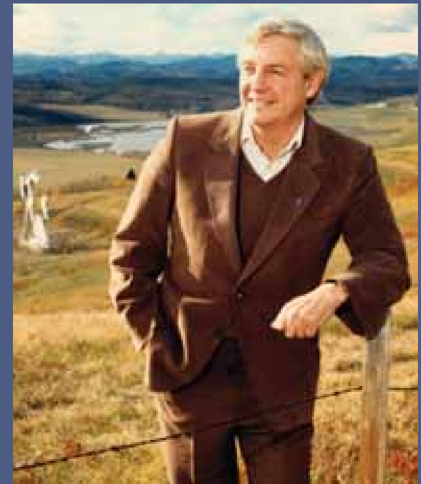
ALLAN BLAKENEY: DEFTLY NAVIGATING THUNDERSTORMS

Brian Topp



Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney was one of Canada's greatest premiers, and there is much for us to learn from his approach to issues ranging from managing a resource dependent economy and the Charter, to how to run a fiscally responsible, economically literate and socially progressive social democratic government.

Premier ministre de la Saskatchewan, Allan Blakeney a été l'un des meilleurs chefs provinciaux du pays et aurait beaucoup à nous apprendre aujourd'hui sur la gestion d'une économie tributaire des ressources naturelles, sur la Charte des droits et libertés tout comme le fonctionnement d'un gouvernement social-démocrate qui est à la fois financièrement responsable, économiquement compétent et socialement progressiste.

I first met Allan Blakeney, one of Canada's greatest premiers, during a high-risk aeronautics experiment. Specifically, in the 1990s the Government of Saskatchewan wanted to see what would happen when a couple of Cessna airplanes purchased in the 1960s continued to be flown as the government's "executive air" fleet to ferry ministers and officials around the sprawling province. Would the planes stay in the air? Or would one of them finally break up after decades of loyal service, tumbling with some of the province's most senior people into a wheat field 10,000 feet below? The planes spent more time being serviced than they did flying — they were the last planes of their vintage flying anywhere in the world. But we kept them in service instead of replacing them, in order to avoid the predictable firestorm of blind populist rage in the legislature and the media.

We also made sure opposition MLAs could fly in them, too, just to keep the whole airplane thing out of the news. Whatever happened, we were in this together.

So it came to be that I would find myself flying, fairly regularly, in one of these tiny, ancient and dangerous planes in the company of my boss, Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow, and Allan Blakeney, Romanow's predecessor as NDP leader and premier.

They would sit crammed next to each other, talking through the toughest problems facing the government. It was the continuation of a conversation they had been having together since 1970, just about the time when the planes were bought.

Cabinet shuffles and ministerial bad behaviour; bond ratings; health care reform; public-sector bargaining; the clockspins of politics and political polls; angry demands for bailouts and subsidies from wealthy rentiers and corporate CEOs; constitutional issues; national unity; trade issues. It is not the easy problems that make it onto a premier's desk. It is the toughest problems — and it was the very toughest ones that Romanow discussed with Blakeney.

Blakeney approached each issue like a fascinating little chess puzzle. What if we did this? What if we did that? Did you think of this? What would it mean if that were so? All with a cheerful, wry humour and the slightest undertone of skepticism about the high principles invoked by principals making their cases, usually at high decibels, before the premier. "When they say it isn't the money, it's the money," I heard him quote Tommy Douglas, more than once.

It is more than fitting that Allan Blakeney is remembered as one of Canada's greatest premiers, since he was exactly that. He was an extraordinary leader, public servant, politician and statesman. He has much to teach us today about Canada's greatest economic blessing and our greatest economic curse — our prodigious natural resources. He played a decisive role in framing Canada's modern Constitution. And last but not least, he incarnates the core of the New Democratic Party's tradition of good government.

I've made some bold claims about Allan Blakeney. As he would say: here's my evidence.

