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C.B. MACPHERSON: A RETROSPECTIVE

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Lister Sinclair
Good evening. I'm Lister Sinclair and this is Ideas on the life and times of Canadian political philosopher C.B. Macpherson. On September 30, 1987, while the organ played a Bach chorale, a crowd slowly gathered in the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall. Two months after his death, they had come to pay tribute to a teacher, a colleague, a friend, and a man who had made a difference in the field of political philosophy.

Marsha Chandler
The University of Toronto has a great many individuals who make enormous contributions to the university, to academe and to the nation. But there are some whose contributions have been so outstanding that we must recognize them. We must pause in our daily lives and reflect on what they have done and on the meaning of these accomplishments. Today, we honour one of these very special few--Crawford Brough Macpherson. He began his career here...

Lister Sinclair
Brough Macpherson taught at the University of Toronto for over forty years. During those years, he achieved a world-wide reputation for his contributions to political theory. In his writings, Macpherson challenged the free market ethic. He called for a new society based on the fulfillment of human potential rather than the acquisition of private possessions. He claimed that such a society could only come into existence through a fusion of socialism and liberalism--the liberal tradition of individual rights and freedoms grafted to the socialist ideal of full human equality. Macpherson's ideas brought him wide acclaim, but he always remained rooted in his own university. He was a committed and compelling teacher and he was devoted to the liberal ideal of the university as a civilized community. His colleague Peter Russell recalled this civility at the memorial service.

Peter Russell
He was, in the best sense of the term, a very civil person, truly a gentle man. I can still see in my mind's eye, and I'll bet many of you can, too, that twinkle in his eye, that warm, somewhat sly smile. It was like the sun. I remember one day in particular when that sun shone on me. I had reviewed a book he had written. It was called The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. On the morning the review appeared, I, as a rather raw rookie, was in some trepidation how my illustrious colleague might respond. But when he poked his head in my office, he smiled, said he enjoyed the review, thought it was quite a good review, though wrong in its fundamental point. And so we talked for half an hour or so, neither conceding very much to the other, but both enjoying the exchange. Now, that's the mark of a civilized community of scholars and a practice as essential as it is difficult to maintain among men and women who may have such different points of view on the human condition.

Lister Sinclair
Civility, intelligence, integrity--these were the qualities that won Brough Macpherson the love and admiration of his students, colleagues and friends. Tonight on Ideas, we pay tribute to C.B. Macpherson with the first of two programs on his life and work. The series will continue tomorrow night. It's written and presented by David Cayley.

David Cayley
A few weeks ago, I asked our CBC Archives for a list of their holdings on C.B. Macpherson. I expected to get back a fairly substantial document, comparable to what one would find for Marshall McLuhan, say, or George Grant. Instead, I received a single page with three entries. For McLuhan, there are nearly a hundred. Within the field of political theory, C.B. Macpherson is a name to conjure with. Outside, it seems, he is very little known, especially in Canada. When he died in July 1987, the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star both ran obituaries by writers who seemed quite unaware of the nature of his achievement. The Toronto Sun in a way did him more justice by attacking his socialism. But among those who are aware of his work, there are many who consider Brough Macpherson to have been an intellectual giant, a thinker of unusual clarity and integrity who set a whole new style in political thought. One of his greatest admirers is federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent, a student of Macpherson's in the '60s.

Ed Broadbent
I deeply believe that he is one of the great thinkers in the democratic tradition; not great Canadian thinkers, but great thinkers in the democratic tradition, stretching from Marx and Mill up to the present. There are very few, for a busy, intellectually oriented person, people that one needs to read, but Brough Macpherson is one of those people that one needs to read because he added to Marx, he added to Mill. He saw certain things that they didn't see, as a person who came later and gave great intellectual rigor to developing the requirements of an adequate democratic theory. He was a great thinker.

Frank Cunningham
It's not possible for a Canadian scholar going to an international conference not to be asked, almost right away, "Oh, did you know C.B. Macpherson?" He's one of the really few social and political theorists that Canada has produced with this kind of international impact and reputation.

David Cayley
This is Frank Cunningham, the head of the philosophy department at the University of Toronto.

Frank Cunningham
I've had the opportunity in the last few years twice to attend international conferences on democracy held in Santiago, in Chile, and what surprised me and pleased me quite a bit the first time I went was: I thought I would introduce the ideas of Macpherson to the Chileans, I would be interested to know their responses, only to find out that they knew, some of them, quite a bit more about his works than I did. His works are translated into Spanish. He has an enormous reputation amongst Chilean scholars, and especially critics of the military dictatorship.

David Cayley
Latin America is an area where Macpherson has a particular appeal, but he is also well known in Europe and Japan. Frank Cunningham thinks that the reason for this popularity is that Macpherson pointed a way beyond the dilemma which has dominated political thought for the last century.

Frank Cunningham
Macpherson was a socialist. His attack on property conceived of as something that enables you to prevent other people from developing their full potential, something that you possess and exclude other people from, his notion of possessive individualism as the political culture where, as he puts it rather nicely, people are more concerned with having than with doing, all of that constitutes one of the truly strong and incisive critiques of capitalist society. On the other hand, what Macpherson was able to accomplish that very few other socialists have been able to accomplish was to perceive within capitalist societies some things of value that must be retained or, as he puts it, retrieved, and in particular, what he wanted to retrieve were certain of the values of liberal democracy. Now, to a lot of people, that's like trying to square the circle. You just can't do it. You either opt for socialism and then you're going to have to forego both the individual and democracy, or you opt for capitalism and, whatever its failings, at least you get liberal democracy out of it. Macpherson's brilliant insight and the strength of his argument and the reason for his popularity was that he showed us how we could have it both ways.

