

# separatism

candidate. Until that time, the movement is doomed to the in-fighting rivalries and petty debates that have so far limited any of their effectiveness.

So far the only hero to emerge from the movement is Louis Riel, a bizarre twist on history as Riel was neither a separatist nor a particularly marked supporter of a unilingual English state in the West.

Yet Christie refers to him as "an honorable gentleman" because "he had a faith, a belief, in the people of Western Canada." And he blames "Canadian history books" for drawing a poor picture of Riel.

Christie has been flogging bumper stickers reading "Louis Riel—Where are you now that we need you?" for \$1 each, and for \$5, Christie will part with a cassette recording of his own separatist speeches.

The separatists' lowest point so far has been Christie's ill-fated 2,500 kilometre journey to Manitoba. In Winnipeg, he drew an audience of eight. At a Brandon University cafeteria, only two people, one a reporter, bothered to attend.

The separatist scenario has each of the four Western provincial legislatures deciding to hold a referendum on a new federation including the two territories. Then the MLAs would write a constitution, which also would be presented to the public in a referendum. But the composition of the new nation has led to the self-destruction of at least one group, the B.C. based Western National Association, sending Christie off with his WCC. Stan Bennet, his chief protagonist, now heads a group called the Western Canada Party.

Some groups want to maintain the monarchy, while others are content that the West simply form a nation before any other blueprints are revealed. Platforms include the elimination of tariffs, the use of only a single official language, the elimination of legal abortions, the reintroduction of capital punishment; essentially, a collection of conservative ideals and values.

A popular analogy with separatists is that of the cow representing Confederation. Fed by the West, Ontario and Quebec get all the milk, while the Maritimes get stuck with the shit.

One now-defunct group even went so far as to write a pithy national anthem, titled, naturally, The Anthem of the West. One of five verses is:

When we found ourselves in slavery dwelling  
We were sad to see our country dying  
Be with courage of the heart  
We resolved to make a start  
To save the future of Our Land

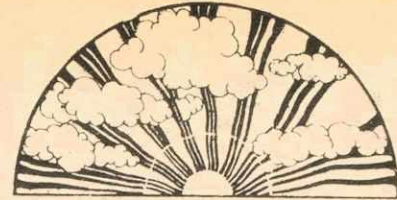
But the evident amateurism might be balanced by businesses' attraction to the Western alienation message.

Vancouver Board of Trade president Bruce Pepper recently said B.C. was not prepared to forego its resources for the sake of national unity. Nor, he said, would B.C. aid a federal government "determined to forge ahead to perpetuate the subsidy of Eastern Canada and to hell with the West."

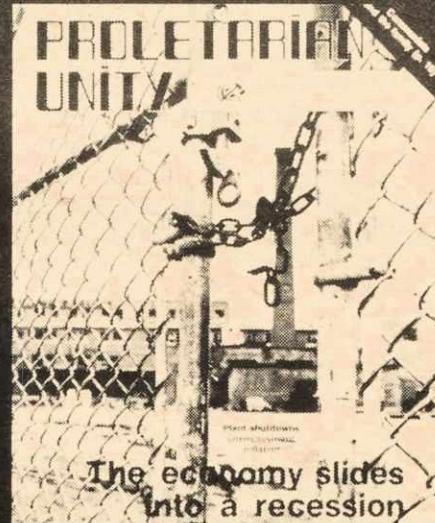
Former provincial Liberal leader Gordon Gibson says the federal proposal for an export tax on gas could well be the equivalent of what the tea tax was to the American colonies.

And for those attracted to the comparison with the American revolution, renegade former Saskatchewan Tory leader Dick Collver has formed a party advocating the secession of Western Canada and its union with the U.S. Collver became the West's first separatist MLA when he left the Tories to sit as an independent separatist. When fellow Tory, and long-time friend, Dennis Ham followed suit, Collver formed the Unionist Party, a name culled by combining the words "union" and "best".

"Even if you create a new constitution, you are talking about something new that's never been tried," said Collver, a wealthy investor with holdings in Arizona. "Why not join the U.S. with a constitution that's been functioning for 200 years and works like a darn? Collver himself would fare better under a constitution like the American's which grants citizens the right to bear arms. The day he stepped down as Tory head, Collver, for no apparent reason, fired a revolver shot from his townhouse balcony.



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