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Alberta's "Panic Election" of 1955

The June 29 election in Alberta—a "panic election," called two years before the "Social Credit" government's mandate would have expired—is over. Admittedly, the government of E. C. Manning gained a victory—but of sorts. Manning's supreme political mastermove was in calling a "snap election" when he did. Had he delayed, his party might have suffered much more seriously. As it is, it was a demoralizing win and Manning's government faces an uncertain future with only this certainty to guide them; that somewhere something has gone wrong.

For those who read any sense in election numerals, here, briefly, is the score. In the 1952 general election, the Manning government captured 52 seats in a Legislative Assembly of 61 members. The combined opposition was nine of which six were elected in the multiple (and major) city ridings of Edmonton and Calgary.

In the 1955 contest, Manning's government retained only 37 seats, five by precariously narrow margins. Three cabinet ministers—the Hon. Lucien Maynard, Attorney-General; the Hon. Ivan Casey, Minister for Lands and Forests; and the Hon. C. E. Gerhart, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Municipal Affairs—went down to defeat. Mrs. C. E. Wood, a 1935 "original" and considered to be one of the best-entrenched members, was heavily beaten in Stony Plain.

The Liberals, led by anything-but-brilliant J. Harper Prowse, captured 15 seats—their highest since 1922. Oddly enough, the C.C.F. (socialists) captured two rural ridings (Vegreville and Willingdon) though their leader, Elmer E. Roper, was defeated in Edmonton (a city noted for returning party leaders) and C.C.F.-ism, as such, is a thing of the past in Alberta.

Very significantly, R. E. Ansley (who was ousted as Minister of Education for his "Douglasite" leanings) retained his seat in Leduc constituency—against a deadly combination of candidates, of which more later. In similar vein, Mrs. Rose Wilkinson of Calgary, who was not given party nomination nor support, ran as an Independent Social Crediter and won. Again—significantly—most of the areas once represented by members who had the best grasp of true Social Credit—members who were ousted from the party ranks in the big split of 1947-48—returned opposition candidates.

For the benefit of sincere souls who feel that Social Credit policy can best be advanced by party politics, here—in my assessment—is the overall blueprint by which Manning and his government suffered this stunning set-back.

With the death of Aberhart, the enemy decided on split-and-conquer tactics. While press and spokesmen viciously attacked every "Douglasite" and every true Social

Credit policy, the same press and spokesmen fed Manning on a manna of praise and honour revolving round the theme of "good government." Torn and check-reined by the conflict, Manning, it would appear, became convinced that the solution lay in getting rid of the troublesome "Douglasites."

The Social Credit board was abolished; its chairman lost membership in the Social Credit League—the party body that decides who shall, and shall not, contest elections. L. D. Byrne, sent by C. H. Douglas as advisor to Aberhart, was removed. So was the Hon. R. E. Ansley. *The Canadian Social Crediter*—a constant target for smears of anti-Semitism, Fascism, *et al.*—was emasculated (and died shortly thereafter).

For such feats, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald* and the press in general praised the premier. Of the Social Credit Board's exit, the *Journal* commented editorially: "Few will mourn its passing." (And in that they were righter than they knew. The few who did mourn had no illusions about what was to come.)

Social Credit party members, convinced then that the road to Ottawa was paved with laurel leaves and bunting, were doubly reassured by victory (having nothing to do with Social Credit) in B.C. The election victory in the neighbouring province was undoubtedly engineered by Manning, aided by political chaos in the province.

Then, when, from a party viewpoint, everything pointed to success, the trap was sprung. At home.

The newspapers turned *en masse* against Manning. The *Journal*, in the 1952 election, demanded his defeat in a front-page editorial; but the time was not yet ripe. By 1955, there was no doubt the Social Credit party was slipping in the public confidence: and those papers which had once lauded the Premier he castigated bitterly in the June campaign as "biassed" and "unscrupulous."

The "big guns" of the Douglasites—which once were more than a match for all the enemy fire—were gone. As the small handful of opposition M.L.A.'s opened their tight, vicious campaign, they had (as Douglas forewarned) the Social Credit party on a battleground of their own choosing. Among Manning's candidates was at least one who had never been heard to say anything but "yes" to any proposal emanating from the Premier: such men were not even able party campaigners. And the best of them now had nothing more to reply with than the small-arms fire of party politicians everywhere. Not only the battleground but the choice of arms was now the enemy's.