David Cayley
Macpherson believed that this utopian possibility of a society both free and egalitarian now existed. Like Karl Marx, he believed that capitalism was the precondition for a new kind of society, that when capitalism reached a certain level of productivity, it would be able to shed its original political culture, the political culture he called "possessive individualism." Previous political philosophers had justified possessive individualism on the grounds that goods were scarce and human desires unlimited, but Macpherson argued that technological progress had undermined this justification. This was how he himself put the point in his 1965 Massey Lectures for the CBC, "The Real World of Democracy".

C.B. Macpherson
We can begin to recognize now that the vision of scarcity in relation to unlimited desire was a creation of the capitalist market society. Certainly before the advent of that society, nobody assumed that unlimited desire was the natural and proper attribute of the human being. You do not find it in Aristotle or in St. Thomas Aquinas. You begin to find it only with the rise of the capitalist market society in the 17th century, in Hobbes and in Locke. Scarcity was set up as the condition whose conquest was to be the great object of human endeavour, but this was only done when the emerging capitalist market society needed it as an organizing principle. An all-pervasive awareness of scarcity was needed, both to justify the operations of those who came out at the top and to motivate those who stayed below and had to be made to work harder than they had ever worked before. We don't need this dominant concept of scarcity any longer. We don't need any longer the morality which gives pride of place to the motive of acquisition. In at least the most advanced capitalist countries, we produce already more commodities and more new capital than we know what to do with, and in the very near future, our problem will be not to get people to work, but to find something for them to do, not to make the most efficient use of scarce means, but to start repairing the scarcity of the human values that have been submerged in the struggle against material scarcity.

David Cayley
Macpherson called for nothing less than a new conception of human nature, a conception that would emphasize self-development. Traditional liberal theory had conceived of human abilities as private possessions which could be used to acquire goods. Potentials would be developed as the market dictated. Macpherson, on the other hand, saw the development of human potential as an end in itself. To make this end a means of getting money or gaining power was a perversion of human nature. Charles Taylor is a professor of political science at McGill University in Montreal and an internationally known political theorist himself.

Charles Taylor
He wanted to propose new ways of seeing human beings and new political theories that went along, connected with that, which would allow us, in his view, to go beyond this age, the age really of capitalist civilization, with all its advantages of growth and production on one hand and disadvantages of injustice and, as he thought,

a real suppression of human potentiality on the other. So he was looking forward to a kind of civilization in which we would have a richer and fuller democracy, a democracy of participation, which would not be centrally based on market and market relations which take people as individuals possessing themselves, their powers and trading in them, as it were, but would, in a sense, take people as possessors of their powers in a fuller sense, where they would get the full benefit of and the full capacity to develop their powers, which he thought in capitalist civilization people didn't.

David Cayley
Macpherson's critique of capitalism was in no sense original. What was original was his proposed solution, a form of socialism which would remain connected to the liberal tradition. So he took the terms of classical liberalism, says Charles Taylor, and he transposed them into a new key. For example, the idea of property.

Charles Taylor
Instead of seeing property as the exclusive right that I have to the things that I own excluding other people, if you like, an excluding notion of property, he proposed at one point a conception of property as the right to access to what I need to develop my potentialities. So in other words, he's taking this classical term from the earlier liberalism, from the liberalism of individualism and possessive individualism, and instead of scrapping it, which is what most people have done in the socialist tradition, he wanted to retain it because he wanted to retain that sense of the "right" to something, the very strong sense of rights, and instead, give it a different interpretation so that it could be retained.

David Cayley
This attempt to retain certain aspects of liberalism was the key to Macpherson's originality as a Marxist thinker. Whether he really was a Marxist was sometimes debated in academic journals, but it is certainly true that the writings of Marx were the foundations on which he built. He shared Marx's view of history and Marx's account of the alienation of labour, but his Marxism, if such it was, always had a critical difference.

Charles Taylor
People who thought of Macpherson as a Marxist were always completely baffled when they actually read him because of this very important feature in his theory, that he tried to rethink the whole issue of the rise of capitalism and move forward to another kind of way of life, a socialist way of life, but he tried to think of it in a set of concepts which were the central concepts of bourgeous liberalism transposed. The point of using a concept like property and not scrapping it, the way Marx did, one of the most important political points of this is that it retains as central the liberal discourse about rights which, of course, classical Marxism doesn't because they thought that the individual would, in the course of things, be fully satisfied by the very subsumption into a new community of classless society and it didn't need to have any defence of individual rights. And of course, nothing could be wronger, as we can see by the experience in history of Marxist- Leninist societies. The idea of a new kind of thought of socialism, a new kind of thought of going beyond capitalism which incorporated this very important element of the rights of the individual, the centering on the well-being of the individual, was really the great contribution that Brough Macpherson was making. So in that way, he builds on Marxism, there's no question about that. Without Marxism, you wouldn't have had the thought of someone like Brough Macpherson. It presupposes Marxism. In another way, he makes a very, very far-reaching revision in it, you might say a change key, and puts it in his own terms.

