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THE ELECTION OF 1963 AND NATIONAL UNITY

RECENTLY I HAVE POINTED OUT the comparative ease with which consensus and conflict have been kept in balance by the Canadian electoral system despite the wide diversity of views within the country.¹ Twice before 1962—in 1925 and 1957—elections had been indecisive, but in each instance another election within a year had given one party an overall majority.

The elections of 1962 and 1963, in failing to produce a similar result, were therefore unique. In 1962 the Liberals increased their share of the popular vote over that of 1958 in every province except Quebec; in 1963 they improved their position still further in all ten provinces. But these additions of public support occurred after their calamitous defeat of 1958 and proved insufficient to give them a clear-cut victory. Indeed, the electorate showed an unmistakable reluctance to entrust them with the reins of office. In Newfoundland alone did they get the support of more than half the voters in 1963; in Manitoba and British Columbia it was barely a third, in Saskatchewan and Alberta less than a quarter. Even in defeat the Progressive Conservatives polled more than half the vote in two provinces, increased their share of the popular vote in four provinces, and secured more votes than the Liberals in five provinces and the Yukon and Northwest Territories (see accompanying tables). To all appearances the principal changes in party support since 1958 have been due more to the increasingly unattractive image created by the Conservative party and its leader than to the enthusiastic acceptance of the Liberals and their leader.

Percentages of Popular Vote by Provinces
in the last Five Canadian Elections

Liberals					
	1953	1957	1958	1962	1963
Nova Scotia	53.0	45.1	38.4	42.4	46.6
New Brunswick	52.7	48.0	43.4	44.4	47.2
Prince Edward Island	51.1	46.6	37.5	43.3	46.8
Newfoundland	67.3	61.8	54.5	59.0	64.4
Quebec	61.0	57.6	45.7	39.2	45.5
Ontario	46.9	37.1	32.6	41.8	46.3
Manitoba	40.3	26.1	21.5	31.1	33.8
Saskatchewan	37.7	30.3	19.6	22.8	24.2
Alberta	35.0	27.9	13.7	19.4	22.0
British Columbia	30.9	20.5	16.1	27.3	32.4
Yukon and N. W. T.	53.8	58.6	49.9	45.7	42.0

Progressive Conservatives					
	1953	1957	1958	1962	1963
Nova Scotia	40.1	50.4	57.0	47.3	46.9
New Brunswick	41.9	48.7	54.1	46.5	40.5
Prince Edward Island	48.1	52.4	62.2	51.3	51.5
Newfoundland	28.1	37.8	45.3	36.0	30.0
Quebec	29.4	30.6	49.6	29.5	19.6
Ontario	40.3	48.8	56.4	39.3	35.3
Manitoba	27.0	35.8	56.7	41.6	42.3
Saskatchewan	11.7	23.2	51.4	50.4	53.6
Alberta	14.5	27.7	59.9	42.8	45.4
British Columbia	14.1	32.6	49.4	27.3	23.4
Yukon and N. W. T.	26.7	41.4	48.9	47.6	53.8

Actually the elections of 1962 and 1963 are part of the same piece and cannot be divorced from each other. Of the former election I have written elsewhere:

"In 1962 it was only natural that there should be a swing away from the Diefenbaker government in all regions, in view of its overwhelming victory four years earlier. But the extent, unevenness, locale, and beneficiaries of the swing were sometimes bewildering. . . . Never had so many segments of the Canadian electorate behaved so differently at any one time."² Yet in view of the general swing to the Liberals in 1962 and the chaotic political situation which followed the election, it may seem strange that nothing like a genuine ground-swell in their favour developed over the next ten months. Instead, the election of 1963 did little more than confirm and reinforce the attitudes that had been evidenced by the voters of different classes and regions in June of 1962.