Never since its inception did the S.C. Party of Alberta spend more money in an election campaign. At that, had not the Premier been smart enough to call the election when he did, his party might not have gained

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From Week to Week

A group of South Australians propose to form a Social Credit Party to contest elections in South Australia. Some of those associated with the move ought to know better; but having read some of their writings at various times in the past, we can see why they don't.

At least we may hope that these recurrent 'Social Credit' parties, while testifying to the reality of the Social Credit Idea, will demonstrate what it is not, and thus help towards clearing the way for a better understanding of what it is.

"Freedom is everywhere in full retreat. In the majority of nations public liberties are trampled underfoot by states afflicted by the disease of totalitarianism. The very idea of individual freedom, built up by centuries of slowly advancing civilisation, is to-day belittled, perverted or even repudiated . . . it is only by rediscovering the Christian message in all its purity that Westerners will find the necessary strength for a new and creative advance. . . ."

—From the Introduction to *Christianity and Freedom* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955).

"There is only one conclusion, and it is clear and simple; we find ourselves, thanks to the machine-revolution, presented with a hitherto undreamed of opportunity, a chance unique in all human history. It is the opportunity to free men from all brutalising labour, from all his most painful material tasks. Shall we be able to seize it? Technical progress is not enough; something else is needed. Liberation by the machine must become a living freedom, organic and truly human, which simply means that this freedom must have a moral and spiritual basis. . . ."

—Daniel-Rops: "Towards a Truly Christian Society," in *Christianity and Freedom*.

"It is suggested that the primary requisite is to obtain in the re-adjustment of the political and economic structure such control of initiative that by its exercise every individual can avail himself of the benefit of science and mechanism; that by their aid he is placed in such a position of advantage, that in common with his fellows he can choose, with increasing freedom and complete independence, whether he will or will not assist in any project placed before him.

"The basis of independence of this character is most definitely economic; it is simply hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious, to discuss freedom of any description which does not secure to the individual, that in return for effort exercised as a right, and not as a concession, an average economic equivalent of the effort shall be forthcoming. . . ."

—C. H. Douglas: *Economic Democracy* (1920).

An "average economic equivalent" may be broadly defined in terms of the machine-power/man-power ratio discussed in this column in our previous issue. The same notion was referred to by Douglas when he compared the industrial system to a lever, ever being lengthened by progress, and enabling 'the burden of Atlas' to be shifted with ever increasing ease.

If anything in economics is 'scientific,' it is this conception of the power-ratio, and the lever. Although it finds no place in 'official' economics, it is a conception which one would suppose would be instantly grasped by engineers. 'Automation' is essentially the field of the engineer, who must, in consequence, become of increasing importance in practical, as opposed to 'official,' economics.

The leading principle of engineering is *efficiency*, in the technical sense. To set "Full Employment" as the objective of industry amounts to the same thing as designing a machine primarily for the maximum consumption of energy.

Initiative is a purely spiritual quality.

"Paradoxically enough, . . . it is of the essence of representative government that the public opinion which it brings to bear on political problems should not originate in political study. It should originate in groups formed for other purposes and living a life controlled by their own moral standards."—(Lord Percy of Newcastle).

"A Factory For Birdmen"

"With mischief aforethought, Colorado Spring's *Free Press* sent sketches of the projected Air Force Academy to cantankerous old (85) Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, asked him for his comments. Replied Wright: '[It looks to me] as if another factory had moved in where it should not be. [It] will probably be known as Talbot's Aviary, or, more realistically, a factory for birdmen.' Then Wright, suggesting that sketches of the Academy's controversial, spare-ribbed chapel be studied for ten years then thrown away, lowered a cantilevered boom on his Chicago competition: 'When the great art of architecture comes down to this sort of thing—what is the right name for such violation of nature?'"

—*Time*, Pacific Edition, June 6, 1955.

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ALBERTA'S "PANIC ELECTION"—

(continued from page 1.)

sufficient members to form a government.

Consider it: the opposition, for years, has had neither organisation nor membership; against it was arrayed the Alberta Social Credit League, whom this writer once heard referred to (in Wall Street, Toronto) as "the best goddam political party in Canada." June 29, 1955, should serve to warn Social Crediters elsewhere that Social Credit policies cannot be secured by party politics.

It might be worth elaborating on the actual "issues" in the campaign—again for the benefit of those who see Social Credit parties as the easy road to victory. Certainly, at the beginning of the year, nothing seemed seriously amiss in the party ranks. The field looked as fruitful as ever, the province was undoubtedly prospering (in relationship to the rest of Canada). What happened then?