David Cayley
Brough Macpherson was born and grew up in Toronto. His mother was a music teacher. His father taught at the Ontario College of Education. Their summers were spent at a family cottage in the Thousand Islands near Gananoque. Brough attended the University of Toronto Schools and then the University of Toronto. There, he gravitated to the students and faculty with artistic and political interests. He was introduced to the writings of Marx and he was one of the founders of the Association for the Appreciation of Music which met to listen to records. Music, especially the music of Bach, would remain a dominating passion for the rest of his life. In 1933, Macpherson graduated from the University of Toronto and went off to England to study at the London School of Economics. He found England familiar. "Some of the people and places have been so like what I expected," he wrote in his diary, "that they seem almost like burlesques of themselves." The social background to his studies was a deepening Depression. Irene Spry is Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Ottawa. She was a colleague and friend of Macpherson's, and she thinks that the Depression must have affected him as it affected everyone who went through it.

Irene Spry
Here were millions of people unemployed. Here were people starving and going ragged and going cold, and yet there was food going to waste because nobody could afford to buy it. You had surpluses of grain, surpluses of milk being thrown away. It was just repugnant to common sense, and this had to be a part of the background of anybody in the social sciences who was trying to find out what was happening and why it was happening. And I'm sure this must have been part of

Brough's background. It couldn't have possibly have helped being part of his background.

David Cayley
London also exposed Brough to the shifting political currents of the '30s. He noted the danger of fascism in England. He met German emigre Franz Neumann, who argued the revolution was the only way to create socialism. He wrestled with this view in his diary. Was it true for England as well or just for Germany? Sometimes he wondered about the strength of his own commitment. But Macpherson was definitely on the left and had been since his undergraduate days. "I would be willing to give up considerable monetary advantages," he wrote to his more conventional brother Brodie, "for the privilege of ceasing to live in a sick and shoddy civilization like today's." He was a socialist, he said, because he had been "seized with a sense of the injustice of the system". His longtime friend and University of Toronto colleague Ursula Franklin thinks that it was a sense that stayed with him.

Ursula Franklin
I think that Brough Macpherson had an ingrained and profound sense of justice, and all he's written about democracy, about all the factors of how a human community organizes its life, its law, its economics, I think had behind it this profound sense of justice, and that things were measured, not whether they were successful, whether they were appropriate, efficient, but in the end, did they contribute to justice. And justice for him meant not uniformity but equality in caring, equality in the real opportunity for all human beings to be regarded, again, with respect and measured by the same standards.

David Cayley
The idea of justice as equality, not uniformity, finds an echo in another of Macpherson's letters to his brother from London. "Socialism," he says, "is not intended to put people on a level. It is to remove the system which prevents people from finding their own level." But Macpherson's London years were not entirely taken up with political concerns. There was also music, a virtual feast of music. A recital by Dame Myra Hess left him "breathless with excitement". And there were the second-hand bookstores. "I am still as helpless in a bookshop as ever," he records. He also found time to travel, in France, Spain and Italy. His diaries, written in a fine, spidery hand, record his keen aesthetic pleasure in the landscapes, the architecture and the food. Years later, he would propose that enjoyment, not ownership, was what human beings needed to be assured of.
Macpherson arrived back in Canada in 1935 and took up a position in the department of political economy at the University of Toronto. Except for a brief leave during the war, he would remain a member of that department until his retirement. One of his colleagues in 1935 was the great Canadian political economist Harold Adams Innis. Another was Irene Spry.

Irene Spry
It was very, very lively, and we used to meet twice a day over cups of tea in the morning and in the afternoon, and I never remember any such meeting that there wasn't some stirring debate going on about some problem that somebody had been struggling with. Everybody whetted everybody else's mind, and there was a real sense of co-operative discovery, and it was into this background that Brough came. And of course Harold Innis was the very creative original member of the department, concentrating on Canadian studies. And in personal conversation with him, in stimulating intellectual contacts, you got not only the impression that this was real discovery going on, but you also got a very strong impression of how great the responsibility of a scholar or would-be scholar was. I think, indeed, Brough's mind-set in many ways, his deep scholarly commitment may in part be traced to Innis's influence.

David Cayley
This scholarly commitment by itself would not have marked Brough Macpherson out from many of his colleagues. But the fact that he was a socialist did, and it was his ability to combine these commitments, scholarly and political, that gave him his true distinction. In England, such a combination was not so unusual. Contemporaries of Macpherson's like E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm all managed it. In Canada, there was really no precedent. Political scientist William Leiss is the author of a forthcoming intellectual biography of Macpherson.

William Leiss
There were very few people like Macpherson in universities, especially in Canada, but in the U.S. as well, at that time. You did not prosper in universities with that ideological position, but you didn't usually go into universities if you had--after all, if you were part of the mission, you figured you might be organizing the working class or something like that. It'd be a better use of your time than giving lectures in universities and spending your time writing articles for academic publications with a circulation that was, first of all, minimal and, secondly, not directed at those who were going to affect social change. It would have been a waste of time unless you were as deeply committed to academic life as you were to your ideological position, and I think that's what Macpherson was.
David Cayley
Bill Leiss bases his argument on an essay called "The Position of Political Science", published in 1942. In this

essay, Macpherson poses himself the question, "What should be the political scientist's attitude towards the political and social reality he tries to analyze? " He answers that although the thinker must not be stampeded by events, "he can be, at the same time, a scholar and a protagonist of political philosophy, demanding change". He goes on to note that many of the classic political philosophers, Smith and Bentham, Burke and Marx, were also pamphleteers.