He was an extraordinary leader, public servant, politician and statesman: Let's trace his career. He was born in 1925 into a Loyalist family in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. His politically conservative father ran a wholesale fruit business serving the south shore of the province (one of the most beautiful places in the world, I can report). Blakeney attended Dalhousie University, picking up an undergraduate degree in history and political science and then a law degree. He emerged with a deep respect for the beautiful prose of English legal

judgments. He also gained his first taste of electoral politics when he took on the "medical establishment" by successfully running against the medical-student-dominated student council, and also as one of the founders of the campus CCF club.

His interest in politics and his obvious ability commended him to the attention of two important talent spotters. The first was the Rhodes Scholarship committee, which sent him to Oxford for two fulfilling years studying philosophy, political science and economics.

The other was George Cadbury. To understand Blakeney, we do well to pause for a moment to understand Cadbury. Cadbury (yes, *that* Cadbury) was the heir to a not insignificant English Quaker fortune built on the chocolate-making business. Having learned to manage large organizations in the family business in England, he signed up to serve in the British government during the Second World War, spending three years as deputy director of production in the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Cadbury was also a long-time member of the British Fabian Society and the Labour Party, and a friend of a number of CCF members who encouraged him to look into the newly elected CCF government in Saskatchewan — North America's first social democratic government.

He did so in 1945. He and Premier Tommy Douglas hit it off. And so Cadbury was soon chairing the Douglas government's Economic Advisory and Planning Board — the kernel that would grow into the Saskatchewan government's robust portfolio of Crown corporations (managed through a holding entity called first the Government Finance Office and later the Crown Investments Corporation) and key elements of its Executive Council, the province's equivalent of the federal Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office.

This was the engine room of the Douglas government — the practical-minded, nuts and bolts centre of the government that wove together the hopes and dreams of the party; the will of cabinet, the enthusiasms and grassroots feedback of the caucus and the executive determination of Premier Douglas and Finance Minister Clarence Fines — and then made much of what the Douglas team (and its succeeding CCF-NDP governments) hoped to accomplish actually happen, one practical step at a time, through balanced budgets and prudent good government.

> He was an extraordinary leader, public servant, politician and statesman. He has much to teach us today about Canada's greatest economic blessing and our greatest economic curse — our prodigious natural resources. He played a decisive role in framing Canada's modern Constitution.

As the architect of much of this, Cadbury was a relentless talent-hunter. He encouraged Allan Blakeney to consider a role in the government of Saskatchewan after he completed his studies, and Blakeney, like many of us, found the opportunity to serve in Canada's first social democratic government irresistible.

And so, in 1950, Blakeney took up a position in the very heart of the Douglas government — in the Government Finance Office, as its representative and corporate secretary on the boards of many of the province's growing stable of Crowns. He served in that role for five years.

In 1955, he was appointed chair of the Saskatchewan Securities Commission. He then began to contemplate a political career and was encouraged to do so by his minister, Clarence Fines, and by the premier. He resigned from the civil service in 1959, briefly worked in a law firm and then stood for a CCF nomination in 1960 with the organizational support of the finance minister, who clearly viewed Blakeney as his political heir.

He was elected to the Saskatchewan legislature in 1960 and was appointed minister of education by Premier Douglas.

In 1961, Douglas became national leader at the NDP's founding convention. He was succeeded as premier by Woodrow Lloyd, who appointed Blakeney as finance minister. In this role, Blakeney played a critical role in shaping the Saskatchewan government's nimble management of the doctors' strike, designed to prevent universal public medicare from being introduced in North America. A complex negotiation, the "Saskatoon agreement" gave Canadian medicare the basic form it has had ever since — not the last time Blakeney would be involved in a complex negotiation that shaped Canada.

In 1962, in the wake of the Saskatchewan doctors' strike, Premier Lloyd appointed Blakeney minister of health to consolidate the public's victory and the introduction of medicare.

The Lloyd government was defeated in 1964. In 1970, after Lloyd's resignation, Blakeney was elected leader of the Saskatchewan NDP, defeating a 29-year-old first-term MLA named Roy Romanow, who gave him quite a run for his money. (Romanow led on every ballot, except the last. Blakeney appointed Romanow as his deputy premier on assuming office.)

