

Comment

NDP increase vote in rural areas

by M. Marshall

If the big surprise in last May's election was the strong 30 percent plus showing for the NDP in Newfoundland, the virtual collapse of the New Democrats in the province on Monday night was widely predicted, even among ordinary voters in Newfoundland.

Last June's provincial election saw the NDP candidates get as few as 50 votes in some ridings, a fate usually preserved for fringe candidates in other provinces. While the Tory budget didn't seem to affect the sizable majorities of John Crosbie and James McGrath in their traditional urban strongholds around St. John's, Crosbie's decision to impose an excise tax for the first time upon farmers and fishermen was widely resented in rural Newfoundland. Outport Newfoundlanders protested with a strong vote for the Liberals; this coupled with a general collapse of the provincial NDP vote resulted in the defeat of Fouse Fauer, the first—and only—NDP MP in Newfoundland.

Throughout the rest of Atlantic Canada the story was much the same. Because so many of the population are mixed farmers-fishermen, the new excise tax imposed on them did what no other issue had ever been able to do: it loosened the hold the Conservatives had on rural Maritimers since the Diefenbaker victory of 1957. Not even PC Cabinet Minister David Macdonald's personal appeal in the PEI riding of Egmont was enough to blunt the anger of Island potato farmers over the prospects of a \$1000 increase in their fuel bills. Seats which the Tories continued to hold, such as the South Shore fiefdom of Lloyd Crouse, saw ma-

orities sharply reduced. The Liberals may have failed to pick up these seats because of the surprisingly strong showing for the NDP throughout all of rural Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

It seems possible that many of these rural votes for the NDP came not from fishermen or farmers, but from rural voters who lived in the country but drove long distances to industrial jobs in town. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) campaign on behalf of the NDP was one of the best kept secrets of the election. Centering on quiet chats in the plant between shop steward and worker, it was apparently successful in convincing unionists that the best way to protest high gas prices was with a vote for Ed Broadbent.

As predicted, the Liberals came close to shutting every other party out of Quebec. Only Roche LaSalle, the PCs' sole francophone MP, narrowly hung on in Joliette. Eighteen years after Réal Caouette came out of nowhere to take 26 seats in rural Quebec, the Creditiste phenomenon finally completely died with the defeat of the 5 remaining Social Credit MPs. Interestingly, the NDP vote in 'la belle province' moved up to take a very distant second place to the Liberals. Interesting, because several studies of the Creditiste voters have suggested that they would tend to vote NDP—not PC—if they couldn't vote Creditiste.

With 74 out of 75 seats in Quebec, the Liberals are in a position to pretty well rule it as a one party state. Perhaps in reaction to this monopoly, many Quebec voters responded to the election with disinterest or by voting for joke candidates like the

Rhinos. Voter turnout was down from 76 percent of those eligible to 65 percent.

Of course, it was against a similar backdrop of widespread voter apathy and a belief that they were being taken for granted in a one party system, that galvanized so many rural Quebecois to support Réal Caouette in 1962. If Federal Liberals fail to deliver on their promises to lower gas prices for rural Quebecers, the New Democrats may win some seats in Quebec, particularly in the north west region, in the next election.

Monday's losses to the contrary, the Progressive Conservatives were hardly damaged at all in Ontario. The Liberals won a lot of Tory-held seats, but the PC's had only 'held' them since May 22nd. In general, the seats the Liberals won back were long-time Liberal strongholds—usually with sizable ethnic populations—that the Tories had only narrowly managed to take because of their popular mortgage scheme and a strong wave of anti-Trudeau feeling in 1979.

What the Liberal sweep failed to do was to dislodge the Tories from such urban strongholds as Nepean-Charleton, held by Walter Baker with a whopping 12,003 majority or in their farmbelt rural seats in southwestern and eastern Ontario. Seats such as Grey-Simcoe or Northcumberland, seats that haven't seen Liberal MPs since the 1930s.