William Leiss
He is willing to state, sometimes in a muted form, but quite soon, he states quite openly his ideological position, usually obliquely, usually as a reference made in making some point about some thinker he's discussing. But it's there and unmistakable. And on the other hand, he says, already as a very young scholar, he's only in his late twenties, that he wants to make an impact on his profession. He did accept it as a mission to try, in one form or another, to get that point of view, what we can call a socialist perspective, in short, accepted as a legitimate part of the range of opinion in university life. I believe that he was conscious of that in some sense, and that he carried it out with a kind of determination and dedication and long range perspective that is truly remarkable. Macpherson changed the nature of the social sciences in Canada. If you compare the range of ideological standpoint that is accepted as legitimate in university practice and university publication when he started and now, that range is much wider now. I think that is a positive development in that it contributes to a rational form of social discourse in that there are ideas that are not forbidden, that we owe a great part of that to Macpherson, and that is the important part of his legacy.

David Cayley
In 1941, Brough Macpherson was lent to the University of New Brunswick at Fredericton to bolster a war-depleted faculty. He taught there for a year, and it was during that year that he met his wife, Kay, later active in the peace movement through the Voice of Women, then a physiotherapist who had come out from England in the '30s.

Kay Macpherson
I was working with three or four other women on the polio epidemic--we still had those in those days--and we were invited to go and listen to chamber music on records of Brough's. And this was in the days when you sharpened the thorn needle to play your records, and it was all very precious and so forth. Well, I stuck it out more than the others who couldn't take sitting in silence for too many hours. I managed to take some knitting along or something. So we usually said that we got married, I married him for his records and he married me for the car. I had a little Ford with a rumble seat in it in those days.

David Cayley
Kay and Brough were married in 1943 and established their first home in Ottawa, where Brough had taken a job as assistant to John Grierson at the Wartime Information Board. Grierson had attracted to the board a group of bright, socially concerned people, most of them on the political left. The next year, the Macphersons returned to Toronto and Brough returned to teaching at U of T. It was there, two years later, that they learned that several of their Ottawa friends had been detained on suspicion of spying for the Soviet Union. The CBC broke the story from London.

Matthew Halton
This is Matthew Halton of the CBC, speaking from London. Here in London today, almost everybody's interested in the big spy story from Canada. There's a wild flood of wild rumours coming over the cables, mostly from Washington, as if somebody were trying to start a witch hunt. But all we know so far is that it's serious enough, that a number of Canadians are suspected of communicating important scientific secrets to another power, probably Russia. No one's surprised, as far as I can see...

Kay Macpherson
All we heard was the news, but we very quickly discovered that two or three of our friends had been picked up. We were rather surprised that we hadn't, I mean, we couldn't see any reason why they should, so we figured that we must have been equally reprehensible. I remember meeting the wives of these guys who'd been picked up. And that summer, while they were still incarcerated, I think, we had a place and still have a place at Gananoque, and some of their wives would come down and we would talk about it. It was the time when our relations with the Soviet Union were good, as far as the general public was concerned. We had had, you know, our great Russian allies in the war, which had only just finished a little bit before, and the idea that all this spy sort of stuff was more than a great, some sort of PR stunt by the government and the RCMP was rather difficult to swallow.

David Cayley
Igor Gouzenko defected from the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa in September of 1945, taking with him a sheaf of apparently incriminating documents. The RCMP investigated. Prime Minister Mackenzie King conferred nervously with London and Washington. And then, in February of 1946, thirteen people, most of whom had been civil servants, were picked up at dawn under the powers of the War Measures Act. They weren't arrested,they weren't charged, they weren't allowed

counsel and they weren't allowed to see their families. They were held under the auspices of a royal commission in a police barracks outside Ottawa. Their rooms were brightly lit day and night and they were interrogated at all hours. Only after the Kellock-Taschereau Royal Commission had found the suspects guilty of treason were any of them charged. Eventually, the Crown prosecuted 22 cases and won eleven convictions, six on charges of violating the Official Secrets Act. But the issue that concerned many people in 1946 was not whether the suspects were guilty, but whether they had any civil rights. Reg Whittaker is a professor of political science at York University and the author of a forthcoming book on the Cold War in Canada. He says that even the existing civil liberties groups were reluctant to defend the rights of the Gouzenko prisoners.

Reg Whittaker
There were some local civil liberties associations which had existed mainly during the war when people were being interned. And some of those were, in fact, largely made up of people in the CCF, the predecessor to the NDP, and they were not very interested, not to put too fine a point on it, in pursuing protests about the Gouzenko affair. They were really much more interested, I think, in trying to distance themselves from the communists. They were already sniffing the wind and saying that the Cold War was under way and that it would be a bad thing to be associated with the communists, and therefore it might be a bad thing to be too visible protesting the way that apparent communists had been treated.

David Cayley
Out of this strategic retreat grew a new organization, the Emergency Committee for Civil Rights. One of the people who was involved in setting it up was Frank Park. He had worked with Brough Macpherson at the Wartime Information Board and then had moved to Toronto himself.

Frank Park
In Toronto, everybody I knew was very interested in what was going on at Ottawa. Some of us went to a meeting of the Toronto Civil Liberties Association to see if they would join or initiate a protest against the methods of the Taschereau-Kellock Commission. There was a series of discussions took place in which finally one group, namely the Emergency Committee for Civil Rights, decided to go ahead with a newspaper campaign or a campaign of newspaper advertising against the methods of the Taschereau-Kellock Commission. And in that work, Brough took a very prominent role.