The NDP was elected to govern the province in 1971, and was reelected in 1975 and in 1978. Blakeney's team was defeated in 1982 in a spectacular rout. Blakeney led a strongly resurgent NDP in one more election in 1986 and then retired to a productive life as a university professor, corporate director and thoughtful adviser to many NDP premiers and federal party leaders, including Jack Layton. He died in April 2011. It is a measure of how his leadership crossed partisan lines that Peter Lougheed was one of the speakers at his memorial service.

So what did Allan Blakeney do during this career that merits him

being remembered as one of Canada's greatest premiers?

To begin, he demonstrated that it is possible to manage a wealth of natural resources in the public interest — one of the central issues that lie before Canada today.

Allan Blakeney demonstrated that a Canadian government can govern, rather than be governed by, resources and resource companies. A Canadian government can uphold the public interest, can stare down powerful multinationals and a federal government in their power, can insist the public be paid for its own resources, can insist they be developed in Canada by Canadian-owned companies. And they can think in the long term — even if that means waiting a little while before building a new mine or sinking a new well.

Saskatchewan has some of the world's largest reserves of petroleum, potash and uranium. Using a variety of public policy tools — including Crown corporations, royalties and taxes, and with tough, unblinking negotiations with some of the world's largest corporations — the Blakeney government promoted a substantial increase in development of all of those resources, on terms that actually worked for the province and for Canada. There was no race to the bottom. There was no bonfire of the public interest, begging for foreign capital on any terms. There was no pillaging of our resources, for pennies on the dollar, to build the industrial economies of other countries. Blakeney used the province's resources to leverage development and to build capital — not to blight the economy and to throw our capital (and Canadian ownership) out the window, as is currently fashionable.

There are many stories available to illustrate this. I'll offer you one.

In 1971, the Blakeney government inherited a potash "pro-rationing plan" from its predecessor, the Liberal government of Ross Thatcher.

Under this plan, Premier Thatcher had allocated production allowances to the province's 10 (mostly foreign-owned) potash mines and had imposed minimum prices — aiming to end rounds of overproduction and price undercutting that had driven the entire Saskatchewan potash industry to the brink of bankruptcy. This was, as Blakeney acknowledged in his memoirs (*An Honourable Calling, Political Memoirs,* 2008), possibly an arrangement of dubious legality. But the federal Liberal government under Pierre Trudeau did not challenge the doings of its provincial Liberal cousins, and no one else did either.

Things changed when the newly elected NDP government under Premier Blakeney tinkered with these arrangements to try to make them work better and to wring more reasonable royalty payments from the industry. After some preliminary skirmishing, the largest producer, Central Canada Potash, filed a lawsuit seeking to have the whole system declared illegal.

> The province's resources were developed by a mix of public and private players who earned robust profits, created thousands of jobs and actually paid appropriate royalties and taxes — permitting the Blakeney government to balance its budget every year, to attack poverty, to improve education and health care, and to implement many other innovative and important reforms and initiatives.

In November 1973, the Trudeau government asked to be added as a co-plaintiff in this action — on the side of the private corporation, against the government. Roy Romanow remembers that intervention well. "Central Canada Potash challenged the legislation alleging it was 'unconstitutional' because it touched on a product (potash) that crossed interprovincial and international borders, and thus arguably fell within Ottawa's power under S.91(2), the 'trade and commerce' clause," Romanow told me. "Joining as a co-plaintiff might be explained by Trudeau's agreement with this constitutional interpretation, and less because of the actual policy. In fact, when the US State Department wrote a diplomatic note to Trudeau complaining about our actions — I was responsible for drafting both bills and navigating a four-month filibuster in the House by provincial Liberals who did not object on constitutional grounds but in support of corporate interests — Trudeau publicly defended Saskatchewan's actions as a domestic, internal matter. By joining as a co-plaintiff, Trudeau positioned the federal government to prosecute the case even if we settled with Central Canada Potash."

