Andrew Brewin
1907-1983

Andy Brewin was for 17 years a New Democrat MP and was recently voted one of the top 50 counsel in an historical list compiled by the Law Society of Ontario. He is also, together with his family, the centrepiece of this booklet as the originator of the Group of 78. On his retirement in 1979, he set about gathering the Group; his wife Peggy took on much of the organizing and all the typing; and his son-in-law George Hynna did the legal work. He did not live long afterwards, to play a full part; but the group held its annual conference for some years by an Ontario lake beloved of him, and the family memory abides.

He was born in Brighton, England, home of his father, an Anglican minister. His mother Agnes Blair was daughter of a Cabinet minister under Laurier. Christian sensitivity and politics ran deeply with Andy. He was brought to Canada when he was 4, but sent back to England to Radley College and then returned finally to Osgoode Law School. He practiced (1930-43) with J.C. McCruer, who became chief justice of
Ontario, and an early achievement was to draft the Trade Union Act for the CCF government in Saskatchewan that gave workers the right to organize. He also successfully fought to the Supreme Court and Privy Council the deportation order placed on Japanese Canadians in 1944 by the MacKenzie King government.

His son John (also a lawyer and former MP) says: “His greatest characteristics were his intelligence and logic, which came from learning Greek, and his willpower. He would take on cases others would avoid, and he would never give up.”

He certainly never gave up in politics. Between 1945 and 1958 he fought and lost five elections in Toronto, and then was elected in 1962 and re-elected five times. He was president of the Ontario CCF (1946-9) and a member of the joint committee that allied the CCF with the

Canadian Labour Congress to form the NDP. He was the Party’s critic for both defence and foreign affairs. He wrote a book Stand on Guard: The search for a Canadian defence policy.

In 1967 he made a hazardous journey into the besieged eastern region of Nigeria during its civil war, and co-authored with David MacDonald The Biafran Tragedy. In 1976 the two MPs investigated human rights abuses in Argentina and Chile and wrote A Gigantic Prison. Peggy, meanwhile, finding that the Canadian Institute of International Affairs excluded women as full members, formed a Women’s Group concerned with the wider world. They were a fearless front-line pair, a model for their five children and many others.