

*J. Murray Beck*

## THE ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR OF NOVA SCOTIA IN 1965

OUTSIDERS WHO OBSERVED the Nova Scotia scene before the election of 1965 received a rude jolt on the night of November 8. Like Nova Scotians generally they had no inkling of the voters' intentions. Peter Regenstreif, the prognosticating wizard of two previous elections, applied his special techniques to Nova Scotia early in the campaign and prophesied that the votes of relatively few persons would be different from their votes in 1963. There might, he thought, be a few shifts in seats. But they would be the result more of local situations than of regional or province-wide trends, and they would certainly be Conservative losses.

Because Ed Johnson was such a strong candidate, Cape Breton South would probably shift from the Conservatives to the N.D.P.; because J. Patrick Nowlan was an outsider—an altogether incomprehensible statement—Digby-Annapolis-Kings was even more likely to move from the Conservative to the Liberal column; because Colchester-Hants was Premier Stanfield's home territory, the Conservatives might retain that seat but the outcome was touch-and-go. Categorically and unequivocally Mr. Regenstreif stated that the Conservatives had no chance at all in Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare and the dual riding of Halifax. On the eve of the election he had not changed his mind.

A much more scientific sampler of public attitudes, the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion [Gallup] poll, makes no attempt to predict the results in individual ridings and contents itself with an estimate of the popular vote by party. Also, because its Nova Scotian sample is too small to be statistically meaningful, its estimates are for the whole Atlantic region. Its conclusion was that a wind slightly more Liberal than that of 1963 was blowing throughout the four easternmost provinces. Certainly it provided not the slightest indication of what was happening in Nova Scotia.

Newspapermen from other parts of Canada also failed to grasp the mood of the Nova Scotia electorate. Early in October, George Bain of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* concluded that the Conservatives would lose at least two seats. Perhaps he should not be blamed too much; this was early in the campaign, and key members of the Conservative organization admitted that they were

in trouble. A little later Charles Lynch of Southam News prophesied even more substantial gains for the Liberals. Apparently he relied far too much on the optimism of a buoyant Liberal organization. Yet he did add the commendable caution that he had seldom been right in his previous predictions.

Outsiders were not the only ones who had the wrong answers, for most Nova Scotians were themselves surprised and not a little mystified by their own handiwork. But apparently one of them knew what they were going to do. On November 1, Premier Stanfield told a meeting at Glace Bay that his party would fare extremely well in Nova Scotia. Privately he is reported to have estimated nine or ten Conservative seats. Actually he was a little cautious, for the Conservatives won ten seats handily and lost Antigonish-Guysborough by a mere 47 votes because of a Liberal plurality of 76 in the service vote. They retained by substantial margins the three seats which Peter Regensstreif said were endangered and, in addition, took Halifax and Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare. The psephologist might now wish to supplement his normal bag of tricks with one of Premier Stanfield's indicators, the number of defectors among his party's workers. Because the Conservative riding and poll organizations remained almost completely intact, the premier felt confident of a substantial victory.

Factually, just how did the Nova Scotia electorate behave in 1965? Table I indicates the size of the vote as compared with that of 1963:

Table I

Constituency	Votes cast	
	1963	1965
Antigonish-Guysborough .....	12,782	12,601
Cape Breton North-Victoria .....	21,362	21,310
Cape Breton South .....	36,818	35,872
Colchester-Hants .....	29,394	29,589
Cumberland .....	17,990	17,975
Digby-Annapolis-Kings .....	33,937	33,524
Halifax .....	182,976	183,467
Inverness-Richmond .....	15,386	15,362
Pictou .....	20,721	21,366
Queens-Lunenburg .....	23,948	23,493
Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare .....	22,422	22,166
Total .....	417,736	416,725

Never before was the number of votes cast in successive elections so nearly equal, just 1031 fewer in 1965 than in 1963. In Cumberland, Inverness-Richmond, and Cape Breton North-Victoria the electors voted in almost identical numbers on the two occasions. Since the number of registered voters was also slightly fewer in 1965, the turnout was approximately 82 per cent in both years. Thus the Conservative gains in 1965 cannot be attributed to greater interest in the election and greater voter turnout. More specifically, there was no significant change in the number of voters in either Halifax or Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare, where the Conservative victories were most unexpected. Yet, because the percentage who voted was abnormally high in both years, it is arguable that the voters reacted just as strongly against Diefenbaker in the first instance as they did against Pearson in the second.