The federal Liberals then further upped the ante. In May 1974, Finance Minister John Turner introduced a budget that provided that corporations could no longer deduct provincial royalties and like taxes from their expenses when calculating federal corporation taxes — in effect, seeking to appropriate virtually all applicable provincial resource royalties.

In his memoirs, Blakeney refers to these federal measures as, among other things, a "declaration of war."

The Blakeney government responded to Turner's budget measures with an alternative tax, which the industry, illegally, refused to pay — waiting out the 1975 provincial election, which the industry clearly hoped Blakeney was going to lose.

That was, all in all, some pretty serious firepower aimed at the Saskatchewan government.

A legal challenge from both industry and the federal government designed to break the province's regulatory authority, a federal budget designed to break the province's royalty regime and a corporate tax strike — the kind of pressure that these days tends to break governments.

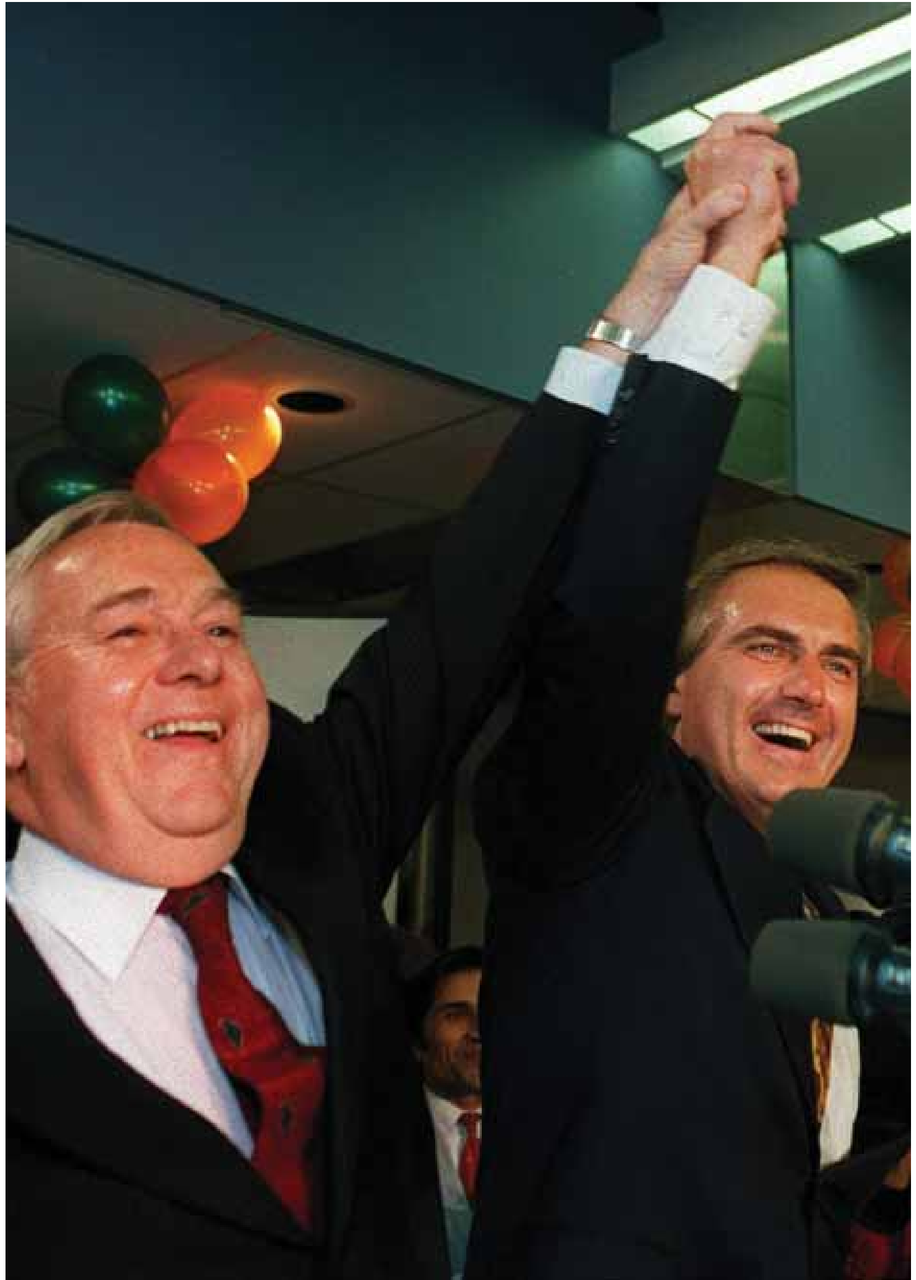
But they didn't break the Blakeney government, which responded in the most robust manner possible.

