

# EXCALIBUR INTERVIEW

With Tommy Douglas, first leader of the NDP

In the early sixties, The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) emerged from many years of meetings and discussions to launch the New Democratic Party (NDP), the political arm of Canadian Labour.

Leader of the new party in its first years of existence was Tommy Douglas, one-time CCF premier of Saskatchewan and probably the most well-known socialist in North America.

Although no longer leader of the NDP Douglas is still active in Canadian politics, both as a member of Parliament and as spokesperson for the NDP.

Douglas spoke with Excalibur last Thursday at Glendon College.

By IAN KELLOGG

**EXCALIBUR - In your talk you outlined the basic principles of democratic socialism; an over-riding concern for the disadvantaged, equality of opportunity, use of resources for the benefit of the people and not for profit, preservation of personal freedom, and the extension of democracy. All these principles seem rather vague. I don't think any party would be against them. How do they differ from the policies of other parties?**

**DOUGLAS-Well, let's go over them. First of all, do you think that in Canada where the bottom 20 per cent of the population according to the latest figures get only 4 per cent of the national wealth, while the top 20 per cent get 42.5 per cent. Is there anything like a fair distribution of income? Can anybody say that our over-riding concern is at present the group at the bottom of the economic spectrum when we only give 4 per cent of our wealth to that whole 20 per cent of the population?**

**EXCALIBUR - You are trying to achieve a redistribution of income then.**

**DOUGLAS-Oh, absolutely. That is why we want a tax system that redistributes income. The Carter report said a buck is a buck, but instead of following Carter we have gone backward. We are giving more tax concessions now than we gave ten years ago when Carter made his report.**

**Take the second principle, equality of opportunity. Do you think there is equality of opportunity for young people going to university or going out to look for a job?**

**Is there equality of opportunity for people going to university or going out to look for a job? Is there equality of opportunity for young women going out on the market and competing with young men? Is there equality of opportunity for a young person growing up in Newfoundland and a young person growing up in Toronto?**

**EXCALIBUR - Wouldn't the other parties be against the same things you are now pointing out?**

**DOUGLAS-I don't think so. They have certainly demonstrated that. The other two parties have been in power and yet...**

**EXCALIBUR - Are they trying to prolong inequality?**

**DOUGLAS-Well, I think they too would like to see a more egalitarian society. What they are not prepared to do is deal with the basic problem. The basic problem goes way back to the fact that under the market economy the people who produce the wealth of the nation never get enough to buy it back. In other words, there is a surplus value in that production. That surplus value goes to the owner class. The owner class uses the surplus value as a cash flow and capital for further expansion. The more they invest it for expansion the more of the country they own.**

**They don't even always use it wisely. Sometimes they use it for useless things that they can sell but really add nothing. But they do nothing to clean up the environment, they do nothing to remove health hazards in uranium or asbestos mines, they do nothing about oil spills, or that we are cutting down five trees for every one we plant.**

**So, you can only have equality of opportunity if somebody is prepared to step in and say look, the major decisions affecting the economy cannot be made on the basis of profitability. They have to be made on the basis of public good.**

**EXCALIBUR - Which one of the five basic principles would you emphasise the most?**

**DOUGLAS-I think the third one is what you have to start with. That is, you have to begin to re-organize society so that the resources of this country, both material and financial, are guided and directed towards producing full employment and a high standard of living.**

**Now, the one that comes first, of course, is I will not support economic change unless, along with it, there is a guarantee of maintaining our civil liberties and prolonging and expanding the democratic process. I'm a democratic socialist. But I'm a democrat first and a socialist afterwards. I will not accept any type of socialism or planned economy which eradicates or eliminates in one particular the democratic process or personal liberties which we have.**

**EXCALIBUR - Most sections of the NDP are against Trudeau's anti-inflation program. However, some commentators have said since the AIB [Anti-Inflation Board] is government intervention in the market, it is a socialist measure. Do you think the AIB is socialist?**

