

## The Evolution of a Province

Once Alberta was poor, now it is rich.

When it was threadbare, it called itself *Next Year Country*; and now, although oil and gas revenues are piling up, it still worries about the future.

It began with a sense of justified grievance. When it and Saskatchewan—remote lands, sparsely peopled by new immigrants—were made provinces in 1905, the federal government retained control of their public lands and minerals.

The first years were hard. Alberta had major recessions, and after the second, in 1921, Alberta voters swept out the Liberals, who had run the province for 17 years. (They have yet to return.) The new political force, the United Farmers of Alberta, organized the Alberta Wheat Pool. Times got somewhat better. In 1930 the federal government surrendered its ownership of natural resources and public lands, and jubilant citizens lit bonfires in small towns along the railway to welcome Alberta Premier J. E. Brownlee back from Ottawa.

The Depression and drought hit, and in 1935

the UFA was voted out and William Aberhart and his Social Credit Party took over. The Socreds promised to issue quick-circulating scrip—"social credit" certificates—to all adults, who would spend it immediately. The federal government said it alone had constitutional authority to issue currency, and the Socreds demurred but remained in power. By the 1940s, they had evolved from apparent radicals into essential conservatives.

In 1947 the first major oil well, Leduc No. 1, blew in, and the Alberta economy began to expand. By the fifties the skylines of Edmonton and Calgary had changed, and there was a general sense of real, if relatively modest, prosperity. "Next year" may have arrived.

In March 1965 Peter Lougheed, a graduate of the Harvard Business School, became the provincial leader of the quiescent Progressive-Conservative party.

In 1967 the Conservatives took 6 of 75 seats in the provincial legislature. In 1971 they took a majority, 49. Premier Lougheed's program was aggressive and prescient. He would use the prov-

*Grain, once the basic source of all Alberta income, remains a vital part of the economy. Alberta produced 243 million bushels of barley and 117 million bushels of wheat in 1977.*

