

emerged as a person with a strong scholarly background in a specific subject, and it was a great course for graduate schools. The Toronto graduate was famous, I think, throughout North America as a person who was well prepared. But it was specialized and it was elitish. Well, Brough was known as a distinguished scholar. He was a graduate of one of our honour courses. He'd done postgraduate work in the U.K. He'd established himself as a scholar, not simply as an exponent of Marxism or some version of Marxism, but as a scholar in his own right. And he was liked as a human being. Moreover, he had not allied himself with the student left in any ostentatious way. Some members of the staff did, and complicated my problem, of course, and everybody else's problem, but Brough stood aloof from it. So I thought, here's an ideal man. He understands the student opinions, at the same time, he's a distinguished scholar. He's a man whom the students respect and here's our ideal man for this very complex subject.

#### David Cayley

The Macpherson Commission reported in 1967. It recommended an end to the old honours system and more of a say and more choice for students. The idea was to eliminate elitism and excessive specialization while still maintaining high standards. These recommendations were implemented over loud protests from the old guard. Controversy continued for many years. U of T professor Ursula Franklin was a friend and admirer of Macpherson's. She thinks the report was based on a noble idea, but the idea was sabotaged by the changing role of the university.

#### Ursula Franklin

What it had not really anticipated, and nobody did or could anticipate, is to what extent education became job training. People didn't look at the university as a place where one spends two or three or four years of one's life getting the best and most rounded education, but something where one not only obtains knowledge, but, most importantly, the certification of knowledge. What was lacking in the report was the recognition that to many people, it isn't the knowledge but the certification of the knowledge that matters, and that what Brough considered minimum standards became maximum standards, through no fault of his own, but through the change of time and the change of the place of the university in the scheme of things. I still think that it's just about the ideal scheme for a university, except that it assumes ideal students, which we don't have.

#### David Cayley

The Macpherson Commission was only one of Macpherson's many involvements in university affairs. He also chaired a committee which dealt with faculty grievances over the granting of tenure. Ursula Franklin

served with him on that committee and she says it showed her a whole new side of the man.

#### Ursula Franklin

What was so striking, and which I would not have seen, had I not had that experience in terms of Brough Macpherson, was his thoroughness, his patience, his utter and total and unmovable set of good manners. That things where I would have said, "You idiots, didn't you see?" Brough would say, "Well, you know, it might have been apparent to you on reflection that one could have avoided some of the problems," and not ironically, not mockingly, but seriously. And in that, I saw for the first time the manifestation of that sense of justice, that Brough really felt to his bone and to the detriment of his own time and intellectual work that obligation that everybody, fool or not, deserves justice, deserves the time it needs to untangle their muddled thinking. And there was a sense of humour, a sense of justice, and an awful lot of work.

#### David Cayley

Macpherson's commitment also extended beyond the walls of his own university. He was always a zealous defender of academic freedom and, in one notable case, intervened with the University of Ottawa to save the job of Stanley Ryerson. Ryerson was a friend from student days. He had lost his first teaching job back in the '30s because of his political views. Then he worked for the Communist Party. But after 1968, his views changed.

#### Stanley Ryerson

After being in Prague in 1968, I left the left wing movement and tried to get back into teaching. And an invitation from the University of Ottawa was countermanded by their high command, and it was the intervention of Brough Macpherson that prevailed on them to give in, and I began to teach again.

#### David Cayley

Stanley Ryerson is still teaching, now at the University of Quebec at Montreal.

Politically, Brough Macpherson was always on the left. His politics took shape in the '30s, when the choice between capitalism and socialism seemed clear cut. He opted definitively for socialism and never wavered from his original view that a society of justice and equality could be based only on the overcoming of capitalism. When the New Left appeared on the campus in the '60s, they could look to Brough Macpherson as virtually the only Canadian example of serious socialist scholarship. But by then, Macpherson was in his fifties, and in university terms, very much an establishment figure. Reg Whittaker is a professor of political science at York University. He was at U of T at the end of the '60s, and he recalls a certain ambivalence towards Macpherson

among the student revolutionaries.

