Liberalism, Social Democracy, and Tom Kent

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Abstract: This article argues that the lines separating different modes of thought on the centre-left of the political spectrum—liberalism, social democracy, and socialism, broadly speaking—are permeable, and that they share many features in common. The example of Tom Kent illustrates the argument. A leading adviser to Lester B. Pearson and the Liberal Party from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, Kent argued for expanding social security in a way that had a number of affinities with social democracy. In his paper for the Study Conference on National Problems in 1960, where he set out his philosophy of social security, and in his actions as an adviser to the Pearson government, he supported social assistance, universal contributory pensions, and national, comprehensive medical insurance. In close association with his philosophy, he also believed that political parties were instruments of policy-making.

Keywords: political ideas, Canada, twentieth century, liberalism, social democracy

Résumé : Cet article soutient que les lignes séparant les différents modes de pensée du centre gauche de l'éventail politique — libéralisme, social-démocratie et socialisme, généralement parlant — sont perméables et qu'ils partagent de nombreuses caractéristiques. L'exemple de Tom Kent illustre cet argument. Un éminent conseiller de Lester B. Pearson et du Parti libéral de la fin des années 1950 au début des années 1970, Kent poussait l'expansion de la sécurité sociale de façon similaire à la social-démocratie. Dans son communiqué pour la Conférence d'étude des problèmes nationaux (1960), dans lequel il a expliqué sa philosophie en matière de sécurité sociale, et de par ses actions en tant que conseiller du gouvernement Pearson, il a appuyé l'aide sociale, les pensions universelles contributives et l'assurance médicale nationale et complète. En lien avec sa philosophie, il croyait aussi que les partis politiques étaient des instruments de formulations de politiques.

Mots-clés : idées politiques, Canada, XXe siècle, libéralisme, social-démocratie

Liberalism, social liberalism, communitarian liberalism, social democracy, liberal social-ism, socialism: on the centre-left of the ideological spectrum there are different sets of values and beliefs, whose differences shade into one another subtly enough to require serious thought to distinguish among them as one moves from the definite liberal centre (which also has a centre-right variation) to the definite socialist left (which for some can be close to communism). These terms, moreover, do not exhaust the possibilities. The eminent political theorist C.B. Macpherson has been described as a "developmental liberal," while the sociologist John Porter has been said to have worked within a "new liberal" tradition (Neal 2012; Helmes-Hayes 2009). To complicate matters further, during their heyday both writers were seen quite differently by many readers, including myself, as neo-Marxist in Macpherson's case or socialist (or at least offering support for socialism) in Porter's. All

of which suggests that we should be wary of exclusionary definitions of closely related forms of political thought.

I became especially interested in the affinities among liberalism, social democracy, and socialism as I was writing an intellectual biography of Frank Underhill, one of the leading liberal—or was it social democratic?—intellectuals of twentieth century English-speaking Canada. Underhill had notoriously swung from aspiring progressive liberal in his young adulthood, to socialist intellectual in middle age, to liberal sage in his senior years, with the result that he was widely regarded as changeable at best and fickle at worst. Studying his political thought, and the intellectual context in which it developed over time, I concluded that, despite the changes in his political party attachments from the Liberals to the CCF/NDP to the Liberals, he remained within a left-liberal–cum–social democratic tradition for most of his adult life. He altered his views on certain subjects, such as the optimal role of the state, but he did not radically depart from a view of the world that could be traced back to his reading of nineteenth- and early twentieth century British thinkers on the left and centre-left as a young man: A.D. Lindsay (his tutor at Oxford), L.T. Hobhouse, J.A. Hobson, T.H. Green, J.S. Mill, and Jeremy Bentham, a lineage that influenced both liberals and socialists in the Anglo-American world (Dewar 2015a; see also Francis 1986).

In the 1930s, in the midst of his most radical period—activist in the newly created Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and drafter of the party's declaration of principles, the Regina Manifesto—Underhill wrote an insightful essay on Bentham, in which he argued that socialism was an outgrowth of liberalism, not a reaction against it. He cheekily quoted Sydney Olivier, a prominent Fabian socialist, to the effect that "Socialism is merely Individualism rationalized, organized, clothed, and in its right mind" (as quoted in Underhill 1932, 667). Hobhouse, whose ideas helped anchor the new liberalism, had expressed the same idea rather more sedately. "The ideas of socialism," he once wrote, "when translated into practical terms, coincide with the ideas to which Liberals are led when they seek to apply their principles of Liberty, Equality, and the Common Good to the industrial life of our time" (as quoted in Kloppenberg 1986, 405). The idea that social democracy and socialism represented the completion of liberalism was widely shared in continental Europe as well, by thinkers and political leaders such as Eduard Bernstein in Germany, Carlo Roselli in Italy, and Hjalmar Branting in Sweden (Berman 2006, 152–53, 207; see also Dewar 2015b). As joint inheritors of the liberal tradition, liberals, social democrats, and socialists shared a family resemblance and borrowed from each other even as they competed with each other. This caused me to rethink my earlier assumption that socialism had emerged in contradiction to liberalism, rather than in a line of descent from it. At about the same time as I regarded Macpherson as Marxist and Porter as socialist—roughly the 1960s and 1970s—I saw Underhill as the defender of an outmoded liberalism whose days were numbered. Fifty years later, I came to think that he was too

often seen through such a partisan lens and, by extension, so also were other thinkers on the centre-left in Canada.