Over-all, the net change in Nova Scotia might be summarized in this way: as compared with 1963, 4.6 of every 100 electors shifted from the Liberals to another party, 1.9 of them to the Conservatives and 2.5 to the New Democrats. Table II indicates the change in popular vote by constituency and for the province as a whole.

Table II

	1963				1965			
	PC	L	NDP	SC	PC	L	NDP	I
Antigonish-Guysborough	45.7	54.3			48.9	49.3	1.8	
Cape Breton North-Victoria	49.2	39.8	11.0		52.8	38.5	8.7	
Cape Breton South	38.9	24.9	36.2		38.1	34.7	27.2	
Colchester-Hants	48.9	48.3	2.8		51.6	43.8	3.6	1.0
Cumberland	50.2	44.9	4.9		53.2	39.4	7.4	
Digby-Annapolis-Kings	49.8	48.5	1.7		53.2	43.7	3.1	
Halifax	46.0	50.0	4.0		47.4	42.6	9.5	0.5
Inverness-Richmond	45.6	54.4			44.2	53.0	2.8	
Pictou	51.0	42.7	5.4	0.9	52.8	39.8	7.4	
Queens-Lunenburg	52.6	47.4			57.7	39.1	3.2	
Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare	46.3	51.8	0.9	1.0	48.5	44.6	6.9	
Total	46.8	46.7	6.4	0.1	48.7	42.1	8.9	0.3

The table indicates that a Conservative wind of some dimensions was blowing throughout almost the whole province. Upper Musquodoboit and Shubenacadie, Blue Rocks and Peggy's Cove, Saulnierville Station and Eskasoni

all reflected the voters' mood in the fashion of 1965. In only two constituencies could the Conservatives do no better than hold their own. While Allan MacEachen, the Minister of Labour, managed to retain his previous majority in Inverness-Richmond, it cost him dearly; he spent so much time there that he could do little to help his party's candidates elsewhere. The promise to finance the opening of a new mine at Lingan enabled the Liberals to improve their position in Cape Breton South. But on balance it was at the expense of the N.D.P. candidate, for the Conservative margin of victory stayed much the same.

In five of the eleven ridings the Conservatives increased their share of the popular vote by about three per cent. They did considerably better than that in Queens-Lunenburg, where they ran a strong sitting member against a Liberal who was virtually unknown. But in Pictou, where they met greater opposition from the Liberals, their margin was somewhat smaller. It was also below the norm in Halifax and Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare, where strong N.D.P. candidates took a large proportion of the votes which the Liberals lost.

Within the constituencies, too, the Conservative gains appear to have been quite uniform. Robert McCleave and Michael Forrestall improved their party's fortunes by comparable amounts throughout the city of Halifax, the city of Dartmouth, and the municipality of the county of Halifax. In Queens-Lunenburg, Lloyd Crouse's gains were spread fairly evenly over the municipality of Chester, the municipality of Lunenburg, and the county of Queens. John Bower increased his party's share of the popular vote considerably more in Loyalist Shelburne than in Acadian Clare—4.9 as compared with 2.7 per cent—but this is understandable in view of his Liberal opponent's much closer connexion with the Acadian voters. In any case Clare participated significantly in the general trend. Whether it was a high-income polling district in the south end of Halifax city, a largely Irish Catholic district in the north end, an Acadian village in Clare, a fishing hamlet in Lunenburg or Guysborough, or an agricultural community in Kings, Hants, or Colchester, the shift to the Conservatives showed a high degree of uniformity.

