

Review of:

Margaret Conrad, *George Nowlan: Maritime Conservative in National Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986, 357pp.

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Much of Nova Scotian politics has to do with roads. While miles of new pavement in Kings North have fed rumours of a fall provincial election, so too has the comparative neglect of Kings South which had the audacity of returning an NDPer. Reading Margaret Conrad's biography of George Nowlan makes these recent shenanigans seem depressingly familiar.

The book can be conveniently divided into three parts. The initial part is concerned, first, with Nowlan's involvement in provincial politics, and culminates in his election to the House of Commons in 1948 (p. 101). Approximately the middle third of the book is details his work as an opposition member and National President of the Conservative Party, and concludes with his appointment as Minister of National Revenue in the Diefenbaker Cabinet (p. 188). The last part of the book deals with his role as the chief Cabinet mediator and backroom politician, and culminates in his death, in 1965, once again a member of the opposition.

Conservative or conservative?

As Conrad describes him, Nowlan was a bundle of contradictions, leading him to be the champion of compromise and mediation rather than a strong protagonist in policy debates. One of these ironies can be found in Nowlan's choice of political parties.

Conrad describes him on many occasions as being ambitious (e.g. pp. 17, 25, 289). A son of a small business family, Nowlan adopted the increasingly common route of education to increase his opportunities and subsequently became a new petty bourgeois professional by studying law. The Dalhousie Law School offered as much a political as a legal education. As Conrad remarked: "Politics was the one career that offered young men a promising future in postwar Nova Scotia" (p. 31).

Provincially, the Liberal Party had a virtual monopoly of political power in the province. The Valley voted Liberal. One of the most prominent politicians in the Valley was J. L. Ilsley, a Liberal and a Kentville lawyer who taught law courses part-time at Dalhousie (p. 25) and who was elected to Parliament in 1926. It was only in 1948, when the popular Ilsley resigned his seat, that Nowlan ventured into federal politics. Crass, material ambition would dictate a Liberal career for Nowlan. Many of the policies championed by Nowlan would be successfully pursued by the Liberal Party. Nevertheless, Nowlan was a Conservative.

Nowlan's formal identification with the Conservative party came in 1919, during the provincial campaign in which the Tories came third behind the Liberals and the Farmer-Labour party. This dismal showing was duplicated in the federal contest of 1921 when the Progressives dropped the Conservatives to third nationally.

The question, then, becomes: why was Nowlan a Conservative? Part of the answer lies in the strength of Tory sentiment in the Valley; even when Liberals dominated, Conservatives remained a strong second (p. 32). The main part of the answer, however, lies in the tendency for voting to be determined by family ties and Nowlan's family were traditionally Conservative.

There is even irony in his heritage. His great-grandfather, Patrick Nowlan, emigrated from Ireland to Nova Scotia in 1818. The O'Nuallains had been hereditary chieftains and major landowners, but their wealth and power declined as British fortunes in Ireland rose (p. 8) Great-grandson George, however, would make much of his local reputation on representing Anglophone interests. Not surprisingly, given Nowlan's landing in western Nova Scotia, Patrick sr. married a woman who was both a Baptist and a loyalist. Great-grandson George would make much of his local reputation by championing the British and Anglophone causes in Canada.

Patrick took leading positions in community life and supported the Conservative party led by J. W. Johnston. Nowlan's grandfather, John George Nowlan, was equally occupied with the farming-lumbering-merchant activities of Patrick Sr., and with community, church and military matters. The Nowlans became pillars of the community.

Nowlan's father was raised during the period of Western Nova Scotia's greatest prosperity, but this prosperity was fleeting and by 1904 all of his children had left the community except the youngest, Charles Randall who inherited the family homestead (p. 10). Conrad describes him as an "individualist" with "strong moral convictions" (he belonged to the more rigid "reformed" Baptist church) who continued the traditional family practices of community and church service (p. 10). Charles married Hattie Delong, the daughter of a Baptist minister, in 1894, and George Clyde was born in 1898. In 1911, the Nowlans sold the family property and moved to Wolfville to provide educational opportunities for their children (p. 12). The Nowlans were small "c" conservatives and also Conservative Party supporters (p. 16), although Conrad makes only one direct reference to party support, which was noted above. Religion was a formative influence on Nowlan, but rather than forging a doctrinaire Baptist, his upbringing compelled a more liberal view of matters of policy and principle. Conrad emphasizes the evangelical Baptism of the Valley, but she also concludes that the Valley had a progressive side, rooted in the prosperity of the surrounding agriculture, which was sustained by apples and the British connection (p. 13). Unlike the stagnating town of Havelock, Wolfville was more cosmopolitan (p. 14). Supported by their farm, the Nowlans were quickly integrated into Wolfville life, in both church and civic institutions. Nowlan's early history, Conrad

suggests, contained a "dramatic tension" between self-sacrifice and possessive individualism which was not easily reconciled (p. 17).