Looking at it solely from the government's point of view, the 1955 session of the Alberta Legislative Assembly opened after the usual fashion. Fifty government members sat down derisively before an opposition of ten. (The government had lost one seat in a by-election, and one of their members occupied the Speaker's chair). Without warning, the Liberal and Conservative members began asking awkward and very potent questions: questions, it seems obvious, that were part of a well-planned strategy.

The first concerned the mysterious manner in which the government had obtained a jail-site near Calgary. A man in Vancouver—brother of a friend of one of the ministers—had taken an option on the land and, a few days later, sold it at a considerable profit to the government. After intensive and stubborn questioning and debate, the Premier admitted the excessive profit but repudiated any hint that the minister in question was implicated. An acid editorial on the subject—carried by the *Edmonton Journal*—led to the Attorney-General filing a stiff suit for libel.

Nothing had been quite as dull as party politics in Alberta since the days of the "Douglasites'" expulsion, but suddenly now an intuitive public began to sit up and take notice.

When the estimates came before the Legislature for approval, the opposition, increasing the pressure, seized on the fact that the government was asking substantial sums as rent for a building they had previously sold. This time, derision from the Social Credit backbenchers had no effect on the stubbornness of the small opposition. They demanded a full judicial inquiry. The Premier flatly refused (his major defence in the whole affair was that he was responsible not to the opposition, but to the electorate) but under increasing and prolonged tension, agreed to an inquiry by the whole Legislative Assembly.

From here on it became apparent to outside observers that the government's confidence, inside the Legislature, was rapidly dissipating. The inquiry revealed that the government had bought the building in question several years previously, had spent almost as much on it as they paid for it, then sold it—despite the increase in property values—at less than the original price, with the proviso that they could rent it for at least a year at a rate comparable to the high downtown office rents.

The purchasers of the property—and this had a dramatic effect on the public—were two government backbenchers, who had purchased it not directly but through their legal counsel and as part of their overall business assets. The opposition called for the disqualification (under terms of the Legislative Assembly Act, which prohibits members entering into contract with the government to their financial advantage, the violation of which carries automatic loss of seat and of sessional indemnity, with a \$200 a day penalty for each day the member has sat "illegally" in the House).

The members resigned immediately (and a Calgary lawyer sued successfully for \$6,200 of penalty money from each: the first person to file suit for such money may receive it) but the Premier persisted in maintaining that the incident was caused by ignorance on the part of the two members concerned. (Later, the members presented themselves for re-election, were—according to press reports—repudiated on election eve by the Premier, won their respective ridings handily and—according to a report one of them read over the radio on election night—were immediately reinstated in the good graces of the League and of Premier Manning. Party politics are sometimes confusing.)

The land inquiry came to a forced conclusion—against strong protests by the opposition—when the Legislative Committee found that nobody was at fault in the affair. As if that should clear up the unpleasantness, the Legislature was asked to consider a Farm Products Marketing Bill.

Ever since the non-party F.U.A. (Farmers' Union of Alberta) had fallen under the guidance of men with avowed socialistic leanings, there had been a steadily-maintained pressure for such a bill. Manning, having lost the light to steer by, introduced the Bill that advocated compulsory marketing of farm products through a central authority.

This was too much for even the government's own supporters, despite the plea by the Bill's sponsors that it would only be enforced if a majority of farmers wanted it. It was denounced as outright socialism. Calgary's Rose Wilkinson (which may, or may not, have had any bearing on her failure to get the "official" nomination) declared she never believed she would live to see the day when such a measure came before the House. The Government hurriedly shelved the Bill, ostensibly to give farm organisations a chance to express their viewpoints. The chance never came—indeed, on the day the farm groups were assembling in the Legislative Buildings, the government announced dissolution and a new election.

In the interval, however, the Opposition opened up anew—again on the issue that government members had used their long tenure of office and their position to better themselves. Their claims are reflected in the following typical headlines, which were carried after the fight went to the people:

**PROWSE CLAIMS MANNING
TRADED FARM OIL RIGHTS**

—*Edmonton Journal*, June 24th.

**CHARGES CROSS VIOLATES ACT
AS DIRECTOR OF OIL COMPANY**

—*Calgary Herald*, June 25th.

In the Legislature, the Opposition wanted to know how public works contracts were awarded, why the tenders

were not opened publicly, why certain firms seemed to get the bulk of government business. As the "issues" waxed warmer, new headlines were to appear:

**JOURNAL AND HERALD NAMED
IN DEFAMATION SUIT NOTICE**

—*Calgary Albertan*, June 28th.

(This particular suit was for damages totalling \$7,500,000, brought by the "certain firms" in question against the two Southam papers. The aftermath of the election augurs a field-day for the law courts, though it might be said that law suits seemed only to add fuel to the inferno.)

