

**BOOKS**

**Gordon is always kind**

By NORMAN DEPOE

As the years roll by, and the people concerned feel they can finally tell a fuller story than was possible under the responsibility of public office and the heat of the political fray, we're gradually getting filled in on what happened behind the scenes in Ottawa during the post-war era, and especially in the troubled 1960s.

This not to say that A Political Memoir, by Walter L. Gordon (McClelland and Stewart, 382 pages; \$15.95) tells us everything we'd like to know about the man who was minister of finance from 1963 to 1965.

Despite some roundhouse swings at both friends and foes, Walter Gordon remains too much a gentleman for that. His prose is gentlemanly, too, sometimes descending into what can only be described as Rabelaisian. For example, no project ever merely has someone's assistance; it must be the "able" or sometimes "very able" assistance of . . . The author is perpetually saying how grateful he is for all this.

These habits make the book hard slogging in parts, but then so does the subject matter: lengthy and acute financial analyses of the Canadian condition over a span stretching from World War II to the beginning Trudeau years.

**DIVIDED PARTY**

Partly in so many words, partly between the lines, though, this essentially dry material reveals an on-going struggle between the conservative and progressive wings of the Liberal party, both in and out of office.

Though Gordon himself at times seems to be a curious friend of the two, he makes it clear that he, at least, regards himself as a progressive, allied with such people as Maurice Lamontagne, Tom Kent (the eminence grise of much of the Lester Pearson years), and to a considerable extent with Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

He confesses that part of his reasons for withdrawing from active politics was his conviction that he could never work with Trudeau as prime minister.

The conservative side of the Cabinet came in for harsh (though still gentlemanly) criticism — their caution about the effective date of Medicare, what Gordon regards as their foot-dragging in other social and financial reforms.

He found it possible to remain on terms of personal friendship with such conservatives as Robert Winters and E.C. "Bud" Drury — to whom he is related by marriage — but makes no bones about his antipathy towards Mitchell Sharp. In fact, it was Sharp's conduct of the ministry of finance that helped Gordon decide not to run again in 1968.

**HOW IT WORKS**

There's a fascinating insight into the way the Liberal establishment works, though it's only between the lines: Two men meet on a special government job, and like each other. One of them likes a third, and so on.

There was a well organized "old-boy" network in existence when Gordon was first tapped, as a competent accountant and management man for various jobs in Ottawa and he met others of his own generation who gradually supplanted the C.D. Howes and the Brooke Claxtons.

And he and his colleagues in their turn tapped other bright young people. The same names keep popping up — perhaps too many of them obscure — again and again.

But the Liberal party managed somehow to stretch its blanket over all of the differences, at varying periods, at least long enough to give the party a new lease on life — and, of course, a new term of power.

There's a touch of sadness in the funny account of how Gordon's almost life-long friendship with Mike Pearson ended under pressure — and a moving account of his visit to Pearson shortly before his death.

There's also a recurrent note of frustration, as Gordon recounts how "progressive" measures were stalled or swept under the rug, and — as is so often usual in political memoirs — a considerable amount of self-justification. Not, however, a patch on the almost hysterical breast-beating of John Diefenbaker in his memoirs.

And, as you'd expect from Walter Gordon, his convictions about Canadian independence from American domination run like a leitmotiv throughout the book.

A GLIMPSE INSIDE  
Both in the text and in appendices, the author gives us generous insight into how policy was formed and executed by quoting from actual memoranda and letters con-

(Continued on Page 13)

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