

Margaret Conrad, *George Nowlan: Maritime Conservative in National Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986. Pp. xviii, 357. \$37.50

Margaret Conrad has written one of the finest Canadian political biographies. Recognizing that Maritime politics are too often presented as "buffoonery, corruption and ideological idiocy," Conrad takes her subject seriously, probing beneath the surface bluster to discover the solid core of Nova Scotian politics, especially Conservative politics. George Nowlan's career was hardly distinguished, and Conrad does not try to make it so. It is, she candidly admits, "in some ways a disappointing record" (p. 292). Yet Nowlan's career illuminates the broader canvas of Nova Scotian political and economic development, and Conrad's excellent knowledge of the real and metaphorical peaks and valleys of her native province permits readers to travel a fascinating journey.

Two forces motivated Nowlan's career: his strong regional patriotism and his Conservatism. Both his region and party did less well than he hoped in the twentieth century. Conrad's wonderful exposition of the personalities and battles at the constituency level, beginning with Nowlan's first provincial career in King's in the days of the Maritime Rights' campaign and ending with his final stand for the disintegrating Diefenbaker government in 1963, reveals how the Annapolis Valley and its people responded to the economic stagnancy and other disappointments. In his federal career, which began in 1948, Nowlan spoke not only for his constituency but also for his province. He tried to cushion the shock as the Maritimes' traditional manufacturing and resource sectors declined, arguing for such nostrums as a twelve mile limit, re-establishment of the merchant marine, and aid to the small Maritime universities. Conrad obviously shares Nowlan's frustration as he fails to get his way and as the growing evidence of Maritime underdevelopment becomes more apparent to the regional patriot. Conrad and Nowlan are sometimes too ready to blame Ottawa for the problems and to believe that there were solutions which Ottawa could find (see, for example, p. 131). Nevertheless, she does make the reader understand that perspective far better than the often arid arguments other academics and politicians have employed to support this case.

Conrad says little about Nowlan's personal life. She does agree with one journalist's comment that Nowlan did not take himself seriously enough. The bags under his eyes, the husky morning voice and the gossip of colleagues bespoke a kind of life far distant from the Baptist tenets of his youth. Nowlan strikes one as a troubled man, one who wandered far from many of his emotional starting points. His private life does not seem to have affected his political advance in his own constituency although it certainly did influence how others regarded "George" in Ottawa. It is a pity that Conrad could not have told us all that she seems to know. What she has given us is a remarkably insightful portrait of the many layers of Nova Scotian political life. Only Dalton Camp's memoirs rival Nowlan in its richness, but here the canvas is broader and the perspective deeper. The Nowlan family may not be pleased with all that Conrad has said, historians will be.

John English
University of Waterloo

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Ann G. Carmichael — *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. xvi, 180.

This study in historical epidemiology offers two major hypotheses about the nature and consequences of the plagues that repeatedly hit the northern and central Italian cities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first is that there was a significant difference between the fourteenth century outbreaks of mainly bubonic plague, which, although deadly, was not a particularly contagious disease and which struck indiscriminately in city and countryside and among all social classes, and the less