

**Faith Johnston, *A Great Restlessness: The Life and Politics of Dorise Nielsen* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006).**

A social contradiction exists in Canadian federal politics between the egalitarian ideology of left-wing parties which prompt female representation in the House of Commons and persistent sexist practices. Agnes Macphail's and Dorise Nielsen's elections to Parliament, from 1921 to 1940 and 1940 to 1945 respectively, illustrate the left-wing egalitarian ideology. Macphail, the first woman to sit in the legislature, represented the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation), and Nielsen was the first Communist MP (Member of Parliament) for the United Progressive movement. Johnston bridges the contradiction between left-wing ideologies and practice in a biography blending memoirs, newspapers, photographs, government archives, and other documents. A smooth-flowing narrative subtly interweaving personal stories and political interpretation demonstrates Nielsen's courage in pursuing revolutionary goals in an anti-Communist environment. The harsh experiences of this Saskatchewan farmwife during the dustbowl years further provide a dynamic interpretation of women's resistance to subjugation and to class oppression.

Johnston begins by chronicling the formative years of Nielsen's life in working-class North London in the 1920s and immigration to North Battleford, Saskatchewan. After teaching in a one-room schoolhouse, she settled for a loveless marriage to Peter Nielsen, a World War I veteran with thwarted ambitions. Her frustration with the neverending work required in raising three children (Christine, John, and Sally) in the abject poverty of the 1930s increased her isolation and her loneliness, and yet all the while a vibrant political climate charged her ambitions. The family sheltered On-to-Ottawa trekkers and listened to accounts of the Regina Riot; leading social democrats Tommy Douglas and David Lewis made passionate speeches in the region. Nielsen's own talented oratory and newspapers articles attracted the attention of Bob Paul and other CCF organizers. She was committed to combating poverty, to stabilizing wheat prices and farm income, to universal medicare, public health, and other social measures. So she secured the local Unity candidacy, left her husband, and moved to Ottawa where she worked as a single mother and a MP.

Chapters 5 to 10 cover the critical Ottawa years. Here Johnston's analysis of her militant support for the Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers in Kirkland Lake, Sudbury, and Timmins, and Communist Party of Canada (CPC) attempts to unite the Canadian Left, are significant contributions to labour and left history. The CPC initiatives of the 1930s and 1940s are comparable to the creation of Québec solidaire, the recent amalgamation of the Union des forces progressistes (UFP) with other parties of the Left in a period of regressive neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. The heightened anti-Communism and nativism of the Second Red Scare of the 1940s posed serious

challenges for a female Communist and explain her candidacy for the United Progressives. From 1940-41, the federal government employed the War Measures Act to declare Communism illegal. Canada was the only Western democracy to do so at the time. The CPC was also made illegal in Ontario; Tim Buck was temporarily forced to move operations to New York; and accustomed to the anti-Semitic elements of the Padlock Law, Quebec activists went underground.

How did this anti-Communist campaign affect Neilsen specifically? Both Mackenzie King and Macphail disliked Neilsen for being a Communist. The RCMP did not arrest her, but carefully monitored her speeches and newspaper articles, and the retention of secrecy regarding party membership was essential to CCF candidacy. Her public pronouncements accusing the government of acting like a Fascist state, as well as the 1941 election of Cora Taylor Cameron, a second female Communist in the House of Commons, prompted the Liberal caucus to think of ways to “shut her up” (118). King strategically and unsuccessfully tried to co-opt her into the Liberal Party, and after her term ended in 1945, he enacted some of the social legislation she had so valiantly upheld.

Neilsen championed health insurance and equal pay for equal work in the wartime years when female employment was a temporary measure and mother's allowance covered egg money. By 1943, a Liberal-Labour coalition and the creation of the Labour Progressive Party (LPP) and the Progressive Conservative Party (PCP) enhanced piecemeal social measures. It was at this point that she faced obvious sexist discrimination within her own party, when she was told to accept the parliamentary leadership of Montreal Communist Fred Rose. Here, Johnston's biography explores feminist initiatives in the male-dominant world of mainstream politics and, to a lesser extent, gender relations and patriarchy within the CPC. A broader comparative approach could shed more light on the particularities of Neilsen's feminist stance for Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster also note that both Macphail and Neilsen were relegated to the backrooms of the CCF and the CPC and to the backbenches of Parliament. Neilsen's confinement to women's issues based on the traditional roles of wife and mother runs counter to the predominance of class over sex/gender and ethnicity which was shown in Andrée Lévesque's analysis of CPC militant Jeanne Corbin. Drawing from her Marxist feminism and close reading of Engels, Neilsen's raising of the issue of male chauvinism within the party contrasts with the lack of feminist intervention on the part of Corbin (210).

Public life is hard on the relationships of politicians and their families, so the attention to the personal completes this biography. The author is to be commended for her discreet treatment of the ending of three long-term relationships over the course of Neilsen's life: the first from her husband Peter (with no legal divorce); the second extra-marital liaison with Bob Paul; and a third relation with Constant Godefroy. Based on the belief that women are no more monogamous than men, she entertained these interim relationships while

desiring a lasting and loving companionship. Single parenting involved stints for the children in boarding schools and with friends and colleagues, and this profoundly affected the rebellion of her eldest daughter Christine. Her broad-minded spirit extended to her children and to the support of single parenting for Christine and an abortion for Sally.

After she lost her seat in Ottawa in 1945, a brief respite in anti-Semitism and anti-Communism drew her to the inner-city enclaves of Toronto. The unfolding of the Gouzenko affair shortly thereafter meant that the country focused on Rose's alleged spying for the Soviets during the Second World War. This was followed by his arrest, trial, 1947 expulsion from Parliament, imprisonment, departure for Poland, and ultimately, the revoking of his Canadian citizenship. Revelations of Cold War policing in Canada complement our knowledge of US McCarthyism and the work of Gary Evans on John Grierson's manipulation of wartime propaganda with the National Film Board. The author provides disclosures of Neilsen's fear of arrest, phonetapping, and also details her involvement with the world peace movement in this period.

The recurrence of Cold War anti-Communism in Canada and her revolutionary zeal took her to China in 1955 where she conducted teacher training in the medical corps and died on Dec. 7, 1980 surrounded by comrades and her daughter Christine. She witnessed the dramatic consequences of the Great Leap Forward, feared expulsion during the Sino-Soviet split, and arrest or re-education during the Cultural Revolution. Accompanied by her daughters and six grandsons, her health steadily deteriorated as she worked on several projects with the Foreign Language Press and attended study groups and public meetings.

This book is a captivating and exemplary rendition of the life of Neilsen. The explicit use of varied sources, the detailed political analysis, as well as the keen attention to personal relations, collective solidarity, and social injustice, are praiseworthy and original contributions to historical scholarship.

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**William J. Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).**

The two-month Gustafsen Lake standoff near 100 Mile House in the summer of 1995 briefly turned Canadians' attention to the longstanding tensions that marred relationships between Native and non-Native people in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia. In this book, William J. Turkel, who grew up in the region but now teaches at the University of Western Ontario, turns his attention to the historical roots of several controversies that erupted in the region in the 1990s. In three parts, the book "explores the ways in which usable pasts are