Safely reelected, the government chartered the Saskatchewan Potash Corporation and set out to nationalize the industry — or, at least, to threaten to do so.

"Technically, the second bill did *not* nationalize the industry," recalls Romanow. "We enacted a trigger in the legislation if we were unsuccessful in buying out a company. We succeeded in doing so, and so no 'act of nationalization' ever took place. This shows Blakeney's deft touch, his carrot and stick approach, in achieving our goals."

Blakeney explained the benefits of this approach this way. "Firstly," he writes in his memoirs, this move would "place beyond the reach of the federal government the returns from that part of the potash industry that would be owned by the Crown. Secondly, it would signal to Ottawa that the vehicle of public ownership was available for other industries, namely oil and uranium, if they persisted in their policy of attempting to get for themselves a substantial part of the increased value of those resources. Thirdly, it would signal to the potash industry that it was wholly unacceptable for the industry to withhold taxes that were acknowledged to be due and owing, and would signal to them also that there were other options for developing the potash industry in Saskatchewan, and accordingly that they could not name their own terms. Negotiations were required. Fourthly, it would signal to other resource industries that our government considered public ownership of some of the resources as an option, and we believed that this would be part of their thinking when negotiating with the government."

All of which proved to be so.



CP Photo

Former Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney with his successor, Roy Romanow, on election night in 1991. Both were known as sensible prairie socialists who balanced their books. Blakeney finished third on our top 5 list of the best premiers of the last 40 years.

And so, for the rest of its term, the Blakeney government oversaw an era of growing prosperity, in which the province's resources were developed by a mix of public and private players who earned robust profits, created thousands of jobs and actually paid appropriate royalties and taxes — permitting the Blakeney government to balance its budget every year, to attack poverty, to improve education and health care, to implement many other innovative and important reforms and initiatives, and to hand off to its successors a public sector with zero net public debt and a growing "heritage fund" that could have been used as investment capital to build a value-added economy.

As is evident from his words, Blakeney didn't fetishize public ownership or believe it should drive resource development, necessarily. It was one of many tools in the tool box, available to be

used to ensure that the public interest would prevail. A refreshingly modern idea, that moderate progressive reformists will return to when today's failed neoconservative economic orthodoxies find their way to the dustbin they deserve.

He played a decisive role in framing Canada's modern Constitution: Arguably, the last truly great debate to occur on the floor of a federal NDP convention (at least, until something equally interesting comes along, at some point in the future) occurred in 1981 in Vancouver. The key protagonists were Allan Blakeney and Ed Broadbent, arguing the merits of the Trudeau government's constitutional patriation initiative.

Broadbent broadly supported the patriation initiative — on terms. He argued that it was time for Canada to have a Canadian constitution; that we needed a functioning amendment formula in lieu of having to refer amendments to the British Parliament; and that it was good for Canada to add a charter of rights, including guarantees for minority language rights. He was supported in this position by two of his predecessors, Tommy Douglas and David Lewis. Federal NDP policy had long called for an entrenched charter of rights.