**DOUGLAS-No, I don't. We didn't object to the AIB legislation because it constituted intervention in the market. As a matter of fact we have been in favour of intervention in the market. We have been advocating for a number of years that the federal government should introduce an incomes policy. Interestingly enough, as far back as 1968 and 1969 the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) asked the government to introduce an incomes policy much along the lines of what we had been advocating. So neither the CLC or ourselves were objecting to the AIB because it constituted public interference in the economy.**

**What we objected to was first, that it left the control of the economy still in the hands of those who have controlled it all along and who got us into the mess we now have. Secondly, this was an incomes policy that applied, really, almost entirely to wages and salaries. Other forms of income such as profits and dividends and interest rates and professional fees go relatively untouched. You've only got to look at the figures for the last year according to the AIB's own report. The professional people who were only supposed to get a \$2,400 increase averaged a \$4,900 increase. So, you can see, this has been in our opinion, an inequitable, unfair and unworkable program. That is why we didn't support it. We will support a proper incomes policy that will effect all sectors of the population.**

**EXCALIBUR - The NDP's stand on the AIB has recently caused labour to criticize the party. What is causing this?**

**DOUGLAS - The unions are very angry at the Trudeau government about the AIB. But, they are also angry at two of the provincial governments which are NCP. That annoyance, in my opinion, arises out of a failure to understand the purport and the power contained in the anti-inflation act.**

**Under the act the federal government used its powers under "Peace, Order and Good Government" to invade the provincial government's jurisdiction over 90 per cent of all workers. The federal government took the sweeping power of saying we have jurisdiction over all workers except those that come under the public sector in the province, civil servants, teachers, nurses and so on. My own opinion is they have no constitutional authority to do that. As you know, the CLC has taken this matter to the courts and I don't know what the Supreme Court will decide.**

**Now, I think a lot of the trade unions mistakenly got the idea that the provincial government could say to the federal government, "well, you can pass this**