Underhill was not alone in straddling the ideological divides on the left. So, too, did many of his fellow members of the League for Social Reconstruction, the association of left-wing intellectuals that he initiated in 1932, together with McGill University law professor F.R. Scott (Horn 1980). They included Leonard Marsh, best known as the author of the *Report on Social Security for Canada*, prepared for the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction and published in 1943; Eric Havelock, a classicist at the University of Toronto; Eugene Forsey, later a long-time research director for the Canadian Labour Congress and eventually a Liberal senator; Graham Spry, co-founder of the Canadian Radio League, which actively supported public broadcasting; and Scott himself, a prominent advocate both of human rights and social reform. Scott has been described by political scientist Allen Mills as standing in "a moral tradition of liberal-socialism (of communitarian liberalism?)" later represented by Macpherson and the philosopher Charles Taylor (Mills 1997, 60). Similarly, two students of Marsh's thought note his intellectual roots in Fabian socialism and his resulting commitment to "rational social planning" and "social engineering," but elect to describe him as a "progressive social reformer" rather than some more specific ideological designation (Wilcox-Magill and Helmes-Hayes 1986, 51). The implication in both cases is of movement between and among closely related modes of thought, rather than betrayal of a cause or inconstancy.

A quite different view of the members of the LSR is offered by historian James Naylor (2016), who questions their socialist credentials and distinguishes them from the working class socialists of the early CCF. He argues that Underhill and his colleagues wished to make the party's base more "universal" than the working class, and that Fabianism had more to do with social engineering than social relations (104, 117). The socialism of CCF leader J.S. Woodsworth also comes under his scrutiny (86). While his study of "labour socialism" in the early CCF is enlightening, Naylor's unwillingness to acknowledge that the differences between socialists and left-liberals, like those between the Communist Party of Canada, the CCF, and other socialists, were "porous and shifting" (5–6), illustrates the ideological partisanship of much of the scholarship focused on the left and centre-left, or so it seems to me.[1]

A more modern example of a broadly progressive disposition is Tom Kent, one of the leading thinkers on the left wing of the Liberal Party during the 1960s, when it was led by Lester B. Pearson and represented in part by such people as Walter Gordon, Judy LaMarsh, Maurice Lamontagne, and Allan MacEachen, relative newcomers also on the party's left. Though Kent's party affiliation was clear, the policies he supported (and helped to generate and implement) were coloured by social democratic ideas, notably in the areas of social assistance, universal contributory pensions, and national public health insurance. Later in his life, he was described by Ed Broadbent, one-time leader of the New Democratic Party,

as "above all else a social democrat," whatever his political affiliations had been at times in his career (Kent 2011). His social and political ideas illustrate the permeability of the lines separating different political beliefs on the centre-left.

Kent's Background and Rise in the Liberal Party

Kent was an English immigrant who had come to Canada in 1954 to take over the editorship of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He was only 32 years old, but he had already spent eight years in the newspaper business, first on the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian* and then as assistant editor of the *Economist*. Before that, he had served in the British intelligence service at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, working on deciphering the notorious Ultra secret. He began contributing to the *Free Press* in 1950 and was invited by its owner, Victor Sifton, to become the editor. Kent turned him down, not wanting to leave the *Economist*, which operated close to the centre of British national affairs. The editor, Geoffrey Crowther, introduced him to a dining club that had been started by the economist John Maynard Keynes, and for a few years he lunched monthly with the likes of Harold Macmillan, the future prime minister. By 1953, however, he had come to feel "ideologically rootless," as he wrote in his memoir. He fully supported the emerging welfare state, but was at odds with what he described as the Labour Party's "devotion to public ownership as a dogma rather than as a device for special circumstances" (Kent 1988, 4–5; Axworthy 2012). The Conservatives had nothing to offer, and both parties were entrenched in "Little Englandism," refusing to recognize the need to "join Europe," which Kent saw as the only way in which Britain could recover some of its former strength and stability.

Canada offered the prospect of change and renewed public engagement, and he took up Sifton's offer, moving to Winnipeg early in 1954, though he spent much of his time in Ottawa as well. It was not long before he became part of political circles akin to those he had left behind in London. In Winnipeg he won a reputation as a worthy inheritor of the mantle of John W. Dafoe, the famous editor who had made the *Free Press* one of the leading newspapers of the country earlier in the century and a voice of progressive liberalism (Cook 1963). Already having been impressed by Liberal politicians like Pearson, Brooke Claxton, and Douglas Abbott while in London and on visits to Canada, and by public servants like Maurice Lamontagne and John Deutsch, he was quickly drawn into the Canadian Liberal establishment, playing a role in the federal government's introduction of a system of equalization payments to provinces (Kent 1988, 13). He grew especially close to Pearson during the Suez Crisis of 1956, when the *Free Press* supported his diplomatic initiatives at the United Nations, which were seen by many others as a betrayal of Canada's historic attachment to Britain. Kent became critical of the government of Louis St. Laurent in its last years, and supported Pearson in the leadership contest that followed the Liberals' defeat in the election of 1957, rather than Paul Martin, the former minister

of national health and welfare. Martin was the shrewder politician, but Pearson was more policy-oriented and better placed to make a break with the past (Kent 1988, 39, 49).