"However, it was a condition of my support, publicly acknowledged and accepted in writing by Trudeau, that there be an amendment to the package that would clarify and confirm provincial jurisdictional control over natural resources," Broadbent told me in a recent exchange. "The resource amendment was of course something Allan had been calling for, for some time, and that I thought was necessary. And might also be an inducement to the Government of Saskatchewan to support the package. Trudeau did deliver on his promise and accepted an amendment clarifying the resource issue.

"Trudeau also gave me assurances that the government would be open in principle to other amendments on the constitutional package," Broadbent remembered. "This I noted in my publicly released letter at the time and of course reported to the federal caucus. Again, subsequent amendments to the constitutional package included major changes affecting the rights of First Nations people and women. On both of these matters, I had direct conversations with Trudeau, who was neither a feminist nor a supporter of Aboriginal rights. Demonstrating his own flexibility and political intelligence, he did accept amendments in both of these areas that were proposed either in committee or on the floor of the House by the NDP."

So then, there was the other side of the debate.

During the 1981 Vancouver debate and in many public statements before and after it, Blakeney took strong issue with Trudeau's whole initiative, arguing passionately that the federal and provincial governments should be led by elected legislatures, and not by appointed courts enforcing a constitutionally entrenched charter.

During the 1981 Vancouver debate and in many public statements before and after it, Blakeney took strong issue with Trudeau's whole initiative, arguing passionately that the federal and provincial governments should be led by elected legislatures, and not by appointed courts enforcing a constitutionally entrenched charter.

"I remember the Vancouver convention well, since I was in the line-up to speak, sometime after Allan Blakeney," Romanow said. "It was a moment of high political drama, since the debate reflected two competing visions of Canada. Blakeney feared the transfer of power from electoral politics, our tradition in Saskatchewan at the time, to judicial 'politics'. In the tradition of Douglas et al., we strongly believed that as difficult as it was, social democracy stood a better chance through door-to-door campaigning than through costly and uncertain Supreme Court decisions, decisions which, once made, had the effect of being a 'constitutional amendment.'"

"That debate in Vancouver was awesome, it should have been taped," remembered Bill Knight, Blakeney's principal secretary (and, interestingly, later Ed Broadbent's principal secretary as well). "Blakeney believed that concrete legislative reform, like medicare or labour standards, was the way to make progress and to act together collectively. And that achieving gains like these through elections and then through legislation passed by an elected legislature would move us forward with wider societal buy-in and less conflict than court-ordered and imposed norms."

Writing many years later in his memoirs, Blakeney added a second argument: that, on reflection, Trudeau's Charter didn't go far enough to merit support. Specifically, the Charter protected individual (civil and political) rights, but was largely silent on collective (social, economic and cultural) rights like, for example, the right to education, health care and the necessities of life. On this argument, Trudeau's Charter constitutionalizes a form of liberalism that courts have used in many countries to nullify the public interest, when that public interest is collective (as I write, the US Supreme Court is contemplating Barack Obama's health care reform from within precisely this frame, for example).

Making the best of a bad situation sums up Blakeney's approach to the whole matter.

In 1980-81, Blakeney was (although he didn't know it yet) in the last years of his mandate. He was being challenged by a recklessly irresponsible but politically clever right-wing populist, Conservative leader Grant Devine. Debating the Constitution was the last thing Blakeney wanted to focus on. But those were the cards he was handed by Prime Minister Trudeau, who was also in his last mandate and was determined to address these issues.

Blakeney brought to the patriation issue his deep schooling in Tommy Douglas' engine room — in the core central agencies of the government whose job is to tackle the toughest issues and to get the best possible result. People with that kind of experience aren't fazed by difficult problems and are slow to give up. He also brought deep experience in stepping up to seemingly insoluble conflicts. Like the 1962 doctors' strike which he played a key role in resolving as finance minister. And like the potash tax strike, which he resolved by cutting his counterparties off at the knees.

The events around patriation have often been told and I'm not going to rehearse them here. But I'll point to his game plan and to the outcome. Broadly speaking, Blakeney pursued three strategies during the patriation debate.

