

Western Canada..The new

by Tom Hawthorn
of the CANADIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

They dream of a free enterprise utopia, of a land where the pioneering spirit is once again revered.

And they see a day when this promised land is delivered in an independent Western Canadian nation.

They are Western separatists, the latest and certainly most visible political cowboys to ride out of the West's current middle-class malcontent. From community halls to radio stations it is the dirty thirties all over again—only this time the strongest protest is coming from the right.

"Surely, after 100 years of economic mistreatment, you should have a choice," says Doug Christie, the 34-year-old leader of Western Canada Concept. "The federal government has been using Western money from resources for frivolous spending for the Mirabel airport, the World's Fair and the Olympics.

"It's done to keep the sweet, selected few in power. It's a corrupt way to float the Canadian debt."

Christie's message, well received by 62 people at a July meeting in Vancouver, is a classical one in the West. It is a feeling that the West is being bled resource dry to feed Ontario and Quebec, that the federal government is some agent out to wreak economic ruin, and that somehow big government, big business and big labour are conspiring to rob the West.

B.C. has enjoyed its usual share of political lunacy this summer. The day after he allegedly shoved a television camera man on his back, Universities Minister Pat McGeer took his seat in the legislature dressed in full boxing regalia, complete with T-shirt reading Take a Camera man to Lunch.

There is a tendency here to write off the separatist movement as another humorous example of the West's lunatic fringe, but the numbers attending separatist rallies, at least in B.C., indicate a growing sense of frustration, alienation and even paranoia amongst traditional Conservatives.

The day after Christie spoke, a rally here



for the Western Canada Federation drew more than 300 people. But that meeting showed some of the schizophrenia of the movement, the We'd-like-to-be-patriots-but-you-people-aren't-listening-to-us syndrome.

When former B.C. cabinet minister and evangelical minister Phil Gaglardi told the meeting that "divisionism" was a "cancer" that "must, of necessity, be eliminated," he got strong applause. Yet when West-Fed's Elmer Knutson thanked Gaglardi "for the same rhetoric we've heard for 114 years," he received a standing ovation.

The separatists have attracted mainly the elderly, old-line Conservatives who feel thwarted that their solid support for the Tories is useless because of Ontario's third-time-lucky love affair with Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Many are the legendary "tennis shoe" constituents, the very ones who guaranteed late-B.C. premier W.A.C. Bennett's many re-elections.

The movement has yet to attract the New Conservatives, the residents of Vancouver's billowing suburbs, who regularly elect Tory and Social Credit candidates. Until they do so, the movement will keep its image, deserved in many ways, as part of the nutty right-wing fringe. Knutson, who spoke to the 300 people at the Vancouver rally, has referred to Trudeau as the "single most dangerous person in Canada" and as someone who must be stopped before "he turns this country into a socialist dictatorship."

The separatists' biggest challenge is in finding a leader under which the five active separatist organizations can rally to attract the suburban conservatives who would be cornerstones of any successful movement.

Knutson is now trying to raise a war chest of \$250,000 to attract a leadership



Rum flavoured.
Wine dipped.

Crack a pack of Colts along with the cards.