

HOPES AND FEARS IN CANADIAN POLITICS

By ERIC DENNIS

IF the fathers of Canada's political parties could look down from the galleries of Parliament or sit in with audiences on the hustings today they would view with alarm many of the activities of their heirs and successors. Whether for good or bad, the policies proclaimed and practised by all parties and the methods by which they react to the policies of their opponents usually bear little resemblance to the principles laid down in their foundation charters.

Perhaps Sir John A. Macdonald, George Brown and Alexander Mackenzie, Woodsworth and Aberhart would finally have to say they could do no better in this day and age, but it would take a lot of persuasion. In any event, they would probably extend their sympathies to those holding their party reins because today the field of Canadian politics is not limited by national boundaries nor is a decision made today necessarily applicable tomorrow.

Canada has become a big country in development and in her status among nations. And with it, Government has become a very big business—too big, it is apparent at times, to wait for Parliament to make up its mind on some issues. The complexities involved in running a nation today are so great that often political parties are still trying to decide what stand to take on one matter when another and bigger issue arises.

Besides this, the more equitable distribution of wealth has drawn the political thinking of all parties—except the Communist Labor Progressive which is no longer represented in Parliament—into the same or almost parallel paths. The result is that the main differences in Canadian politics are rapidly getting down to mere party labels and personalities rather than divergent policies. Conservatives of today have been called Liberals of yesterday who have run out of ideas for reform and CCF-ers "Liberals in a hurry". The Social Crediters have been described as the only real Tories left in Canada.

Usually there is more extreme variation of ideas found within parties than between them. Often there is more opposition between Government and Parliament, either openly or behind the scenes, than between party and party.

The Liberals have their right wingers, their middle roaders

and their left wingers. So have the Conservatives, the C.C.F. and, although to a lesser degree, the Social Credit party.

It is found even within the cabinet—that top inner circle of government administrators where there is supposed to be solidarity in speech, action, and even in thought. Prime Minister St. Laurent and his first lieutenant, C. D. Howe, can rightly be considered in the middle of the road. Secretary of State J. W. Pickersgill who was an influencing hand in many of the social security policies introduced by Mackenzie King, is a Liberal "leftist". Ministers like tax gatherer J. J. McCann are in the right bower.

In the Conservative party, there are front benchers' like financial critic James Macdonnell who are rightist in their thinking and others like John Diefenbaker, left of centre.

In the C.C.F. group in Parliament, M. J. Coldwell is having increasing trouble keeping unity of socialistic thought among his members. There are the so-labelled "silk hat socialists" like hardware merchant Ross Thatcher of Moose Jaw who even refuses to support his party's policy of nationalization of banks.

In the Social Credit party, there are such opposing viewpoints as those of John Blackmore of Lethbridge, championing the cause of McCarthyism, and Social Credit Leader Solon Low proclaiming that this is not the party line.

The four parties in Parliament usually talk the same basic language on Canada's foreign policy. All preach free and freer trade. It is only occasionally that the old line of protectionism is heard in the Conservative quarter and it is little louder, if any, than that heard from certain members of other groups. All parties favor continued public ownership of certain industries and the exclusive right of private enterprise in other fields.

The result of all this has been a gradual disappearance of the fire that once flared across the floors of the House of Commons and Senate. In the Upper House old-time debating is all but dead. Only part of the reason for this is the fact that a mere seven Conservatives are left in the Opposition. The chief reason is there is just not enough division in thought.

Although Parliament sessions are getting longer and members are talking more than ever before, because of the expanding job of Government, debates are becoming duller. Weeks can pass on Parliament Hill without opposition of serious consequence on issues of the day between parties. This accord may make Canada a stronger nation but it also creates apathy

among Parliamentarians and among the Canadian public, too, which was quite apparent in the last federal election.