As a result, Canada's disunity is now described as "our most pressing problem." Nor is it viewed simply as another phase of our long-term racial problem, the continuing effort to secure a *modus vivendi* between English- and French-speaking Canadians. Professor John Saywell thinks that "not since 1921 has the nation been so deeply divided on an urban-rural basis." He continues: "Indeed, the revulsion of professional elements, the business community and the lords of the press [against the government] were skilfully used [by Mr. Diefenbaker] to build up urban-rural antagonisms in a desperate Machiavellian attempt to retain power. . . . In this one sense, Mr. Diefenbaker's noble vision of a united nation marching towards new frontiers became a nightmare of rampant sectionalism and deep-seated occupational divisions."³

If the foregoing statement purports to suggest that Mr. Diefenbaker deliberately engineered a rift between urban and rural Canada by consciously alienating the former to ensure the support of the latter, it makes little sense. No politician would go out of his way to spurn more than half the electorate in this manner. The situation is considerably more complex than that. In some measure the election itself was precipitated by acts of American government officials which were, to say the least, of dubious propriety. Before the campaign was well advanced, two additional factors disturbed Mr. Diefenbaker. Most of the metropolitan press, and particularly two big Toronto dailies which normally support the Conservatives, turned against him, while the financial interests reneged on their usual contributions to the Conservative campaign chest.

The outcome was not surprising. At Vineland on March 5 Mr. Diefenbaker referred to a conspiracy of great interests, national and international, having aligned themselves against him. His subsequent speeches did not elaborate upon these interests more explicitly, but it was apparently the so-called "Bay Street Barons", the Toronto newspapers, and the American government and periodicals that were

intended. "Everybody's against me but the people", he told a typical meeting. "No, I haven't got the big Toronto papers with me, but a crowd like this makes it pretty plain that the people are reading other papers." John Diefenbaker was using the same tactics to woo the Canadian people that he had found so effective in winning over Western Canadian juries. As columnist Gerald Waring put it, "Now the Canadian people are his jury, and he's working on their sympathy, their instinctive tendency to side with the underdog—especially an underdog hard done by." Electioneering of this kind appears altogether unedifying, but it is neither better nor worse than many of the tactics of democratic politics. In any case it has in no sense widened a rift between urban and rural Canada as Professor Saywell seems to allege.

If rift there is, it has developed over the past four or five years and stems naturally from the unique phenomenon of having a prairie radical as leader of the Progressive Conservative party and from other personal characteristics of Mr. Diefenbaker. Professor Frank Underhill, although no admirer of the former Prime Minister, accurately summarizes his peculiar virtues and disabilities:

Emotionally and temperamentally Mr. Diefenbaker is attached to the little man. This, indeed, is his strong point But [his] emotional commitment works in a peculiar way. Amid the complexities of our modern civilization, the little man's intelligence is not sufficient by itself unless assisted by that of trained experts and specialists. And [Mr. Diefenbaker's] populist democratic emotions make him too suspicious of expert civil servants and central bankers. . . . He too easily assumes that the nobility of these emotions, which identify him with the ordinary citizen, is a satisfactory substitute for expert knowledge and for action based on that knowledge.⁴

According to J. W. Dafoe, after Laurier had become Prime Minister he felt that he should not be expected to do anything which might endanger his standing with his compatriots. Similarly John Diefenbaker made sure that his favourite "little man"—the Prairie wheat-grower—could not complain of shabby treatment at his hands. At the outset his government accepted without question the Saskatchewan dam project even though a Liberal government had more than once rejected it because the experts had declared it to be economically impracticable. When climatic conditions resulted in bad harvests, he lost no time providing acreage payments that were geared especially to meet the needs of the small farmer. Above all, by facilitating the sale of wheat to Communist China and the Iron Curtain countries, he and his Minister of Agriculture, Alvin Hamilton, emptied the grain elevators and brought unprecedented prosperity to the Western farmer.

It ought not to be surprising, therefore, that the electors of the three Prairie Provinces continued to show an overwhelming preference for John Diefenbaker

in the election of 1963. As Peter Regenstreif has indicated, he had been successful in creating an impression among Western farmers that "he, personally, [was] their representative in spite of the fact that his party might not be." Even in Manitoba, where there was considerable disillusionment with Canadian politics, Lester Pearson appeared to be such an unpalatable alternative that switches away from the Conservatives were held to a minimum. As a result, the Conservative party won every rural seat in the Prairie Provinces except Red Deer and Medicine Hat, and even in those two ridings Social Crediters Robert Thompson and H. A. Olsen had their previous majorities reduced.