### Reg Whittaker

Macpherson was perceived by many as being very conservative and stodgy and, you know, somebody who was out there in his study, in his ivory tower, and wasn't engaged in the real world of politics. And it was only, I think, a little later than that still when in fact the kind of enthusiasm of that era waned and people began to realize the limitations, thought the revolution was about to be made in 1968, and it wasn't. And then, in fact, in many ways, his importance, I think, grew once again because, in fact, there was much in his writing which spoke to the problems and the limitations of the kind of gung-ho adventurous leftism of that era.

### David Cayley

One of the reasons for Macpherson's renewed importance as a role model for the academic left was his position within the field of political science. Macpherson had always insisted that political science is fundamentally a moral science, concerned not just with what is but with what ought to be, and he argued that the subjects of this science, human beings, should be viewed in an integrated way and not through a series of narrow academic disciplines. It was this position which led him to fight strenuously when the traditional field of political economy began to fall apart into separate academic departments of economics and political science. Macpherson took the view that politics and economics were inseparable. The issue came to a head over the question of whether the journal of the field should be divided into two. One of Macpherson's allies in the struggle was Irene Spry, now Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Ottawa.

### Irene Spry

I was in England at the time, and Brough was, of course, in Toronto, and the issue came up at the Learned's whether the journal, which had been the Journal of Economics and Political Science, should be separated into a Journal of Economics and a Journal of Political Science. And I found out afterwards, I didn't know at the time, but I wrote enraged letters when I heard that they had decided to divide it, because I wasn't there at the time and didn't take part in the discussion, and learned afterwards that Brough had fought tooth and nail against separating economics and politics because it seemed to him, as I think it seemed to everybody who was influenced by Innis certainly, that you couldn't separate economics and politics, that it had to be political economy to make any sense at all. Economists tend to think that because they think they can measure things that they're working at, they are more scientific than other social scientists who are dealing with data that they can't always measure. And so they feel they should go off by themselves and practice their

mathematical analysis separately, without trying to take into account the political elements. But the only way in which you can subject problems to very concrete mathematical analysis is by simplifying them to the point at which you have controllable things to measure. And if you simplify human activities, if you whittle away the social institutions and the political activities, you're left with such a limited aspect of human activity that it's unintelligible.

### David Cayley

The problem runs the other way as well. Political theory without its economic elements also becomes unintelligible, and Macpherson thought that this was what had happened to contemporary liberal theory. It had denied or ignored the nature of the capitalist system, which to Macpherson meant basically exploitation. Classical liberal theory, he thought, had been more honest. So long as no alternative society seemed possible, he said, political thinkers could be analysts and apologists at the same time. But when the legitimacy of the capitalist system was finally challenged by an articulate, politically ambitious working class in the 19th century, liberal theory changed direction. It grew ambivalent, wanting a better world but unwilling to see that capitalism had become the real fetter on further social progress. The epitome of that ambivalence to Macpherson was the thought of the 19th century English liberal, John Stuart Mill. Mill held a very high conception of human nature. "The end of man," he wrote, "is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers." But Mill failed to see, according to Macpherson, that the realization of such a vision was impossible in capitalist society.

### Alkis Kontos

Before he died, he was planning a major work on John Stuart Mill. He had his collected works and that's what he was working on. Because he began to understand that only a systematic treatment of Mill will sharpen Macpherson's own argument about liberal democratic theory and capitalism. And I found it always very interesting that he thought a major work on Mill by him, C.B. Macpherson, would be more important and constructive than a major work on Marx.

### David Cayley

Mill's thought was so strategic for Macpherson because it was in Mill that he saw the possibility of getting liberal theory back on the rails. Mill had projected into liberalism ethical ideals which could never be fulfilled within capitalism. This left liberal theory, in effect, all dressed up with nowhere to go. The result eventually was the fading of these ideals. Political science lost its visionary gleam and began to be satisfied by nothing more than a description of how things are. The way out of this box, Macpherson thought, was to go back to the

original error in Mill and correct it. Then liberals would be able to see that the only possible fulfillment of what is best in liberalism lies in socialism.

Brough Macpherson was a political theorist and he wrote very little about practical politics, but he did sometimes take positions on the issues of the day. One such case was the FLQ crisis of 1970. Macpherson took part in a debate at the University of Toronto, and Reg Whittaker was there.