A few weeks ago a young member from the Maritimes rose to deliver his maiden speech in the House of Commons. He had worked on it for days and nights, had consulted older hands, had checked and re-checked his facts, had practised on his talk in the silence of his bedroom. He was sure it would go over in a big way. As he expounded with the best he could muster on the problems of his constituency, his province, and his nation, and what should be done about them, he suddenly made the frightening discovery he was speaking almost into a vacuum. Other members came and went through the lobby curtains. Side discussions in the chamber set up such a clatter he could hardly hear himself despite the new loud speaking system. Page boys brought in the afternoon newspapers and members still in the chamber who were not already engaged in something else turned to them. In the galleries, attendance had dwindled down to a few old men.

After 20 minutes, the new member sat down—a dismayed, and deflated man.

“Nearly everybody walked out on me, damn them!” he protested to friends later. “Is this what happens to a man who fights to get into Parliament?”

To rub more salt in the wounds of his pride, he found the next morning’s newspapers had given him only one line. He is now beginning to consider he was actually lucky. Many backbenchers don’t even get that.

Outside of cabinet ministers, when they make important statements of policy, there are only a few Parliamentarians left who can be assured of at least a half-filled House when they have something to say. C. G. “Chubby” Power, wartime National Defence Minister for Air, is one of them; Progressive Conservative John Diefenbaker and CCF-er Clarence Gillis are others.

The reason is that they at least can give the impression they are saying something that’s worth listening to. They do it with neatly turned phrases, a bit of acting, repartee, and without reading their speeches. The same speeches droned out by some other member, reading, would fall flat and would draw few more than the necessary quorum for an audience. Speech-reading, which has become the custom rather than the exception in the chambers of Canada’s Parliament even though it is considered against the rules, has done more to kill the vitality of politicians

and their debates than any other single factor. It leaves the impression that much, if not all, of it was copied from books or prepared by somebody else.

The truth, unfortunately, is that most members don't care how many members listen to them in the House of Commons or how they sound. Primarily, they want to get the speech on Hansard so they can send copies home to their constituents, hoping at the same time that the press will give it publicity.

This decline in the old-time political zip of modern Canadian politicians has also lessened the interest of the public in them and in their views. Without the ability to rally the public through individual members of Parliament and without clear cut principles opposing those of opponent parties which individual Canadians can fight for, parties today have to rely to an increasing degree on organization to get support at the polls. This is moreso in the case of Opposition parties because the party in power is able to hold out to the public the record of the benefits it has extended—family allowances, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and other forms of assistance—even though the public paid for them, in the first place, through taxation.

Despite this, the Liberal party maintains the best system of national organization and it sees that it works not just at election time but between elections.

The Opposition parties are only beginning to realize that organization is what counts—not speeches and high sounding policy statements which, too often, are merely of the "me-too" variety worded a little differently from those of the Government or are contradicted a few days later by the very people who proclaimed them.

For good government, it is necessary to have a strong opposition and this calls for both quantity and quality. Without it, ministers will naturally seek to increase their powers, Parliament will be disregarded to an increasing degree by the Government and public faith in institutions will decline.

The Conservative party, which has been in Opposition at Ottawa for the last 19 years and is now but a shadow of its glorious past, has taken another good look at itself in recent weeks and has set out on a new organization effort. It has decided to concentrate on welding together under its banner as many of the antigovernment voters as possible instead of continuing to seek power by changing leaders and changing its name and changing its policies.

At its annual meeting held a few weeks ago, a young Toron-

tonian with plenty of energy, enterprise, ability, personality, time and private capital was elected national president and, as such, also chief organizer, and pledged himself to "revitalize the party from coast to coast". President-elect George Hees has set his hand to going into the farming, fishing, forest and factory lands of the nation to win friends and influence people for the Conservative party and he has many potentials to work on.

The Liberals won a return to power in the 1953 election with 173 of the 265 seats in Parliament but with slightly less than half of the popular vote and only 32 per cent of the eligible votes. They dropped 20 seats below their 1949 victory (which had been slightly whittled in by-elections between 1949 and 1953). The Conservatives gained by 10, the C.C.F. by 10 and the Social Credit party by five.