The two men also represented a deeper division in the Liberal party—what Kent later called an "ideological divide"—between the old guard, who were more conservative in their views and approached political campaigns as a form of public combat, and newcomers like him, who saw themselves as progressive and thought of politics as a process of policy-making. "Mackenzie King," he wrote, "famously characterized CCFers of his day as Liberals in a hurry. It would have been equally apposite to say, especially in the 1960s, that many Liberals were social democrats waiting for their moment. They wanted an activist government pressing toward a more equal society at a pace that could be fitted in with other public requirements" (Kent 2006). Their position contrasted sharply with that of the old-timers, who saw the Liberals as the governing party and their role as managers. The division became apparent in the immediate aftermath of Pearson's election to the leadership, when a small group that included Kent and Lamontagne advised against moving a motion of non-confidence in the government, on the grounds that a mid-winter election at a time of high unemployment was to be avoided, and that the party was ill-prepared, in any case, for a new election. Pearson instead accepted the advice of J.W. Pickersgill, the former minister of citizenship and immigration, supported by St. Laurent and his close adviser C.D. Howe—quintessential old guard—to call on the new minority government of John Diefenbaker simply to resign, so that the more experienced Liberals could return to office and bring order to the nation's affairs. They could hardly have offered a better opening to the prime minister, who attacked Liberal arrogance and asked the governor general to call a new election for the end of March (Kent 1988, 61–62; Bryden 1997, 45).

Pearson quickly realized his mistake and met with Kent in Winnipeg—late one night during a stopover en route to Ottawa—to ask him if he would help draft an election platform, promising to resist any opposition from others in the party. Kent agreed, even though he was still editor of the *Free Press*. Along with Lamontagne and John Deutsch, who had both left the civil service, and a few others, he was soon involved in creating what would become the Pearson Plan for the 1958 election. He had no illusions about Liberal prospects, but he wanted to make a point about the importance of presenting a concrete plan to the electorate, rather than merely attacking the government, in hopes of establishing a pattern for the future (Kent 1988, 65). In this, at least, he and his colleagues achieved some success, though they did not anticipate the full extent of the humiliation the Liberals would suffer at the hands of Diefenbaker's Conservatives. The platform they came up with grew out of the resolutions passed at the leadership convention and hinted at some of the policies the party would develop further in the elections of 1962 and 1963: improvements in unemployment insurance, family allowances, and old-age pensions, including a national contributory pension plan; a national health insurance plan; and measures aimed at increasing employment and stimulating consumption. After the election, the journalist

Bruce Hutchison, who had close ties to the old guard, called it "leftist nonsense": "What is the new Liberalism anyway? Keynes and Kent? Debt and deficit? More government and less taxes? A slight revision of the Regina Manifesto?" (as quoted in English 1992, 209). Allowing for the source, and for some polemical exaggeration, this was not an unfair characterization of the general direction in which Kent wished to take the party.

Kent's Philosophy and Practice

Two events, besides the dim hopes of an election victory in the near term, considerably strengthened the position of the progressive wing of the party (Bryden 1997, 54). The first was a meeting of academics, politicians, business people, and trade unionists held at Queen's University in September 1960. Formally designated the Study Conference on National Problems, it later acquired semi-mythic status as the Kingston Thinkers' Conference. It was held under the auspices of the Liberal Party, though part of its rationale was that it was *not* a party policy meeting. That was to come later in Ottawa, the National Liberal Rally, which was the second event. Kingston was planned as a non-partisan brainstorming session, organized by the former civil servant Mitchell Sharp at the behest of Pearson, who was encouraged by friends and advisers, notably Kent and the nationalist Walter Gordon. Among them was Underhill, who had welcomed Pearson's election to the Liberal leadership in a warm personal letter ("Dear Mike"), saying he was the only person capable of turning the party in a "liberal [small-l] direction." "Liberalism," he wrote, "belongs to the left or else it becomes meaningless" (Underhill 1958). He urged Pearson to court the "great many intellectual and educated people" who might be attracted to liberalism, and to hold a conference similar to the one held in Port Hope in 1933, when Vincent Massey had organized a meeting, at his own expense, to rethink policy.

Kent left the *Free Press* early in 1959 to become vice-president of Chemcell Fibres in Montreal, freeing him up for deeper involvement in politics. He gave a long paper at Kingston that Pearson later called "the most intellectually brilliant" of the conference, and that helped to lay the foundation of the party's progressive reorientation (as quoted in Kent 1988, 88). Earlier in the year, he had written his friend Jo Grimond, the leader of the struggling British Liberal Party, about the need for Canadian Liberals to shift their party "a good many notches" in an egalitarian direction: "That's essential if we really want to regain the radical role that, in Britain, Socialism has muffed and that here is at the moment hopelessly spread among individuals rather than parties. We have to show that we really do want to create a much more equal society." This would entail a shedding of nineteenth century economic liberalism and acceptance of the need for "a more collectivist framework" of economics and administration, fashioned to stimulate individual initiative and responsibility, to raise employment levels, and to encourage the development of skills

and attitudes attuned to a more equal modern society (as quoted in Kent 1988, 76–77; see also English 1992, 226–28).

