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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Election Battle Seen Amazing

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THIS SHAPES up like an amazing election. The top PCs ensure me they're going to retain the four Island seats. The top Liberals tell me "it never looked so good." Even the New Democrats are talking victory - yes that's right - in this Province - where third parties have received such rough treatment in the past. Nobody ever saved his deposit in the past, and that means polling at least 50 percent of the winning total.

I don't know what the New Dems are thinking on the National scene, but I do know both the PCs and the Liberals are expecting to win a majority, the last I heard, and that was this week.

The Liberals had expected to win most of the seats as early as mid-winter, but they thought then that no party would have a clear majority. They've increased their optimism since then. My best pipeline tells me the PCs expect to have a majority, with something more than 25 votes to spare. I haven't got the details on the majority the Grits are expecting.

MOST PEOPLE to whom I talk here about the election tell me that "people are quiet, they're not saying much." Several of the National figures who've been here tell me that's true generally across the nation.

Liberal prophecies here range from two members on the Island - very few will settle for less - a few more say three, and the most optimistic say four, though, I don't think that even they mean it.

The thinking on the New Democrat threat ranges from the solid PCs and Liberals who shrug it off as negligible, to those who suggest their share of the vote may be surprisingly large.

Majorities Are Discussed

LIBERAL LEADER Alex Matheson who is back on the job and feels "just as good as ever" doesn't agree with the idea that there are tremendous majorities to be overcome. The majorities of 6,182 for Angus MacLean and 5,693 for Heath Macquarrie in 1958 for example are not the figures the Liberals have to worry about now, he maintains. They were registered when the country was turning in an unprecedented landslide decision for the PCs in March 1958. An extra 383 votes would have reelected the Liberal government in 1959, although the PCs won by a margin of 22 seats to eight, he told me.

A check of the records reveals that he's right, if you could pick the votes just where you want them - and of course nobody can. Philip Matheson won by 14 votes over George Kitson in 2nd Queens, Russel Driscoll defeated Eugene Cullen by 16 votes in 3rd

Queens, Keith Harrington had 25 over Frank MacNutt in 3rd Prince and Walter Shaw had 27 over Crawford Sinclair in 1st Queens.

ANDREW MacRAE had 48 more than Harold Cudmore in 3rd Queens, Douglas McGowan had 58 over Keir Clark in 3rd Kings, John MacLean won by 90 over William Acorn in 1st Kings, Frank Myers had 105 more than Stephen MacLeod in 1st Queens on the franchise.

That's how the Liberals get 383 votes turning the tide , for they would have changed the decision in eight seats and upset the balance in favor of the Grits.

The Parliamentary Guide records for example that the PCs polled a total of 24,649, and the Liberals 24,191 which is another indication of how a few votes can make a big difference here.

Mr. Matheson will resume political activity Monday when he will appear on a TV program with Jack Pickersgill and also in a meeting here in Charlottetown, he told me this week.

Big Change Is Suggested

IF YOU SAY I haven't told you anything, you're right. There's nothing I can tell you about trends here because none is evident to date. Normally trends do not become evident in this province until the last week or 10 days of the campaign. But the unprecedented swing to the PCs here never did become evident four years ago, until election day March 31. It could be that the political feelings of Islanders may be just as hard to predict this time.

But the Liberals here point jubilantly to certain signs across the country that could spell trouble for the PCs. Some of the bigger magazines are talking of a stalemate, which would be a tremendous change from the 208 the Tories took in 1958 - the Liberals had 48, the CCF 8 and Liberal Labor one. Any of the guesses could be good but to date they are only guesses.

Dan Barrett Still Likes P.E.I.

A letter from Dan Barrett in London, Ontario extolling the good qualities of former premier and senator, the late J. Walter Jones, recalls an interesting evening I spent with him back in the middle fifties at the home of Vimy Jones Siegrist just outside of London, Ontario.

I'm sure many old friends will be glad to hear of Mr. Barrett who was well known in this province where he represented the Purine feeds company for ten years or more. That was the period before H.J. "Jack" Kennedy took over as their representative. And he still loves the Island.

DAN BARRETT loves to talk politics, and he came down here once to work behind the scenes for the late Premier Jones in a provincial election. Nobody knew he was doing it, but the canny Barrett was able to work effectively "selling" the value of the man who was premier of this province for more than ten years from 1943-53. "Walter", he says "usually had more ideas in his head - and most of them were good ones - than a dog has fleas."

It has been interesting to hear from Mr. Barrett again, and I know that many people who knew him in other years will echo my sentiments.

Pack Pedlar Days Recalled

REMEMBER THE days of the pack pedlars? I talked this week to Elias Kays, one of the two surviving members here of those colorful, travelling businessmen of yesteryear.

Only recently Mr. Kays saw several of his sons established in a Charlottetown wholesale business. Another son is with the father in his store on Upper Queen Street.

Mr. Kays sat with me for a few minutes on the protruding window sill of a lower Queen Street merchantile establishment, as I asked him something about his experiences.

He came here in 1913 and travelled the countryside for several years before he started his own store here in 1916.

“Was it as hard a life as it always seemed to be?” I asked.

Mr. Kays who could speak only the Arabic language when he came here, and knew no English at all, replied that it was the best way to learn the English language.

“I THOUGHT at first I would never learn it” said the man whose brother Frank was here ahead of him. And he started selling through the country when he still had no English.

He had prices written down, he told me, and he would point to the article and to the price, which was a pretty difficult way of doing business. But he was only travelling two months when he stopped saying he had “no English” and talked with the people as best he could.

He carried close to 100 pounds, gross weight, in the two packs. The big pack was carried on the back. The smaller box - it carried all sorts of small items - was carried in front. They were both strapped to his shoulders and “one helped to balance the other.”

The pedlar of those days - Thomas Michael of Charlottetown is the only other man living in this province, so far as I know, who carried his pack - stopped for the night where darkness overtook him.

Hospitality Was Everywhere

I ASKED Mr. Kays if he ever had trouble getting accommodation for the night. He smiled as he assured me he had no trouble, except for the first few trips he made to one area. The people there had been soured by visits from several pedlars who had visited there shortly before, and they were naturally careful. But that soon disappeared, and the homes were gladly opened to him. “Everyone wanted me to stay overnight.” Mr. Kays recalled with pleasure.

He didn't mind the heavy pack so much once he got used to it, except that on one occasion he was almost crippled, temporarily, by pains in his legs. He travelled as far east as the Island goes, as far west as West Devon which is just beyond Portage.

THE VISIT of those men was a welcome break in those long-gone days when radios were unknown, and people were glad to chat with someone who could talk interestingly of what was happening elsewhere in the province.

It's completely impossible for people who were not living then to realize the difference between then and now. Even in my own boyhood days I can recall that a neighbor who had been in Charlottetown, or Summerside, was invariably asked when he returned "Have you got the town time?" And visits to Charlottetown were rare, made often with horse and wagon, and others on the train.

I recall that one man who lived not so very far away from my home was unusually fond of his liquor, and he often walked half way to town, so he could have that much more to spend on whiskey when he got there.