Two main influences in Nowlan's early life were his education at Acadia and the war. The former prepared him for a legal career; the latter reinforced the values of patriotism, freedom and democracy and induced identification with the nation (p. 24). The legal ambition was clearly a case of anticipated upward mobility (p. 25). At Law School Nowlan became even more closely identified with the Conservative party. It was a case of family tradition determining the route for ambition. Career

In 1925, Nowlan, aged 27, contested the provincial election in the dual-member riding of Kings County for the Liberal-Conservatives. In the campaign he successfully identified himself with progressive issues: Maritime rights, administrative reforms, foreign ownership, hardships in Cape Breton, "adequate care for the mentally ill, a reformed penal system, [and] protection for children" (p. 34).

Elected as part of a Conservative sweep, Nowlan quickly grasped what was required for re-election, which he secured despite a Liberal resurgence in 1928. The issues were economic and the Conservative election was based on a progressive platform championed by Nowlan. Once in office, however, the party was unable to deliver the promised reforms. The Maritimes were mired in a depression well before 1929. Welfare measures were deemed impossible to implement and the only development strategy that the Party had was to court foreign and Upper Canadian capital. Despite his rhetoric to the contrary in the campaign, Nowlan "endorsed his party's handling of industrial strategy" (p. 44).

Conrad claims that during Nowlan's on the job apprenticeship as an MLA from 1925 to 1933 he "discovered -- to his lasting regret -- the boundaries of political morality" (p. 35). She never makes a case for his regret, but she does make it amply clear that, early in his career, Nowlan was prepared to step beyond these nebulous boundaries. At the same time, she makes it clear that, in many cases, it was simply a plague in both houses. In 1933, for example, Nowlan tabled the Public Accounts Committee report during an opposition speech at the moment the Lieutenant Governor entered the House to Prorogue it (p. 50). That was also the year of the "Franchise Scandal", a severe form of the "well developed tradition of election list manipulation" (p. 53). The Ward Executive of Kings County had briefed a Special List Committee on the importance of ascertaining voter's preferences when adding them to the list. The result was that fourteen percent of potential voters were left off the lists in the county, most of them Liberals. Conrad concluded that Nowlan "could scarcely deny his complicity in the unsavoury affair" (p. 53).

He learned the political lesson at the polls when he fell to personal defeat in 1933, along with the whole Conservative party in Nova Scotia, a fate soon to be suffered nationally. The main cause was the depression and the Conservative response to it, although Nowlan was saddled with a reputation for some shady dealing. The

Conservative party would languish in a political vacuum in the country and province for the next twenty years.

Nowlan's inner-Party fortunes, however, were still high. He acquired a well-deserved reputation as a back-room politician in who pulled the strings (p. 70). Conferences engineered by the inner circle were made to appear to be the result of spontaneous interest (p. 79). Later, he recruited and moved a leadership candidate to contest the provincial leadership although Stanfield was his choice and a foregone conclusion, to avoid the appearance of a rubber-stamp convention (p. 91).

As it had been in 1919, Nowlan's defeat came during a resurgence of radicalism in the country brought on by the depression. With the rise of social democracy and a split in the Conservative party federally, Nowlan dithered about running for the CCF or the Reconstructionists, but saw them as disastrous in the long term for his career. It was better to bide his time and strengthen his place in the Party (p. 58). This resolve was strengthened following a further defeat in 1937, an election which was unusual, according to Conrad, only in the openness with which money and rum were used to buy votes (p. 65).

Nowlan remained active in party affairs but declined to run again and face defeat, demonstrating a well-tuned sense of political survival. Meanwhile, the Valley was being altered by forces beyond individual control. A new form of patronage was being created by the growth government bureaucracies and federal monies for pensions, unemployment insurance, mothers' allowance, and the expansion of government employment (p. 77). By the 1950s the federal government had become the principal employer in the area as farming collapsed all over the Maritimes (p. 180). Defense spending, in particular, assumed major proportions (p. 183). Corresponding to this shift was a redefinition of Nowlan's ambition. Increasingly, he aspired to office in federal politics.

By 1948 Nowlan had successfully avoided nominations for ten years, but that year he risked the hustings again in a by-election, after Ilsley had retired and there was a reasonable hope that the electors would register a protest vote. They did in large numbers and Nowlan entered the House of Commons. By Nova Scotian standards it had been an aberration -- a clean campaign (p. 100).