In his Kingston paper, somewhat grandiosely entitled "Towards a Philosophy of Social Security," Kent first put forward the political, historical, intellectual, and ethical grounds for the policy proposals he had in mind. If he later described himself and some other Liberals as "social democrats waiting for their moment," he also began by distinguishing them from the CCF, the "fundamentalist" critics of contemporary society, and social security from socialism (Kent 1962, 10). As he had decided already before emigrating, and hinted at in his letter to Grimond, the Labour Party was too focused on production and nationalization, whereas social security was concerned with collective consumption. The same criticism applied to the CCF. He insisted that he was not advocating radical social transformation or claiming that more government was desirable in principle; rather, he was trying to build on the changes that were already occurring without conscious plan. Modern society was already characterized by a large measure of collectivism. People acquired more things collectively—roads, parks, schools, and so on—the closer they lived together, and the growth of cities came to require urban planning. Changing technology also encouraged collective decision-making, for example, in the building of railways and electrical networks, and in the harnessing of nuclear energy. The result was a "mixed economy," combining government intervention and planning on a growing scale and business activity that was increasingly dominated by large corporations. This could only accelerate, creating a need for knowledge and skills that would affect education and require greater public support of science (Kent 1962, 19).

In an argument reminiscent of that offered by the Austro-Hungarian historian and philosopher Karl Polanyi, Kent noted that the era of laissez-faire, far from being the normal state of human affairs, had been an interlude, as unlike what had gone before in the eighteenth century as what came after in the twentieth (Polanyi 1957). He acknowledged that government intervention had given rise to fear among some that society was heading down what the economic theorist Friedrich Hayek called the "road to serfdom," but he argued that Hayek misconstrued liberty as simply the absence of coercion. Any public endeavour, in this view—sanitation systems, water supply, even public schools—represented an infringement of individual freedom. The only truly free man was the hermit. Kent believed, on the contrary, that freedom also demanded opportunities: "And therefore society does not only restrict the individual; it also makes him free" (Kent 1962, 24; Hayek 1944). Freedom was to be understood as "freedom to" as well as "freedom from." Indeed, again reminiscent of Polanyi, property rights were a form of freedom, but they were conferred by society acting collectively. Kent's purpose was to show that social security was consistent both with the material forces at work in the present and with the ethical principle that everyone, not just the privileged, should enjoy freedom and protection from the kind of calamity—illness, unemployment—that leads to financial ruin. The opposition he sought

to counter was not so much of those defending the status quo as of the "reactionary criticism of the social atomists, the neo-liberals, the ghost-ridden, latter day prophets of the dead age of laissez-faire" (Kent 1962, 29).

All of this was a necessary prelude to his policy proposals, because he thought that the movement driving the social security measures enacted in the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s—old age pensions, mothers' allowances, pensions for the blind and disabled, unemployment insurance—had lost its impetus. A protest in the name of the "dignity and the brotherhood of man" against the human misery especially evident in the Great Depression, it had maintained that "economics must sometimes, at least, come second to human solidarity," and that the welfare of the less fortunate could no longer be left to charity or emergency relief. It had not been without its own philosophical basis, in other words, but had run out of steam with the return of prosperity after the Second World War (Kent 1962, 9). As a result, those who favoured the extension of social programs in the present needed to think anew about first principles. "In general," he said, social security was "the provision by the state of income to various groups of people who cannot earn an adequate standard for themselves" (15). It could take the form of either money (for example, public welfare) or services (for example, hospital care). Its roots lay in "the ethics of human solidarity," and its purpose was only in part to be a "social safety net"; primarily, it was an instrument of human development (18). "The philosophy of social security," he said, concluding his long introduction, "is an equalitarian philosophy" (32).

Kent went on to enumerate eleven areas for policy consideration: medical insurance, either comprehensive or based on ability to pay; sickness insurance, akin to unemployment; an increase of unemployment benefits by moving from an insurance system to one based on need; supplemental benefits in prolonged periods of unemployment, taking account of regional variations; new employment training programs; public investment in depressed areas to encourage "re-location of capital"; urban renewal, especially in the inner core of cities; support for public housing; support of smaller class sizes in public schools and improved access to universities; support for "hard-case" social welfare; and improvement of foreign aid in the name of human solidarity (Kent 1962, 39–50). This was undoubtedly an ambitious program, but he did not anticipate it all being undertaken at the same time. He spent the last part of his paper addressing potential criticisms, especially of those who already accused government of living beyond it means. This last section was the same length as the introduction, and each was twice as long as the policy proposals in between.

The challenge facing reformers, Kent said, in a classic expression of moderation, was to navigate their way between the Scylla of trying to do too much too soon and the Charybdis of underestimating what was possible and moving too slowly (Kent 1962, 52–53).[2] He soberly addressed the critics of "big government." To those who warned of inflation and debt, he acknowledged that inflation was always a danger, but in recent years

it had been the result of high levels of private investment more than government expenditure, while government debt had risen much more slowly than gross national product. To those who bemoaned high taxes, he pointed out that current levels of taxation did not discourage productivity, and that the previous decade had not been one of ruin or stagnation but of relative economic growth. The problems that he saw in the areas of education, urban decay, international development, and the failure in some areas of technology to keep up with Russia were the result of too little government expenditure, not too much. To those who feared socialism, "creeping" or otherwise, he argued that a failure to build on the progress of collectivism "to improve the human condition" was much more likely to lead to a socialist reaction than what he was proposing (Kent 1962, 80).

