

The NDP regained power in 1999. The NDP government, re-elected to a fourth consecutive term in October 2011, continues to lead the country with new policies and programs of a progressive nature. At the same time, however, there is a recognition that the party has moved to the right on fiscal and social issues in the 23 years since Pawley retired. There is, moreover, greater emphasis on winning elections as opposed to building the party and the movement. The vision has dimmed. As a consequence, the local constituency associations have become more subdued.

The question that is left after reading this book is: can the NDP rediscover its democratic socialist vision of equality and rejuvenate its politics? It is important to continue to win elections; but can the NDP do that while maintaining the democratic socialist vision that characterized Pawley's political practice?

Stewart, Roderick and Sharon Stewart. 2011. *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. ISBN 979-0-7735-3819-1. Cloth 39.95 CAD. Pages: 479.

Reviewed by Ken Collier
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Canadians may not often consider who is the best known of us around the globe. Arguably, this figure is the focus of Roderick and Sharon Stewart, who present a chronological account of Dr Norman Bethune's colourful, explosive, unpredictable and contradictory life from birth and upbringing to a rather disorderly university career, where Bethune's sheer brilliance and exuberant personality pushed him past pitfalls that would have sidelined most others. Subsequent chapters follow Bethune in 1936-37 to the Spanish Civil War, then to China in 1938-39. He performed breathtaking surgical feats and created war-front health services credited with saving thousands of lives during two of the greatest defining revolutionary upheavals of the 20th Century. In China, he is officially revered, having statues, museums and publications honouring him.

Struggles persist over interpretation and facts in the previously best-known Bethune book *The Scalpel, The Sword: The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune* (McClelland and Stewart, 1952) and the films (two of them starring Donald Sutherland). Churches, left-wing and socialist political parties and the governments of Canada, Spain and China, made competing claims throughout the Cold War about Bethune's legacies on three continents. So Roderick Stewart, author of a prior biography, joined now by his wife Sharon, felt drawn back into the Bethune maelstrom to correct misinformation and to render as level an account as partisans are able, presenting and documenting materials that had often been subjected to fast-and-loose treatment. Where they can't prove a point,

they admit it. Where the volume of material is too large, such as that dealing with the motives driving such varied authors on Bethune or China as Ted Allan, Agnes Smedley, Edgar Snow and former Canadian Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, among others, it likely had to be set aside for future research.

Bethune's public story began as he decided to join the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. He wanted to open surgeries close to the battle lines to prevent the loss of lives of the wounded caused by delays and lack of skilled treatment. Frightening numbers died because they lost too much blood, got gangrene or were given wrong (or no) drugs. Bethune's Communist commitment and the fascist threat drove him to demand that money be raised to set up surgeries and mobile blood clinics, where he often conducted direct person-to-person transfusions, using his knowledge of field testing for blood type compatibility. Patients were carried back to hospitals he organized, often peasant's houses or any shelter left standing. He frequently gave the wounded his clothing and food.

Though often credited with inventing mobile blood banks and army surgical units, it is more accurate to say Bethune learned of the techniques invented by others and adapted them to the ferocious realities of, for example, the road to Almería in Spain, where, in addition to field surgery, he photographed and wrote as the sole journalist about the agonies of streams of refugees just trying to stay alive.

Mercurial characters like Bethune draw admirers and opponents. The Spanish adventures created tensions there and in Canada. His often atrocious behaviour got in the way just as much as the practical realities of fighting fascism. When Bethune returned from Spain to Canada on a fund-raising tour, political manoeuvring prevented his return. With the support of the Communist Party of Canada and solidarity organizations, Bethune swiftly turned his focus to China.

In the anti-fascist struggle against Japan, which drove the Guomindang and the Communists together in a common front, Bethune shouldered new responsibilities, becoming the phoenix of legend and of his own writings. Creating and adapting methods rarely seen in remote and war surroundings, he saved lives and taught hundreds of Chinese peasants how to do the same while the artillery boomed and the bullets whistled. Bethune died of physical strain, exhaustion, poor diet and ultimately from one of several infections in his limbs after he cut himself during an operation near the front.

The Stewarts present a supported, detailed account of Norman Bethune's meteoric career. Their controlled but obvious admiration for the man fuels the story and its accuracies. It is doubtful that a final definitive Bethune book can be compiled, for the contexts of political struggle, personal life and motivation, technical, medical and organizational skill in war and other currents created continuing turbulent and conflicting images of this very complicated man.

The Stewarts breeze by Bethune's Communist Party activities. Though they note the theoretical literature he always had with him, there is no mention of the conclusions

that Bethune drew from it. Archives likely hold some Bethune's notes on Marxist ideas, but *Phoenix* portrays little more than his "man of destiny" approach to Communism. If that is all there was, it has some important implications for the Communist Party of Canada and how they accepted him, employed his skills and personality and folded him into the party apparatus in much more flexible ways than the usual party stereotype.

There is some unfortunate messiness in the book. A map listed on the wrong page in the table of contents has no legend, so you only discover that a certain kind of line is a railroad from either close reading of the text or reference to another map more than 100 pages earlier. Another map is missing towns named in the adjacent text, making it hard to follow the route and the chronology of Bethune's war marches. Wonderful pages of photographs appear, unannounced in the table of contents. The name of the woman Bethune married twice is misspelled twice. It may be understandable that Chinese place names have different English spellings, but they sometimes occur on the same page. Some people and topics appear in the index, others do not.

On the other side of these minor complaints, reading the admirable endnotes independent of the text conveys a story in itself. Detailed and pointed, they tell of important events and trends in the Communist Parties (of Canada, of China and of the USA), in government and in the political culture of the times.

Part of the fitting conclusion sums up a sparkling personage: "Bethune's life exhibits recurrent cycles of achievement and self-destruction – the pattern of the phoenix. He was a born crusader, and the evangelistic spirit created by his Christian upbringing later informed his developing social consciousness and his ultimate faith in communism" (375).

Lilley, Sasha. 2011. *Capital and Its Discontents: Conversations with Radical Thinkers in a Time of Tumult*. Oakland: PM Press. ISBN: 978-1-60486-334-5. Paperback: 21.95 CAD. Pages: 279.

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Capital and Its Discontents: Conversations with Radical Thinkers in a Time of Tumult is well worth the read, but is likely to be much more alluring to initiated readers. In this new book, journalist Sasha Lilley interviews many of the luminaries on the left today including Noam Chomsky, Ellen Meiksins Wood, David Harvey, Mike Davis and Leo Panitch. Seventeen different writers are interviewed in all. The range of themes