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ON THE PASSING OF POLITICIANS' OCCUPATIONS

Regrettably, ballots in Canadian federal elections no longer include the occupations of the parliamentary candidates. Amendments to the *Canada Elections Act*, adopted in 1970, brought to an end the practice dating back to 1874 of listing, next to a candidate's name, his address and occupation. Those two pieces of demographic information have been replaced with something new to federal ballots: the name of the candidate's political party. A candidate's "political affiliation" may now be shown on the ballot on the condition that his party (1) has been accepted by the Chief Electoral Officer as a properly registered political party; (2) had at least twelve members of the House of Commons at the time parliament was dissolved; and (3) had nominated candidates in no fewer than fifty constituencies four weeks prior to the polling day. As the requirements are sufficiently stiff to discourage the names of frivolous "parties" from appearing on the ballots, their practical effect, for the foreseeable future at any rate, will be to allow only the names of the four parties presently represented in the House of Commons to appear on the ballots. For all candidates other than those who wish to label themselves as "Independents", the law makes it clear that only their names, and nothing else, shall appear on the ballots.

Why lament the disappearance from the ballots of something as seemingly inconsequential as the occupations of parliamentary candidates? It may be sufficient to note that in the past such information no doubt proved to be a useful device for the voters to distinguish among candidates with identical names who, either quite accidentally or quite deliberately (one generally suspected the latter), found themselves running against one another in the same constituency. Thus, in Cape

Breton South in 1962 “adult education” MacInnis, who won, in the event, handily over the sitting member, was apparently distinguished with little difficulty from among his only two opponents: “mine worker” MacInnis and “salesman” MacInnis. Reason enough for retaining occupational listings? Perhaps. But the amended *Canada Elections Act* (1970) shrewdly allows for such an eventuality. The one condition under which a candidate may now have his occupation and address listed on the ballot exists when “having the same name” as one of his opponents, a candidate petitions the Chief Electoral Officer. (Sec. 31(1) (d)).

The justification for occupations listed on the ballot appears to lie in a different direction and is a good deal more subtle than one might at first suspect. Do we not, with increasing frequency, it seems, criticize modern governments for being far too much a creature of parties and not enough the result of the efforts of individuals? Have we not now taken one more step, this time in law, in giving support to such a criticism by having sanctioned the removal of a person’s occupational description from the ballot and its replacement with the label of a political group? Once again the particular is submerged by the general, and one piece of evidence which serves to remind us that politicians are something more than “party” candidates alone is lost. Politicians are, after all, men and women from varied backgrounds with a great range of interests, talents, and occupations. We should do our best to recognize them as such.

Although we may be under the impression that lawyers, businessmen and farmers are about the only ones to seek federal office, that is far from the truth. On the contrary, the variety of occupational backgrounds of parliamentary candidates is a striking feature of the *Reports* issued by the chief Electoral Officer over the past fifty years.¹ Candidates for federal office have included, among others and quite apart from those in the more predictable occupational categories, a cheese buyer, un chauffeur de camion, a sign and pictorial artist, un cordonnier, a food inspector, a governor of a prison, a stone sharpener, a first aid attendant, a monetary expert (Social Credit, of course), a felt weaver, un directeur d’école de boxe, a fashion designer, a handwriting expert, un herboriste, a piano technician, a musician and voice instructor, morticians, auctioneers, plumbers, professional hockey

players, architects, railway conductors, airline pilots, restaurateurs, barbers, florists, and dry cleaners.