In the general election of 1949, however, that was all water under the bridge and the old order of bribes and character assassination featured prominently (p. 108). Nowlan lost by four votes. However the Liberals were eventually found guilty of manipulating the Service vote and the election was declared void. With this tit for tat, Nowlan was finally able to put the Franchise Scandal behind him. A ferocious second campaign resulted (p. 114), which Nowlan eventually won handily.

With his Party in opposition, Nowlan consolidated his position in Parliament, by becoming the chief spokesman for Maritime grievances, and in the Party, by becoming President in 1950. In the latter position he could utilize his talent for back-room maneuvering. But as President, his ability to organize nationally was tested and found

wanting (pp. 144-160). He won re-election in 1953, but the national results for the party were still dismal.

In 1957, under the "renegade" Diefenbaker, the PC's finally acquired power, although in a minority government. Utilizing the Valley biases of being pro-British, pro-Anglophone and anti-Upper Canada, Nowlan exploited the Liberal's apparent preferences for Quebec and Upper Canada and the government's failure to side with Britain in the Suez Crisis, winning 58% of the vote (p. 174). His mandate was consolidated in the Conservative election sweep of 1958. Nowlan was considered cabinet material and given the National Revenue and eventually the Finance portfolios. Ironically, it was financial matters (exemplified by the "Diefendollars") as much as anything else which fueled the Liberal resurgence in 1962. Torn by infighting and withering Liberal critiques, the second minority Diefenbaker government, formed in 1962, fell in the following year. Nowlan was in the front lines of Parliamentary debate and Committees, and in the party trenches he tried to act as a mediator for the "curious bedfellows in the Progressive Conservative party" (p. 288). These efforts took a heavy toll, and Nowlan died in office in 1965, again as a member of the opposition Red Tory

Nowlan came to political maturity during and just after World War One. It was a heady time for social reformers and political changes were in the air. In Nova Scotia there was a wave of support for the Farmer-Labour Party. Nowlan was not impressed by radicalism of any kind, particularly when the issue was political method. Progressive ideas had considerable currency in post-war Canada. For Nowlan these were associated with a populist identification with Maritime grievances and a preference for small business. These corresponded with his disdain for Upper Canada and discomfort with big business (p.

Nowlan flirted, intellectually, with the reformist left, and tried to import some progressive policies into the Tory party.

Conrad writes that, in the 1919 provincial election, "Kings County did not field third-party candidates and Nowlan actively supported the Conservative party" (pp. 26-27), his first public identification with politics. This juxtaposition of political identifications is not accidental, although it is not meant to suggest that Nowlan would have supported any other ticket.

With the founding of the CCF, and the obvious problems of western liberal capitalism, Nowlan dabbled in Fabianism and the works of H. G. Wells (p. 56). Convinced that times had changed and that old economic doctrines were obsolete, he sought a reconstructed capitalism, denying "'the desirability of bolstering up the old capitalistic ship and allowing it to cruise merrily over a sea of exploitation manned by a crew of financial pirates and cut throats" (pp. 56-57; 134). He recognized that to leave capitalism unreformed "'is to threaten the very existence of that system"' (p. 57).

He was attracted to the New Deal of Roosevelt, and to the welfarist notions of fairness and equality. For these reasons, Conrad attached the "red Tory" label to Nowlan

(p. xv). Given the temper of the times, the Conservatives tried to shake the Tory label by adopting initiatives on government involvement in the economy and social reform, and by attaching the word "Progressive" to their name, which they did in 1942. This succeeded in splitting the party which still sought financial support and ideological leadership from big business. They were ultimately outmaneuvered by the Liberals, who stole some of the CCF's thunder and donned the mantle of the party of the welfare state.

If the success of the interventionist state made Liberal fortunes, it also created space for the Conservative Party to make some hay with a traditional appeal against big governments (p. 78). At the same time Nowlan would use his "red Tory" ideas to draw attention to the plight of the Maritimes. Again, the irony for the man who thought he represented Maritime interests, was that he was able to accomplish so little of lasting benefit for the region. Even following the election of Diefenbaker, whose populist rhetoric promised much by way of regional development, the government was dominated by small "c" conservatives.

Maritime Grievances

The sense of Maritime grievances was a permanent condition and the foundation of Nowlan's career. He championed the agricultural interests in the Valley and sought federal support for farmers (p. 41). Nowlan consciously cultivated the image of being the spokesman for the region, carving out both a national reputation and strengthening support in Nova Scotia. As a Minister, he proposed measures for regional development of both an immediate and a longer-term nature. The Diefenbaker government was receptive to regional claims for economic equality and plans for federally-sponsored development bodies (pp. 231-233), but no long term commitments were forthcoming. At best, for example in the coal industry, Nowlan was only able to slow down the shock of mine closures and unemployment (pp. 236-245). Even the subvention for coal he was able to get in 1962, was seen as more a political than an economic matter, with a federal election coming that year (p. 244).