When he came to the economics and politics of taxation policy, Kent noted that he had once favoured taxing the undistributed profits of corporations in order to ensure that profits went to shareholders, where they would be taxed as income, but he had decided it might do more harm than good, possibly causing too great a disturbance to "the organization of our industrial life." In discussing various alternatives, he urged instead that the state be "more rigorous" in its treatment of legitimate business expenses, and specifically that it disallow—gradually, over a period of time—advertising and "perhaps other merchandising expenditures" from being included as expenses for tax purposes, and that it consider taxing advertising outright (Kent 1962, 70–71, 74–75).[3] It would also be useful to replace existing succession duties with an inheritance tax on wealth passing to the next generation on maturity: that is, when both husband and wife were dead and their children had reached the age of 21 or more. Much to his later annoyance, the proposal related to advertising expenses, occupying two pages of an 80-page paper, received the lion's share of attention in press reports of his presentation and was later singled out by Diefenbaker, who described him as "a dreamer and philosophic socialist who wants to tax advertising" (as quoted in Bryden 1997, 59). He was especially annoyed because the conference had originally been planned as a small, private gathering of 50 people, but as numbers had swelled to over 200 it was opened to the press, turning his proposal from an idea to be considered into a political red flag. He later wrote that he had been more offended by the accusation of being a dreamer than of being a socialist, which he clearly was not (Kent 1988, 87–88).

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Kingston conference in enlivening reformist sentiment in the Liberal party, even if it was the Rally held the following January that gave it concrete expression. Kent himself was sceptical, later suggesting that the ideas put forward at the conference departed little from the Liberal platform arrived at in 1958. While there was some truth in this, he was overly modest in his recollection, perhaps because of his anger with Pearson—their first major disagreement, he later said—over the last-minute change of plans that had made it a public event (Kent 1988, 79–80; Stursberg 1978, 63–64). Nevertheless, the conference succeeded in bringing new

people into the Liberal fold and in generating enthusiasm and energy among new and existing members. John Turner, Jean Marchand, Maurice and Jeanne Sauvé, and Mitchell Sharp were all drawn to the party—all of them new guard, if not necessarily progressive wing—while William Mahoney, Canadian National Director of the United Steelworkers of America, who also spoke at the conference, found Kent's paper, in particular, encouraging about the future of the Liberal party (Bryden 1997, 59; Kent 1988, 88). J.W. Pickersgill was prominent among the naysayers, dismayed that a paper like Kent's, or like Maurice Lamontagne's sympathetic discussion of price controls in economic policy, could ever have been delivered at a Liberal gathering, but those were the very papers that generated the most excitement (Stursberg 1978, 64; Gordon 1977, 86).

Not the least energized were those who had been arguing for a change in policy direction ever since Pearson's election to the party leadership—Gordon, Lamontagne, and Kent prominent among them—who now proceeded to organize for the convention that was to take place four months later. Gordon chaired the policy committee, while Kent took on the job of drafting resolutions and working papers. They wanted to carry forward the ideas broached at Kingston, and to do so in a way that did not alienate the more cautious and conservative members of the party. This required wide consultation and careful planning. After vigorous, sometimes heated debate, the convention delegates endorsed the resolutions put before them, notably in the area of social policy: for example, a health plan financed through the tax system rather than premiums. On the question of pensions, they went even further, rejecting a cautious proposal for certain limited improvements in pension coverage in favour of a broad statement declaring the current system inadequate and calling for a lowering of the starting age for old age pensions to 65. For all these reasons, Kent regarded the Rally as a "triumph" (Kent 1988, 92–93). Rather than disavowing the legacy of Kingston, as the old guard had hoped, delegates embraced it, especially on the social policy front (Bryden 1997, 63). This was not the end of internal party conflict, but for the moment the progressives had the upper hand.

Policy and Politics

For nine months following the rally, Kent served as an advisor to Pearson and the party, working closely with Gordon in a voluntary capacity. In October, at Gordon's urging, he accepted a full-time position as "Special Consultant to the Leader of the Liberal Party and to the National Liberal Federation," a mouthful of a title, but meaning essentially that he worked as policy advisor and writer of pamphlets and speeches (Kent 1988, 111). His background in journalism, as well as his sharp intelligence, made him ideal for the job. He wrote policy papers aimed at bringing into focus the ideas of Kingston and the resolutions of Ottawa, and entrenching them in the party platform. As the expected election of 1962 drew near, he wrote a booklet aimed at candidates, laying out the party's policies, and a

series of campaign pamphlets on a variety of issues, for wider public distribution. "Romantically, perhaps," he later wrote, "I saw myself as the agent articulating a consensus of liberally minded people on what the government should do in the 1960s in Canada" (Kent 1988, 117). Romantic or not, Kent's recollection captures his sense of feeling able to speak for moderate, progressively minded people, that it was possible to do so, and that, in doing so, one could capture a national body of opinion. At the same time, it is also true that Keith Davey, who became a close ally as national director of the party, described him as "the most left-wing liberal I have ever known. Most of us were determined to move the party to the left, but no matter how far we went, Kent wanted us to go further." As campaign scribe, and in other roles he played, he acted as "a one-man intellectual blood bank for the Liberal Party," in the words of Tom Axworthy (2012), whom Kent mentored during his own early years in the Liberal back rooms.