With social and technological changes having introduced a more or less continuous stream of new fields of employment, the list of occupational types seeking public office has swollen accordingly. In 1921, lawyers and farmers together made up slightly more than one-half the total number of candidates running for parliament, but in 1972, those two occupational groups accounted for only seventeen per cent of the candidates. In 1930, one of every seven candidates was either a manufacturer or a medical doctor; in 1972, the ratio was one in fifty. The first of several "advertising executives" appeared as a candidate in 1940. (He was elected too). During the 1950s, personnel officers, public relations consultants, laboratory technicians, and travel agents began to stand for public office. A decade later the list widened to include students, airline agents, a coffee house proprietor, un aide air climatise, a recreation director, un guide touristique, un conseiller en habitation, a systems analyst, an insurance counsellor, a "residential therapist", a marketing researcher, an electronics technician, and, not surprisingly by 1968, a "federal-provincial coordinator". According to the nomination papers and the *Reports* of the Chief Electoral Officer—but no longer the ballots—the first election of the 1970s brought with it evidence of a host of relatively new occupations. They read very much like a list of participants in a seminar on contemporary education: graduate students, teaching assistants, a childcare worker, an environmental planner, a teacher consultant, an educational television coordinator, a reading specialist, a landscape architect, and, predictably, a "technocrat". As some of the ever-growing crew of politicians' "executive assistants" had begun to run for parliament in the 1960s, it was clearly only a matter of time until an "Executive Assistant to a Former Prime Minister", and a "Conseiller du Premier du Canada" appeared as candidates. They did, in 1972, and both were elected.

To confound those who might otherwise attempt to describe Canadian parties as "class-based", each of the parties has made a practice of choosing candidates who, on the face of it at least, might be presumed to feel more at home in some other party. Admittedly, when they have chosen to run for parliament, businessmen, manufacturers, and merchants have exhibited fairly strong preferences for the Liberals

and Conservatives; social workers, university professors, and United Church ministers for the CCF and NDP; and chiropractors for the Social Credit party. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to suggest that none of the parties has wished to present to the voters an image of relying excessively on a narrowly defined occupational pool for its candidates. The Liberals have run market gardeners, locomotive engineers, un maître-boulangier, un paie-mâitre, miners, un chef de gare, and lumbermen. Among the Conservative candidates has been a stevedore, a tinsmith, a drover, an industrial cook, a telephone foreman, a labourer, a section foreman, a sheet metal worker, and a "local labour leader". On behalf of the CCF and NDP, chartered accountants, pharmacists, medical doctors, business managers, and contractors have run for parliament, as has the president of a lumber company and (in 1935, no less) a private banker. Those who have stood as Social Credit candidates have included un paysagiste, a bricklayer, a stove mounter, a freight solicitor, un chef, and a commissionaire. These lists are by no means exhaustive. They simply illustrate the variety of occupational backgrounds of those seeking public office on behalf of Canada's different parties and the apparent desire of all the parties to avoid too immoderate an association with any one occupational group.

How have those who might truly be regarded as *politicians of some long standing* listed themselves under the "Occupation" heading of their nomination papers and on the ballots? At least some for whom politics is more than a temporary avocation (and this does not represent a particularly large group in Canadian political history) have preferred to retain their original occupational identification throughout the whole of their political careers. Others have varied their label from one election to the next, for what reason only they will ever know. One thing is apparent: in Canadian politics, a rose is rarely a rose. Duff Roblin (in 1968) and Jean-Luc Pepin (in 1972) have been the only nationally prominent political figures seeking parliamentary office to have labelled themselves as a "politician" on the election forms. And in the event, it may not have done them much good.

John Diefenbaker, throughout a political career spanning five decades and including thirteen federal elections in which he ran as a Conservative candidate, remained a "barrister". For each of Paul Martin's ten attempts to win a seat in parliament (every one of which

was successful) his occupational label varied only between that of "barrister" and "lawyer". The same was true for both George McIlraith, an M.P. for thirty-two years, and for Gordon Churchill, elected to the Commons seven times in a row. Jimmy Gardiner, clearly a "politician" by anyone's standards, remained a "farmer" on the ballots of his Melville constituency, and Michael Starr, successful on all but two of his nine attempts to be elected federally, retained his original occupational listing of a "clerk". Even the "party politician", Chubby Power, who served as an M.P. for nearly four decades and who won every federal electoral contest he entered, preferred not to alter his original occupational classification, that of "avocat". As a "clergyman", Stanley Knowles twice met electoral defeat, but with a change to "minister and organizer" in a 1942 by-election, then to "minister and printer" (the best of two worlds?) in the remainder, a combination was apparently discovered which helped to see him successfully through all but one of his subsequent ten elections.²