Just how extraordinary was the behaviour of the Nova Scotian voter in 1965? Was it quite as unique as it has been made out to be? It is true that the Conservatives gained three seats in the province, one more than their net gain in all Canada. But it is also true that in the matter of seats the Liberals

did poorly everywhere except in Newfoundland. They did make gains in Quebec, but in view of the threatened collapse of both the Conservatives and the Cr ditistes these were considerably fewer than was expected. In the other provinces they lost either one or two seats, or merely kept what they had. This generally mediocre showing contrasted markedly with the Conservative successes, some of which, it could be argued, rivalled the gain in Nova Scotia. Thus the Conservatives retained all 17 of Saskatchewan's seats despite the federal government's achievements in selling prairie wheat, while in Quebec, the province where John Diefenbaker was supposed to be anathema, they held on to their eight seats and increased their popular vote from 413,562 (19.5 per cent) to 432,941 (21.3 per cent).

It is likewise arguable that the cleavage in political behaviour between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island on the one hand and Newfoundland and New Brunswick on the other has been exaggerated. Table III shows the percentage of the popular vote polled in these provinces by each party in 1963 and in 1965.

Table III

	1963				1965			
	PC	L	NDP	Other	PC	L	NDP	Other
Newfoundland	30.0	64.5	4.2	1.3	32.4	64.1	1.2	2.3
Nova Scotia	46.8	46.7	6.4	0.1	48.7	42.1	8.9	0.3
New Brunswick	40.4	47.3	3.7	8.6	42.5	47.5	9.4	0.6
Prince Edward Island	52.0	46.4	1.6		53.9	44.1	2.0	

The table indicates that in Newfoundland and New Brunswick, where the Conservatives are supposed to have done badly, they increased their share of the vote by 2.4 and 2.1 per cent, while in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, where their gains are regarded as extraordinary, they improved their popular vote by only 1.9 per cent in each province. The explanation of this apparently strange phenomenon lies in a more significant feature of the voting patterns. For while the Liberals managed to retain about the same share of the popular vote in New Brunswick and Newfoundland, they lost 2.3 per cent of it in Prince Edward Island and 4.6 per cent in Nova Scotia. Prince Edward Island was the only province in which a moderate Conservative gain in the popular vote was matched by a comparable Liberal loss, Nova Scotia the only one in which a moderate Conservative gain was accompanied by a much greater

Liberal loss. It was this falling off in the Liberal vote that paid off in seats, especially as the Liberal majorities to be overcome in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were generally much smaller than in the other two provinces.

If the behaviour of Nova Scotia was unique, it was because the Liberal vote there fell much more sharply than in any other province. The drop of 4.6 per cent compared with 2.9 per cent in Manitoba and 2.7 per cent in Ontario, where the losses were next largest. Why did Nova Scotia react more strongly against the Pearson government than any other part of Canada? Some observers gave all the credit to Premier Stanfield. One reporter called him "the Atlantic ace up the Tory sleeve." Keith Davey, the national organizer of the Liberal party, put it this way: "We got creamed by the Stanfield machine . . . I think Mr. Stanfield was making his bid for the Conservative national leadership and he was successful at that."

But this is far too simple a view of things. Not that anyone should underestimate the political talents of Robert Lorne Stanfield. For in his own way he is able to perform the kind of political magic once practised by his Liberal predecessors, William Stevens Fielding, George H. Murray, and Angus L. Macdonald. He won the provincial election of 1963 so decisively that he seemed to hold Nova Scotia in fief. Yet only a few months earlier he had been far less successful in the federal election, even though he had campaigned almost as vigorously as he did in 1965. Not only had the Liberals gained five seats, but they had polled almost as many votes as the Conservatives.

It was in a totally different context that he fought the election of 1965. Two years earlier he had had to campaign on behalf of an administration which had been discredited and a leader who had thoroughly disillusioned the more sophisticated voters. This group evinced no greater enthusiasm for John Diefenbaker in 1965, although time may have moderated a little the intensity of their dislike. Even the Conservative M.P.s from Nova Scotia, most of whom had strongly supported Mr. Diefenbaker's efforts to retain the party leadership, campaigned for a Conservative, not a Diefenbaker, government. Some of them made scant reference to their leader in their speeches, other than to talk of the benefits to Nova Scotia of a Diefenbaker-Stanfield team. Apparently they sought to neutralize the less palatable with something more attractive.