Having decided against running as a candidate in the 1962 election—he doubted the chances of an intellectual with an English accent—he agreed to do so the following year, accepting the nomination in Burnaby-Coquitlam. It was a riding of which he had little knowledge, much less personal experience, but his main opponent was T.C. Douglas, the new leader of the NDP, founded in 1961 as the successor of the CCF. Gordon and Davey both thought that the contest might contribute to the national campaign, even if hopes of winning the riding itself were slim. With the Liberals attempting to gain traction against the Conservatives on the basis of a socially and economically progressive platform, it was important to show voters who might be leaning toward the NDP that their interests would be served by the Liberals, and they hoped that Kent would get enough national exposure in opposing Douglas to make the point (Kent 1988, 201–2). It was a theory that had shown itself before in other ways, notably in Gordon's reaction to Kent's Kingston paper. "I must shake the hand that has strangled the New Party before it's born," he had enthused (Kent 1988, 88).[4] His candidacy might also help to keep Douglas in his riding.

An additional consideration for Kent personally was that Pearson had rejected his advice to keep the party's options open on the question of whether to accept nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Instead, in a departure from party policy and without consulting Kent or any of his close associates ahead of time, Pearson spoke publicly in January 1963 in support of honouring Canada's existing commitment to equip its armed forces with nuclear weapons under joint control with the United States. Kent was "appalled" by the decision and later considered it a major factor in the Liberals' failure to win a majority. At the time, he judged it would be better for their relations if he did not spend the election campaign in close company with Pearson (Kent 1988, 191–92; Gordon 1977, 116). He couldn't have got much farther away than Burnaby-Coquitlam. To no one's surprise, he lost to Douglas, but he returned to Ottawa to become Pearson's policy adviser after the Liberals won a minority government.

Over the next two years, first as co-ordinator of programming, then as policy secretary to the prime minister, he immersed himself in policy, politics, and government. His first major accomplishment was the critical role he played in initiating planning for pension legislation, and in achieving agreement among the provinces, and especially Quebec, on the structure of a national contributory pension plan (Kent 1988, 226).[5] This was made more difficult by the problems surrounding Gordon's first budget in June 1963, which severely damaged the finance minister's authority in the cabinet and in the party caucus at large, undermining the support he might have lent to negotiations. Kent recognized, earlier than most, that the government's plans (and his own) would have to be radically revised if Quebec—then in the midst of the Quiet Revolution and rising nationalism—was to be brought on board. Together with Gordon Robertson, clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the Cabinet, he met with Premier Jean Lesage of Quebec in August 1963, and again, this time with Maurice Sauvé, recently appointed minister of forestry, after the federal-provincial conference of April 1964. This was a sign of things to come. The result of these negotiations, and of others within cabinet, was that the federal government accepted most of the principles of the Quebec plan and, after further provincial negotiations, notably with Ontario, introduced legislation in parliament in November 1964 (Kent 1988, 258–60). It passed early the following year.

Kent's work necessarily covered the entire range of government policy: from major questions such as helping to develop the idea of "co-operative federalism" that accompanied, and grew out of, pension negotiations; to particular issues like Trans-Canada Airlines' proposed closure of its Winnipeg maintenance facilities; to the management and structure of the public service; to taxation of advertisements in foreign-owned publications, such as *Time* magazine, and Canadian-American relations in general; to the creation of the Economic Council of Canada (Kent 1988, 267, 293–95, 305–7, 313–17, 346–49). Nevertheless, those policies that grew out of his Kingston paper remained primary concerns. In December 1964, the pension question more or less out of the way, he proposed to Pearson a Canada Opportunity Plan, a cluster of proposals clarifying and extending existing programs of social assistance, retraining, and regional development. The underlying purpose, following from the principle he put forward at Kingston that social programs were instruments of human development rather than merely a social safety net, was the prevention of poverty, not just a response to it. Equally important, he assumed that economic and social programs were not separate from one another, but properly belonged together so that their implementation would lead to economic growth and full employment. A central proposal was for a Canada Assistance Plan, consolidating various welfare programs and sharing the cost of administration with the provinces (Kent 1988, 360). It was an idea that already had support among bureaucrats in Health and Welfare, who were active in the Canadian Welfare Council, which had called for such an integration of programs several years earlier (Bryden 1997, 206n62). The Opportunity Plan also included what was to be the *Area Development Incentives Act*,

designed to stimulate economic growth in underdeveloped regions, and other programs to retrain workers and assist their ability to move in search of work.

Medical insurance had been first on the list of specific programs Kent had proposed at Kingston, and he planned for its introduction late in the mandate of the Pearson government, making it the "jewel in the record of achievement" with which the Liberals would enter the next election (Kent 1988, 365). Not for the first time, he had to adjust his own plans in response to the uncertainties surrounding the prime minister's, as well as to other considerations. Among the latter was the possibility of an early election, which Kent would have preferred to avoid but which others, including Gordon, favoured and Pearson did not rule out. In addition, the difficulties of the pension plan negotiations led some to wonder if health insurance ought not to be put off indefinitely. Meanwhile, several provinces were going ahead with their own insurance plans, most notably Saskatchewan, where provincial medicare legislation was greeted by a doctors' strike that lasted for three weeks in July 1962 (Bryden 1997, 126–28). On the positive side, the Royal Commission on Health Services, chaired by Chief Justice Emmett Hall, published the first volume of its report in June 1964, calling for comprehensive and universal public health insurance, including prescription drugs and children's dental care. The strength of its recommendations, Kent thought, "took much of the wind out of the opponents of medicare" (Kent 1988, 364; Bryden 1997, 132). Still, he did not underestimate the obstacles ahead.