This is the most remarkable facet of the radical transformation wrought in the Conservative party by John Diefenbaker. Ten years earlier the party was fighting for its very life on the prairies. In Manitoba only one Conservative was elected from a rural riding; in Saskatchewan, Conservative candidates lost their deposits in every seat other than Prince Albert and Qu'Appelle; and in Alberta a similar fate befell their candidate in every rural riding. To illustrate the change which has occurred, the constituency of Vegreville, Alberta, may be cited. In 1953 the Conservatives did not even run a candidate in the riding; in 1957 their nominee, Frank Fane, polled less than ten per cent of the vote and lost his deposit; in 1963 he secured more than sixty per cent of the vote, and his five opponents lost their deposits. In all three Prairie Provinces the Conservatives garnered a greater share of the popular vote in 1963 than in 1962, and in Saskatchewan they actually did better than in 1958.

Mr. Diefenbaker's sympathy for the underdog extended also to Canada's other have-not region, the Atlantic Provinces. In providing them with financial assistance, he was almost lavish. His government instituted the system of Atlantic Provinces Adjustments Grants, promised a causeway to connect Prince Edward Island with the mainland, offered a Federal loan on generous terms to New Brunswick to complete the Beechwood power project, kept a number of Nova Scotian coal mines in operation through Federal subventions long after there was any economic justification for their survival, and enabled the shipyards of the region to operate at capacity by providing Federal subsidies.

Measured in political terms, this type of assistance was not nearly as effective as in the Western provinces, although the Conservatives did manage to win half the seats in the Maritime Provinces in 1963. For one thing the measures in question did not result in the same degree of economic well-being that they produced on the prairies. But there were other factors as well. While traditionalism is much stronger in the Atlantic Region and swings in voting much less pronounced, there is normally a marked tendency for the shifting voter to follow the national trend.

At a time when many voters in the region were disturbed about the political instability at Ottawa but had the feeling that Mr. Pearson would have the largest contingent in the next House of Commons, it was only natural that the swing would be to the Liberals, even though Mr. Diefenbaker remained considerably more popular than the Liberal leader, and even though many voters declined to switch because of the Conservative government's considerate treatment of the area. Local factors also had their effect. In New Brunswick the split along racial lines, already marked in 1962, became, if anything, more pronounced in 1963, while in Nova Scotia the intervention of a popular provincial premier and government kept the Conservative losses within smaller proportions.

In contrast, the collapse of the Conservatives in central Canada in 1962 and 1963 stems not a little from the other side of Mr. Diefenbaker's character as portrayed by Professor Underhill. As chief prosecutor of the St. Laurent administration in the 1957 general election, he found full scope for his special talents. Buttressed by the enactment of a popular legislative programme, he played the same role to perfection in the 1958 election, even though a few intellectuals were already suspicious of the evangelical nature of his political oratory. Subsequently the story was simply that of a steadily deteriorating image of himself and his government. When the question was one of providing government assistance in piecemeal fashion to distressed economic groups, he could act with decision. But when it came to formulating coherent defence and economic policies, he quickly gave the impression of being less sure-footed. His suspicion of the Civil Service built up by the preceding Liberal administrations led him to mistrust their recommendations. His steady alienation of the leaders of opinion in the community led him to minimize the positive accomplishments of his government and to exaggerate its deficiencies.

Take defence, for example. Whether a middle country like Canada can formulate a rational, consistent defence policy in a day of rapid technological change is problematical. But the Prime Minister's tolerance of the inconsistencies and reversals of position of George Pearkes over an extended period created the impression that the government was bumbling in defence, and when the capable Douglas Harkness finally took over the Department of National Defence, it was too late to repair the damage. Or take the conduct of Dominion-provincial or Commonwealth or international relations. As Professor Underhill sees it, Mr. Diefenbaker's favourite course was to seek one of those big conferences in which he could make "a melodramatic, and well-reported, display of his noble emotion." He failed to recognize that public conferences accomplished nothing "unless they ha[d] been preceded by months of hard, unspectacular, confidential negotiation by technical

experts." Even in domestic affairs, writes Professor Underhill, Mr. Diefenbaker displayed more of a genius for the theatrical than for "the humdrum business . . . of putting legislation through Parliament."⁵ Undoubtedly this point of view is over-stated. Yet it was an impression shared by an influential segment of the Canadian public, and in politics impressions are often more significant than actuality.