Yet the revulsion against Mr. Diefenbaker had never gone as far in Nova Scotia as in the urban areas of central Canada. Among the less sophisticated voters he still possessed much of his earlier attractiveness. His trip from Truro to Yarmouth during the second-last week of the campaign became a

triumphal tour, perhaps the best reception he received anywhere in Canada. To many Nova Scotians he and his administration looked good compared with their successors. For a variety of reasons the Pearson government had evoked anything but a favourable image in Nova Scotia. The Prime Minister himself had made little impact upon the province; his television performance was poor, his oratory dull and uninspiring, and he had created something of an impression of bungling and indecision.

These factors operated in varying degree throughout most of Canada. But others of a more limited application intensified the Pearson government's unattractive image in Nova Scotia. There were, first, the charges of corruption in high places. Such allegations tended to be treated much more seriously in a less urbanized society, especially where the puritanical tradition is strong, than in a highly urbanized one, which is more tolerant of the foibles and laches of big business and big government. There was also the Anglo-Saxon backlash, the widespread suspicion that the government had been kow-towing to French Canada. On this basis many Nova Scotians explained the adoption of the new Canadian flag, a change not looked upon with enthusiasm in a province where British sentiment is still strong and where the red ensign and the Union Jack were considered to be good enough.

These two factors also operated in rural Ontario, the Prairies, and other parts of Atlantic Canada. But there was one that had special application in Nova Scotia. Partly through political ineptitude, the Pearson administration had let the impression be created that it was not nearly as solicitous as its predecessor about Nova Scotia's problems. Premier Stanfield and his ministers had been cultivating this idea since 1963, and it can not be denied that the men who wielded the real power in the Pearson cabinet showed little concern for the difficulties of a have-not province and evinced no desire to make exceptions or find special means to meet its needs and demands. Or perhaps they were so preoccupied with Quebec that they were insensitive to the claims of other provinces. This contrasted sharply with the attitude of John Diefenbaker who, whatever his faults, never lacked sympathy for the have-not provinces and cared not a whit that meting out special assistance to them defied rational argument or created a dangerous precedent. Nova Scotia, which had helped materially in bringing him to power in 1957, received much the same kind of treatment as his own province of Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia Conservatives have never grown tired of describing him as the best friend the province has ever had. In contrast, Premier Smallwood labelled Mr. Diefenbaker as Newfoundland's Public Enemy Number One and Premier Robichaud

said: "We cannot afford a second Diefenbaker regime in Canada." Both these premiers also expressed satisfaction with the treatment that Mr. Pearson had accorded them.

To the extent that the debate on relations with Ottawa helped to determine it, the climate in Nova Scotia was therefore considerably different from that in New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Certainly Premier Stanfield found it far more congenial to his purposes than it had been in 1963. For him the campaign of 1965 was largely a matter of reinforcing what he had previously said about the province's treatment at the hands of the federal government. He missed no opportunity to tell his story. During the thirteen days before November 8, he was absent from the campaign trail only once; he spoke in every constituency except Cumberland and also made a major television address. Because of the death of George Nowlan and the voluntary exile of Allan MacEachen to Inverness-Richmond, he became the chief campaigner in Nova Scotia.

Why did he intervene so actively in a cause which was not directly his, and risk serious damage to his own image if his participation did not reap dividends? One theory has it that Mr. MacEachen had drawn his ire by criticizing his approach in dealing with the federal government and by taking too much credit for Nova Scotia's industrial expansion. Again, this is too simple a view.

A moderate man who shuns partisanship in its most blatant forms, Mr. Stanfield is, none the less, a strong party man. Provided that the public interest does not suffer, he plays the party game to ensure success. Convinced that the Progressive Conservative party has a useful and necessary role to perform in provincial and national development, he makes certain that he can never be accused of not carrying his full weight in all the party's ventures or of being disloyal to the party's national leader or organization. Under his direction, more than ever before, the federal and provincial parties are one. He takes it for granted that the Conservative M.P.s from Nova Scotia will present and defend his government's position at Ottawa and campaign actively in provincial elections. In turn, he automatically throws the full weight of the provincial organization behind the party's federal candidates. Undoubtedly he feels some responsibility for aiding the Conservative M.P.s whom he persuaded to enter politics in 1957. But most of all he appreciates the need for a united effort in a province where a short time ago his party was struggling, not to win, but merely to survive.