While he opposed an early election, allies such as Gordon and Davey argued that there was wide public support for national health insurance, and that winning a majority would strengthen their position within the party as well as in the House of Commons. Even if there were to be an election in 1965, Kent believed it was necessary for the government to lay out its position clearly beforehand. The man who made it possible to do so, in his view, was A.W. Johnson, the assistant deputy minister of finance, who in 1964 had moved to Ottawa from Saskatchewan, where he had served as deputy provincial treasurer (Kent 1988, 365–66; Bryden 2009, 325; Marchildon 2011). Johnson proposed a simplified version of shared-cost programming, in which the federal government would refrain from working out the details of administration. Instead, it would establish principles to which provinces would have to adhere in order to receive federal funding. Kent later wrote in his memoir that this was "the kind of solution that, once you have heard it, you kick yourself for having failed to think of" (Kent 1988, 366). The four principles arrived at, and presented to a federal-provincial conference in July 1965, were that coverage of physicians' services had to be comprehensive, universally available, portable from province to province, and publicly administered. If these were met, the federal government would cover half the cost (Kent 1988, 267–68; Bryden 2009, 326). Plans went somewhat awry when the Liberals were returned with another minority later that year, but the *Medical Care Act* was passed in 1966, though its implementation was delayed until 1968 because of resistance from fiscal conservatives in the cabinet such as Mitchell Sharp, now minister of finance.

Kent was only indirectly involved in the later stages of the medicare debate, having left the Prime Minister's Office after the 1965 election to become deputy minister in the new department of manpower and immigration. He had requested the move, partly because of his annoyance with Pearson for accepting Walter Gordon's resignation as minister of finance, which Gordon had submitted because of his advice in support of an election, and partly because the minister of the new department was expected to be Jean Marchand, the Quebec labour leader, who had been at the Kingston conference and whom he admired. Marchand, and the two fellow Quebecers he brought with him, Gérard Pelletier and Pierre Trudeau, had been potential recruits in 1962, but had reacted against Pearson's decision on nuclear weapons. They ran in 1965 as strong federalists, and Marchand agreed to take on manpower and immigration. Kent moved with him to the new department of regional economic expansion after Trudeau's election as Liberal leader but later came to believe that a major failing of Trudeau's government was its attempt to separate economic and social policy in the interests of "rational" planning. Early in 1969, he drafted a letter from Marchand to the prime minister in which he put the case baldly. "The first requirement of social justice," he wrote, "is that there should be enough jobs. That is a basic economic issue, but it is also the primary social issue" (Kent 1988, 430). Dismayed by the government's apparent willingness to sacrifice employment to the containment of inflation, he left the federal public service in September 1971.

Liberalism and Social Democracy

Whether or not Kent actually was a social democrat in Liberal clothing is open to question, but it seems clear that his philosophy of social security had a number of affinities with social democracy. His appeal to history and experience, for example, rather than to abstract justice or ideology; his assumption that gradual reform was preferable to radical change, much less revolution; his belief that the goals of greater equality and human solidarity were bound up with the means adopted to achieve them, and his belief, therefore, in the need for democratic political negotiation: all were features of the social democratic tradition from its early days, as was his appeal to ethics and his aversion to ultimate solutions (Kloppenberg 1986, 6, 201, 286). Eduard Bernstein, one of the founders of European social democracy at the turn of the twentieth century, rejected Marxist historical materialism and the inevitability of revolution in favour of political action in the here and now aimed at piecemeal reform. "What is usually termed the final goal of socialism," he wrote, "is nothing to me, the movement is everything." Socialism was not something that *had* to be, but something that *ought* to be; that is, its basis was more ethical than scientific. At the centre of its pursuit was the need to expand "the sphere of social obligation" (as quoted in Berman 2006, 40–41). Socialism was neither end nor movement for Kent—the contemporary CCF/NDP were his rivals—but expanding the sphere of social obligation was also central to his philosophy.

Across the channel in the United Kingdom, something similar occurred. There, Fabian socialism represented the evolutionary, parliamentary road to socialism, while the new liberalism moved classical liberalism away from a narrow individualism toward collective responsibility for social ills. Early Fabians included Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells, while T.H. Green, Leonard Hobhouse, and J.A. Hobson laid the intellectual foundations of the new liberalism. The two groups agreed not only that change was best pursued through political means, but that change, whatever the ultimate goal, entailed an ethical revival to counter the individualism and alienation of modern society. A sense of social responsibility, they thought, would bring individual preferences into line with the social good (Kloppenberg 1986, 348, 352). Hobhouse famously warned against obsessing over the precise limits of socialism and liberalism. Whether one was a socialist liberal or a liberal socialist, he said at one point, paled in significance when the political enemy they both shared was a reactionary and imperialist Conservative Party (Collini 1979, 79, 96). His point is underlined by a passage from the minutes of a meeting of the Rainbow Circle, a discussion group of socialists and liberals that met regularly in London before the First World War: "The discussion turned largely on the relative merits of Liberalism & Socialism, but suffered from the fact that the definitely socialist members & the definitely liberal members did not seem to be agreed on what Liberalism & Socialism were" (as quoted in Jackson 2012, 34).