David Cayley
That summer, Brough Macpherson toured Western Canada, speaking in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary and Vancouver in defence of the rights of the Gouzenko prisoners, and he helped to write a series of full-page ads which appeared in the Toronto Star during the spring and summer of 1946. Reg Whittaker thinks that Macpherson's activities very nearly cost him his job.

Reg Whittaker
As a result of this, there were, in fact, pressures that were brought to bear on the University of Toronto to do something about this guy, to get rid of him. And I understand, although it's hard to get documentary evidence on this, but I understand that Harold Innis, the very famous political economist who was the chair of the political economy department at the University of Toronto, had in effect put his own job on the line and said that if they got rid of Macpherson that he would go. And it was a credible threat because he had offers from big American universities like the University of Chicago, and they backed down. The very curious thing about this is that Brough himself appeared not to be very much aware of what had happened. He once told me that Harold Innis had said around that time that he had had to put in a word for him, for Macpherson, with somebody higher up. That was all that Brough ever knew about this, and this was an intervention, as far as I can see, with the president of the University of Toronto to save Macpherson's job.

CBC announcer
What's going on in the Soviet Union? What is happening to the Russian experiment? Tonight, in answer to many requests, the CBC brings you a Citizens' Forum on the Soviet Union in theory and practice. Our microphones are set up before an open meeting of the International Relations Club of the University of Toronto, the largest and most..

David Cayley
In January of 1949, the CBC asked Brough Macpherson to debate with John Garrett, a professor of English at the University of Toronto. The subject was the Soviet Union. Garrett led off with an all-out attack on Communism, calling it the greatest political hoax of the 20th century. Macpherson responded.

C.B. Macpherson
I'll say first that in my view, what the Soviets are doing is getting on with the job of reaching the original goal of the 1917 Revolution. That goal, as you, Mr. Garrett, have stated it, is a classless society of freedom and plenty after a transitional period of dictatorship. Now, how do I reach my view that the Soviets are moving towards the original goal of equality and freedom? Simply by assuming that it is still a Marxian leadership I don't see how it could be anything else when they spend

so much time teaching Marxian theory in their schools and colleges and adult education. You say that thirty years after the revolution, they have a new inequality. I agree, but I point out that the Marxian plan counted on a period of inequality of income, lasting until they reached a level of production high enough to allow equal enjoyment and a satisfactory level for everyone. This level they have not reached.

David Cayley
Macpherson went on to praise the Soviet Union for expanding access to education and raising the general standard of living. Then he returned to the justification of one party rule as a necessary phase in the transition to communism.

C.B. Macpherson
I agree that they have not yet got the liberties that we value most highly, but I point out that they were not promised and did not expect full liberty of opposition or full freedom of speech. They knew this was impossible as long as counterrevolution could be expected. The point is that these restrictions will not be needed when the basis for full socialist equality has been reached, for then there won't be any danger of counterrevolution. In the meantime, the vast majority of them have the freedoms they value most, the positive freedom to make something of themselves, which means social security, education, culture and meaningful work. And they have a wide degree of freedom of criticizing the actual administration and personnel of the factory and of the town hall. So on both these things, equality and liberty, I see them moving along the lines they had charted and I see no reason why they cannot reach their goal.

David Cayley
Macpherson's presentation to the International Affairs Club was an extremely thorough, carefully argued defence of Soviet Communism. He even justified Stalin's notorious 1935 purge on the grounds that it was a real and necessary method of uprooting counterrevolution. These views were not just an aberration. Macpherson believed that the Soviet Union had as much right as the liberal capitalist states to be called democratic. He assessed Soviet society in the same unsentimental way as he assessed liberal society, as a trade off between freedom and equality. Both would be possible, he believed, only under conditions of abundance. The West had chosen freedom and paid the price in terms of horrendous inequalities of wealth during its industrial revolution. If the Soviet Union were now choosing to trade political freedom for greater equality, Macpherson was not going to condemn them.

In 1953, Brough Macpherson published his first book. It was called Democracy in Alberta and had examined the farmers' movement and the Social Credit movement in that province from the 1920s to the 1940s. The book was a pioneering attempt to apply Marxism to the study of Canadian society. Macpherson's hope was to show that class analysis was still, as he says, "the most penetrating basis for the understanding of political behaviour."

William Leiss
Macpherson did try in that book to carry out a program he set for himself in the late '30s and early '40s, which was to change his discipline by showing the interrelationship between political ideas on the one hand and what he called concrete political facts on the other. So what he was going to do was to develop a brand of political science as an academic enterprise that would bring the discussion of political ideology and the crucial questions about socialism versus capitalism right into the discussion of, say, political institutions. Instead of separating political theory and government and so on, bring them together and show how what were thought to be merely questions about ideas really are questions about the very substance of political life.

David Cayley
Leiss thinks that Democracy in Alberta failed to realize Macpherson's ambitions for it because the facts wouldn't fit his preconceived categories. Others have estimated the book more highly, claiming, I think rightly, that Macpherson's approach yields real insight into the character of agrarian populism, then and now. But there is one compelling piece of evidence in favour of Leiss's view, that the book was essentially a false start. Democracy in Alberta was Macpherson's one and only foray into empirical political science. Subsequently, Macpherson became what Leiss calls "an epic theorist", a term he borrows from the American political scientist Sheldon Wolin. Epic theory is the attempt to boil an entire social system down to its essential principles. It's what Hobbes and Marx and Plato do, and henceforward what Macpherson will do as well.