But the climate of austerity and the proclivities of the majority of the caucus precluded any real initiative, beyond a toothless, or rather penurious, committee.

One of the main contradictions was between his "red Toryism" and the party's move towards increased austerity. As Minister for National Revenue and ultimately Finance Minister, he was often in the position of having to advance measures which were contrary to expansionism and contrary to the interests of the Maritimes (p. 204). Tax reduction was ahead of social policy (p. 160), an indication that he had failed in the backrooms of party policy-making (p. 162). Ironically, the Liberal opposition offered a programme of economic stimulation in response to the austerity Nowlan was obliged to present and defend (p. 276). The real foundation of Party power was in the corporations.

The image Nowlan had as champion of the "little man" was quite acceptable in the seats of economic power provided it didn't translate into political power.

Big Business

During his brief stint in provincial politics, Nowlan had campaigned for welfare measures and economic development, along the lines of increased federal support and opposition to foreign ownership of resources. Rhodes' Conservative government in Nova Scotia, however, sought development via the traditional route of big, foreign business, which was largely unsuccessful. He claimed to have insufficient revenue to implement the welfare reforms (p. 37). In Conrad's view, "their progressiveness was more real than obvious" (p. 55). It was a case of practicalities giving away to economic realities. For all Nowlan's populism, big business still called the shots in the Conservative party and the country as a whole. Unless the Bay Street Barons "were placated, the government would face insurmountable difficulties in exercising the prerogatives of power" (p. 269). The Conservatives felt that the government had no business in the boardrooms of the nation (p. 238).

As Finance Minister, Nowlan was acceptable to the business community because he would not "pursue policies that would undermine Canadian capitalism" (p. 267). Nowlan was a "staunch proponent of free enterprise" but "keenly aware of its shortcomings" (p. 67). This dilemma was clearly articulated in Nowlan's perception of Diefenbaker who was not connected to the country's big business interests. That meant that, on the one hand "the Party could not be accused of favouring the big interests". On the other hand, however, without these connections he "would be unable to raise the money to conduct a "first class campaign"". The progressiveness of the party was always kept in check by sensitivity for the interests of the Montreal and Toronto business interests from whom the Party collected money (p. 135). As always in Canadian politics, the ultimate irony was that, for the most part, these were the same people "who greased the wheels of the Liberal organization" (p. 136). When the division was called, Nowlan's "populist and regional concerns were increasingly in conflict with more powerful forces in the party" (p. 136).

As a Minister, Nowlan was short on policy and long on public relations, even in such departments as National Revenue which could be the kiss of death for a political career. As a consequence, he allowed the senior civil servants a relatively free hand at the details, a policy which sometimes got him into trouble in the House, such as the issue of the Auditor General, when the confidentiality of tax files was temporarily placed above the right of the auditor general to complete access (pp. 195-199). Conrad concluded that Nowlan was negligent in the matter (p. 199).

Nowlan also had his share of labour difficulties. Although he supported the concept of the CBC and adopted a hands-off approach to programming (p. 229), he also

privately saw the francophone producers' strike in Quebec as a "chance to get rid of the whole bunch of leftists and radicals" which the CBC President had been "harbouring" (p. 222). Nationalism

Another political issue which was difficult for Nowlan because of the need to present policies which were acceptable to his constituents concerned Canadian nationalism. It may be difficult to connect nationalism with the Conservative party, but one it was one of the key elements in Diefenbaker's victory. The Chief's government was unpopular south of the border, especially because of its trade policies which included broadening Canada's trading partners to include Communist countries and strengthening domestic industry (pp. 254-255). A vocal minority favouring free trade with the U.S. was out of step with the times. Nowlan, however, had to walk a narrow line on this issue because nationalism was less popular in the Valley where people still held imperial prejudices and reacted coolly to anti-Americanism (p. 258).

Nowlan's nationalism had other limits as well. Despite some rhetoric early in his career, it didn't extend into the realm of private enterprise, and in opposition he condemned "the whole philosophy of Canadian takeover of foreign corporations" (p. 294), although in the same breath he could condemn the Upper Canadian takeover of Maritime concerns (p. 295). At the same time, he could become vigourously exercised by such matters as the flag debate, especially given the imperial prejudices of many Valley conservatives (p. 298). These kinds of political horses he would beat for all he was worth.