Consistency is no more the rule in the listing of at least some politicians' occupations in successive elections than it is in politics generally. The exact reasons for a politician changing from one election to the next the occupation listed on the election documents are by no means clear, but it seems fair to assume that changes in personal or political fortunes prompt the alterations. According to the election documents, Réal Caouette, a federal candidate on ten occasions, has held a variety of different occupations at one time or another during the period of nearly three decades he has run for parliament: *gérant*, *agent d'assurance*, *garagiste*, *président*, and *homme d'affaires*. For George Hees, the switches have been from manufacturer (in the early 1950s), to industrialist, to cabinet minister, back to industrialist, and, more recently, to businessman. The redoubtable J. W. Pickersgill ended his parliamentary career as he began it, as a "Minister of the Crown",

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For party leaders, prime ministers, cabinet ministers and other parliamentarians, there has been no standard method of occupational labelling. It has varied according to the individual. Only three national leaders of political parties have listed their occupations on the ballot as that of a "party leader" or a "national leader": H. H. Stevens in 1935, M. J. Coldwell in 1949, and T. C. Douglas in each of the six elections he contested federally in the 1960s. A decidedly recent development (all but one of the nine instances occurred in 1972) has been for parliamentary candidates seeking re-election to give "Member of Parliament" or "Député" as their occupation, even though such use of the term is quite clearly incorrect, for with its dissolution for an election there is, technically, no longer a parliament of which an individual might claim to be a member. Perhaps that impropriety was sensed by Tom Lefebvre who, in seeking re-election in 1972, gave as his occupation on the nomination papers that of a "Former Member of Parliament".

Another practice, by no means widespread in the past, suddenly and quite inexplicably became popular in 1972: nearly one-half the members of the cabinet seeking re-election gave as their occupation either the specific title of their ministerial post or the label "cabinet minister". For the period from 1921 to 1968, an average of only four cabinet ministers per election had done the same thing, but in 1972 the number jumped to eleven. During his time in federal politics, Lester Pearson had adopted this practice. From the 1948 by-election that gave him a seat in parliament following his appointment to the cabinet (and excluding 1963 when he was listed on the ballot as a public servant), Pearson's career was neatly summarized by the succession of labels he used for his seven federal elections: "Secretary of State for External Affairs" (four elections), "Leader of the Opposition" (two elections), and "Prime Minister" (one election). What lessons might be learned from Arthur Meighen's example are not entirely obvious. As prime minister at the time of the 1921 and 1926 elections he ran, respectively, as "king's counsellor" and as "Prime Minister of Canada", and was defeated on both occasions. When, as Leader of the Opposition in 1925, he was listed on the ballot as "One of His Majesty's Privy Councillors", he was elected. Meighen's great protagonist, Mackenzie King, chose the title "Journalist" in 1921, "Prime Minister" on three occasions (including two by-elections that followed general election defeats), and "Gentleman" for the remainder of his electoral contests.

"Gentleman", "gentilhomme", and "lady" were quite acceptable terms of self-description at one time in Canadian politics. They have now all but disappeared. Canada's first woman M.P., Agnes MacPhail, who started her twenty-year career in federal politics as a "farmer", ended it as a "lady", but her example, for the most part, has been ignored by those women in politics who have succeeded her. Nearly all have chosen to run for parliament using either the label of their profession (chartered accountants, lawyers, nutritionists, teachers, and so on), or the term "housewife". A few have been listed on the ballot as "married woman", and an even smaller number as "widow", the latter term having been favoured primarily by those running, almost always in a by-election, to fill the parliamentary vacancy created by the death of their husband. (For what it is worth to Women's Lib., there has never been a "married man" or a "widower" running for parliament). Sadly, the number of "gentlemen" has been in steady decline. Although the

length of the list of candidates has nearly doubled over the past fifty years, the number of gentlemen has dropped from fourteen in 1921 to three in 1972. At that, one of the three in the last election was listed on the election documents as a "retired gentleman" and he, along with one other, had no party affiliation. Only Claude Wagner of the Progressive Conservatives was electorally successful. Perhaps the abandonment of the terms "lady" and "gentleman" might best be understood as part of a general movement in the direction of increased specificity in the labelling of occupations and areas of personal interest, combined, at the same time, with a growing reluctance (by no means exclusive to politics) to adopt labels associated with gentility. How else could one explain the label chosen by one woman who in former times, at least, might well have been listed on the ballot simply as a "lady", but who ran in Toronto in both the 1957 and 1958 federal elections as a "voluntary civic affairs observer"? (Whether the decrease in the number of ladies and gentlemen over the past five decades bears any relationship to the increase in parliamentarians' salaries over the same time period remains a moot point.)