#### **Reg Whittaker**

I have a very vivid memory of Macpherson appearing at a debate, I believe it was at Hart House, and taking the side of the government and justifying the imposition of the War Measures Act, more or less, ironically on very Hobbesian grounds that you couldn't allow a parallel power to exist. He saw the FLQ as a parallel power and that you could only have one sovereign, in effect, and so on. And intellectually, as one would expect, a very solid and I think probably looking back at it, although it was very hard to see it in those terms at the time, probably a much better case than was being presented against, because of its intellectual purpose.

#### **David Cayley**

There is in Macpherson's files a fascinating letter written around this time to Pierre Trudeau. The purpose of the letter was to plead for a quick revocation of the War Measures Act in order to prevent further abuse of civil liberties in Quebec. But in it, Macpherson also expresses his support for the government's initial decision to call in the military. In 1946, during the Gouzenko spy affair, Macpherson had wholeheartedly defended the rights of the people detained without trial under the War Measures Act. Why he now expressed even qualified approval for the Trudeau government's actions is puzzling. Perhaps Macpherson didn't really understand or sympathize with Quebec nationalism, or perhaps he really did believe that there was an apprehended insurrection in Quebec. Another occasion on which Macpherson addressed day to day political questions involved NDP leader Ed Broadbent. Broadbent had been a student of Macpherson's in the 1960s, and after entering politics, he continued to read Macpherson with keen interest. Then, one day, he received some political advice about the New Democratic Party from his old mentor.

#### **Ed Broadbent**

Brough had written to me following a provincial election setback and made the argument that the party ought to have what would be described in present terminology as a more "leftist" program. That, in his judgement, from the point of view of practical politics, the particular policy framework of the Ontario NDP at that time was not adequate to its potential, that if we had had a more

leftist oriented program, in his judgement, the party would have practically done better. So, as was always the case, his argument was a serious one, and in this particular case, I happen to believe, a profoundly mistaken one. But it was the kind of discussion that I enjoyed because in that particular instance, for example, my own judgement was that the ideological framework of the NDP frankly had little to do with the electoral setback, that many other aspects of political life, the positioning of other political parties, the given personality of our own leader at a given time, as well as other leaders. There are many other aspects of change in political society than political philosophy.

#### **David Cayley**

Aside from this intervention with Ed Broadbent, Macpherson was not active in the NDP, though he was a supporter. In his writings, he deals with the question of how to build socialism only in quick hints and short sketches. Leo Panitch is a professor of political science at York University. He thinks Macpherson's lack of attention to the question of political change was a consequence of his attitude towards Marxism. Macpherson used Marxism as a critical tool in his analysis of liberal thought, Panitch says, but he largely ignored Marxism as a prescription for a future society.

#### **Leo Panitch**

My main criticism of Brough is that he didn't see it as his task, as a socialist intellectual whose life was bound up with thinking about what are good political institutions, he didn't see it as his task, until very late, to try to turn that brilliant mind to the question of what would and should socialist political institutions be. I often wondered whether that was something that was induced by a certain orientation to the defence of the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War, which one can admire, not ever wanting to heap any more condemnation than what was already being heaped on it by so many unprincipled people. And if anything Brough was, he was a very principled man.

#### **David Cayley**

Leo Panitch's criticism is borne out, I think, by Macpherson's 1965 Massey Lectures. In them, Macpherson defined democracy not just as a system of elections and competing parties, but as any system of government in the interests of the people. He analyzed three variants of democracy--the Soviet Union, the populist one party states of the Third World, and the capitalist liberal democracies. The section on the Soviet Union takes the theory of one party dictatorship leading, when material conditions permit, to a classless society, pretty much at face value. How the Soviet Union can ever actually make the transition from one party rule to free political institutions, he doesn't say. Instead of criticizing the Soviet Union and its justifying Marxist



Leninist theory, he uses it as a stick to beat the liberal democracies. The success of the Soviet system, he argues, is going to force us to face the fatal contradiction of liberal democracy, the contradiction between democracy as an ethical ideal and capitalism as a system of exploitation. And then, having established the idea that there are now competing versions of democracy on the world stage, he comes to a remarkable conclusion.