William Leiss
He never again writes a book which deals with the interplay of political ideas and political institutions. He turns instead to epic theory, which is represented best in the book of nine years later, Possessive Individualism, but everything thereafter is, in my view, fundamentally the same. It's the epic theory approach. It's basically concentrating on the dialectic of political ideas, with some of their impacts on political institutions, but those impacts are always very sketchily worked out, not much in detail. Nothing like what was attempted in Democracy in Alberta. So I think the evidence is clear that this was something he set out to do early on. He carried it out. It failed. He gave it up.

David Cayley
At the same time as Macpherson was working on Democracy in Alberta, he was also developing a very different line of research-- political thought in 17th century England. Macpherson's first article on Thomas Hobbes was published in 1945 and portraits of Hobbes and John Locke hung above his desk in his study. He also had a particular interest in the political ideas of the Levellers, a Puritan sect active at the time of the English Civil War. In the early 1950s, the Macpherson family, which by then included three children, went on sabbatical to Oxford. Brough's 17th century studies were already well advanced and he met a kindred spirit in historian Christopher Hill.

Christopher Hill
I found him absolutely fascinating on 17th century political theory. My job is teaching 17th century history and we clicked on that because I'm interested in the history of ideas, and he was interested in the political background to ideas, so that fitted very well. We each, I think, stimulated each other in a way. And he used to ask me a lot of awkward questions about the Levellers, and he used to give me all sorts of exciting ideas about the way Levellers were thinking, which, you know, wasn't my line of country until I talked to him. He was terribly good at asking questions that historians hadn't answered about the ideas his people held. If I were to be absolutely frank, he has been criticized in some quarters for being a bit too rigid in some of his answers, and I think he was so philosophically minded that he tended to make more rational sense out of 17th century ideas than perhaps the people made in the 17th century, made them more consistent thinkers, I think. But he was very interesting and made us all think a very great deal harder about their way of thinking, and so started up all sorts of marvellous questions. That's what he was really good at.

David Cayley
The result of these questions was Macpherson's masterpiece--The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Published in 1962, the book treats 17th century political thought as the expression of an emerging capitalist society. Macpherson found in thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke the beginnings of a consistent philosophy which he calls possessive individualism. This new philosophy saw society as a market, a war of everyone against everyone, Hobbes says, and the individual as a private owner of himself and his abilities, competing in this market. Possession in such a society was the only security and the only freedom, hence possessive individualism. The book made a major impact in academic circles. Christopher Hill thinks that part of the reason was the breadth of Macpherson's scholarship.

Christopher Hill
It was his combination of knowing his history and being a very good analyst of political theory. I mean, most people who wrote about political theory wondered who Hobbes's ancestors were and what his relation to Machiavelli was. But he hadn't been related as closely and as skilfully and with knowledge as Brough did to the society in which he lived, and that goes not only for Hobbes but for Harrington and the Levellers and Locke as well. I think it was this whole interdisciplinary approach of assuming that you can't understand the ideas unless you understand the society which gave rise to them. It's elementary once the point has been made, but it had escaped an awful lot of people who wrote about political theory and the people who wrote about history hadn't, I think, fully grasped the relevance of the ideas of the political thinkers. I think he brought the two together in a way that was new.

David Cayley
Possessive individualism was a real contribution to scholarship on the 17th century, but it was also something more. It created a new archetype which could be used to analyze and correct contemporary society. And more than that, says Bill Leiss, it was also the moment at which Brough Macpherson discovered his own distinctive voice.

William Leiss
By voice, I mean a unique and appropriate mode of expression for the ideas that he wanted to express, something that would combine a personal style with an interpretive thrust. Now, he found that in The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, and thereafter he never lost it. With the concept of possessive individualism, he found something that would express in a concept his ideological standpoint. It is a notion that is both descriptive and critical. He could use this concept to talk about Hobbes and Locke in a way that's close enough to the sources that the other scholars who don't share his approach have to engage him, often on his own terms. He found, in short, the way to express that unity that he had in his mind from the very beginning in a way that would force his discipline to confront his ideas. He did not do that in Democracy in Alberta. He did it with Possessive Individualism. It's thrilling, in a sense, if you're a university academic to see that, the difference between the two books..

David Cayley
The political theory of Possessive Individualism made quite a splash when it was published. "It is rare for a book to change the intellectual landscape," George Lichtheim wrote in his review for The New Statesman, "but the unexpected has happened and the shock waves are still being absorbed." "Possessive individualism" remained Macpherson's master concept for the rest of his career. He joked about it in the introduction to his very last book, published in 1983. "The critic who remarked

that I never write about anything except possessive individualism," he said, "will find here no need to retract." Tomorrow night at this time, I'll examine these later writings in which Macpherson fleshed out his critique and his prescriptions for contemporary society, and I'll look at his role in university affairs, particularly the Macpherson Commission which transformed the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Toronto in the 1960s.

Lister Sinclair
On Ideas tonight, C.B. Macpherson: A Retrospective, part one. The program was written and presented by David Cayley.

PART II

Lister Sinclair
Good evening. I'm Lister Sinclair and this is Ideas on the life and times of Canadian political philosopher C.B. Macpherson.

Irene Spry
I have never had an impression of Brough that he accepted ready-made solutions of any sort. I think he was always trying to find out.

Ursula Franklin
He thought about things that are worthwhile thinking about and he looked at these things without essentially being prejudiced other than by his moral integerity. For me, his greatest influence has been his clarity, his mode of thinking, and I go back to his essays, not so much in search of solutions but in search of the process of clarity.