The Conservatives see brighter hopes not only in this result but in the fact that Canada's largest province, Ontario, has a Conservative government with 80 of the 90 seats in that legislature; in the fact that, for the first time in many years, the party recently won a seat in the legislature of socialist-strong Saskatchewan, regained two seats in Social Credit Alberta's Legislature, increased its representation in Nova Scotia's House and regained power in New Brunswick. In the first by-elections of the 22nd Parliament on March 22, the party held two Ontario seats and picked up additional votes—but not enough—in two Quebec ridings.

The biggest strikes against the Conservative party today are the absence of a unified support for its leader, George Drew, and an undercurrent conflict between its so-called "Old Guard" and those who want to break the grip it has held on the party. Mr. Drew was given "unanimous" endorsement at the recent annual meeting of the National Progressive Conservative Association but this was a standing vote registered only by the attending delegates who had not been sent to it from organized, grass-roots constituency meetings. There are also reports from some who did attend the meeting that they did not vote against the motion of confidence but neither did they display support for it.

Mr. Drew, with this recorded vote of confidence, however, now will likely remain in command of the party until after the next election and it will be up to himself and Mr. Hees and others in the top brackets to sell him as a man who warrants support and who can form a good government. Next to organization,

putting across a leader to the public is today the most important undertaking for a party unless the government of the day does something that will arouse a strong anti-government vote. An inherent shyness in Mr. Drew which is often mistaken for aloofness makes such a selling job not an easy one despite his proven capabilities.

There are many others who have been mentioned as being better material for the Conservative leadership but it is questionable whether they could bring any more gains to the party on personality, alone. What is needed by the Conservatives is extensive organization plus some firm, lasting policies, especially something that will excite the imagination of the voters.

In the last federal election, the party had only a weak organization at work. Candidates were often named at open conventions and many of these were packed by supporters of opportunists who had no special love for the party. Neither was there a policy that the Conservatives could drive home to the voting public. Mr. Drew and his associates came out with a multi-point platform but it was too late in the game to do anything with it except give the opposing parties something to hit with some well-aimed shots. Liberals, CCF-ers and Social Crediters bombarded it with claims that it was impractical because it promised tax reductions on the one hand and new expenditures which would drive taxes higher on the other.

The feeling of many political observers at Ottawa is that the Conservative Party, as the Official Opposition, misses many an opportunity to level constructive criticism at the government on issues of the day and thus gain political capital. Instead, it too often takes stands which either are unpopular or strange. An example was the suggestion made by Mr. Drew a few weeks ago that the Government should advise the U. S. it would be "unfortunate" if Senator McCarthy was allowed to come across the border to preach McCarthyism in Toronto. Many took this as a threat to one of the basic freedoms—the freedom of speech—in this country and, regardless of their hatred for McCarthyism, they were ready to fight for his right to be heard, even on Canadian soil.

If the Conservatives can achieve the shot in the arm they need through the proposed party "revitalization" program, it will be good not only for them but for Canadian democracy. The longer one party remains in power, the greater is the need for a strong Opposition to keep it in check. There is little chance that either of the two splinter parties in Parliament—

the C.C.F. and the Social Credit—will form the Official Opposition, at least for a few years yet. They are feuding between themselves. There is also disagreement within the parties on major policy issues.

Many CCF-ers say openly there is little use making an all-out effort to get into the Government or Official Opposition benches until the next depression comes along because socialism cannot flourish on a national scale at a time when the pockets of the average Canadian are jingling. Anyway, most of their policies have been taken over in recent years by the Liberal Government and put into effect with the credit going to the Liberals, instead of the C.C.F.

The C.C.F. also may have a leadership problem on its hands soon, but not for the same reasons as those which stirred up divisions within the Conservative party. M. J. Coldwell, who has led the group since the Woodsworth era and is one of the ablest and most sincere politicians ever to sit in the House of Commons, is not in good health. There is some talk that he will resign at the party's convention this Summer. Should he do this, the party will not be short of potential leaders. There are available men like Premier Tommy Douglas of Saskatchewan and that versatile printer-preacher-politician, Stanley Knowles, M.P. for Winnipeg North Centre. But there are indications that many CCF-ers in high places would not be too ready to give their loyal support.