### C.B. Macpherson

What I am suggesting is that in the world from now on, power and influence will depend on moral advantage, and I'm suggesting that we in the West will decline in power unless we can discard our possessive market morality. Power oriented as we are, this argument should surely be decisive. If I am right in saying that national power from now on is going to depend on moral advantage, on moral stature, then the claims of morality and power will coincide. The way to national power will be the recognition and promotion of equal human rights, and the pursuit of these ends will bring an enlargement of individual power as well. Not the powers of individuals over others, or at the expense of others, but their powers to realize and enjoy their fullest human capacities.

### David Cayley

Macpherson delivered this lecture over twenty years ago. The fateful marriage of morality and power never happened. Neither national nor international politics became a moral competition. Macpherson's analysis turned out to be an overly neat intellectual scheme projected on to the messy, heartbreaking world of power politics. Macpherson was a brilliant and clear-sighted analyst of political theories. When it came to political practice, he was often no freer from wishful thinking than the rest of us. Another criticism which can be made of Macpherson has to do with the role of technology in his scheme of things. Macpherson saw technology as essentially neutral, a force to be shaped by the social system rather than a force in itself. It's a view that Charles Taylor questions. Professor Taylor teaches political theory at McGill.

### Charles Taylor

He shared the more classical Marxist's upbeat attitude to technology, and he shared their view that we could overcome scarcity, and that the overcoming of scarcity would be what allows us to take a step beyond. And that's certainly true, there's a very big issue on which really I suppose I stand on the other side, that I think that there are grave problems about advanced technological society which itself in a sense prevents our arriving at an age of abundance, overcoming scarcity, because it generates needs in a certain sense almost as fast as it meets the technological progress. So in these respects, I'm considerably less optimistic about the

future, about that element of the future, or counting on that to help us beyond present civilization than he was.

### David Cayley

Macpherson's optimism depended on his unshakeable faith in the possibility of a non-market society. To Macpherson, capitalist market relations and socialist non-market relations were clearly posed alternatives. Critic William Leiss thinks that this reflects the originating moment of Macpherson's thought, the 1930s, when capitalist democracy appeared bound to break apart into fascism and socialism. But history, he says, passed Macpherson by. After the Second World War, a hybrid of capitalism and socialism developed and political options changed. William Leiss teaches at Simon Fraser University. He has just completed an intellectual biography of Macpherson.

### William Leiss

The earlier stark opposition between capitalist market relations and some form of socialist non-market relations is gone. We have in capitalist society a restricted set of market relations in which society and the state put boundaries on the range of market principles. And, on the other side, in those societies which are nominally dedicated to socialism and communism, they're all madly scrambling to reintroduce market principles as fast as they can because their economies, in most cases, are in shambles.

### David Cayley

Lack of realism about markets, about technology and about the political face of socialism, these constitute what I think are the major criticisms that can be made of Macpherson's thought. Most of them draw attention to the unexamined Marxist assumptions which are built into the foundations of his theory. Macpherson's strength was his powerful and discriminating critique of liberalism. His weakness may have been that he never exposed Marxism to the same searching scrutiny.

When Brough Macpherson died, he left many friends behind him. Talking to them, I began to realize that I was dealing with a man of quite extraordinary good will. One of his close friends over the years was Herb Whittaker, the former drama critic for the Globe and Mail. He was a frequent visitor to the Macpherson household and to Macpherson Island, the family cottage near Gananoque. He remembers Brough's modesty.

### Herb Whittaker

Occasionally, as the Japanese edition would come out, or the Spanish edition of his works, he might venture a slight mild boast, but it was never very dominant. His modesty and his reserve, and the very quiet humour that sustained him all of the time, was much more dominant than anything aggressive in argument's sake. It was

delightful, in his last years, there was a family gathering for other people, sherry party, and some of his colleagues got around him and started to praise him and ask him about this and that. And it had been the first time I'd ever seen him in a situation which really allowed for his distinction, and that was very, something that was startling to me, because he'd always been, he had listened very much to the children, he supported Kay's great work, and he also paid very serious attention, he was the arbiter of the family and very quiet. I never found him in any sense somebody who needed to show his power.