Certainly Nowlan's national sentiments did not extend to Quebec. He had long seen Quebec as the Achilles heel of Liberal governments, linking long-term support for Liberalism in Quebec with federal tributes which could be exploited by the opposition in the rest of the country (p. 74). The Liberals were accused of "compromising national policy to serve the interests of Quebec" and to quietly point this out would go over well in Kings and Annapolis Counties (p. 165). Nowlan was not alone. The Quebec caucus, 50 strong, felt increasingly alienated by Diefenbaker's Anglophone bias (p. 258).

Nowlan's analysis of the situation was clear: Pearson's government was antagonizing the country by trying to appease Quebec at the same time as it was unable to satisfy Quebec's demands. In this no-win situation for the Liberals, he counselled lying low to benefit from the political fall-out (pp. 296-297). He was sensitive enough not to go whole hog on the offensive, despite the Anglophone bias of his constituents, although his successor, son Patrick, would be less reticent when playing the anti-Quebec card in the riding. Patronage

Part of Nowlan's political success in the Valley resulted from his skillful recognition and use of local prejudices. But there was more to success than this. Politicians were local brokers and re-election depended, in part, on successful manipulation of the patronage system, the importance of which was magnified in Nova Scotia by hard times (p. 45). The most important areas of patronage in Kings County were in the highways and at the Kentville Sanitorium. Patronage involved a certain

reciprocation. For example, in return for having the supervisor of Standard Paving consult daily with Nowlan "about different men to put on", the MLA arranged for Standard to do a "'little extra work' on a sharp curve east of Wolfville" (p. 46). During the early years of the depression, however, the pipeline began to dry up (p. 47).

Conrad argues that patronage was, for many, "a vital source of income and was often tied to party support." Only those economically secure could voice an independent political voice; for the rest, they had a "floating vote" and could be bought. In a close riding, patronage often made the difference (p. 48). As the brief history of Nowlan's career makes painfully obvious, patronage was only one form of election racketeering which had evolved in Nova Scotia.

Nowlan, apparently, wanted to be seen as a statesman rather than a party hack "who wallowed in the mire of patronage and petty matters" (p. 35). According to Conrad, Stanfield considered him a "political hack" (p. 91). Yet it was just this level of politics which was crucial to re-election. The amount of constituency work multiplied enormously after his election to Parliament in 1948. This contradiction between petty matters and re-election was managed by Nowlan, in the long run, by hiring competent and completely loyal people to run his constituency office and handle the petty matters (pp. 103-104) while he was free to do his back-room maneuvering for Senate seats and judicial appointments. In Kings Nowlan became "some grand benevolent patriarch" (p. 123).

Nowlan's political career was not lucrative; on the contrary, it was damaging to his family finances and ultimately the health of his wife who had "aged beyond her years by the burdens he had placed upon her" (p. 63). She was the principal victim of Nowlan's ambition. With respect to personal corruption, however, Conrad remarks that Nowlan "took pride in not having used his position to derive personal gain" (p. 292). This was all part of the image which Nowlan maintained. He was very early aware of the importance of image, and consequently, of the need to manipulate public impressions (p. 35). The Franchise Scandal was a difficult mistake to live down, but Nowlan learned from such mistakes and seldom repeated them.

By 1948 Nowlan had a well oiled election machine. Efficient office assistants handled routine matters, reproducing Nowlan's signature. An assistant combed the newspapers and sent congratulatory letters to constituents. Important constituents in Ottawa were entertained (p. 104). As Conrad concludes, Nowlan had constructed "one of the most modern and efficient election machines in Canada" (p. 118-123). In an period prior to television, Nowlan used the radio and the newspapers. He was the master of the political meeting and the door-to-door canvas; for the latter of these he had developed a tried and effective formula which included leaving cards for people who were not at home. (pp. 124-126). In Ottawa he developed personal relations with the press gallery (p. 134), never underestimating their power to project or destroy political images. His

political image was "carefully cultivated"; only in later years, Conrad suggests, did the "back-slapping bonhomie develop...a shallow appearance" (p. 124).

Ultimately, all this electioneering was based on a profound disrespect for the voters who, according to Nowlan, "grasp at externals, and will vote for the chap they know, or what they like, rather than on any question of principle" (p. 126). Conclusion

You get the sense that Nowlan was not a mover and a shaker in the party but only a mediator; that is, it is less interesting as a political biography and more interesting as an account of the famous Diefenbaker years..paMargaret Conrad@George Nowlan: Maritime Conservative in National Politics@Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986,357pp.

Nova Scotian politics has generally had more to do with rum, patronage and roads than with an enlightened electorate choosing between policy alternatives. In the light of contemporary political shenanigans, Margaret Conrad's biography of Nova Scotian politician George Nowlan seems depressingly familiar.

