

Thorsell swipes Coutts, Clark

(Editor's Note: in order to rub salt in the wounds of the arrogant and cynical Mr. Coutts after His August electoral lose In Spadina to, horrors! a New Democrat, we reprint a sometime *Edmonton Journal* associate editor's remarks on Coutts' U of A antics some years ago.)

Did you know that Tory leader Joe Clark and backroom Liberal tycoon Jim Coutts once marched together under a banner proclaiming, "Our beds have cockroaches?"

Well, politics makes strange bedfellows and they did. It was March, 1960 and the issue was student residences at the University of Alberta. According to a *Journal* report at the time, "an estimated 300 slogan-chanting, placard-carrying University of Alberta students marched on the Legislative Building" to demand bugless housing for young men from High River and young women from anywhere. But it wasn't the loose, ragtag kind of demonstration we are used to these days. Young fogey Clark (leader of the campus Tories) and fast-action Coutts (leader of the campus Liberals) already had the political shell game down pat.

Reported *The Journal*: "Spokesmen for the marchers (Clark and Coutts) claimed it was an unorganized and spontaneous demonstration. However, the marchers carried mimeographed sheets of instructions telling them to keep the demonstration orderly and to avoid blocking traffic on their walk from the university to the Legislative Building. The instruction sheet said, 'Keep in mind: this march is unorganized, unplanned and spontaneous.'"

Ah yes, the instinctive swell of public adulation that sweeps protesting non-candidates into office. Canadians need no longer wonder how either of these gentle gentlemen ascended to the neo-gothic niches of power, although slick Jim Coutts didn't even need election to become Pierre Trudeau's right-hand man.

Upon meeting Provincial Treasurer E.W. Hinman in the Legislative foyer, Clark and Coutts "chanted" slogans and presumably joined their fellows (including CCF student leader Grant Notley) in greeting Mr. Hinman's excuses with "boos and hisses." Finally, decorum shattered completely when "someone blew a trumpet." (Down the hall, Premier Ernest Manning is rumored to have looked skywards.)

The rambunctious Clark-Coutts demonstration so upset a pious Mr. Hinman that he accused them of using a method "which is usually associated with countries other than ours." One assumes he was referring to democracies. At any rate, it was the closest either Clark or Coutts came to being called un-Canadian — before, not since.

Alberta's student residences were built a few years later and one suspects that both Clark and Coutts took all the credit and still do.
William Thorsell, April 25, 1979.



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