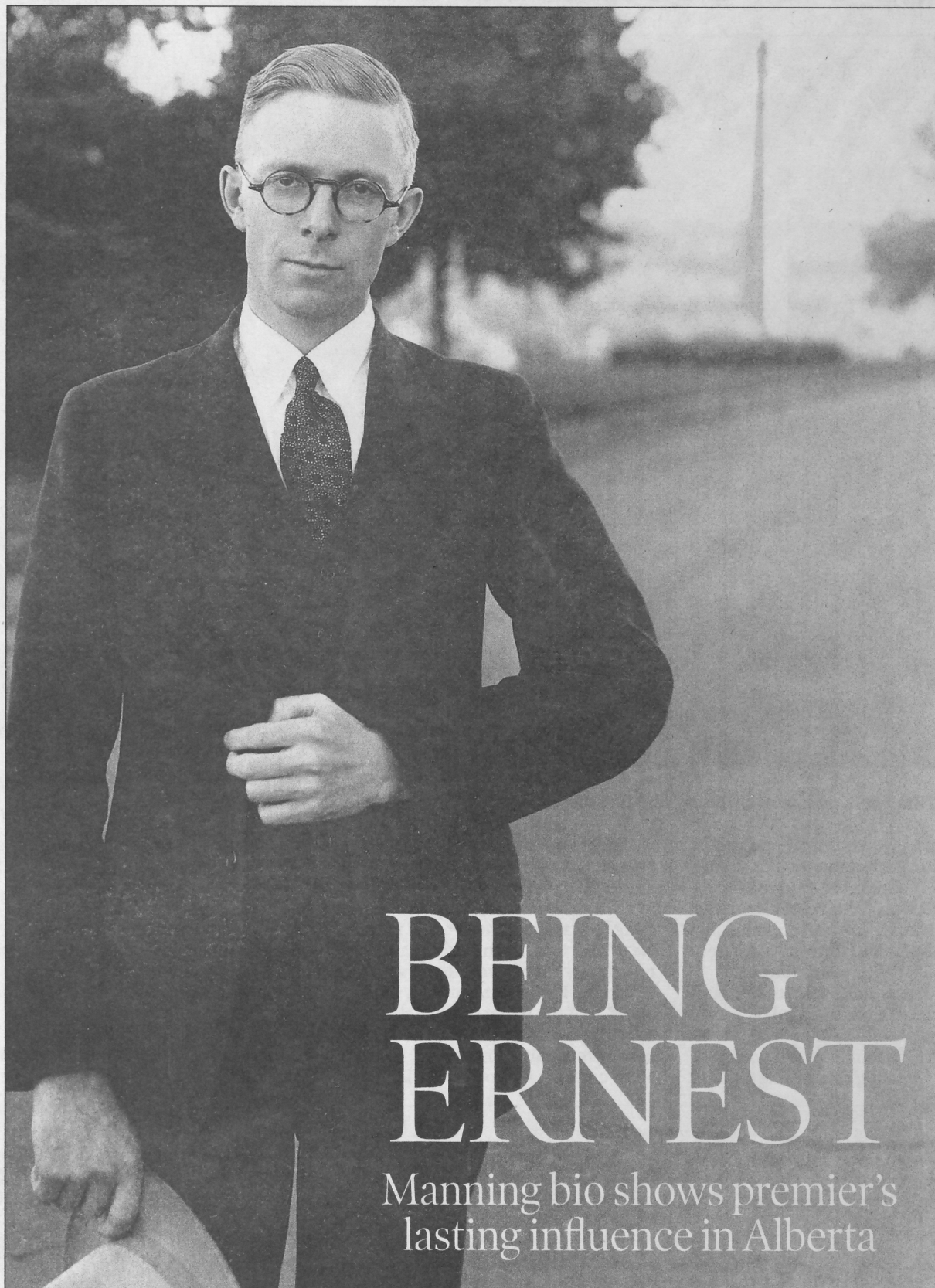


BOOKS IN REVIEW

Calgary Herald Jan. 4th, 2009



BEING ERNEST

Manning bio shows premier's
lasting influence in Alberta

Ernest Manning, who served as Alberta's premier for 25 years, in Edmonton in 1935.