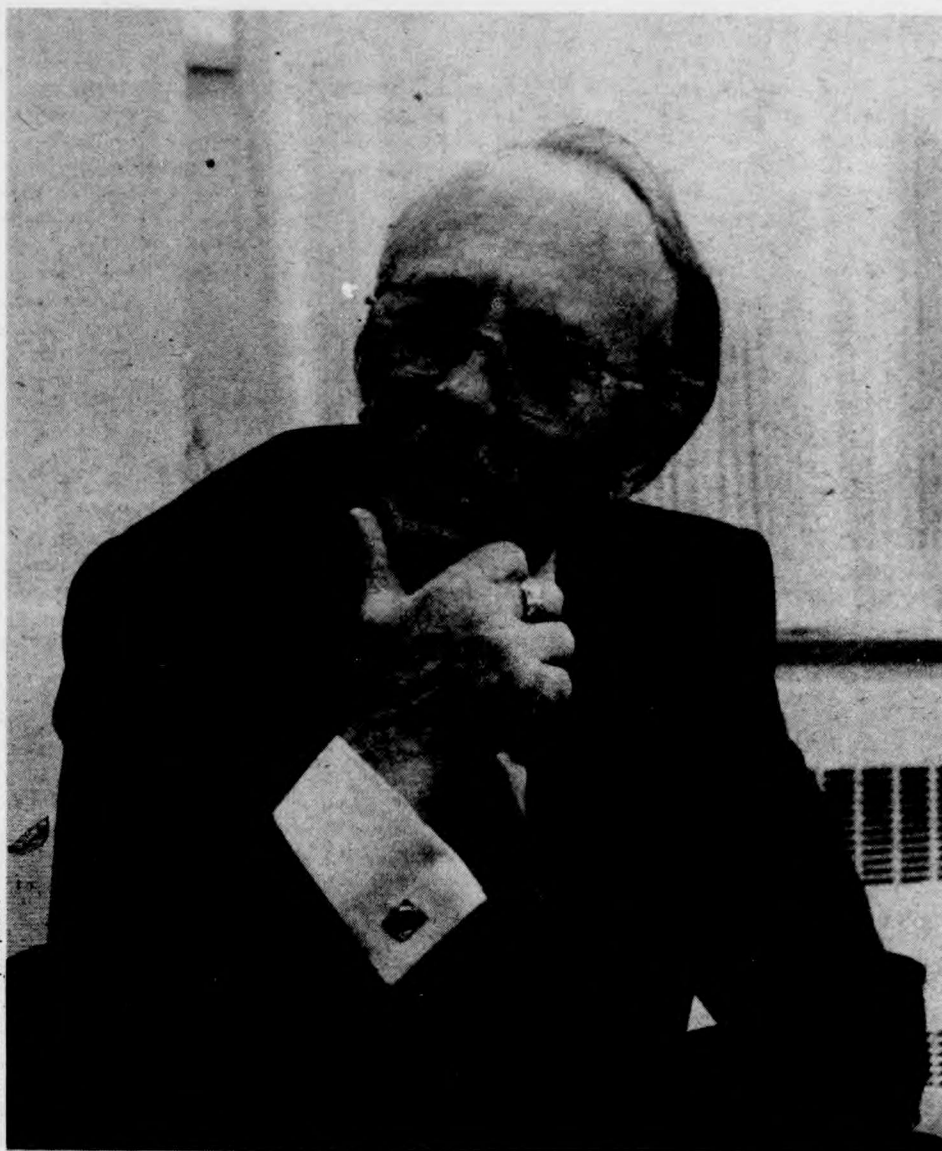


Photo: Frank Sinopoli

**We object to the AIB because it leaves control of the economy in the hands of those who have controlled it all along, who got us into the mess we now have**

**legislation for your 10 per cent, but for the 90 per cent that come under our jurisdiction you can't touch them". Well, unless the court decides the legislation is ultravires, the federal government can continue. All the provincial governments can do is to keep out their own public sector. And that is what the NDP governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and the government of Quebec have all done. I don't see that the NDP premiers could have done anything differently from what they have done.**

**EXCALIBUR - In the past year Trudeau and the Liberals have dropped in popularity. However, all their lost support has gone to the Conservative Party and not to the NDP. In light of this fact, now do you foresee the majority of Canadians coming to support the NDP in the future?**

**DOUGLAS-First of all I agree with you that in the last year any switch in the vote has been from the Liberals to the Conservatives. This, of course, troubles us a great deal. We would have hoped, at least, that the progressive people in the Liberal party, and there are a lot of progressive people in the Liberal party, would have switched to us. I think eventually that is what will happen. But apparently it hasn't happened yet if you can believe the polls.**

**I frankly don't know the reason. I think part of the reason is that in Canada we have a tradition, an unfortunate tradition, of being negative voters. We don't vote for a programme, we don't vote for a policy, we don't vote for a government. We vote against**

**governments. And in order to vote out a government we don't like, we vote for some other government even though it may not be one with better, and indeed could be worse. We've been doing this ever since confederation.**

**I don't know how long it's going to be until we get people to vote for something, to say, "this is a programme, and I'm going to vote for it. I may be the only person that will vote for it. But I'm going to vote for it." And after a while there will be two people to vote for it, and then four people.**

**But, we have developed a psychology in this country in which we look on elections almost as a horse race. People say, "Did you lose your vote?" when they mean did your candidate not get elected. Well, you are not backing a horse. You are voting according to your convictions. As an old friend of mine used to say, it is better to vote for something you want and not get it than to vote for something you don't want and know damn well you are not going to get it.**

**So, my hope lies in the fact, that as people realize both the old line parties, really with identical economic philosophies, demonstrate the futility of maintaining the present economic system, a lot of the progressive people in both parties will turn to us. How long that is going to take I don't know. I do know this, that in the last thirty to forty years a lot of those people have turned to us and I'm convinced this will happen increasingly in the future, particularly as Social Democratic parties gain favour in other parts of the world.**

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