Opposition charges could not be answered before fresh charge were made—that a relatively-unimportant highway outside Edmonton had been hard-surfaced right to the door, and no further, of an open-air theatre owned by a cabinet minister—and that, finally, every member having dealings with Treasury Branches was likewise guilty of violating the Legislative Assembly Act.

That was the end. The Premier hurriedly adjourned the House and called a government caucus. Out of it came the sudden snap election.

The Legislative debates had set the pattern of the election campaign. The Liberals, it might be said, fought with facts, figures, dates and names—though how justified their statements are is impossible to assess at the moment. The Conservatives (who faded out of the fight almost as completely as the C.C.F.) played a political game of "Twenty Questions." The Socialists, blating a "Humanity First" programme, did make reference to the good work they had done in the past, in getting rid of the 'fascistic' Social Credit Board, among other things. Their freak wins in two predominantly Ukrainian ridings can be completely discounted: the only role they played was to oust "Social Crediters" by voting Liberals as "second choices" under Alberta's transferable ballot system of voting.

On the surface at least, the Social Credit Party spent by far the largest amount of money. Their newspaper advertisements were huge. One radio programme alone—a broadcast of the Premier's Grande Prairie address—ran a full 45 minutes and was re-broadcast over every radio station in the province. That particular broadcast was the party's supreme effort: the opposition claimed it answered charges which they had never raised.

The field tactics of both the Liberal and Social Credit parties are well worth attention.

The electors were fully aware of the paradoxical helplessness of their position. "Who will you vote for?" was a question few seemed able to answer, even on election day. To them, there was the apathetic and certainly anything-but-unconscious realisation this time that no matter who won, they lost.

The Premier and the government appealed to them not to let "the accomplishments of 20 years of Social Credit" be undone—to "go forward with Social Credit to even greater accomplishments." But in the electors' minds was the feeling that—whether or not the charges of personal opportunism were justified—the government members had lost all interest in Social Credit as such; that they would follow the pattern of the last few years: smoothing out the edges of the welfare state; cushioning, to a degree, the chainmarks of control and bureaucracy, till the flesh was

adjusted to the yoke; highlighting the comparatively fine financial position of the province, as if such a state had been compelled by them and not merely *permitted* by the Money Power. Social Credit, of course, was not mentioned. The very fact that the Premier's forces dropped all reference to Social Credit as such accounted, I am sure, for many of their losses. I am equally convinced that the wisdom of the opposition, who refrained from attacking Social Credit principles, was responsible for many of their gains.

The realisation of nameless betrayal was reflected in the vote. The Alberta people have grasped probably much more of Social Credit thinking than they have been given credit for. They were bitter towards those who no longer made even a pretence of following their once-professed beliefs. The "charges" of the Opposition were merely something tangible against which they could offer some sort of mute protest.

Much more significant to me was the manner in which the Liberals picked their candidates. Without exception, they sought out the most-respected persons in the ridings and ran them under the Liberal banner. Party-heelers, even party platforms, were cast completely aside. The people, in effect, were offered responsible, well-thought-of men of stature; were told, in effect: "Vote for them and you will have integrity of representation, as well as honesty of government."

No one need be deluded into thinking, of course, that such motivation extended beyond winning party seats. The significant point—semi-tragic, in a sense—was that it was the Opposition who capitalised, at least to a degree, the basic principle of the Union of Electors: that it is the man, and control of the man by the people, that is of paramount importance. Only bitter memories of the debt era—and stoic distrust of the Liberals as a party—kept the electors from returning a much heavier opposition than they did.

The once-maligned "Douglasites" stood practically untouched and unsullied by the campaign. The only slighting reference towards them came from the leader of the C.C.F.—who, after 14 years as an M.L.A., went down to unquestioned oblivion.

In Leduc, where Ansley ran, there was more than a hint that the government was willing to forget past differences and allow him to run as the "only" S.C. candidate. Interests working spitefully within the party—as well as the expected interests without—decreed otherwise. A government candidate was entered. Considering the unique nature of this election and of the forces used and deployed against Ansley, it is highly significant that he again held Leduc Constituency.

The situation in which the government found itself before June 29th is far from finished. It is a situation that could mean the end of the Social Credit Party, as such, in Alberta. How that would affect the goal of the worldwide Social Credit movement is not within the scope of this article.

For the moment, it seems certain Premier Manning will take the expected steps to "clean house." Whether he will attempt to rejoin the battle for Social Credit is something else again.

—P.G.