In economic matters the Diefenbaker government was plagued with substantial unemployment throughout most of its term of office. Deficit financing may be a remedy for this condition, but there is little evidence that the substantial deficits incurred by the Conservatives fitted into a well-conceived programme of fiscal planning. Again, the impression left with many observers was that of piecemeal expedients and a general failure to cope with the basic problems of the economy.

This combination of circumstances led after 1958 to the steady alienation by the Conservative government of the armed services, federal government employees, intellectuals, business executives and professional people, and generally speaking, the upper-middle and upper income brackets of Canadian society. Peter Regenstreif first uncovered the defection of the last-named groups from the Conservative party as he conducted his trend analysis survey in the major urban centres during the 1962 election campaign. The crisis in Canada's balance of international payments which appeared to have been concealed from the public eye until after the election, the failure of the Diefenbaker government to proceed in a normal manner with the public business and especially its inability to present a budget over an extended period, the profound disenchantment with Mr. Diefenbaker himself, and the distinct unease resulting from the prospects of continued political instability all led to the almost complete collapse of Conservative strength among these groups in many of the major urban centres in 1963.

This clearly points out the fact that in our collectivistic society political attitudes are more and more determined by what various groups and classes expect and get from their government. As the American political analyst Samuel Lubell observed, the Western farmer and the elderly, who have come to expect direct government assistance, and who, in fact, were recent beneficiaries of such action, continued to be ardent supporters of John Diefenbaker in the 1963 general election. On the other hand, the higher income groups, which, above all, wanted stable government and responsible fiscal management, turned against Mr. Diefenbaker *en masse*. Even more than in 1962, Mr. Regenstreif found the Conservatives taking a shellacking at their hands in 1963. In the Montreal ridings with large Anglo-Saxon populations which were once the principal source of Conservative strength in Quebec—Mount Royal, Notre-Dame-de-Grace, St. Antoine-Westmount, and St. Lawrence—

St. George—the Conservative candidates all lost their deposits, and in Mount Royal the N.D.P. actually outpolled the Conservatives.

In the eighteen constituencies of Toronto and York County, all of which were won by the Conservatives in 1958, the contest for seats was waged between the Liberals and the N.D.P., and no Conservatives were elected. Indignant and horrified at what Mr. Diefenbaker had done to their party, many Conservatives bolted it for the first time. David Lewis, the N.D.P. member for York South, apparently lost his seat because of the almost complete defection of the normally Conservative vote in Forest Hill Village to the Liberals. But the Conservative collapse in Toronto and the Yorks was not confined to the higher income brackets. The ethnic voters, most of whom supported Mr. Diefenbaker in 1958, this time turned to the Liberal party, perhaps because they identified it as the party of the common man, while the working class and lower income groups shifted either to the Liberals or to the N.D.P., possibly because of the Conservatives' failure to cope with chronic unemployment. However, the swings were a matter of communications as well. Without a doubt the vocally strong anti-Conservative bias of almost all the opinion leaders of the community permeated and influenced all classes and conditions of voters in the metropolitan area.

Yet it neither permeated nor influenced substantially the rural voters of the province, and particularly those of western Ontario. As Helen Allen of the *Toronto Telegram* wrote, "Somewhat amazingly I have noted very little anti-Diefenbaker sentiment outside the urban areas. Very, very little." Indeed, 19 of the 27 seats won by the Conservatives in Ontario were contiguous seats in western Ontario, a region which up to the turn of the century was a bastion of Liberal strength. In this area the Conservatives made their only gains in Ontario in the ridings of Kent and Lambton-Kent. The evidence is that the higher-income voters of London, Guelph, Galt, and Kitchener, which are included in this largely rural enclave of seats, tended to shift to the Liberals but not in sufficient numbers to prevent the Conservatives from winning by reduced majorities.