Mr. Stanfield probably felt impelled to intervene all the more because

of his recent relations with Ottawa. For most of his premiership up to 1963 he could expect sympathetic consideration from the federal government of the day, especially since he had been an architect of its initial victory. Certainly he had a direct pipe-line to the fountainhead of authority at Ottawa. That happy situation ended in April, 1963. He could not have expected the same solicitous attention from a Liberal government. Yet he had hoped for considerably greater recognition of the fiscal incapacity of his province. The political maladroitness which characterized the Pearson government in this area as in many others provided him with more than enough ammunition for electioneering purposes.

At Sydney Mines he pointed out that the opening of a new mine at Lingan could not bring maximum benefits to the region unless it was accompanied by the assurance of a greater market for Nova Scotia coal. At Sheet Harbour, Glace Bay, and Truro he maintained that the Pearson government's treatment of offshore mineral rights was "contrary to the whole tradition of Canada since Confederation." While the larger provinces had hinterlands of their own, "Nova Scotia cannot expand, except under the sea." At Auburn and Bridgewater he demanded that, if a tight-money policy was introduced to put a check on the economy, it should not be applied to the Atlantic region where there was no danger of the economy becoming overheated. At Pictou and Mulgrave he objected to the provisions of the Canada Assistance Act and the proposals for supplementary old-age security benefits which called for equal matching grants from the provinces regardless of their fiscal capacity. Like other Conservative spokesmen, he made an invidious comparison of the belated Pearson proposals with the Diefenbaker promise of universal old age pensions of \$100 a month to be paid entirely from federal funds. Liberal workers who found life-long Liberals voting Conservative on this account considered it a crucial factor in the outcome. Certainly it had special significance in a province which has a large proportion of old people.

As for the Liberals, their organization seems not to have recovered in some areas from their defeats of 1956 and 1957. It is also debatable whether they used their resources to the best advantage. Their saturation campaign of radio spots actually nauseated many voters. Not even prosperity or the "majority-government syndrome" could save them. Peter Regenstreif contends that voters in the Atlantic region consider it so vital to their own interest to be on the winning side that they anticipate the outcome of the election when they cast their ballots. But this time, at least, it does not seem possible that

the electors who decided the result in Nova Scotia really expected a Diefenbaker victory.

No one Liberal could match the effectiveness of Premier Stanfield on the platform. He is still awkward in his delivery, and he makes no attempt to appeal to the emotions. Yet his audiences listen in rapt attention even though they forbear to cheer. In him they recognize the man of sincerity, the voice of reasonableness and good sense. This time he spoke convincingly of the unattractiveness of the Liberals, but he was less convincing in the alternative he offered. While he may have persuaded many of them not to vote Liberal, he could not induce all of them to vote Conservative. Many of these turned to the New Democrats, especially because of their good candidates and stronger-than-usual campaign. The improved showing of the third party's candidates undoubtedly contributed to the election of a Conservative in Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare and of the second Conservative in Halifax. Conversely, of course, the N.D.P. campaign served to strengthen the unfavourable Liberal image and in some measure added to the Conservative vote.

Some questions about the election in Nova Scotia will never be answered with certainty. When did the voters who decided the outcome make up their minds? How significant was the campaign itself in determining how they voted? Certainly when Peter Regenstreif and George Bain visited the province, the public had thought little about the election except that it was unnecessary. Joe Clarke, the provincial organizer of the Conservatives, contends that "before the last two weeks it was difficult to see where we'd win." Only in the closing days of the campaign did the man in the street talk seriously about the prospects of Robert McCleave running ahead of the second Liberal in Halifax. The Conservatives appeared to have gauged the situation correctly. Premier Stanfield was not merely joking when he said, "We're going to peak at 10 o'clock" on November 8. His effective participation and a strong Conservative organization acting in the context of an unattractive Liberal image were the keys to the Conservative victory in Nova Scotia. The Liberals at Ottawa will never again underestimate the political talents of Robert Stanfield.