Minister, David Stystem, who ac-
complished a lot and was widely
respected by his fellow ministers
across the country for his record
in agriculture.

The authors say little about the
performance of Barrett as his own
Minister of Finance, perhaps be-
cause his foibles as premier over-
shadowed anything he did in the
finance portfolio.

Among the many travails of the
British Columbia government, this book pro-
vides especially valuable insights in
to two that one would expect an
NDP government to handle with
care. One was a farmers' and present-
ly poisoned relationship with or-
ganized labour. The other was the
depth anger of the expanding wom-
en's movement. Both the women's
Barrett never understood their
needs and their special place in the
NDP universe.

From this book, it is pretty clear
that labour's expectations were
unrealistic and ill-judged. Modest
benefits and vote-seeking promises to
the labour code disappointed labour.

Things really came apart with back-
to-work legislation and price con-
control in 1975. It is the authors' case
that back-to-work legislation
was realistic and price controls were
stable given the severe economic conditions of the time. Labour re-

tused to understand the impossi-
ble position the government was in.

The case of the women's move-
ment is different. It is hard not to
conclude that Barrett at best had a
timeline or more and perhaps had a
deep antipathy to the demands of
feminists seeking equality for
women. The women's movement
was justifiably alienated by him
and his government's views. He just
didn't get it.

A question long posed by ob-
servers of British Columbia poli-
tics is "what kind of government
did Barrett actually provide?"

It is a radical left government
intention on altering the fundamen-
tal social and economic order, as many
in the business sector claimed then
and continue to claim today?

Or was it essentially a pop-
ulist, reformist government
which the electorate voted for
possible task of modernizing, in
short order, a province that had
fallen badly behind, as many of the
New Democrat faithful claimed
then and claim now?

Or was it simply a quixotic,
incoherent blend of political adven-
turers, with generally good
intentions, thrown into government
unprepared and unequipped to cre-
ate and manage a well-considered
plan of attack to claim today?

For those who understand why
Weber's "the Protestant Ethic and
the Spirit of Capitalism"
is still a
classic, Barrett is the modern
version.

Barrett, who was married to a
woman at a time when such a
marriage was not acceptable, is
obviously 

THE ART OF THE IMPOSSIBLE is
based on detailed research into
what was said and done by many
of the key actors. As result, its tell-
ling has a human dimension that
is lacking in histories of the
time. The author has pulled
back the usually-drawn curtains and closed
doors of the legislative building of-
ices and meeting rooms, permit-
ing us virtually to see and hear what
is happening, largely as told by those
who were there. The book is packed
with tales of the manoeuvrings, missteps and politi-
cal adventures of the many larger-
than-life characters that made up
the NDP cabinet, the caucus and
other organizations of the time-
none more colourful than the Pre-
miere.

Here are some of his best lines:
"We're going to have to
"We're not going to be held
human beings, but human
 beings, too."