The Social Credit party is hoping it can do some day in the national field what it did in British Columbia in its last election. After serving as a one province party only for several years, it stepped across the boundary and into a political vacuum created by public distrust in existing parties in the Legislature. It swept the province with missionary zeal. On the type of government it gives to British Columbians depends, to a large degree, whether or not it can make advances in other provinces. Most Canadians felt that it could not miss in oil-rich Alberta. With British Columbia, it's different.

Social Credit national headquarters were recently moved from Edmonton to Toronto to be in the centre of the national political field and the party is planning a country-wide organization spurt preparatory to putting candidates in every constituency in the next federal election—and as many provincial contests as possible in the meantime. Here again there has been talk of a leadership change. Some consider that Premier Manning of Alberta, who has been able to build up quite a

personal Sunday morning following with his radio religious talks, would be a better drawing card for the party than the present national leader, Solon Low.

There also had been speculation in some quarters that the Social Crediters, who now sit in the extreme right bower of Canadian politics and preach many of the principles that have been apparently discarded by the Tories, might join forces with the Conservatives. Premier Manning has even been mentioned by some old-line Conservatives as a potential national Tory leader. All this has been spiked for the time being, at least. At the recent annual meeting of the Conservative party, a statement of policy against accepting Social Crediters was endorsed.

"The principles of the Conservative party, based upon the concepts of freedom of the individual and freedom of economic enterprise, can never be reconciled with those of a party which believes in theories of state capitalism and restrictions of the rights and liberty of the individual and of the press," the statement reads. Social Credit Leader Low reacted to this with his own pronouncement that there could never be any agreement or rapprochement between his party and the Conservatives.

While all is not well with the ties holding together the Opposition parties, there appears to be no question of unity with the ranks of the Liberals. Even though it has left, centre and right wings of thought, the Liberal party has rallied around its leader, Prime Minister St. Laurent, with greater loyalty and affection than it ever did around Mackenzie King during his long and successful years as head of the party and of the government. This goes in English-speaking Canada as well as in St. Laurent's own French-Canadian Quebec.

St. Laurent, now 72 but as fit and with as much fight as ever, has no intentions of quitting as long as his health holds out and there is no intrigue within the party to get rid of him. In fact, all Liberals seem happy at the thought he is staying and hope he will lead them again in the next election. He had wanted to retire prior to the 1953 election, as he had wanted to after the war and the term of service for which he was drafted by King, but Liberal stalwarts pressured him to stay on because they felt there was nobody else who could win as many votes for the party. He finally agreed after his advisors, worried by the results of various provincial elections and federal by-elections, convinced him that the party might be in trouble and could be defeated or, at least, could fail to get a clear majority.

Mr. St. Laurent refused to retreat before what was pictured as an anti-government storm and he led the Liberals back to another term in power. It was during this election campaign that St. Laurent started to change his opinion about his job. The thoughts of an easy life in his Quebec City home he once held disappeared. He found he was enjoying politics and that probably he would be very unhappy away from it.

Around him, St. Laurent has an able ministry, both politically wise and administratively wise. Experience from their jobs in Canada and experience from close contact with political and administrative leaders of other countries have taught his ministers much. On them, he found, he can depend for loyalty and for perfect tuning in the flexibility of policy making and policy application in keeping with the steadily changing spirit of the times. He had no worries when he picked up his bags earlier this year and took off on a round-the-world goodwill flight that won for him, his party, and his country new friends and new kudos. His trusty lieutenant, Trade and Commerce Minister C. D. Howe, took over as Acting Prime Minister and leader of the government benches in Parliament. If Mr. Howe had not been available, he would readily have placed Finance Minister Abbott, External Affairs Minister Pearson or one of a half dozen others in command with complete faith in them. When several of the top ministers had to go to Washington during the Prime Minister's tour, Defence Minister Claxton took over as the senior minister left in Ottawa.