First, he experimented with bilateral bargaining with Trudeau. In a series of conversations between the two governments, Blakeney attempted to get Trudeau to change his patriation package to make it more acceptable. Some progress was made — for example, the Trudeau government ultimately agreed to enshrine clearer provincial control of natural resources in the Constitution through a new section 92A, resolving the legal issues raised during the acrimonious potash litigation. But it became clear to Blakeney that Trudeau was conducting numerous concurrent negotiations and was going to have a hard time successfully resolving all of them.

He then experimented with collective bargaining. He helped engineer a common front among six, and then eight of the provincial governments, and tried to simultaneously derail the federal government's emerging strategy of repatriating the Constitution unilaterally, while concurrently trying to bring the parties together around some sort of negotiated solution. (Blakeney later wryly wrote that in hindsight, it might have been better for the country if the Trudeau Liberals had gone ahead with unilateral patriation, instead of filing a Supreme Court reference that blew up in their faces, forcing them back to the table with the provinces. Blakeney believed the British government would likely have given Trudeau what he wanted. And all the provinces could then have been outraged together, without isolating Quebec.)

And finally, Blakeney and his team went for the deal — once it was clear that common front confrontation had lived out its usefulness. Blakeney was never going to agree to René Lévesque's last-minute solution of putting the whole package to a referendum (look how well that worked out in the subsequent Charlottetown referendum). He wanted the file closed and off the table. And, as had been the case in 1962 during the settlement negotiations to end the doctors' strike, he knew that meant that all parties were going to have to weave together a compromise.

And so that is what he went for, and that is what Canada got — the Charter of Rights, with a notwithstanding clause that preserved, in some cases, the supremacy of elected representatives over appointed judges. A trade-off between Trudeau's vision and Blakeney's.

Blakeney brought to the patriation issue his deep schooling in Tommy Douglas' engine room — in the core central agencies of the government whose job is to tackle the toughest issues and to get the best possible result.

The Canadian Constitution is, I think Blakeney would be the first to agree, an unfinished piece of business. Blakeney's view, as set out in his memoirs, that a worthy charter of rights should include collective rights, might point us to where we need to go next, as this dark period of neo-conservatism comes to an end. That will be an important discussion, if so, and should include the collective rights of the people of Quebec, whose National Assembly has not ratified the 1981 settlement.

Blakeney would also be the first to say, I think, that the fates of the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown referendum teach us not to attempt constitutional amendments unless we can be certain we will succeed.

He incarnates the core of the New Democratic Party's tradition of good government: As my final piece of evidence of the merits of Allan Blakeney, a few words about one of his most lasting contributions to his political party and to social democracy in Canada — the NDP's deep tradition of good government.

In 1992, Blakeney, working with University of Toronto professor Sandford Borins, published his best book, *Political Management in Canada* (1992). It is a sort of Socratic dialogue between Blakeney and Borins, discussing the art of political leadership, leading a cabinet, getting best results from the public service and many other topics. It is a treasure chest, that book — and should be mandatory reading for any Canadian social democrat with any hopes of working in any role in government. I got to see that governing tradition in action, and I feel strongly it is an approach to government that can serve our party well, both provincially and federally.

Blakeney's book speaks for itself. I'll just point to a few of the characteristics of that governing tradition that struck me when I was living in it.

First, it is a responsible approach to government. In particular, this tradition has a prairie socialist's allergy to excessive reliance on public debt. And so, New Democrats governing in that tradition are careful with the family silver, do what they can to repair public revenues and then tailor the suit to fit the cloth — rather than running structural deficits that can only have one end, as we see in parts of Europe today.

Second, it is a respectful approach to government. New Democrats governing in that tradition tend to be respectful of Parliament and of legislatures, for example, and would never

dream of delivering a budget speech in an auto parts plant, or a Throne Speech on a talk radio station.