In most urban areas throughout the country similar shifts occurred, although in varying degree. Not a single Conservative managed to get elected in metropolitan Hamilton or Vancouver. In Carleton, Ontario, the urban and suburban voters, many of them civil servants, shifted in sufficient numbers to overcome the Conservative bias of the rural areas, and for the first time since Confederation the constituency failed to elect a Conservative. Gordon Churchill managed to retain the lower-middle-class constituency of Winnipeg South for the Conservatives, but Liberal Harry Hays won the former Conservative stronghold of Calgary South with its upper-income composition. Conservative candidates ran up big majorities in Regina and Saskatoon but, as Peter Regenstreif indicates, "the attitude that the world

revolves around the farm is not confined to the farmer" in Saskatchewan. Much more surprisingly, the Conservatives increased their majorities in the three Edmonton seats, even Marcel Lambert in the upper-income riding of Edmonton West. These last results point out the danger of treating in the aggregate special segments of the population, such as the urban voter, without reference to special regional conditions.

Much more serious than the rift between urban and rural Canada is that between English and French Canada. Between 1891 and 1958 the Liberals always secured a majority of Quebec's seats in Federal elections. Since then the province's political behaviour has been, to say the least, dynamic. Two powerful factors operated to produce change in 1958. The new Liberal leader, Mr. Pearson, had none of the special appeal of his predecessor in Quebec (his opponents dubbed him *Monsieur Personne*). But above all, a general feeling pervaded the province that Mr. Diefenbaker would win handily and that Quebec would suffer if it declined to get on the band wagon. The result was that the Conservatives secured half the votes and two-thirds of the seats, their first victory in Quebec in 67 years.

Disillusionment with the Diefenbaker government quickly followed. In 1962 the Island of Montreal returned to its traditional Liberal allegiance, electing 20 Liberals to one Conservative. But elsewhere it was different. Outside of Montreal, the Social Crediters took 36.5 per cent of the vote and elected 26 members to 15 for the Liberals and 13 for the Conservatives. The seats of the *Creditistes* extended in an almost continuous band from the Eastern Townships, along the American border, northward through Quebec City, and across the northern part of the province. For the first time in history a third party had achieved substantial success in a Federal election in Quebec. Peter Regenstreif, who was one of the few observers to forecast the effectiveness of Réal Caouette's demagoguery among the lower-income groups in the rural areas, described Social Credit in Quebec as "basically a mixture of economic dissatisfaction and ethnic identification canalized by powerful oratory." He attributed part of its success to the fact that neither of the old parties possessed a leader who was particularly attractive to Quebec.

Buoyed up by its 1962 success, Social Credit widened its scope of operations in 1963 to include all the Quebec ridings and particularly those on the Island of Montreal. By thus diluting its strength, it may have hurt itself, for although it increased its popular vote from 26.0 to 27.3 per cent, its candidates elected fell from 26 to 20. On the Island of Montreal it failed to win seats, but it increased its vote substantially, running second in four low-income ridings on the eastern and southern part of the Island. There it had the support of voters who might normally be expected to

support the N.D.P.; in contrast, the N.D.P. did much better among the intellectuals and middle-class voters in higher income ridings.

Outside of Montreal, the real contest was between the Liberals and *Creditistes*, although seven Conservatives managed to retain their seats because of their own popularity rather than that of their party. This time Peter Regenstreif discovered an intensification of the patterns that had been evidenced a year earlier. He found even less support than before for the *Creditistes* among better income groups and suggested income break-off points in both rural and urban ridings above which such support became negligible. He concluded somewhat disconsolately that "the most striking feature of the political situation in French Canada today is the development of genuine and passionate class consciousness on the part of both Sacred supporters and opponents alike. Political preferences are almost always expressed in terms of "we" and "they". . . . In French Canada, there is the party of the rich, the business community, the professions and the skilled—and a party of the poor. It goes without saying that Caouette is a master of intensifying this cleavage."⁶ Nonetheless, the Social Credit leader could not contend with the genuine fear of political instability and the tendency to revert to traditional Liberal voting; on April 8 the Liberals secured 45.5 per cent of the Quebec vote and 47 of its 75 seats.