When Prime Minister St. Laurent goes, the problem of the Liberal party will not be one of trying to find a suitable successor but whom to choose from among several good potentials—Howe, Pearson, Abbott, Claxton, Public Works Minister Winters, Citizenship Minister Harris, Health Minister Martin and others. All have proven their ability.

The personalities and capabilities of St. Laurent and many of his ministers plus the policies like family allowances, old age pensions without means tests, the fathering of NATO, the proposed construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, alone, if necessary, that have aroused imagination of Canadians have kept Liberalism predominant in Canada. They have been enough to overshadow in the minds of most Canadians such issues as continued unnecessary order-in-council government, extravagance, unemployment and trade reverses which the Opposition has tried to bring to the fore.

It is true that the Liberals lost seats in the last general

election but party leaders say they are not worried. In fact, some openly claim they would have been happier if they had lost more because it would have provided a stronger Opposition to make the Liberals now being groomed for future portfolios a keener lot. They realize, they say, the danger in lethargy. One veteran cabinet minister and a strong influencing hand in the moulding of mid 20th-century Liberalism has said he would like to see his party in the Official Opposition for a year or two—for its own good.

What would happen if the Conservatives did move into the Government benches and the Liberals into the Opposition? The Liberals say not much would change, if anything, in policies because the Conservatives today are really Liberals with another name.

The Conservatives have indicated there would be changes. They have committed themselves to a "drastic reduction" in Government expenditures and a lowering of taxes, a more equitable distribution of the tax dollar between the different governmental taxing authorities in Canada, a contributory health insurance scheme if they could get the provinces to cooperate, such things as equal pay for men and women, increased research into new uses for Canadian resources and the rights of the payers of any provincial income tax to deduct from federal income tax an amount equal to what their province would get from Ottawa under a tax rental agreement. The latter, a policy laid down at the recent annual meeting of the Conservative party, is taken in Ottawa as an overture made exclusively to voters of French-Canadian Quebec which has been fighting for a deduction equal to 15 per cent of the federal tax instead of the five per cent allowed under the tax rental formula. The Conservatives claim other provinces which already have signed agreements want it, too.

Mr. Drew has to break the hold the national Liberal party has on Quebec to win an election. Only time will tell whether Quebec voters will repay him with their ballots for fighting their cause in the national field. It will also tell whether he will lose votes outside of Quebec because of it.

A question which is often raised as Canada moves further and faster along the path of its invigorated economy is this: Will Canada get back to a two-party system or are splinter parties here to stay and, if they are, will they bring to Canada the instability of government experienced in France, Italy and other countries with multi-party parliaments?

W. S. Gilbert wrote that every boy or every girl born into this world alive was either a little Liberal or a little Conservative, capital "L" and capital "C". But they lived in a different age and in a land where there was not the same spirit or potential spirit of rebellion against commonly accepted creeds and customs.

So far, most of the splinter parties that have sprung up in Canada have been virtually seven-day wonders. They have been born on a spirit of discouragement or disgust, have flourished for a while and the have died on their own or have become absorbed into the old-line parties. This happened with the Progressive party of the 1920's, the United Farmers, the Reconstructionists and others.

Will it also happen to the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Social Credit party?

If the past can be taken as a guide, the answer is yes and others will rise to take their places with similar or completely new political creeds. But, the old-line parties cannot afford to dismiss the possibility that new movements can spread like prairie fires in Canada if enough Canadians consider that the big parties have been tried and found wanting.

Canada's progress had developed more than minerals, forests, and fisheries. It has developed a better educated citizenry with newspapers and radios—and, next, television—in every home to keep the public informed.

More and more Canadians no longer feel they are breaking faith if they don't vote the way father and grandfather did. If they considered the old-line parties had failed them and new parties and their new ideas looked good, probably they would be less hesitant today than they were yesterday in supporting them at the polls.
