

Tommy Douglas: The Father of Medicare History 103

Themes:

- Socialism and social democracy: Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the New Democratic Party (NDP)
- Universal Health Care (Medicare)

Thomas Clement Douglas

- born in Scotland, 1904
- working-class background
- immigrated to Canada at age 6 – Winnipeg
- osteomyelitis
- WWI back to Scotland
- Family back to Canada in 1919 - Winnipeg General Strike

Early 1920s - All Peoples' Mission run by J.S. Woodsworth

- Brandon College (1924-30) – embraced the Social Gospel: “practical Christianity” or, as Tommy Douglas put it, “the application of the gospel to social conditions”

1930 – Minister; married Irma Dempsey; moved to Weyburn, Saskatchewan

- Depression – worked with poor and unemployed

Steps toward politics – president of Weyburn Labour Association (1931) (branch of Labour Party)

Socialism - a political doctrine that criticizes the existence of social, economic and political inequality in society – calls for redistribution of power from affluent owners to the working class through collective political and economic action

Social Democracy / Democratic Socialism – compatible with democracy and the political system; believe in expansion of state into social and economic democracy (eg. equal right to an education, medical care, pensions, employment and safe working conditions)

- NOT like communists, who believe in radical overthrow of system and placing of power in hands of a dictator representing the people

State to redistribute wealth – “the cream separator”

Douglas: Personality

1932 – Co-operative Commonwealth Federation party established – purpose:

The establishment of a co-operative commonwealth, in which the basic principle regulating production, distribution and exchange, will be the supplying of human needs instead of the making of profits.

1934 – Douglas runs as farmer-labour candidate in provincial election – loses

1935 – runs as CCF candidate in federal election – wins!

- CCF’s external affairs critic in late 1930s; pushed for farmers’ rights
- WWII – CCF grow in popularity

1944 – Douglas returns to provincial politics – CCF wins Saskatchewan election

- first time a **socialist govt** elected in North America; Douglas as Premier of SK
- Douglas and the CCF reelected in every provincial election, 1944-1960

Reorganizes govt; flurry of legislation

Most revolutionary changes: health and welfare – “Humanity First”

Steps towards universal health care

- 1944 – free medical care for old age pensioners, women on mothers' allowances, widows, orphans, the blind, the developmentally challenged, people suffering from cancer, tuberculosis, polio, arthritis
- 1947 - first public hospital insurance program in Canada
- 1959 - promised to bring in a universal health care program for Saskatchewan – attributes:
 - universal
 - pre-paid plan
 - publicly administered
 - high quality of medical care
 - had to be accepted both by those providing the services and those receiving it
- 1962 - Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act

1961 - Douglas already off to Ottawa to lead the **New Democratic Party (NDP)**; party in opposition

- Liberal minority governments (1963, 1965) – adopted social welfare agenda including the Medical Care Act (1968)

Douglas and 1970 October Crisis – civil liberties denied?

1971 – Douglas resigned as leader of NDP; but stayed in Ottawa until 1979

1981 - diagnosed with cancer

1986 – passed away

Legacies:

- first leader of a socialist party to form a government in North America (1944-59)
- “Father of Canadian Health Care” – symbol of Canadianism
- “Greatest Canadian”?