The book can be conveniently divided into three parts. The initial part is concerned with Nowlan's involvement in provincial politics up to 1948. Approximately the middle third of the book details his work as an opposition member and National President of the Conservative Party. The last part describes his role as a principal mediator and back-room politician in Diefenbaker's Cabinet.

Based on the extensive archives accumulated by Nowlan during a life-time in politics, the book is much more than a biography. Throughout, Conrad explains the social and economic context of Maritime and national politics. The last section is concerned at least as much with an analysis of the Diefenbaker years as it is with Nowlan's prominent position as an insider politician. Although the narrative ends precipitously with Nowlan's death, the defeat of Diefenbaker and the coming to power of the Liberals under Pearson represents a convenient benchmark in Canadian politics.©An Ambiguous Legacy©

With his Baptist, Maritime background, populist sentiments and commitment to the Conservative Party, Nowlan's political evolution occurred in the context of considerable ambiguities, leading him to be the champion of compromise and mediation rather than a strong protagonist in policy debates. Born in 1898 to a small business family in Western Nova Scotia, Nowlan followed an increasingly common route for upward mobility, seeking a University education and professional career. At the Dalhousie Law School, Nowlan was introduced as much to a political as a legal education. As Conrad remarked: "Politics was the one career that offered young men a promising future in postwar Nova Scotia." (p. 31).

The future seemed more promising for aspiring Liberals than Conservatives. Provincially, the Liberal Party had a virtual monopoly of political power in the province. From 1926 to 1948, Kings-Annapolis-Digby sent J. L. Ilsley, a Liberal, to the House of Commons. In 1919 the Tories came third in Nova Scotia behind the Liberals and the Farmer-Labour party. This dismal showing was duplicated in the federal contest of 1921 when the Progressives dropped the Conservatives to third nationally. Crass, material

ambition would have dictated a Liberal career for George Nowlan. Furthermore, many of the policies he would advocate were successfully pursued by the Liberal Party. Nevertheless, he formally identified himself with the Conservatives.

Part of the explanation for his political allegiance lies in the strength of Tory sentiment in the Valley; even when Liberals dominated, Conservatives remained a strong second (p. 32). The main part of the answer, however, lies in the tendency for politics to be determined by family ties and Nowlan's family was traditionally Conservative (p. 16). Family tradition determined the route for political ambition. ©Career©

In 1925, Nowlan, aged 27, contested the provincial election in the dual-member riding of Kings County for the Liberal-Conservatives. In the campaign he successfully identified himself with progressive issues such as Maritime rights, administrative reforms, concern over the foreign ownership of resources, and hardships in Cape Breton (p. 34). Once in office, however, the Conservative Party was unable to deliver the promised reforms. The Maritimes were mired in a depression well before 1929 and social welfare reforms were dropped. The only development strategy the government concocted was to court foreign and Upper Canadian capital. In practice, then, the Party contradicted Nowlan's campaign rhetoric. Nevertheless, demonstrating that his first allegiance was to the Party, the necessary vehicle for personal ambition, he "endorsed his party's handling of industrial strategy" (p. 44).

Conrad claims that during Nowlan's on the job apprenticeship as an MLA from 1925 to 1933 he "discovered -- to his lasting regret -- the boundaries of political morality" (p. 35). She never makes a case for his regret, but she does make it amply clear that, early in his career, Nowlan was prepared to step beyond these nebulous boundaries. At the same time she points out that, in many cases, it was simply a plague in both houses. In 1933 Nowlan was caught in the middle of the "Franchise Scandal", a severe case of the "well developed tradition of election list manipulation" (p. 53). The Ward Executive of Kings County had briefed a Special List Committee on the importance of ascertaining voters' preferences when adding them to the list of eligible electors. The result was that fourteen percent of potential voters were left off the lists in the county, most of them Liberals.

Nowlan learned a political lesson at the polls when he was defeated in 1933, along with the whole Conservative Party in Nova Scotia, a fate soon to be shared by the national Party. Nowlan lost again in 1937 in an election which was unusual, according to Conrad, only in the openness with which money and rum were used to buy votes (p. 65). The Conservative party would subsequently languish in a political vacuum for the next twenty years. Nowlan's inner-Party fortunes, however, were still high. He acquired a well-deserved reputation as a back-room politician, engineering Conferences and leadership contests and, simultaneously, trying to avoid the appearance of behind-the-scenes manipulations (pp. 79, 91).

In 1948 Nowlan risked the hustings again in a by-election, after Ilsley had retired and there was a reasonable hope that the electors would register a protest vote. They did in large numbers and Nowlan entered the House of Commons. By Nova Scotian standards it had been an aberration -- a clean campaign (p. 100). In the general election of 1949, however, that was all water under the bridge and the old order of bribes and character assassination featured prominently (p. 108). Nowlan lost by four votes, but the Liberals were guilty of manipulating the Service vote and, when Nowlan appealed to the Courts, the election was declared void. A ferocious second campaign resulted (p. 114), which Nowlan won handily.