Seats such as these are the backbone of the provincial Ontario Tories. So while Bill Davis's Machine stayed home, Ontario's true blue traditionalists did save Joe Clark's bacon, reducing what could have been a rout into a mere severe disappointment.

Energy pricing was supposed to be the issue in Ontario, yet how else can we account for the fact that farmers in energy-hungry Ontario stayed with the Conservatives, excise tax and all, while the oil-rich western farmers switched to the Liberals, and in particular, to the NDP?

If the NDP couldn't make gas hikes an issue among Ontario's farmers, neither could they sell it to the industrial workers of the province. Instead, the NDP lost three northern industrial ridings and failed to win at least a dozen more Ontario seats they had hopes of winning. Their problem is that many of the same seats that hold sizable concentrations of industrial workers also hold sizable ethnic groupings—and at the federal level, ethnic voters tend to give great support to the Liberals.

One of the biggest of these ethnic groups in Ontario are Francophones. As part of the general urge of Francophones everywhere in Canada to indicate support for the pro-federalist position, they gave overwhelming support to Mr. Trudeau's candidates. Even longtime CCF-NDP MP Arnold Peters of Timiskaming, who had withstood every assault since 1957, was swept under in the move to elect a strong bargainer to deal with Premier Levesque. Until the federal NDP learns to emulate the example of the provincial NDP in Ontario and makes a determined effort to woo ethnic Ontarians, they will continue to occupy the fringes of Ontario's, and consequently national, politics.

With 144 seats under their belts as they hit the Manitoba border, Liberal organizers could be forgiven if they had visions of 170 seats dancing

before their eyes. They had seen how potent a vote-getter the new Tory excise tax on farm vehicles was for the Liberals in Atlantic Canada—how could it fail among the wall-to-wall farmers on the Prairies? Besides, hadn't Mr. Trudeau promised to double-track the CN mainland as well?

Unfortunately, that pledge—which some unwary Liberal Prairie candidates at first dismissed as 'a proposal from the Rhinos'—became a symbol of how poorly the Eastern-dominated Liberals understood the essential concerns of the West.

Instead, it was the NDP who won away rural seats from the Tories in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and most surprisingly, in the Interior of British Columbia. All these rural Western seats, coupled with the decimation of NDP seats east of Manitoba, (they now hold only 5 seats there), makes for a party that looks uncannily like the CCF of the Fifties, before the Diefenbaker phenomenon forced them to regroup as the urban-based and Eastern-oriented New Democratic Party.

Certainly, the post-February 18th Progressive Conservative Party will bear little resemblance to the Party in Diefenbaker's heyday, something we can credit the Crosbie Budget with. Its unpopularity among rural Canadians, cost the Tories seats and votes everywhere the Diefenbaker name was magic. Conversely, its great popularity among upper middle class Canadians, allowed the Party to withhold most of its suburban seats throughout Southern Ontario from the Liberal tide and to retain its urban seats in Lower Mainland British Columbia from the twin assaults of the NDP and Liberals.

Letters

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Nova Scotia Technical College and the Nova Scotia Institute of Technology is about as easy as confusing the editor of my high school newspaper with you; we didn't have a paper.

Concerned Nova Scotia
Technical College Student
R. Scott McVittie

St. Patrick's Day

correction

CORRECTION

In the Gazette of February 7, 1980 it was incorrectly reported that the Dalhousie University Women's Ice Hockey Club had rented the Bonnie Piper for March 17, 1980—St. Patrick's Night.

First of all, the team did not

rent the Bonnie Piper. The Bonnie Piper has recently started a program of "Booster Nights" whereby established teams etc., are able to host a week night at the pub, but there is no rental fee involved for use of the premises.

Secondly, the Women's team is hosting such a night on Tuesday, March 11, 1980, rather than March 17, 1980 as previously reported. It will still be an "Irish" night though with the well-known local band "Blakeney Still" providing the entertainment. Tickets are available from team members at \$2.00/person.

We regret any inconvenience that the previous article may have caused to anyone, including the management of the Bonnie Piper.

Kate Connors
Dalhousie University
Women's Ice Hockey Club

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