

# ALBERTA PROVINCIAL ELECTION

by Jerry Slavik

thus suggests that the bland, projected was what the voter DP voters, they seem to have high this appears to be a very interesting fact is that although 1/3 of parties in Edmonton fell outside the age range only one (or perhaps two) falls outside that age range, he ut the 18 through 20-year-olds in this election, made itself felt at a youthful image, failed to Aoser look at that is difficult, nsa a station by station basis. A over, if two assumptions are te young candidates more than ngters are to be found at polling Ve ked at the results, station by hie contains the University. The 3atu, McKernan, and Belgravia s big closest to the University in wtschool district, home of the jsi) The results indicate that at eok 10.24% of the votes, as oue remainder of the riding. In 70t vote--or at least the liberal, e limited effect, at least in the enove hardly seem large enough d ciates much. It should be noted is, the NDP candidate failed to agerhaps, again, because Tanner bese the PC-Socred campaign in fou than most others, pushing the

at use data on this variable from ll dem specify it. It would appear eled candidates had a University ml(9) of the NDP did. The PC's did who did not have at least a ultim to confirm popular images: ot) had degrees came from the esey an era when University equent for politics. In the case of e ly to represent that party's resentinue to present their bland, allir candidates had University :a tement (those two candidates amthe poorest showings of all PC ly, C candidates in Edmonton list iste experience among their

emandidates in Edmonton, the is s to reflect, as much as these por images. None of the three noncould command as large a ridis the provincial average; they themontion ridings, in terms of e that showed best (Pauline 3ococumbent (Ethel Wilson). The ind terms of relative percentages tho (Irene Domecki), running herichak) barely came within 5 rialred turnout (40.4%). Despite againother woman, the PC's one f thurst showings of all PC's in thatd montion (as generally across ce when running against other l noce at all.

smaller than one Liberal) in the NDley ranked 12, 10, and 6 in tity; none, again, did as well as s, Cy voters appear only slightly came than do those in Edmonton. y Itain House may, I think, be h case were strong enough to p ofex. (agitation, and sex) then appear usiof Edmonton voters primarily red nment, and that in so doing, tive was available. In Edmonton, mallservative principles appeared h orption (Dave King) invariably ad, managerial, and most atesble. With regard to the NDP itioroboration for Mr. Notley's doctally matter. In Calgary where ively, the voters appeared to be rd DP image. In Edmonton, the oxicleam to represent primarily a remnstance by and large the NDP happure.

ht m that despite the amount of :preo am not now, nor ever have any Party. As a United Statesian, or f losing my citizenship; as a qg mly.

Peter Lougheed," the young dynamic leader of the Progressive Conservative Party has given Alberta a new image.

With a well organized million dollar campaign, the desire for change, that has topped six provincial governments, was channelled into the demand that NO Albertans need Peter Lougheed.

Designed to capture the mood of an electorate eager to shatter the notion that Alberta is the Christian fundamentalist country cousin of Canada, the campaign swept the Lougheed Team into power, with 48 seats.

The overwhelming defeat of the Social Credit party, which has ruled Alberta for 36 years, longer than most Albertans have lived, surprised everyone, including the Conservatives.

Thus we have the traditional bourgeois description and analysis of the Alberta election. Unfortunately, it is painfully accurate. It reveals Albertans have eagerly embraced American style politics. A form of politics where images annihilate issues, personalities overshadow positions, and style replaces substance.

In short, it features politics without conflict or debate. The result is the politics of the media circus. McLuhan is regrettably appropriate in analyzing the Alberta election--"the medium was the message".

By a strange or perhaps ironic twist, the Social Credit government can take more credit for the Conservative victory than the Lougheed Team. As Manning openly stated in Oilweek, the aim of the Social Credit party was to create "the stable conservative affluent atmosphere that encourages free enterprise". Drifting on the wealth of natural resources and guided by their Bible and the principles of capitalism they have succeeded beyond their greatest hopes. They have fostered the bourgeois materialist conditions in a puritan society to the point where the political and social consciousness in Alberta appears One-dimensional.

Furthermore, in their long one-party reign, they have dismissed and stifled dissent, criticism and debate to the degree that the electorate appears incapable of recognizing, much less cogently dealing with substantive political issues. Isolating Albertans from the mainstream of Canadian politics behind an oil slick of prosperity, Social Credit continually refused to acknowledge the relevance of the issues of unemployment, American economic domination, poverty, or Quebec. The result is that nowhere in Canada is the political awareness at a lower ebb.

By avoiding, ignoring, or denying these issues the recognition they demand, the Socreds have lulled Albertans into a false sense of smug security. Yet, they have achieved their goal, namely to put the critical spirit of social awareness and political analysis to sleep in Alberta. They were, in their own terms of reference, a very successful government.

Unfortunately, they put themselves to sleep also, or, perhaps, became senile with old age. They forgot that in such a non-political atmosphere, the electorate's decisions must be made on the basis of essentially non-issues. The style, image and personalities are the key factors. Unfortunately, the Socreds were out of date on all accounts, a major mitake for a product in a society which considers itself to be fashion conscious.

Alberta is a young urban, modern province. Accepting and adapting to change is vital, in fact, essential in any technological consumer society. Even car salesmen and insurance executives know that. Yet, while the packages must change, the purpose, operation, and effects of the products change very little. As long as the market, whether for automobiles or politicians, is monopolized and mesmerized, any appearance of change must be superficial and deceiving. One only need analyze the platforms of the Conservatives and Socreds and attempt to distinguish between them to realize the difference is negligible.

Unlike the Social Credit party and othr parties laboring under misnomers, the Alberta Conservative party is essentially what its name implies--a conservative party. Such honesty is refreshing but not endearing. A conservative party intends to follow the established and traditional means of maintaining law and preserving the existing social order of society. It is usually characterized by paternalism that often borders authoritarianism.

In Alberta, sustaining the existing order means preserving a capitalist system under the out-dated label of free enterprise. Individual freedom is, of course, already assumed to be the case; and economic and social barriers are, for the most part, left to individual initiative and "private" enterprise, to be overcome. Being a modern government the conservative may be so liberal as to re-evaluate the blatantly corrupt and degrading welfare system, but certainly avoid the underlying problems such as poverty and income distribution.

The new government will also generally avoid interfering in the market place except to ensure the corporate participants the freedom they need and desire. Moreover, lthrough various government mechanisms, such as tax incentives and depletion write-offs, it will encourage free enterprise (read American potpoations). In short, it will perpetuate the social and political order of the status quo that shared Alberta's wealth and privileges under the Socreds. Peter Lougheed is to be commended for directing a party openly and honestly admitting as much.

Copying Trudeau not only in colors and style, but also in format Lougheed promised the electroate nothing new or very different. Given his conservative philosophy, it is understandable that Lougheed has no new policy for dealing with the American petroleum companies. They will continue to exploit Alberta's major resources at the cost of millions of dollars yearly to the Alberta people. He pointed out attempts would be made to find a "better deal" through increased royalties, but failed to elaborate in dollars and sense. Considering Alberta has the highest productivity in the oil industry and charges the lowest price per barrel

anywhere in the world, he has an effective bargaining position. However, given a conservative capitalist's understanding of what constitutes a fair price or deal for government, the only ones to lose in the bargain will be Albertans.

Another one of Lougheed's urgent concerns was to establish secondary industry in the province in order to ensure its future when the oil is depleted, a rapidly approaching situation. Unfortunately, he had no specific policy suggestions to make as to how this may be accomplished. If he follows the policies of the Conservatives in Manitoba or the Alberta Socreds, Albertans will continue to be thoroughly exploited. One has only to examine the outright give away policies of these governments such as tax incentives, low interest loans, and forgivable grants and subsidies to foreign corporations. When compared to the small rate of return in terms of employment and income, it is not difficult to realize such policies are not in the best interest of Albertans.

Despite their apparent election enthusiasm to maintain the family farm, the Lougheed Party has endorsed the Social Credit White paper entitled "Tradition and Transition" which is effect plans for the demise of 2/3 of the family farms in Alberta. While he effectively avoided the backlash against the Liberals for their destructive farm policies, Lougheed could only counter with an expurgated version of the NDP policy of a two price system for grains. As expected, the Lougheed image was not as readily acceptable to skeptical farmers, particularly in the fundamentalist south. However, political power Alberta has moved with the people into the cities.

It was to the urban voter that Lougheed concentrated his appeal. The Conservative Team promised to revitalize urban growth and transportation.

In the area of education, the Conservatives promised to remove the cost burden of elementary and secondary education from the property tax assessed by municipalities and cover it entirely with provincial funds. While this will slightly, and only slightly, redistribute the cost of education, it avoid speaking to the larger issues of the class distribution of education and to eliminate the barriers to higher education facing most Albertans.

In short the Conservatives, in adopting the same limited scope and philosophy as their predecessors, cannot bring about substantial change in Alberta. Furthermore, they have no intention of doing so. Their major election claim was to do the same thing, only better and more efficiently.

The Conservative will have little difficulty in replacing the incompetent Socred legislators. Peter Lougheed has proven to be a very energetic, capable, and efficient leader, almost single-handedly building the party into power in a relatively short time. He has surrounded himself with businessmen and professionals who will undoubtedly use the business techniques and management systems to streamline the encrusted bureaucracy. However, management is not noted for either imagination or new direction, only efficient quiet administration. Proficient management avoids or denies conflicts. It thrives in an atmosphere of unquestioning acceptance and a narrow scope of awareness. It was this atmosphere the Socreds created and the Conservatives will perpetuate--only more thoroughly and efficiently.

The new Conservative management will not be neutral or impartial administrators. A brief sociological analysis of the Lougheed Team leaves no doubt as to whose interests the new government will be serving. It is dominated by businessmen, oilmen, corporate lawyers and other successful professionals. The Conservatives received the firm endorsement of the Alberta Business Review as the part best representing their interest. Furthermore, the over one million dollars required to finance their campaign did not all come from party fees. The corporations will collect on their investment.

It was Harry Strom, in a strange twist of logic, who noted that the Conservatives will encourage socialism because they are so dominated by the representatives of big business that they would provide the NDP with ample ammunition for attacks of the injustices of unrestrained capitalism. If this proves to be the case, as it most assuredly will be, perhaps the inequities and contradictions will be sufficiently blatant to arouse the most dormant Albertan conscience.

The question is then one of forming a vocal and effective opposition. Although the Socreds form the official opposition, it is unlikely they will be able to muster a sufficient or credible attack. The election left the party shattered and without many of its most articulate experienced spokesmen. Furthermore, the Conservative victory absorbed the right wing of the political spectrum in Alberta. Regarded by many as the more liberal of the "Tory Twins", the disenchanting Socreds may regroup under the Liberal party. However, this is unlikely as most Socreds will drift with surprising ease into the Conservative camp.

The NDP would seem to be the logical opposition having a platform, policy and philosophy that provides a clear alternative to the Conservative monolith. Having elected a moderate but articulate leader in Grant Notley, the NDP could become a watchdog and constructive critic of the government.

Although it went down in popular vote from 16% to 11%, much of the loss was generally interpreted as a desire to be rid of the Socreds by voting Conservative, rather than a vote against the NDP. Lacking in election funds, poorly organized and inadequately prepared, the NDP did not present themselves before the Alberta electorate as the credible alternative they are in other parts of Canada

Part of the Lougheed election strategy was to ignore the challenge and questions posed by the NDP. However, they will not be so easily avoided with the Legislature. If the debate is effectively carried on, it may be the forum to re-open political thinking in Alberta. If the NDP fails to provide this kind of opposition, Albertans will continue under one party conservative dominance.