It is somewhat paradoxical that the returns of 1963 clearly manifest a split between rural and urban Canada which does not appear to have serious long-term implications, yet throw little light upon a split between English and French Canada which may threaten Confederation itself. Even in 1963 the Liberals improved their position slightly in the three Prairie Provinces, and put up strong fights in the nineteen constituencies in western Ontario which went to the Conservatives. If Mr. Pearson continues to sell the Western farmer's wheat, and if, as appears possible, he projects a much more attractive image as Prime Minister than as party leader, he should have no difficulty in recapturing a substantial segment of the rural vote for his party. But he must beware of one hazard. His opponents will be collecting evidence to persuade the unsophisticated voter that the Liberals have learned nothing during their six years in opposition and that they are still divorced from the "grass-roots". So at all costs he must avoid the impression that his ministry is composed of "egg-heads" who put the expert knowledge of the Civil Service ahead of public demands.

In their turn the Conservatives are not condemned permanently to the role of agrarian party. "Tory" Toronto had disappeared long before 1963, but Conservative candidates will in future wage successful campaigns both in Toronto and in York County. The traditional Conservative urban vote will return to the fold as

soon as the conditions which caused its disaffection have disappeared. This could only mean the retirement of John Diefenbaker, since the revulsion of the sophisticated city voters against his leadership was such that he can never regain their confidence. When Gordon Churchill—with the apparent approval of Mr. Diefenbaker—recently read into Hansard a forged letter allegedly bearing the American ambassador's signature, he demonstrated conclusively that the Conservative high command had not even yet learned why it had alienated the leaders of opinion in the community. Ideally the new Conservative leader should be someone who can continue to get substantial support on the Prairies and at the same time present a favourable appearance to the urban elements which John Diefenbaker alienated. Since Western Conservative M.P.'s regarded the resignation of George Hees as a traitorous act, he fails to satisfy the former condition. Premier Duff Roblin of Manitoba meets both tests, and the additional one of being able to talk fluently to French Canadians in their own language, a probable prerequisite for all national party leaders of the future.

The second and more serious rift is simply beclouded by the successes of the *Creditistes* in 1962 and 1963. Even if Social Credit commits hara-kiri through internal dissension, national unity will remain imperilled. The departure of Maurice Duplessis from the political scene resulted in the emergence of forces which had been pent up for twenty years or more. A renaissance followed in every facet of Quebec life, including the political. Throughout the entire French-Canadian community of Quebec the idea is now generally accepted that French Canadians are second-class citizens, not partners in Confederation. A bewildering variety of organizations, some strongly separatist, reflect this idea in varying shades.

The anti-intellectualism of Caouette has a strong nationalist ingredient, but it makes its principal appeal to lower-income groups through its economic arguments. Hence the *Creditistes* are less of a threat to Confederation than the intellectuals and opinion leaders of the community, who appear to have become determined nationalists *en masse*. Veteran students of Canadian politics like Professor Underhill, who consider the French Canadians to have been the best politicians in the country, especially in their ability to secure accommodations not adverse to their own interests, are appalled by the attitude now prevalent in Quebec that Confederation has proved a failure. Where, they ask, are the moderates of bygone days?

One Quebec intellectual, Maurice Sauvé, who is also the Liberal M.P. for Iles-de-la-Madeleine, recently elaborated the typical demands of thinkers like himself. Within Quebec there must be greater autonomy; "what Quebec wants is to govern itself in its own way." Outside of Quebec, there must be equality of status for the

French Canadian: "We practically do not have the right to live in certain provinces. We have been waiting since 1867. . . . We can wait no longer." Typical, too, was the sense of urgency in his remarks: "The hour of the last chance has really arrived—for the traditional parties." Undoubtedly English-speaking Canada is favourably disposed at the moment to improve the status of French and the French Canadian outside Quebec. But the first demand may present greater difficulties. In a day in which nine provinces are more than satisfied to allow the Federal government an ever-increasing role in economic development and the provision of social services, it may not be easy to permit the Quebec government to assume substantial additional responsibilities within the existing Federal structure. Workable solutions to these problems will probably depend upon how well the 47 Liberal M.P.'s elected in Quebec on April 8 fulfil their traditional role of bridge between the Anglo-Saxon majority in Canada and the French-Canadian majority in Quebec.

NOTES

1. See the essay entitled "The Democratic Process at Work in Canadian General Elections", in J. H. Aitchison (ed.), *The Political Process in Canada* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 36-63.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.
3. *Financial Times of Canada*, April 29, 1963.
4. *Toronto Star*, March 16, 1963.
5. *Ibid.*
6. From syndicated column in *Ottawa Journal*, March 11, 1963.