The lawyers, as is so often the case, deserve special attention. They have displayed an uncanny knack for survival over the past fifty years of Canadian politics. Other occupational groups that at one time were so much a part of the federal political scene have all but disappeared from parliamentary politics. The gradual reduction in the proportion of farmers, medical doctors, and manufacturers nominated for parliament has been matched by a concomitant reduction in the proportion of members with those occupations elected to parliament—a not unreasonable consequence. (See Table I). For the lawyers, however, the case has been quite different. Their proportion of the candidates nominated has slipped markedly and is now half what it was fifty years ago. In 1930, when the lawyers' percentage of the total number of parliamentary candidates reached its peak, more than one in every four candidates was a lawyer, whereas in 1972 the figure had dropped to slightly more than one in every ten candidates. Yet the lawyers' relative numerical strength in both the House of Commons and the cabinet, although it has evidenced a tendency to fluctuate, has not altered as greatly over the years. It has certainly not kept pace with their reduced proportion of parliamentary candidates. (See Table II). Between twenty-five and

thirty-one per cent of the membership of the House of Commons has been made up of lawyers and (with the exception of 1921, when at least some cognizance had to be taken of the fact that more farmers were sent to parliament than lawyers in the election of that year), between forty-four and sixty-four per cent of the cabinet ministers have been lawyers. This suggests that it makes relatively little difference how few lawyers are nominated as parliamentary candidates: they still manage to end up with about one quarter of the seats in the House, and about one half of the posts in the cabinet.

For the political scientist, or the demographer, or the historian, or some other generally inquisitive type, it matters little that the federal ballots no longer include the occupations of the parliamentary candidates. The researcher has at his disposal the mine of valuable information published in the Chief Electoral Officer's *Report* following each election, and as the *Reports* continue to include the candidates' occupations (as they have since the first one appeared in 1921), nothing, for him at least, has changed. In fact for the past decade his job has been eased, for since 1963 the *Reports* of the Chief Electoral Officer have included the individual candidate's party affiliation. By examining those *Reports*, the social scientist soon discovers that occupational labelling in Canadian federal politics has been clearly recognized as a matter of individual preference. Self-classification has remained the respected rule, free from any attempt to pigeon-hole candidates into specific categories for administrative simplicity.

He learns, too, of the extent to which individuals from an increasingly wide variety of occupational backgrounds have sought public office in Canada. Although the lists of candidates seeking election to parliament have scarcely constituted a microcosm typical of the occupational groupings of the society as a whole, an examination of those lists suggests two important qualities of the Canadian political system: a reasonable degree of openness, and adaptability. Precise numerical representation of groups defined according to occupation, or any other particular characteristic for that matter, should best be left to the ruminations of ideologues. What matters is the extent to which the political community may properly be regarded as fair and equitable in resolving differences and in arriving at decisions through its use of a particular type of representative system. One sign of a healthy political

community is its capacity to permit, relatively free of institutional encumbrances, those who decide to stand for public office to do so. That the occupational composition of the lists of candidates has changed and broadened to the extent that it has since 1921 would seem to attest to the health of the Canadian polity. At the same time the continued dominance of members of the legal profession in the Canadian political arena far beyond that which their numbers in society or in the lists of parliamentary candidates would seem to warrant, suggests a variety of possible explanations: awareness, on the part of those who are highly motivated by political drive, of a relatively safe political career route; recognition, first by the parties, then by the electorate, of the political skills and abilities of those whose education, professional training, and occupational socialization have done so much to equip them for public service; and the possible existence of deeply rooted deferential attitudes on the part of the electorate.

The case for reinstating occupational listings on the federal ballot rests on two or three interrelated points, all having to do in some way or another with the voter. At one time, when the justification for excluding parties from ballots and other electoral documents was based on the theory that parties did not "exist" within the legal framework of parliamentary government, it was crucial to the parties themselves to make obvious to the voters who their candidates were. This was a responsibility welcomed by, and tacitly understood to rest with, the political parties. By the same token, the voter who wanted to tell the candidates apart when he was confronted with the ballot had to know by the time he entered the voting booth which candidate was running for which party. Or more accurately he had to know, as a minimum, one name: that of the candidate running for the party he wished to support.³ This was his responsibility. The change introduced in 1970 does not mean that the parties will no longer continue to do their best to inform the voters of their candidates' names—because, of course, they will; nor does it mean that the voters will no longer avail themselves of the opportunity to match names with parties before they enter the polling booth—because they will, too. But as the responsibilities are no longer exclusively pre-voting ones (and, for that matter, no longer exclusively extra-governmental ones), the change does signify a different attitude on the part of legislators to political parties which, when carried over to the voting level, has a tendency to over-simplify

electoral politics. Now the voter is presented in the only formal electoral document he has an opportunity to view over a period of three, or four, or even five years, information displaying a restricted conception of the political process: NAME and PARTY. The previous form, listing the more individual, less collective characteristics (NAME, ADDRESS and OCCUPATION), at least had the attraction of showing even the most casual voter who might have glanced quickly over the ballot that parties are not the only component in the political process. At the same time, it evidenced a recognition on the part of the legislators that individual candidates were something more than party representatives alone.

Moreover, why penalize the voter? These features of Canadian politics that help to accentuate some of the variety of Canadian society should surely be retained. Who would have preferred, for example, the pretty humdrum Sainte-Marie ballot as it appeared in 1972, with its list of candidates and its all too predictable party labels (Liberal, Progressive Conservative, Social Credit, NDP, two Independents, and one candidate with no listed political affiliation), to the list that would have appeared had the former provisions still obtained: *conseiller technique; pharmacien; agent d'assurances; vendeur; comedienne; gerant de commerce; and comptable?* Virtually any dash of colour in politics is worth the effort. This is no less true when it is a matter of recognizing societal differences as they apply to politics. Take the example of the voters in Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare, who, in 1962, had to choose their MP from among a lobster dealer, a shoemaker and beekeeper, an automobile dealer, and a university professor. They acted as one would have expected true Nova Scotians to act. The lobster dealer was re-elected. But then, there was no lawyer running against him.

Table I

Farmers, Medical Doctors, and Manufacturers,
Per Cent of Candidates and Members of Parliament,
First Election of Each Decade, 1921-1972

	<i>Farmers</i>		<i>Medical Doctors</i>		<i>Manufacturers</i>	
	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>MPs</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>MPs</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>MPs</i>
1921	32	31	8	7	4	3
1930	16	17	10	13	4	4
1940	15	15	6	7	2	2
1953	12	10	1	2	1	1
1962	11	8	2	3	.4	1
1972	6	8	2	3	.2	-

Table II

Lawyers as a Per Cent of Candidates,
Members of Parliament, and Cabinet Ministers,
First Election of Each Decade, 1921-1972

	<i>Lawyers as a Per Cent of Candidates</i>	<i>Lawyers as a Per Cent of MPs</i>	<i>Lawyers as a Per Cent of Cabinets Formed Following Election (excluding Senators)</i>
1921	22	30	37
1930	27	31	56
1940	24	31	64
1953	17	31	55
1962	16	27	44
1972	11	25	50

FOOTNOTES:

1. Canada is one of the few countries to have such a wealth of electoral data presented within a few months of each election. For this study, the occupational listings have been taken from the Chief Electoral Officer's *Reports, 1921-1968*, and *Extracts of Part I and Part IV of the Chief Electoral Officer, December, 1972* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer). The fact that in 1970 occupations were dropped from the ballots at the same time that party affiliations first appeared was an unfortunate combination of events. The arguments presented in this study in favour of reintroducing occupational labels should not, necessarily, be taken as a plea for the abandonment of party affiliation on the ballots. My thanks to A.F. Madden of Nuffield College, Oxford, and D. E. Smith of the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. Stanley Knowles has been one of the very few candidates to have listed two occupations on the ballot at the same time. Rarer still has there been any triple-listing of occupations at the same election by the same person. The example of one woman, running for the Social Credit in 1962 as an "infirmière, institutrice, écrivain", may have broken new ground, but it has not been widely emulated in subsequent elections.
3. For some voters, of course, voting for the candidate, *not the party*, remains their prime consideration - but this too requires prior information.