In 1957, under the "renegade" Diefenbaker, the PCs finally acquired power. Nowlan was given the National Revenue and eventually the Finance portfolios. Ironically, it was financial matters (exemplified by the "Diefendollars") as much as anything else which fueled the Liberal resurgence in 1962. Torn by in-fighting and withering Liberal critiques, the minority Diefenbaker government, formed in 1962, fell in the following year. Nowlan was in the front lines of Parliamentary debate, and in the party trenches he tried to act as a mediator for the "curious bedfellows in the Progressive Conservative party" (p. 288). These efforts took a heavy toll, and Nowlan died in office in 1965, while once again a member of the opposition.©"Red" Tory©

Nowlan came to political maturity during and after World War One, a period of social reform exemplified in Nova Scotia by the rise of the Farmer-Labour Party. Nowlan was not impressed by radicalism of any kind, but progressive ideas had considerable currency in post-war Canada. For Nowlan, these were associated with a populist identification with Maritime grievances and a preference for small business. Both of these predispositions corresponded closely with his Maritime disdain for Upper Canada and discomfort with big business.

Nowlan flirted, intellectually, with the reformist left, and supported efforts to import some progressive policies into the Tory party. Convinced that times had changed and that old economic doctrines were obsolete, he sought a reconstructed capitalism, denying "the desirability of bolstering up the old capitalistic ship and allowing it to cruise merrily over a sea of exploitation manned by a crew of financial pirates and cut throats". His motives, however, were far from those which animated the CCF. He recognized that to leave capitalism unreformed "is to threaten the very existence of that system" (pp. 56-57). Although a "red Tory" (p. xv), Nowlan was Tory blue on the inside.

The solution to the salvation of capitalism, he concluded, was Roosevelt's New Deal. He supported a programme of greater government involvement in the economy and further social reform, changes that were formalized when the word "Progressive" was added to Conservative in 1942. The irony in the name was symbolic of a serious split in the Party which continued to seek financial support from the pirates and cut-throats. The "Progressive" Tories were ultimately outmaneuvered by the Liberals, who stole some of the CCF's thunder and cloaked themselves as the party of the welfare state.©

Maritime Grievances and National Priorities©

Nowhere was the welfare state more popular or expectations higher than in the Maritimes which had a deep sense of regional grievance. This condition of being the permanent underdog became the foundation of Nowlan's career. He consciously cultivated the role of spokesman for the region, carving out a national reputation and strengthening his support in Nova Scotia. As a Minister, he proposed measures for regional development of both an immediate and a structural nature. The Diefenbaker government was receptive to regional claims for economic equality and plans for federally-sponsored development (pp. 231-233), but no long term commitments were forthcoming. The climate of financial austerity and the proclivities of the majority of the caucus precluded any real initiative.

As Minister for National Revenue and ultimately Finance Minister, Nowlan often had to introduce measures which were contrary to expansion and contrary to the interests of the Maritimes (p. 204). Tax reduction was always placed ahead of social policy (p. 160). Ironically, it was the Liberal opposition which offered a programme of economic stimulation in response to the austerity Nowlan was obliged to present and defend (p. 276).

As Conrad concluded, unless the Bay Street Barons "were placated, the government would face insurmountable difficulties in exercising the prerogatives of power" (p. 269). The Conservatives agreed with Bay Street that the government had no business in the boardrooms of the nation. When the division was called, Nowlan's "populist and regional concerns were increasingly in conflict with more powerful forces in the party" (p. 136). As always in Canadian politics, the final irony is that, for the most part, these were the same people "who greased the wheels of the Liberal organization" (p. 136).

As a Minister, Nowlan was short on policy and long on public relations. He preferred to leave most matters to senior civil servants, content with supplying the "big picture". As a consequence, he was sometimes negligent (pp. 195-199). Nowlan also had his share of labour difficulties. Although he supported the concept of the CBC and adopted a hands-off approach to programming (p. 229), he also privately saw the francophone producers' strike in Quebec as a "chance to get rid of the whole bunch of leftists and radicals" which the CBC President had been "harbouring" (p. 222).

In his broadcasting policy, Nowlan was a nationalist, but his vision of the nation had clear limits. Diefenbaker, in part, rode the nationalist horse to power, a far cry from the current "free trade" sell-out. Nowlan, however, had to walk a narrow line on these issues because nationalism was less popular in the Valley where people still held imperial prejudices and reacted coolly to anti-Americanism (p. 258). Nowlan's nationalism had other limits as well. Despite some rhetoric early in his career, it didn't extend into the realm of private enterprise. He condemned Walter Gordon's "whole philosophy of

Canadian takeover of foreign corporations" (p. 294). At the same time, he could become vigorously exercised by such matters as the flag debate, preferring the Red Ensign over the Maple Leaf. These kinds of political horses he would beat for all he was worth and receive kudos from many of his constituents.