Third, it is a relatively open and inclusive approach to government. One of Blakeney's mantras, Bill Knight remembered, was this: "Don't bring me the problem. I *know* the problem. Bring me the solution!" This is a premier speaking to a minister or to a senior official, letting her or him know that their role is to propose solutions as well as to raise problems. This may seem a little trite, but it is fundamental to Blakeney's approach to leadership. He expected all the lights to be on in the building; he wanted the full benefit of everyone's proposals, as well as their ability to identify problems. I've looked into governments rooted in other political traditions, whose premiers believed they had all the answers all the time, and spoke to their colleagues in the form of orders, often barked. That did not make for happy teams, from what I could see, or particularly effective ones.

(On this theme, here is another Blakeney story, offered by Knight: "One time the premier's assistant called down to my office in the basement late in the afternoon saying the premier wanted to see me — now. As always I tried to charm what the subject matter might be, only to be told 'The premier seems perplexed.' This was code to be on alert. Up the stairs I went, thinking hard on what I may have misfired on lately. When I came through the door Allan Blakeney was behind his desk throwing pages from a report up in the air muttering to himself. I was immediately relieved since I didn't write things down! So bravely I said — 'Well, Mr. Premier, how goes your day?' He proceeded to tell me that he had a report from a midlevel public servant in Social Services that he had sent back to the individual, meticulously showing how a memo should be structured and written in proper clear English. I commented that he must see great promise in this public servant to take the time to show him the way. 'Yes,' Blakeney replied, 'but he didn't correct the structure or English. He changed his recommendations. I agreed with the recommendations!" He laughed. I laughed. Between those two laughs the whole building shook.")

Finally, it is a systematic approach to government*:* this model of government can move quickly when it has to, but it generally takes a systematic, comprehensive (and, some might perhaps occasionally mutter, an ever-so-slightly plodding) approach to public affairs. Cabinet business, the work of the central agencies, the tasks of ministers and cabinet, the machinery of government, are carefully thought through, carefully managed and done in an orderly and thoughtful way. In the result, governments in this style don't crackle with entrepreneurial initiative quite the way they might otherwise do. On the other hand, if we look at, say, the increasingly embarrassing antics of BC Liberal Premier Christy Clark, her fractious cabinet and her long-suffering political team (who must be wondering what they got themselves into), we can see what government without a centreboard looks like.

"Allan Blakeney was a principled pragmatist," Romanow said. "This phrase reflects his complexity, sensitivity and determination, which is so essential to a functioning and progressive democracy — something we are far from today. He was true to his principles, to the end, and would pursue them in the uncertain world of pragmatism. He was much like the fishermen and farmers who were Allan Blakeney's influences. People who pursued their dreams, but sometimes had to temper them."

Saskatchewan makes up about 3 percent of Canada's population. When well led, its provincial government has boxed well above its weight in this ever-changing, complex federation. The province has been very well led indeed by a string of competent, thoughtful, determined and tough CCF and NDP premiers, of whom Allan Blakeney was one of the best.

Saskatchewan makes up about 3 percent of Canada's population. When well led, its provincial government has boxed well above its weight in this ever-changing, complex federation. The province has been very well led indeed by a string of competent, thoughtful, determined and tough CCF and NDP premiers, of whom Allan Blakeney was one of the best. Just like those ancient Cessna airplanes we used to fly around in, those governments were extremely good at manœuvring over or around the occasional thunderstorm in their way — and even flew right through a couple of them when absolutely necessary (I flew in those planes once or twice when they did that — it is not for the faint of heart). For the government, as for the airplane, it was always extremely reassuring to know that the pilot knew exactly what he was doing.

As a final note, in his brief concluding speech at Allan Blakeney's memorial, his son Hugh didn't talk much about Allan Blakeney's degrees, or his ministerial career, or his adventures as premier, or any of Allan Blakeney's many other accomplishments and contributions. But he did speak, in unforgettable terms, about the song Allan Blakeney sang to his children at night to help them get to sleep. It was a reminder that Allan Blakeney had time in his life for much more than politics — and a timely reminder, in an era of 24/7 politics, of what the people closest to people in politics really remember and value most about them.

Brian Topp is past president of the New Democratic Party of Canada. In the 1990s he served as deputy chief of staff to Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow.