

Leading Grit plugs education

an interview by Lloyd Robertson

The Liberals are coming! Better look out! They're in their offices preparing for the fall term at the Legislature; they're out on the streets talking to constituents; they're looking forward to the next provincial election and maybe a leadership convention; — they're everywhere!

One of those very Liberals is Grant Mitchell, M.L.A. for Edmonton-Meadowlark since 1986. Having finished an Honours B.A. in Political Science at the U of A, Mitchell completed his Masters at Queen's University in Toronto. After dropping plans to pursue a doctorate, he returned to the west in 1976 to become a budget analyst for the Alberta Government. In 1979 he joined the now-defunct Provincial Group and became its vice-president of operations. Mitchell spent 7 years with the firm before making plans to run in the 1986 provincial election.

What's he been up to recently? According to Mitchell, listening to voter concerns and promoting and influencing Liberal policy decisions have been the order of the day.

One of the areas that Mitchell is most concerned with is education. In particular, advanced education.

He is aware of the importance of the educational system as he is critical of the present government's handling of it.

"We have a special situation in Alberta. We're in the midst of an economic downturn which has driven people out of the ranks of the employed and into the educational centers. If we are to diversify our economy and improve our ability to compete in the high-tech and industrial fields, then education is the key. It is an investment in the future."

Mitchell goes on to criticize the government's priorities.

"The present cut in educational spending (3%) amounts to roughly 35-40 million dollars. By comparison, the provincial government of Alberta has, in the last recorded year, spent 35 million dollars more on government travel expenses than the government of B.C. (B.C. \$29 million, Alta. \$64 million). That money could have been used to maintain the level of funding for advanced education. That's more important to me than having 4 cabinet ministers go to the far East, or having Ian Reid spend \$500,000 on his recent investigation of Labour Laws around the world."

Frivolous spending, says Mitchell, is the culprit.

"We're dealing with a government that learned to govern in the good-times. They've failed to set priorities."

Mitchell also finds fault in the provincial government's reluctance to raise the minimum wage. He points out that a lot of students work at minimum wage (\$3.85/hour if you're over 18, \$3.65 if you're under), and that it hasn't been changed since 1981. His opinion is that this standard is clearly too low.

"I don't care whether you're a student or a single parent or whatever, nobody can afford to live with any dignity at the present minimum wage."

Although he is reluctant to list an acceptable level he does have a few ideas.

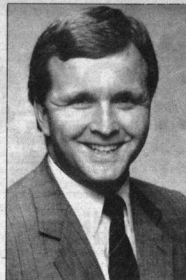
"It's difficult to say without proper economic analysis, but I don't see \$6 or \$7/hour as being an unreasonable figure. If we were to let inflationary changes dictate the minimum value of an hour's work, then \$6 or \$7/hour would come close to the 1981 level."

The contrary argument, of course, is that the raise in the minimum wage would be reflected even more dramatically at the sales counter. But Mitchell points out that that may not necessarily be the case.

"If the minimum rate goes up for all companies, it doesn't necessarily make any single company less competitive than any other. At the same time, I don't see why I should benefit from lower prices at the expense of someone not being able to live even at the poverty level."

If you're starting to think that Grant Mitchell has some pretty definite ideas about the role of the Liberal party and its future in Alberta, you're right. He's dedicated himself to a philosophy of constructive reform and voter participation. Things are changing in Alberta, he insists and Mitchell remains optimistic that the Liberals can pick up the pieces to a complex puzzle.

"I firmly believe that the Liberal Party of Alberta will form the next provincial government. All the means to accomplish that goal are within our control. We don't have



Liberal Grant Mitchell

the N.E.P. (National Energy Program) hanging over our heads any more. We've taken a fresh approach."

Liberal ideology seems to be a hot ticket in Alberta as of late with rumours currently circulating that the leadership of the party is at stake, or soon will be. Popular names such as Laurence Decore, Calgary Mayor Ralph Klein, and yes, Grant Mitchell, are apparently vying for Nick Taylor's position.