Susan Macpherson
I really cannot remember if I ever heard him lose his temper, whereas all the rest of us in the family would get mad and yell our heads off. But I can't remember an occasion on which he actually raised his voice in anger.

Leo Panitch
I think what he was doing, above all, was attempting to show that there was a crucially positive dimension to liberalism and that liberalism could not maintain that most positive element unless it became incorporated in socialism. And I think implicitly he was saying to socialists that the socialist project involves the retrieval of liberalism.

Lister Sinclair
C.B. Macpherson was Canada's best known political thinker, noted both for his critique of liberalism and for his attempt to save what he thought was best in it. When he died, on July 21, 1987, the tributes came from around the world. His books have been translated into eight languages and his ideas are as avidly discussed in Latin America and Japan as they are in North America. Macpherson's academic home was the University of Toronto, where he taught for over forty years. His students remember him as a persuasive teacher who presented ideas with freshness and clarity. His colleagues recall his humour, his civility and his integrity. His scholarship was legendary and so was his commitment to the university as a community of scholars. Tonight on Ideas, we remember Brough Macpherson with a look back at his life and work. This is the final program in our two-part series. It's written and presented by David Cayley.

David Cayley
In 1962, at the age of 51, Brough Macpherson published the book that made him famous--The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: a study of the 17th century origins of modern liberalism. This work set a direction which he was to follow in all his subsequent writings. "Possessive individualism" became his master concept, the term which he thought epitomized liberal thought, showing both what was good in it, concern for the individual, and what was wrong with it, defining individuality in terms of possessions. Two years after the book was published, the CBC asked Macpherson to present the 1965 Massey Lectures. He called his lectures "The Real World of Democracy", and in one of them, he tried to explain what possessive individualism is and why it is a perverse conception of human nature.

C.B. Macpherson
I want to suggest that our moral and political theory took the wrong turning when it began to interpret the human essence as possession or acquisition. Before the rise of the all-inclusive market society, the traditional view had been that the human essence was activity in pursuit of a conscious rational purpose. Then, with the rise of the market society, the essence of rational purpose was taken to be the pursuit of maximum material possessions. This was a fairly realistic conclusion at the time because with the rise of the market society, possessions were becoming the only effective means an individual could have to the achievement of any rational purpose. Yet, as a social theory, it left a good deal to be desired, for as soon as you take the essence of man to be the acquisition of more things for himself, as soon as you make the essential human quality a striving for possessions rather than creative activity, you are caught up in an insoluble contradiction. Human beings are sufficiently unequal in strength and skill, that if you put them into an unlimited contest for possessions, some will not only get more than others, but will get control of the means of labour to which the others must have access. The others

then cannot be fully human, even in the restricted sense of being able to get possessions, let alone in the original sense of being able to use their faculties in purposive, creative activity. So in choosing to make the essence of man the striving for possessions, we make it impossible for many men to be fully human. By defining man as an infinite appropriator, we make it impossible for many men to qualify as men.

David Cayley
This is the heart of Macpherson's critique of capitalism. It centres on what Karl Marx calls "the alienation of labour" and what Macpherson calls "the transfer of powers." "Abilities" is probably the nearest equivalent to what Macpherson means by "powers". When people have to sell their powers to live, he says, they give up more than they get back. They give up the profit which is made on their powers, what Marx called surplus value, and they give up the purposes to which they could have put their powers, had they not had to sell them. This was how he expressed the idea in his Massey Lectures.

C.B. Macpherson
If you take the powers of a man to be simply the strength and skill which he possesses, then when he sells the use of that strength and skill to another at its market price, there is no net transfer of any of his powers to another. He is selling something he owns for what it is worth. He gets no less than he gives. But if you take the powers of a man to be not just the strength and skill he possesses, but his ability to use that strength and skill to produce something, the case is altogether different, for then his powers must include his being able to put his strength and skill to work for purposes he has consciously formed. His powers must therefore include access to something to work on, access to the land or materials or other capital without which his capacity to labour cannot become active labour and so cannot produce anything or do anything to his purpose. This is exactly the situation most men are in and necessarily so in the capitalist market society. They must, in the nature of the system, permit a net transfer of part of their powers to those who own the means of labour.

David Cayley
To Macpherson, the transfer of powers was a violation of human nature, which he thought of as something real and distinct. He denied the prevalent contemporary view that human beings are just what their environment makes them. Instead, he aligned himself with the older philosophy of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas. Like them, he thought that human beings have a definite end or purpose, "an essence" he also calls is, and this essence is conscious, rational, creative action. Alkis Kontos is professor of political science at the University of Toronto. He was a close associate of Brough Macpherson's.

Alkis Kontos
He believed that there is a human essence to which certain needs correspond. It is also true that this human essence has been deformed or dehumanized or changed, but not in a permanent sense of changed, has been reoriented and disoriented under certain historical circumstances, primarily capitalism. And he believes that the shining forth of this human essence empirically can only take place in a specific society, in a society which does not encourage, does not aid and abet possessive individualism. Macpherson's difficulty, and Macpherson understood it to be the true political difficulty, is the stage of transition from the present society to this other stage. And so, his constant argument, and a very powerful and lucid argument, is to point out analytically the possibility of differentiating the human essence from its false manifestations in false needs, and therefore to emancipate us from the inability of seeing how things could be otherwise if we posited human beings differently. So, in other words, to be able to see without the blinkers of the specific historical moment.

