

A lion retires

by R.F. MacDonald

George Grant, widely referred to as Canada's most eminent philosopher, is retiring this year to write, marking the end of an era. He has taught at Dalhousie from 1947 to 1960 and from 1980 to 1984.

Grant is considered an anomaly by most doctrinaire political scientists; in *Lament for a Nation* he defended what they considered the indefensible—Diefenbaker. Yet that book serves only as a brief practical introduction to Grant's sweeping view of the struggle between the ancients and the moderns. His assertions have grand implications; mainly that we have come to what could be called the end of politics, and ultimately the end of philosophy itself.

In an interview with the *Gazette*, Grant explained why he chose to retire in Halifax rather than his native southern Ontario.

"You know, central Toronto where I grew up—my mother's house—is now a parking lot to a subway station. In Nova Scotia there hasn't been such an enormous break with the past. There's a greater continuity with the past and that means people belong to things in a more immediate way.

"One thing I have noticed down here is the great hostility to central Canada. Yet as people like the greater continuity—the greater solidity of life in Nova

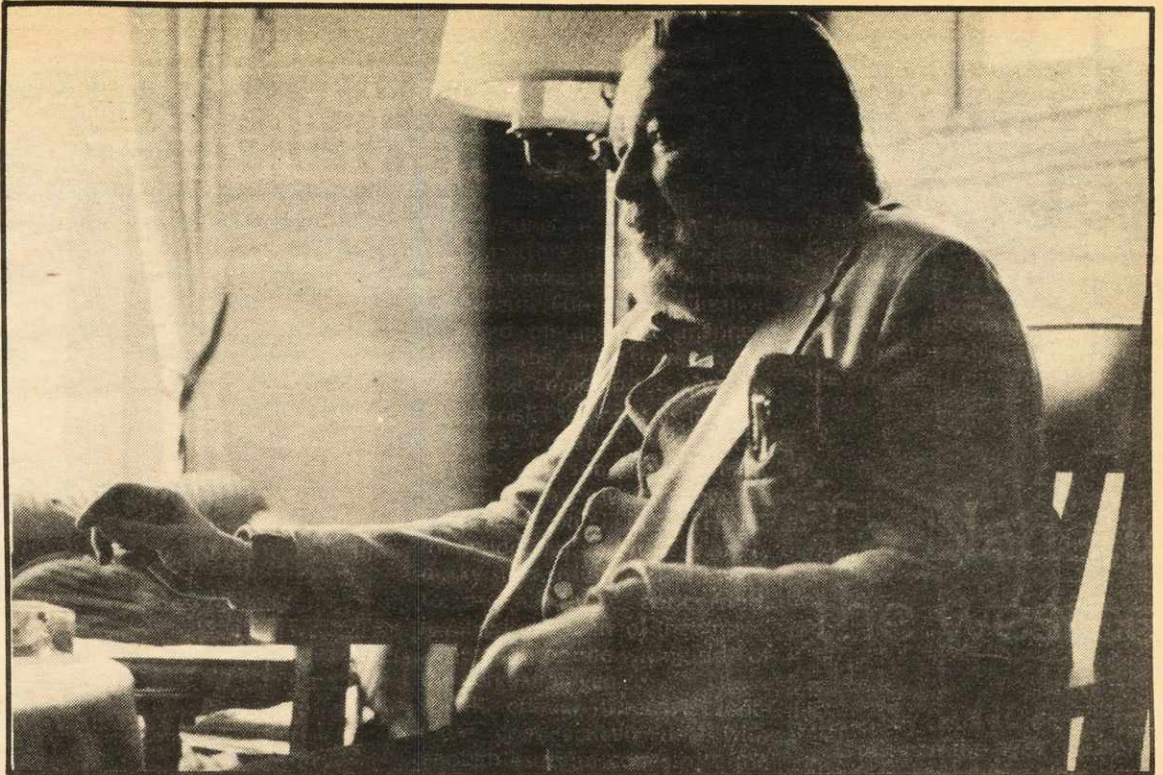
Scotia—they are envious of the other way.

"A place like Nova Scotia is as finely controlled by large scale continental capitalism as any place, but it isn't as immediately controlled. In Ontario it is almost impossible not to live in the ambience of the great corporations."

Grant's reputation as a conservative seems at odds with his dislike of corporations. Indeed, for someone like John Crosbie (who advocated free trade during the Tory leadership campaign) Grant would seem to be more of a New Democrat. Yet it must be remembered that it was Sir John A. Macdonald who rejected continentalism with the National Policy. What Grant sees is the impossibility of resurrecting this policy after the world wars and the ravages of C.D. Howe.

The Liberals, according to Grant, periodically talk nationalism but they have always acted as integrationists. The economy of Ontario, he said, is now locked into that of the United States.

In *Technology and Empire* Grant said the position of the conservative in what he calls "late state Capitalism" is noble but ultimately futile. He was asked whether the position of the left had also been rendered futile, particularly with regards to his assertion in *Lament for a Nation* that the desired end of



George Grant, one of Canada's most eminent philosophers, is retiring from Dalhousie this year.

Socialists and Conservatives was the expression of the common good (only their means defined them).

"Let me say what I meant by conservatism. It is just a fact that the Conservatives built certain national institutions running east and west rather than north and south. These national institutions were nearly all built by the Conservative Party: Macdonald built the railway against all the pressure from the Liberals, the Bank of Canada—Bennett, the CBC—Bennett. It (the CBC) is

such a Liberal Institution now but it was set up by the Conservatives. The older Conservatives used state power to enable Canadians to exercise some degree of control over their own lives, for the common good. After all, it was Bennett who put through the New Deal in Canada which Mackenzie King got rid of as soon as he got in. Socialists will never get anywhere in North America because we've always been run by the bourgeois, every society is run," said Grant.

"The one reason I've been a

Conservative is that the least respectable bourgeois have been Liberals. I mean respectable in how you care about your own country and how it is run.

"In late state Capitalism, which is a highly developed form of technological society—much more developed than the Marxists—you're not going to have politics, in the old fashioned sense, of people really taking part directly in what happens in their countries," he mused.

"I think in that sense you can say it's the end of politics."

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