Certainly Nowlan's national sentiments did not extend to Quebec. He had long seen Quebec as the Achilles heel of Liberal governments which he accused of "compromising national policy to serve the interests of Quebec". He counseled that quietly pointing out this Liberal dilemma would go over well in Kings and Annapolis Counties (p. 165). His political successor, son Patrick, would be less reticent when playing the anti-Quebec card in the staunchly Anglophone riding. Patronage

Part of Nowlan's political success in the Valley resulted from his skillful recognition and use of such local prejudices. But there was much more to his electoral success. Politicians were local brokers and re-election depended, in part, on successful manipulation of the patronage system, the importance of which was magnified in Nova Scotia by hard times (p. 45). Patronage involved a certain reciprocation. For example, in return for having the supervisor of Standard Paving consult daily with Nowlan "about different men to put on", the MLA arranged for Standard to do a "little extra work' on a sharp curve east of Wolfville" (p. 46). Conrad argues that patronage was, for many, "a vital source of income and was often tied to party support." Only those economically secure could voice an independent political voice; for the rest, they had a "floating vote" and could be bought. In a close riding, patronage often made the difference (p. 48). In Kings, Nowlan became "some grand benevolent patriarch" (p. 123).

As an MP in the 1950s, Nowlan had larger fish to fry. Conrad argues that the welfare state and the expansion of government employment in the region created opportunities for a more sophisticated operation of constituency-level patronage which fit well with Nowlan's role as Maritime spokesman.

Nowlan, apparently, wanted to be seen as a statesman rather than a party hack "who wallowed in the mire of patronage and petty matters" (p. 35). Yet it was just this level of politics which was crucial for political success. Re-election was managed by Nowlan, in the long run, by hiring competent and completely loyal people to run his constituency office and handle the petty matters (pp. 103-104), leaving him free to do his back-room maneuvering for Senate seats and judicial appointments.

By 1948 Nowlan had constructed "one of the most modern and efficient election machines in Canada" (p. 118). Efficient office assistants handled routine matters, reproducing Nowlan's signature. An assistant combed the newspapers and sent cards to constituents having a family celebration. Campaigning prior to the widespread use of television, Nowlan used the radio and the newspapers effectively. He was the master of the political meeting and the door-to-door canvas. He had developed a tried and effective formula for canvassing which included leaving cards for people who were not at home. (pp. 124-126). In Ottawa he developed personal relations with the press gallery (p. 134),

never underestimating their power to project or destroy political images. His image was "carefully cultivated"; only in later years, Conrad suggests, did the "back-slapping bonhomie develop...a shallow appearance" (p. 124).

Ultimately, all this electioneering was based on a profound disrespect for the voters who, according to Nowlan, "'grasp at externals, and will vote for the chap they know, or what they like, rather than on any question of principle'" (p. 126).
©Conclusion©

Nowlan was an ambitious man and he achieved a certain measure of personal success. In a wider sense, however, it was particularly hollow. He never made it to the Senate or the judiciary, although he was rewarded with an appointment as Crown Attorney. He was Party President, a Cabinet Minister and was seriously considered as an interim leader -- and Prime Minister -- by Diefenbaker's enemies. But as self-appointed spokesman for the Maritimes, few of his initiatives had any lasting benefit for the region.

What he was truly successful at was winning elections. Nowlan's real legacy for Nova Scotia was two-fold, neither part of which is a blessing. One is an election machine which, despite some recent cracks, continues to dominate the federal constituency. The other is the beneficiary of this machine, Pat Nowlan. Gone is any pretension to national office or to a role as regional broker. All that remains is the hollow shell of traditional prejudices and allegiances.

Conrad writes well and she has access to some fascinating and revealing sources. Read ©George Nowlan© for the glimpses it offers of old-fashioned Maritime politics and the debacle of the Progressive Conservatives in office nationally. It may be prophetic on both counts.

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Ian McKay
Book Review Editor
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Dear Ian:

I have enclosed a copy of my comments on Margaret Conrad's book. Any editorial suggestions would be much appreciated.

It is close to the date and length specified in your letter of 3 April, although a little long on both.

I have just received Vol. 6 No. 1. It looks especially interesting.

Thanks for the opportunity to review the book. It is a little out of my line, but I found it quite interesting. I hope to see you again before too long.

Regards,

Tony Thomson