

TRIBUTE: PEOPLE WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Ernest Manning left indelible

Alberta will not seem the same without him. So said the Herald editorial in a qualified tribute to Ernest Manning in 1968, when the veteran Social Credit politician retired at the peak of his power after 25 years as premier. The tribute had to be qualified because the relationship between Manning and this paper was never particularly warm.

The ice began to form after the death of William Aberhart in 1943. The Herald, in an unsentimental editorial, reminded readers that the paper had been one of Aberhart's political enemies, and suggested that the Social Credit movement Aberhart had



**BRIAN
BRENNAN**
Herald Columnist

brought to provincial power — with economic theories the Herald characterized as “unsound, impractical and unworkable” — would likely die with him.

Ernest Manning, however, believed differently.

This farmer's son from Carnduff, Sask. had been chief political lieutenant to Aberhart during the early years of Social Credit, as well as having served as lecturer at Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute, and he knew how to keep the torch burning.

Manning used the exposure of a weekly religious broadcast to secure his political base, fought off the left-wing challenge of the populist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1944, quietly put behind him the more unorthodox economic theories that had sustained Social Credit through the Depression, and settled down to the task of administering Alberta's affairs through a combination of conventional financial conservatism and cautious social reformism.

Serene is the word often used to characterize Alberta's politics during the post-war period, when the province moved from a quiet farm-based economy to a bustling centre of the energy industry.

After the discovery of oil in Leduc in 1947, it became necessary for Manning's government to develop policies that would ensure Albertans a fair share of returns from exploitation of the province's natural resources.

Manning juggled the demands of the commercial oil interests and the rights of the people of Alberta, and skillfully satisfied the interests of both.

All this serenity, however, wasn't good enough for the province's Liberals, under leader J. Harper Prowse.

Not even the absence of a provincial sales tax, nor the short-lived payment of \$20 a year from the province's new oil wealth to every adult Albertan, could persuade Prowse that Manning's government really had the interests of the province's taxpayers at heart.

Taking his cue from the Herald,

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which reported in a National Newspaper Award-winning 1955 investigative story that 11 Social Credit MLAs might have broken the law by doing business with the province's treasury branches, Prowse levelled a series of wrongdoing and bad management charges against the government.

Some of the mud stuck. In the ensuing provincial election, Manning lost 15 seats to the Liberals — the only time in seven elections as leader that he didn't win by a landslide.

However, when a royal commission subsequently cleared the Socred government of all maladministration, except in relation to government land sales and purchases, Manning was vindicated.

He trounced the Liberals in the 1959 election and in the process, reported the Herald's Bill Gold, "established himself as a leader of even greater strength than William Aberhart."

Manning never forgave the Herald for casting the first stones.

He didn't have much good to say

about the Liberals either. "He has been notably sensitive to criticism," commented the Herald editorial.

"He has considered opposition parties as being obstructive and a hindrance to governmental administration when, in reality, they are an essential element in government of the people, by the people, for the people."

At the end of the day, however, Alberta had been "extraordinarily well-served" by this premier who had moved the province into the modern era with oil-financed education, health and transportation facilities, turning it from a have-not into one of Canada's three most affluent provinces.

"By and large, no provincial leader has ever earned and won more public respect, confidence and admiration than has been sustained over a remarkably long period by Premier Manning."

I welcome nominations for the Tribute column. You may reach me by phone, 235-8671, fax, 235-7379, or email me at brennanb@theherald.southam.ca