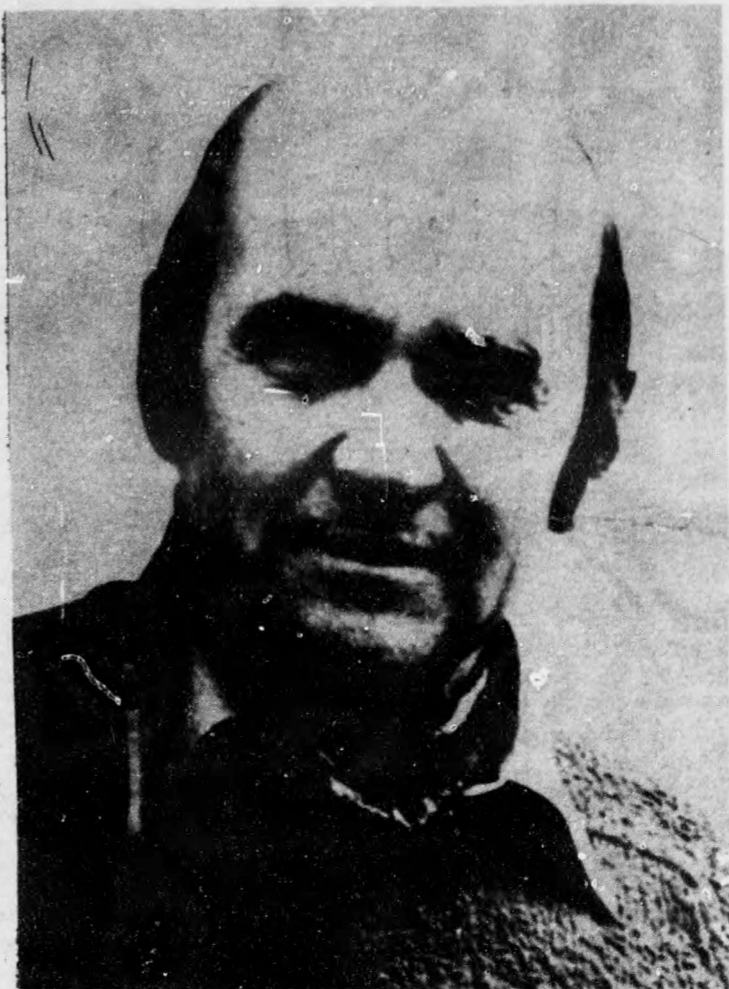
"I'll tell you about the goddam Liberal health program. A woman comes to me, see, she's half out of her fucking mind, with this Christless lump in her breast. So I take a section, see, because she probably has cancer but no way in God's world can I operate on her until I damn well know what's wrong with her."

"Well Jesus, I have to ship the goddam tissue to St. John, on the fucking bus, see, and Wait, Christ, three days to a goddam week while this poor woman is half out of her mind - maybe she's a mother, see, or has to work for a goddam living - but I can't tell her whether she has cancer or not, whether I have to remove the goddam breast or what the hell I'm going to do to her because the fucking grits refuse to give a clinic in this Christless city. And I've told those bastards a hundred times: for Christ's sake stop building those fucking liquor stores and give you goddam doctors a decent chance to practice medicine and save a few fucking lives."

Chalmers is presently in the cabinet as a minister without portfolio so cabinet meetings must be concise when he presents a problem to be decided on, defined in his best manner as revealed by Camp's book.

There are several such lengthy quotations in the book and they are a tribute to Camp's elephant like mind. In fact his memory is so well developed that several personages quoted in the book decided to sue the author for great amounts (including an outraged Chalmers who turned the air blue with poignant comment on the state of literary talent in the country when informed of the contents of the book) of money only to be reminded by friends of better memory and political acuity that it would be unwise.

Why did he write the book, maybe for his wife who he says has had to suffer with all the changing of political fortune, just to prove to her that it was all worth it. Somewhat I doubt it. Camp is clearly a man of some ability and men of that nature especially in the creative world of advertising are slightly off center in regards to containing their ego. His form of work demands great concentration, preparation and brilliant and consistent execution, all of which cries out for recognition. Camp's book gives



Dalton Camp, ex-president of the national Conservative party, is considered to be primarily responsible for Diefenbaker's ousting in 1967.

him the credit he feels he deserves without bias, malice or prejudice just as he tells us it does.

There are lots of instances where the modest minded reader would laugh or react in disgust to the men he portrays in his graphically written novel. But it is not easy to brush away the intelligent and occasionally brilliant observations he makes concerning the art of politics. For example one or two has to think of the present political has been, Louis Robichaud caretaker leader of the liberal of the opposition, when reading the following observation.

"When men in power lose their touch, their faculty in determining the political climate, the tragedy is they are the last to know it is gone. For awhile their power and reputation will sustain them, or the gift of their opponent's folly may rescue them, but when the decay of judgement sets in, it permeates the bones of the public man and he has not long to last. It is a terminal condition and no amount of luck may save him."

It is comments like this and many more like them that make this book worth reading and keeping as future reference should anyone consider a career in politics.

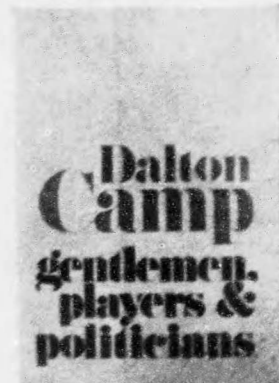
The most unique aspect of the book is that it is completely Canadian. A book of rare quality that will serve our political appetite for some time until the sequel is published some time in 1972.

It will be doubtlessly be of the same gender, a trifle more of "the great things I did for the Canadian Conservative Par-

ty are as follows" but we can stand this if only to get a glance of this nation as a political operation.

We need more Canadian authors and books as this one, the more we have the more we will learn hopefully about ourselves. Camp's book leaves no doubt that we a political identity much different to that of the United States despite their domination. We are a nation that has come of age.

He has offered the politically interested a choice, take your chance and be a player, a politician or a gentleman. They are too scarce in number.



Dalton Camp, a resident of Toronto, was born in New Brunswick and is a graduate of UNB. An active Progressive Conservative for many years he became nationally famous as the man who forced John Diefenbaker to step down as head of the Conservative Party. Mr. Camp has recently given up public life in favour of writing a newspaper column and completing the second volume of his memoirs, the completion of *Gentlemen, players and politicians*, expected to be published later this year.