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BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

Big Tent Politics: The Liberal Party's Long Mastery of Canada's Public Life

R. Kenneth Carty Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015

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Some ideas in Canadian politics are perceived and taught as simple facts. The most common of them is that the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) is the “natural governing party”. In his most recent book, *Big Tent Politics*, R. Kenneth Carty looks at the factors behind the Liberal party's success over the last century and also provides interesting insights into the transformations of the last 30 years and their meaning for the party. While some of the arguments found in this book have been made before, Carty's views on these matters remain pertinent and are worth revisiting. Moreover, the setup of the book makes it essential reading for scholars interested in Canadian electoral history.

It is worth noting that *Big Tent Politics* could have easily been divided into two stand-alone books. Chapters 1 to 3 are mostly about electoral politics from a historical perspective, with more than a few aspects covered in a somewhat similar fashion in Richard Johnston's recent *The Canadian Party System: An Analytic History*. Chapters 4 to 6 look at party politics—notably party organization, financing and leadership selection—in more detail. Chapter 7 is a rigorous diagnostic of where the Liberal party stands today.

Carty's first major point focuses on deconstructing the myth of a dominant Liberal party in Canada. He does not question the party's remarkable success, in terms of both governing years and leadership longevity. However, he shows convincingly that support for the federal Liberals has always been uneven across Canada, loosely connected to provincial politics, and severely dependent on the support of certain groups, such as Catholics, French-Canadians, or immigrants. In this sense, the Liberals are indeed unique, from a comparative perspective.

Carty shows how in a difficult context, in which the diversity of Canadian realities made the life of national political parties challenging, the Liberals were able to adapt extremely well to changes in the social and political environment. This is his second major point. The structure of the party—decentralization of finance and membership but centralization of branding and policy making—has served the Liberals well by allowing them to stick together despite serious potential sources of division over the years.

This franchise model, so useful in the twentieth century, is unfortunately problematic today. Carty's third point is that what we consider to be the fundamental characteristics of modern politics—nationalized party politics, declining and marginalized membership, homogenized messages—has put significant stress on this model, making it largely inefficient in managing intra-party divisions and contestations. Carty also notes that an old Liberal habit of grooming leaders with high profiles from outside the realm of partisan politics is not the norm anymore, making the party more prone to internal tension.

The fourth major point is a quite pessimistic evaluation of where the Liberals now stand. The party is in a tougher place than it has ever been. It suffers from a decline in its secular electoral support and a broken internal structure. The party has also lost most of its electoral strongholds (notably Quebec). The 2015 election was obviously a positive event for the Liberals,

but it does not undermine Carty's conclusions. The party is and will remain competitive, but it is not a dominant party anymore.

Despite the book's numerous strengths, an important aspect of Canadian politics is not well covered. Though Carty is interested here explicitly in the Liberals, more could have been done to explain why the Conservatives were not able to adopt a similar strategy. The thesis of an "opposition mentality" that would have forbidden non-Liberal forces from playing a larger role seems weak at best. Understanding the incapacity of former iterations of Conservative parties to compete seriously in the long run is important, especially since their fate has changed significantly since the early 2000s. Stephen Harper's contribution to the dynamics of electoral politics is deeper than what Carty (or others) acknowledge. The shift from a brokerage model of party politics to a more ideological competition will have a considerable impact on the future of all three major federal parties. And if the comparative politics literature is correct, this shift is not good news for the Liberal Party of Canada.

Finally, an unfair but necessary critique of *Big Tent Politics* concerns its timing. Though there are a few references to the rise of Justin Trudeau, we do not get the author's full take on the return of electoral success under the party's new leader. The book's insights imply that the long-term trend will continue, but the LPC has made serious organizational efforts to reinvent itself since its crushing defeat of 2011. That being said, this book makes the most of the extensive knowledge of its author and of his unique capacity to understand trends and shifting moments. *Big Tent Politics* is already a classic.

Histoire de communication politique : Pratique et état des savoirs

Sous la direction d'Anne-Marie, Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2018, pp.370

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Sous la direction d'Anne-Marie Gingras, *Histoire de communication politique : Pratique et état des savoirs*, ouvrage collectif de 17 chapitres et une introduction, se donne trois objectifs : contester les affirmations sur les origines récentes de la communication politique, démontrer le caractère évolutif de ces pratiques et présenter l'état des connaissances dans certains sous-champs de cette discipline. Pour y arriver, l'ouvrage propose diverses contributions couvrant des périodes et des contextes géographiques variés, avec une attention particulière aux États-Unis et au Canada.

Vu la primauté historique des États-Unis dans la naissance de la communication politique moderne, il n'est pas surprenant que nombre de chapitres leur soient consacrés. Tout d'abord, sont à identifier les origines anciennes de la forte personnalisation qui caractérise les campagnes électorales contemporaines. Contrairement aux affirmations qui la lient à la popularisation de l'usage de la télévision à partir des années 1950, la personnalisation des campagnes présidentielles américaines remonte au 19^e siècle (chap.1) et les évolutions technologiques ne feront que l'accentuer. Des « causeries au coin du feu » radiophoniques de Franklin Roosevelt à l'usage impulsif de tweeter avec Trump, la communication présidentielle apparaît également très marquée par les traits de caractère de l'occupant du bureau ovale (chap.4).

Ainsi, loin d'être figées, les pratiques communicationnelles des présidents américains sont en constante évolution comme le reflète l'analyse de la communication de la