The tensions between socialism and the new liberalism, and their convergences, gave rise to a new, social democratic mode of thought that accepted capitalist markets as efficient and productive, but refused to accept the inequalities and exploitation they created when allowed to operate freely. It argued for control of markets sufficient to ensure that the individual rights claimed by liberalism were accessible to all, and for a promotion of social solidarity, an inheritance that Kent drew upon. So also had Frank Underhill, though an indication of the shift in his thinking by 1960 is seen in the backhanded testimony he offered of Kent's more progressive position when he criticized Kent in his Kingston paper for "importing Manchester Guardian–Fabian socialism to a cold climate and to a fast-changing society where security could not receive so much emphasis" (as quoted in English 1992, 220). While some would argue that Keynesianism and the welfare state sought to "repair rather than replace capitalism," it is difficult to draw a clear line between social democracy and left-liberalism on this basis (Wiseman and Isitt 2007, 578).

It is mildly ironic that the declining electoral fortunes of the CCF in the 1950s undermined the radical hopes that had accompanied the party's founding and the gains it had made during the Second World War (Young 1969, app. B). There was little reason to fear a threat from the left when Kent delivered his paper at Kingston in 1960, which left him an intellectual opening that he proceeded to fill. Partly in response to its electoral problems, the CCF moderated its ideological position, adopting the Winnipeg Declaration of Principles in 1956, which was considerably softer in its language than the original Regina

Manifesto on which the party had been founded. Notably, the declaration abandoned the resounding call to arms with which the manifesto had concluded—"No C.C.F. Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth"—which was a change warmly welcomed by Underhill, who was in the midst of moderating his own position (Dewar 2015a, 147–48; Young 1969, app. A).

In the next few years the party embarked on a reorganization that led to a formal alliance with the Canadian Labour Congress and the creation of the New Party, then the New Democratic Party in 1961. The intellectual foundations of the new party were laid in a book edited by McGill University political scientist Michael Oliver, *Social Purpose for Canada*, published in 1961, which sought to modernize the ideas and policies developed a quarter-century earlier, in 1935, in the League for Social Reconstruction's *Social Planning for Canada* . The new book, endorsed by the New Party, proposed the adoption of Keynesian methods of state intervention in preference to the nationalization of industry, and as a means of redistributing income in "the affluent society"—a phrase made current by the liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith—in support of the working class and the poor (Bradford 1989, 86).[6] The line separating left-liberalism and social democracy, in short, was permeable by social democrats as well as liberals.

In later years, Kent drifted away from the Liberal Party, disagreeing with such policies as Trudeau's tax rental agreements with the provinces, which reduced the leverage of the federal government in negotiating federal-provincial cost-sharing, and especially with Paul Martin Jr.'s 1995 budget, which dismantled many of the social policy gains made earlier. Reduction of funding for health care, post-secondary education, and social services not only damaged programs but broke faith with the provinces, Kent thought, making future federal-provincial co-operation even more difficult than it generally was. At the same time, he continued to be interested in public policy, as president of the Cape Breton Development Corporation and the Sydney Steel Corporation, as head of the royal commission investigating concentration of newspaper ownership, and as the founding editor of *Policy Options* magazine (Axworthy 2012; Kent 2002; Dewar 2017). He was dismayed by the atrophy of political parties as instruments of policy-making, a function that was taken over by lobbyists, consultants, think tanks, NGOs, and activist organizations. In the late twentieth century, parties came to act primarily as advertising and vote-getting machines, rather than as means of bringing people together and negotiating differences, tasks at the very heart of politics as traditionally defined. Professional pollsters and fundraisers were now more important than citizen volunteers (Kent 2000, 6–7).

He also became more expressly social democratic in outlook, affiliating himself with the left-leaning Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the Broadbent Institute (Kent 1999). In a research report written for the latter just before he died in 2011, he addressed

the difficulties of implementing social democratic reforms in a federal system like Canada's, where the techniques of co-operative federalism developed in the sixties had been succeeded by jurisdictional confusion and federal-provincial conflict. The problem was not that people had turned against government action in the interests of society as a whole, but because times were hard—jobs were insecure, household debt levels were rising, homes were expensive, the future was uncertain—and the result was greater anxiety and fractiousness. He continued to think that Canadians shared the values of equity and fairness that underlay the reforms of the sixties. Their apparent disengagement from politics—as indicated, for example, by declining voter turnout at elections—resulted from a loss of faith in their political system, which in turn resulted from the failure of political parties to put forward policies that conformed to those values and were specific enough that politicians could be held accountable for them, once elected. The definition of social democracy he offered effectively encapsulated his outlook: "Social democracy, as I understand it, is a society where the enterprise of productive employment in a market economy is joined with active government to secure the public interest in equality of opportunities and fairness of outcomes" (Kent 2011). It suggests in its moderation that he continued to straddle the intellectual divide between social democracy and left-liberalism.

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NOTES

1. The same thing might be said on the liberal side of Reginald Whitaker's categorizing of William Lyon Mackenzie King's 1918 tract, *Industry and Humanity*, as corporatist liberalism, a label questioned by Paul Craven (Whitaker 1977; Craven 1979).
2. On moderation as a distinctive approach to politics, see Craiutu (2017).
3. Kent later returned to his original position on the taxation of undistributed profits (Kent 1988, 86).
4. The New Party evolved into the NDP.
5. Kent discusses the pension plan process in detail in his memoir (Kent 1988, chs. 17–22, 219–92).
6. The book was criticized by Kenneth McNaught, biographer of J.S. Woodsworth, for "abandoning socialist principles" (McNaught 1999, 154).

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