

NDP's future in Nova Scotia

by Michael Greenfield

Since the formation of the Commonwealth Co-operative Federation (CCF) prior to the 1935 election, the two major parties combined have not received more than 80% of the votes. Today the New Democratic Party (formerly CCF) is the ruling government in 3 Provinces and commands much attention on the national scene. It is no longer possible to call the Canadian political system a 2-party system. However, there are areas of the country where the NDP has not been able to gain much support and because of this has not been able to make a serious Federal bid. In both Quebec and the Maritime provinces the NDP is not yet considered a serious alternative. Still, in Quebec they have other important parties aside from the P.C.'s and Liberal's, the Realliment Crediste and the Union Nationale parties clearly make for a multi-party system. The Maritimes remain the sole region that can still be labeled 2-party.

However, the situation may soon change. Here in Nova Scotia the NDP has been concentrating their efforts. The last election they brought in many party workers from out west, for the first time ran a whole slate of candidates, increased their percentage of the vote, picked up 3 seats in the Provincial Legislature, and for the first time won a seat in the Federal Parliament. Still a major breakthrough eluded them; that would be a victory on mainland Nova Scotia. The NDP has never been able to extend itself outside of Cape Breton. The question arises - Can the NDP win a seat on the mainland? Does the NDP have a real future in Nova Scotia?

We brought these questions to the leader of the New Democratic Party in Nova Scotia, Jeremy Akerman.

Jeremy Akerman is the first to admit that the NDP faces a terrific struggle toward real power in Nova Scotia. The biggest problem, according to Mr. Akerman, is to overcome the "psychological factor". He explains that people like to feel that they are on the winning side. Many people would like to vote for the NDP but they just do not feel that the NDP can win. Many voters do not want to "waste" their votes. Therefore, according to Mr. Akerman, the most important accomplishment for the party would be to present a winning image.

But images in politics are based less on desire and ability and more on money. The NDP just does not have that much money. While in the last Provincial election the Tories spent \$183,000 and the Liberals spent \$200,000, the New Democratic Party spent \$25,000.

The NDP relies on public donations and cannot afford to pay their campaign workers as do the other parties. They clearly need more money to run more effective campaigns.

However, the vote is not just affected by the economic situation within the party. The Province's total economic outlook will have a serious effect on the votes, according to Mr. Akerman. Jeremy Akerman divides the economic climate into five zones: Prosperity, Good, Fair, Bad and Depression. The optimum times for the NDP will be when the economy is Good, when people are doing well but know that they could do better and can afford to take a few chances, and when the economy is in a state of Depression, when people have nothing to lose and look toward new alternatives. In the last national election people were seriously worried about the economy and the NDP suffered a severe setback.

Still, Mr. Akerman is quite optimistic about their future in Nova Scotia. Their accomplishments in the last election give them reason for hope. As far as getting a seat on the mainland goes Mr. Akerman states that there are "3 or 4 ridings" where with a good campaign the NDP has a distinct possibility of winning in the next election.

But the NDP is certainly not resting between campaigns. The three Provincial House members, including Jeremy Akerman, are labouring full time. Collectively they are working much harder than the 12 Conservative members. The NDP is pushing for many reforms and proposals. Two of the most innocuous pieces that the NDP is working on but that Jeremy Akerman fears the elitist Liberals will find some reason for opposing are reforms of the Privacy Act and Election Act. The Privacy Act stipulates that in order for a citizen to collect in a case of an invasion of privacy, bugging etc., he must prove damages. The NDP would like to eliminate the need to prove such damages, further protecting the citizen against invasions of privacy. The Election Act says that in order to run for political office in Nova Scotia you **do not** have to be a resident. The NDP would like to see a residency requirement. Other reforms the NDP is working on include: increased independence from Minister Bagnell for the Environmental Control Council, re-organization of the Sydney Steel Corporation, which includes the placing of 2 members of the non-management work force on the board of directors, and repeal of the Bonus Act which grants the

opportunity of 9 year tax breaks to corporations merely by vote of the municipal council.

If these measures do not look like the red terror of socialism it is because the New Democratic Party represents the red terror about as much as the Liberal Party does. The NDP is more akin to the democratic socialist parties of West Germany, says Jeremy Akerman. The older hard line "nationalize anything that moves" philosophy is no longer part of the NDP. Jeremy Akerman still sees the need for some basic changes such as increased government control of business and reform of what he describes as the worst taxation system in the West, but has moderated and hopes to appeal to the usually conservative Nova Scotians as a viable ruling party.

The logical order of their ascent to power first requires that they defeat the Conservatives. They must start running second on a mainland where they have consistently not been able to. The NDP slogan reflects their aim to undermine the Conservatives - "The only real opposition".

And in the face of diligence by the NDP and the lacking on the part of the Conservatives, particularly their leader, Jeremy Buchanan, Jeremy Akerman foresees a good election for the NDP next time around. Even if the Conservatives do not totally collapse, Mr. Akerman feels that the NDP is on its way up in Nova Scotia. Many people feel that the New Democratic Party is the party of the future, and for Jeremy Akerman the future may be just about here.

Many though do not see any real future for the NDP. They consider the difficulties facing the NDP insurmountable. Professor Beck, a leading authority on Canadian politics, sums it up when he says that the "key factor is breaking through the traditionalism and conservatism of the political culture" and that the prospects look bleak. The Liberals are riding high at the present and many consider the Conservatives firmly entrenched. The traditionalism of this area is too deeply rooted. One opinion is that it would take an NDP victory nationally in order to spur the follow the leader type Nova Scotian voters toward the NDP. However, if a break onto the mainland is to come about Prof. Beck is of the opinion that it will come in Halifax and/or Pictou first.

We see that there are many factors that can affect the success of the NDP in Nova Scotia. The most important being: the conservatism of the area, the money, and the general



In the foreground: Jeremy Akerman

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