

Act, which authorizes the restrictive regime, is brought to bear in arguing the need for greater openness.

Behind Closed Doors makes a strong case that the prevailing protections against the release of federal cabinet documents are, even accepting the basic imperative of cabinet secrecy, unnecessarily restrictive. The author's recommendations for reform, set out in very general terms in the conclusion, are definitely worth considering. However, those interested in cabinet processes, as opposed to legal analyses of cases and wording of statutes, will want to read the book selectively.

From Left to Right: Saskatchewan's Political and Economic Transformation

Dale Eisler, Regina: University of Regina Press, 2022, pp. 392

Rylan O'Connor, McGill University (rylan.oconnor@mail.mcgill.ca)

On October 26, 2020, the Saskatchewan Party, Saskatchewan's centre-right party, was re-elected to a fourth consecutive majority government. Parallel to this success has been the remarkable relegation of Saskatchewan's former "natural governing party," the New Democratic Party (NDP), to the political wilderness. The NDP, a party born out of "agrarian socialism," was reduced to a small urban base with no presence or prospects in rural Saskatchewan—finishing third in some ridings behind the fringe-separatist Buffalo Party. This was the first time that the NDP had not won or placed second in every provincial riding since 1938 (283). The 2020 provincial election demonstrated the entrenchment of a long and profound transformation in Saskatchewan politics—"from the birthplace of the NDP to its possible deathbed" (xv).

In *From Left to Right: Saskatchewan's Political Economic Transformation*, Dale Eisler argues that the puzzle of Saskatchewan's political transformation is "one of the most interesting and least explored questions in Canadian politics" (xv). Over the course of 20 chapters, Eisler rectifies this deficiency and provides its most comprehensive treatment to date. Eisler is a former journalist whose professional life has coincided with much of what is covered, and his account is an intimate one. He tells the story of Saskatchewan's transformation from the perspective of someone who has both lived through it and reported on it.

Eisler's analysis proceeds chronologically, with each chapter structured around a particular election or significant event. The first half of the book broadly covers Saskatchewan's era of social democracy, beginning in the heady days of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (NDP after 1961) and Tommy Douglas' progressive brand of prairie populism. Eisler charts how Saskatchewan earned the mythic reputation as the home of Canadian socialism due to its unique collectivist political culture and innovative social policies. Eisler locates the end of this era and Saskatchewan's tradition of agrarian socialism with the election of the Grant Devine Progressive Conservatives in 1982. The second half of the book traces the subsequent consolidation of Saskatchewan's political transformation up to the recent 2020 provincial and 2021 federal elections. Crucially, Eisler identifies two central and related components of this process—the NDP's estrangement from its rural roots and the continued salience of populism in Saskatchewan society.

According to Eisler, the single most important factor in Saskatchewan's transformation was a set of structural changes in Saskatchewan's agricultural economy and society in the 1970s and 1980s and the NDP's failure to reconcile itself to these changes. Eisler notes that this period brought new technology and global economic thinking, which precipitated a process of intense

marketization of Saskatchewan's rural society. Farms grew larger and less numerous, a context wherein the vitality of rural communities began to suffer. Eisler argues that within the new entrepreneurial and competitive individualist climate of rural Saskatchewan, the collectivism of the NDP began to be seen as increasingly anachronistic. More still, after a decade in power, the NDP lost its historic populist appeal. It was seen as increasingly disconnected from the people of rural Saskatchewan in favour of urban elites and interests.

In this way, Eisler problematizes the conventional left/right ideological framing of Saskatchewan's transformation. Eisler argues that when viewed through the prism of populism, the story of Saskatchewan's political development is one of continuity. Throughout Eisler's discussion, the constant, albeit at times latent, force of populism in Saskatchewan politics and society is evident. Eisler observes that Saskatchewan's tradition of prairie populism has never been beholden to firm ideological commitments but rather appeals to a fundamental shared sense of geographic place and pragmatism held by Saskatchewan people. This was foremost in the populist tendencies of the socialist Tommy Douglas and also the conservative Brad Wall half a century later. Eisler's book is a story of hubris. It demonstrates the mobilizing force of populism, both in the NDP's dominance and its demise, and now in the fortunes of the Saskatchewan Party. Eisler shows that populism is not only corrosive; it has also been a mechanism of democratic representation. Nevertheless, Eisler warns that populism must not be taken for granted and should be engaged with caution, so as to avoid its malign potential readily on display both at home and abroad. This is an important reminder, which cannot come often enough.

Eisler has written a clear and important book that fills a hole in the understanding of Saskatchewan and Canadian politics. *From Left to Right* is far-reaching in both ambition and scope. Eisler provides a committed and richly descriptive study that makes modest, yet exceedingly illuminating, analytic insights throughout. It is rigorous enough for academics yet lively and accessible for a general audience, making it a must read for anyone with an interest in Saskatchewan and Canadian political history.