#### **Claude Bissell**

Brough was, among other things, a great party man, and curiously enough, I remember him most vividly--this is a comment upon me, I suppose, more than upon Brough--as a member of large parties that we used to give in the president's office. And he'd always be one of the last to leave and obviously was one who enjoyed himself most. If he was a left wing radical, he didn't carry with it any of the puritanical attitudes of the left wing radical. He was a person of great geniality and a person who I think inspired friendship.

#### **David Cayley**

Brough Macpherson lived and worked in a very active household. Kay Macpherson was a leading figure in the Canadian peace movement through the Voice of Women, and later an active force in feminist politics. They had three children. Kay was arrested in an anti-nuclear demonstration in Paris in 1964, flew to Hanoi in 1968, and put up draft dodgers in the basement. Brough supported her and described their different political styles as their domestic division of labour. Brough the theorist, Kay the activist.

#### **Kay Macpherson**

I don't think he had any intention of getting involved in the practice of most of the activities that were going on if he could avoid them. I mean, sure, he went marching when the professors went. On one memorable occasion, they were dug out of the U of T to go down to the American embassy. I don't know whether it was Selma or what it was, and he managed to get himself into that. But it was very unusual occurrence to get any activism of that kind. He was much more useful anyway advising all the hotheads around him as to what to do in the way of what to say and how to cope with situations and so on, which is what he was used for, as much as possible.

#### **Ursula Franklin**

He was an instrument and he played on that instrument, and he didn't suddenly become a drum when he essentially was a superb violin, but he was an everlasting resource to the active peace movement. And again, as I've mentioned over the grievance committee,

the amount of time that Brough spent being available to check thoughts, to check briefs, to check ideas, was a major contribution. He was the sounding board, he was the sympathetic critic, he was a person one talked to before presenting a brief. He would think of all the questions that people would ask, but he would also set things right at earlier stages. So he was a resource. He also was, as it was in the arts, a quiet but not unsubstantial supporter in terms of money. So I think it was the activity that was appropriate for that person in that sense of being a highly precious instrument. He was an intellectual Stradivarius, and you don't take that out in the rain.

#### **Kay Macpherson**

Frequently, at meals or any other time, he would announce, "I'm sorry, I just had an idea. Go on, and I'll be back". And he would go off and closet himself in whatever study there was at the time. And he might come back in ten minutes or in a couple of hours, but obviously something was churning on, whether he was carving the dinner or anything else. That happened quite often. Or maybe in the middle of the night, he'd occasionally get up and go up to his study and write for an hour. So all this theory was going on all the time, whatever else we were doing.

#### **David Cayley**

In the last few years of his life, Brough Macpherson suffered increasingly from emphysema, though he continued his work right till the end. He died on July 21, 1987. His daughter Susan was with him.

#### **Susan Macpherson**

My mother and I sat with my father, and took turns holding his hand, and we just talked with each other because he wasn't really talking. In fact, he wasn't talking at all. And he was just breathing very slowly, and with his oxygen mask on, and the nurse would come in every once in a while and turn him from one side to the other. And about three o'clock in the afternoon, I was sitting, my mother was holding his hand, and we were talking, and I was watching my father, and I just--I had seen a couple of occasions on which I wasn't sure if he was going to take another breath. There was like a long pause in between breaths and then he'd start again. And then I saw just there wasn't another breath. And I interrupted my mother, who was telling me something about something unrelated, and I said, "I think he isn't breathing any more." And she looked, and he actually died very peacefully.

#### **Alkis Kontos**

Just, I think it was two or three days before he died, he was very weak from the illness. He still had his humour and actually, the last discussion we had was on Hobbes. I was preparing a paper for a conference, and we just

chatted again and again. So he was, I think he was quite unique, and the more I think back on our relationship, the more I tend to respect his style, the way he did it.

### **Lister Sinclair**

That was C.B. Macpherson: A Retrospective, the second and final program in a two-part series written and presented by David Cayley. Technical operations, Lorne

Tulk, Derek Stubbs and Joanne Anka. Special thanks to Ken Puley at CBC Radio Archives, and to Kay Macpherson for her cooperation and permission to quote from unpublished papers. The producer was Marilyn Powell. The executive producer of Ideas is Bernie Lucht and I'm Lister Sinclair. Good night.

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