David Cayley
"In every age," Macpherson once wrote, "men always confuse the system they live under with the unalterable laws of human nature." But how to devise political concepts more faithful to human nature? Macpherson's response was to try to revise the concepts of classical liberalism. This was a key advance for the Marxist tradition to which Macpherson belonged. Marxists had generally thought of liberalism as nothing more than capitalist apologetics. Macpherson argued that what was good in liberalism should be preserved. The value of his approach can be seen in his treatment of property, one of the cornerstones of liberal thought. Up until the 17th century, he argued, property had often meant a right of access to something rather than a right to exclude others from it. Rights to hunt or glean or pasture animals were often held in common. Then, with possessive individualism came the idea of exclusive private ownership. Today, we can hardly conceive of property in any other terms. But Macpherson made a strong case for reviving the older sense of the term, a sense still in use in other cultures, and for once again thinking of property as a right to use things rather than a right to control and accumulate them. Frank Cunningham heads the philosophy department at the University of Toronto. He illustrates Macpherson's idea of property with a story.

Frank Cunningham
We live across the street from a park, and a friend of ours who lives on a reservation in the Northwest Territories was visiting us with her two children--I

guess they were around four or five years old--one of whom was named Stanley. And we sat on our porch and watched Stanley and his sister go across the street to play in the park. And it chanced that there were some other children there, one of whom had brought a tricycle, and left the tricycle and went over to some swings to play on the swings. Stanley went over to the tricycle and got on it and started riding it about, whereupon the mother of the child whose tricycle it was raced across the park and jerked Stanley off and then started berating Stanley for taking her son's tricycle. And the son, in fact, started crying that his tricycle had been taken. Later on, Stanley cried about this, but at the moment, he simply looked bewildered. We were witnessing this scene with some consternation, and his mother explained it to us. She said, "You know, where he comes from in the village on the reservation, the notion of that tricycle belonging to the other kid when the other kid didn't want to play with it is completely foreign. Stanley just doesn't understand what's going on right now". Now, if they'd both wanted it at the same time, there might have been maybe even a fight, but the notion that that tricycle belonged to somebody who didn't need to use it is not something that you would find amongst kids playing on the reservation. Now, this story, to me, is a perfect illustration of the two concepts of property. The kid's mother in the park was operating on an exclusive concept of property and Stanley had been brought up with, as it were, an inclusive concept of property. Now, if Stanley can have that idea and the rest of the kids on the reservation can have that idea, why can't we all have that approach to property? That's Macpherson's challenge.

David Cayley
When Brough Macpherson joined the department of political economy at the University of Toronto in 1935, he committed himself to a life of teaching and scholarship. It turned out to be a life supremely suited to his temperament and talents. Northrop Frye says that Macpherson had the ability to think about things as if for the first time, and this quality made him a teacher who could lead people into real intellectual discovery. In his graduate seminars, his former students say he knew how to listen and learn from criticism. Within the field of political theory, he was a tireless controversialist, reviewing books and debating ideas with contemporaries like John Rawls and Isaiah Berlin. He lived the academic life with real relish. Alkis Kontos came to the University of Toronto at Macpherson's urging and still recalls the conversation that made up his mind.

Alkis Kontos
We met when I was a student, and it was striking. Great names, usually they are very taken by their own fame. So Macpherson, I said to him, "what would you say if a student of yours whom you are convinced is very bright, who is extremely bright, you have no doubt as to his or her mental abilities--were to come to you and say, 'Professor Macpherson, you're very important and all that, I enjoyed your classes, but really, I think fundamentally your thought is wrong'." And what I was looking for is to see if he would say, as most people sa, well, I must have made a mistake, he's not that intelligent. And Macpherson laughed and he said, "What year is this student in"? And I said, "What difference does it make"? And he said, "Well, a great deal, because if he's graduating, I will say what a pity, such a bright individual that hasn't seen the truth. But if he's not graduating, I still have time to persuade him or her". And I always thought that's a very interesting insight to his thought and that, in some sense, persuaded me that it would be delightful to study with him because he is not a kind of despotic individual that says here is the doctrine, you have to accept it. He will always argue and argue and argue and try to persuade. I think that's his understanding of the individual and that's his understanding of what he takes to be positive in liberalism.

David Cayley
Macpherson was deeply committed to the university as a community based on free discussion and inquiry. During his long career at the University of Toronto, he played a prominent role in university affairs. His most notable contribution came in the 1960s, when the traditional idea of the university was being sharply challenged by the New Left. Macpherson chaired a commission on undergraduate instruction in the arts and sciences. Claude Bissell was then president of the University of Toronto and he recalls the circumstances which led him to appoint Macpherson to the commission.

Claude Bissell
The student left, and the student left was a small group, but it dominated the campus in many ways, as people of ideas usually do, and their theory of the university was it should be a sort of perpetual seminar. McLuhan's idea, but not quite McLuhan. And the staff would be first among equals, they wouldn't be father figures. They would lead the university in discussions of immediate social issues. This is putting it in its most radical and its simplest form, but that was the sort of concept. And they were opposed to any suggestion of professionalism or elitism, of course, and they thought that we were responsible for that kind of attitude in the curriculum. And to a certain extent, we were, because the University of Toronto had been the university which was most concerned with what were called the honour courses, which were elitish courses. This is the faculty of arts and science. They were based upon specialization, although it was modified specialization. You had some assisting subjects, but primarily you