

BULLETIN

Tommy Douglas appeals to the nation

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by LEYA BEHRA

Leya Behra, daughter of HSA member Zaheda Behra, has won the Tommy Douglas Scholarship offered through the National Union of Public and General Employees. Leya Behras imagination brought Tommy Douglas -sad and restless spirit" to speak to us. Leyas mother, Zaheda, is a medical radiation technologist at Vancouver General Hospital. Other awards offered through NUPGE are the Visible Minorities and Terry Fox Memorial Scholarships, as well as a scholarship for aboriginal Canadians. Children of HSA members have won NUPGE scholarships for four of the last six years. Congratulations!

Friends, social democrats, Canadians, lend me your ears again. I am a voice from the past and I have not been able to rest in peace lately.

As my spirit roams across my beloved Canada, I find myself disheartened by the attempts of provincial, and federal, governments to erode the corner-stones of social democracy.

In Nova Scotia, Mr. John Hamm, and his government, has proposed Bill 68, this takes the right to strike away from nurses and health care workers. This bill will also give cabinet the authority to impose settlements.

In British Columbia, the newly elected Liberal government has chosen to legislate its nurses and health care professionals back to work, instead of dealing with the issues.

In Ontario, Premier Mike Harris has proposed tax relief for parents who sent their children to independent schools. This will definitely gut the public education system.

All these actions will slowly destabilize Canadian society. This country will then also be robbed of its distinct status that has made Canada unique enough to be voted, by the United Nations, as the best place to live. I dont understand why we are forging ahead without examining, and appreciating, our past.

I have always believed that one should, -never discard something, just because it is old." In its enthusiasm for new ideas, each generation is in danger of -throwing out the baby with the bath water."

I began my work as a small-town Baptist preacher, in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, in the early 1930s. I later joined the CCF and my political life began.

In 1944 the CCF won the election in Saskatchewan, and a beachhead of socialism, on a continent of capitalism,

was established.

As Premier, I passed the "Farm Security Act" protecting farmers from creditors. In 1945, I invited Japanese-Canadians to resettle in Saskatchewan.

In 1947, we, the CCF, launched the Saskatchewan-wide free hospital care.

The first Arts Board, in North America, was soon established. The first small claims court followed, a minimum wage and a forty hour week became policy in Saskatchewan.

Union membership doubled. In October 1961, we introduced the State Health Insurance. This insurance made high quality health care available to everyone regardless of his or her ability to pay.

This same year I became the national leader of the newly formed NDP. In 1963, the NDP, in opposition, nudged the government towards Medicare, pensions, and labour reforms.

For 45 years, together with members of the CCF, and then the NDP, I worked relentlessly to achieve a democratic, independent Canada; free of poverty and inequality. I firmly believe we want -a society in which the wealth produced will trickle down to every citizen, a society in which there will be full employment, an adequate return for the primary producer. A system of social security against the hazards of sickness, physical incapacity and old age. We can think of nothing we need more and we can be content with nothing less."

I have addressed this nation many times in the past, and I want to repeat, and once again share with you some of my thoughts and visions. I believe -the happiest people in the world are those who are working for something bigger than themselves." Freedom, like peace, is indivisible.

I must protect my neighbours rights in order to safeguard my own." I believe that -mans destiny cannot be settled in the marketplace." I want to remind provincial, and federal, governments that the philosophy of my government was, -Humanity First." We believed that the measure of any community is the amount of social and economic security that it provides, for even its humblest citizens.

Mr. Chretien, Canadians have always been committed to the idea that the have nations owed certain obligations to the have not nations. So please dont ignore the AIDS crisis in Africa.

Mr. Romanow, you have been appointed as a one-man Commission, on the future of health care in Canada. To you I say, when Medicare was introduced in Saskatchewan, it was perceived as economically impossible, and dangerously radical; but today Canadians, independent of class, or colour, enjoy access to quality health care. So when you make your recommendations, remember -The art of governing is the art of foreseeing." Medicare can be saved with better planning.

Thank you all for coming out, and listening to me speak again. I realize you laid my weary body to rest in February 1986, but the spirit of Tommy Douglas is sad and restless.

I felt it was time to remind Canadians not to be complacent and politically apathetic. Governments should represent the people. Demonstrate your power and vote for the government that will restore and preserve a just, and equitable society for all Canadians. And I urge you to remember that we should all strive to be our brothers keeper.

Leya Behras essay won this years Tommy Douglas scholarship from the [National Union of Public and General Employees](#). For information on other scholarships available through HSA, please contact Leila Lolua, HSAs Education Officer.

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