Although Mitchell hasn't confirmed his entry into the leadership race, he also doesn't deny it.

"I haven't announced that I am running, and I won't be announcing (it) until a more appropriate time." (Mitchell implies that a leadership convention is in the works.) "Certainly Mr. Taylor has announced that he will be running and that's great. He has every right to

do that. Right now, I'm primarily concerned with my responsibility to my constituents, Albertans as a whole, and the Liberal Party. The primary thing is to build the Liberal Party and I'm interested in working with all Liberals who are geared towards establishing the party in Alberta."

But if past voter preference is any indication, the Liberals may be in for a rough ride. Generally speaking, the party has had difficulty establishing itself in the rural areas. Even in the 1986 election, that best showing yet, support for Liberal ideology came almost exclusively from Alberta's two major urban centres. Almost all of that came from Edmonton.

But Mitchell optimistically points out that Lougheed's Tories won over rural voters only after they had achieved a footing in the cities. In any event, he agrees that it won't be easy. In the final analysis, discontent with the Tories will have to be strong enough and support for the N.E.P. weak enough. Only then will the provincial Liberals be in a position to form a government.

But at least Mitchell is taking the right attitude. He pauses to put in a plug for his party: "Politics is a way to change the world in a positive sense. As a Liberal, I'm reform minded and I want to have an impact on this province. What we need in Alberta is a brand new political party, a fresh political movement without the baggage of the past. We need a vehicle of renewal and we have to bring back the decency and integrity to provincial politics. Where do you find that? You find that in the Liberal Party."

St. Mary's dumps CFS

HALIFAX (CUP) — Saint Mary's University and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) reached an out-of-court settlement this spring over disputed membership fees.

CFS was awarded \$8,000 from the original \$12,000 bill, which dates from the 1982-83 school year. The agreement was signed April 27.

According to Dave Hensbee, student council president in 1982-83 and 1983-84, a referendum in March of his first term ordered a pull out by over 60 per cent.

Hensbee said dissatisfaction with CFS services was expressed in the fall of 1983 but that CFS persuaded SMU to remain until the national conference.

"Membership was prolonged for their (CFS) convenience, to prove themselves," said Hensbee, a management and marketing graduate.

Hensbee feels CFS overstepped its political mandate and didn't provide the services it advertised.

"They had a motion that said that the Canadian military should make money through cake sales. That's not relevant to students. We were frustrated making changes from

within. When we tried to help out or discuss, we were cut off," he said.

Hensbee also cites the confused transition from the National Union of Students to CFS that year as affecting the organization.

CFS Chair Tony Macerollo said the council was obliged to forward already collected fees to the organization.

"But the principle is not the monetary amount," Macerollo added. "It's the financial stability of (this) organization at stake."

Said Macerollo, "There's a recognition on both parties' part that this particular action was very much motivated by political factors at that time... Neither side is interested in carrying that on."

"It's over and it's done with and we're happy to venture forward litigation-free in the Atlantic."

Kaplan on Liberal policy

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in a democratic society to restrict a person's use of their native language on a sign? After Meech Lake, the question will be: is it reasonable in a distinct democratic society? The Charter of Rights should take precedence over the 'distinct society' clause, and be interpreted the same way for all Canadians."

Kaplan said the Liberals have presented a set of ten amendments to the accord. "These will be our platform for the next election," he said, "but if the opportunity doesn't present itself we will support the document as it is."

When charged with catering to Quebec popular opinion by sup-

porting a flawed document, Kaplan conceded, "the Quebec vote is a fact of the issue." Nevertheless, Benjamin Franklin signed confederation documents that preserved the slave trade, which he despised. You reach the point where you have to call it progress at some level, and this accord does more good than harm."

On the issue of Senate reform, Kaplan revealed an idea of his own which he was presently putting forward to the Liberal caucus. "If elected, we should refuse to appoint anyone to the senate for ten years. This isn't unconstitutional, and it would force the Senate reform issue."

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