Calgary Herald Archive

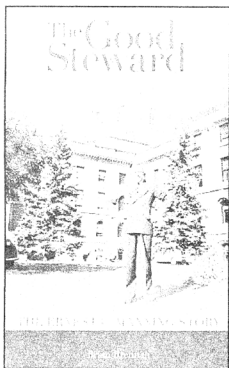
CATHERINE FORD
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

How is it possible that no writer until Brian Brennan was ever successful in producing a biography of the Alberta premier who made the most lasting impact on this province? Surely that's the question Brennan asked himself and one from which Brennan's readers benefit.

Ernest Manning won seven elections, retired the provincial debt and turned Alberta into an economic powerhouse. If all Alberta citizens know about this province is limited to the bewildering and inexplicable staying power of the Progressive Conservatives, then this is a must-read biography. Ralph Klein didn't invent debt-reduction, Ernest Manning did. The Tories didn't invent the faceoff with Ottawa, Social Credit did. Today, in an age of blowhard politics, Preston Manning's father would be an anomaly, a politician who succeeded with quiet resolution, a firm and steady path, and a big-C Christianity that guided his life and all his work. Ernest was as his name suggests.

Brennan has given this quiet man, who saved much of his passion for his weekly Back to the Bible Hour radio broadcasts, a spirit and a face to those who know him only as a figure in history. Manning was very much a man of his times, and in Social Credit, he was able to meld the personal and the political. One of the great aspects of this biography is how Brennan has given Social Credit a human face, even though it is widely — and de-

servedly — reviled. But it was a movement of its time, and the men who created it and brought it to power in Alberta, beginning with William Aberhart and his



REVIEW

**The Good Steward:
The Ernest C.
Manning Story,**
by Brian Brennan
(Fifth House Ltd.,
226 pages, \$24.95)

successor, Manning, believed in it.

When Manning was 17, he mail-ordered a radio. "It proved to be a fateful acquisition. If he was looking for direction in his life, Ernie found it in a religious broadcast featuring the

fire-and-brimstone voice of William Aberhart, a 47-year-old Calgary high-school principal and self-taught Bible scholar," writes Brennan. Aberhart's Sunday broadcasts transformed the young Manning, so much that he wanted to become a preacher himself.

He was the first graduate of Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute and he married Muriel Preston, the Institute pianist. By that time, Aberhart had come to regard Manning as the son he never had and Manning became Aberhart's full-time assistant.

History records the stunning success of Aberhart's brand of politics, which adopted the social credit ideology and added

fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity to it. In 1935, Social Credit took 56 of 63 seats in the legislature. Manning became a cabinet minister and when Aberhart died in 1943, Manning was his successor. He abandoned the Social Credit monetary policy, purged the anti-Semitism and turned Alberta Social Credit into the most conservative political party in the country.

But who was the man behind the politician? Who was the husband, father, and friend? This is where Brennan's brilliance as a storyteller shines through, in making Ernest C. Manning, premier of Alberta for 25 years and subsequently a member of the Canadian Senate for 13, more than just words in a history book.

Yes, Manning's story is the story of a political dynasty, but it is also a very human one, a story of a hard-working childhood on a Saskatchewan farm, a love of music, a growing love of Jesus Christ and thus, a commitment to both the material well-being as well as the spiritual health of Albertans. Even today, Manning's words about Alberta remain prophetic. Here's just one example of many: In 1953, in a speech given in London, Manning said that Alberta was largely overlooked outside Canada and inside, too. As Brennan quotes him: "We felt we were regarded as the poor relations of the family who had to be tolerated but otherwise ignored. I am happy to report that this is no longer the case."

Alberta's prosperity is built on the hard work and personal commitment of men like Manning. The Good Steward reminds us of that debt.

Manning's path worth walking again

Calg Herald
Oct 26-2008



**DAVID
FINCH**

Retired premiers in Alberta never really go away.

Living or dead, they sometimes come back to remind us of the lessons that we might want to forget.

Last year it was Peter Lougheed who spoke up, encouraging us to pay attention to the royalties the government charges petroleum companies for the opportunity to develop oil and gas.

The royalty debate is far from over, of course. With the price of oil at just half its peak, we will probably see adjustments to last year's royalty regime before it takes effect on Jan. 1, 2009.

It's amazing how much dif

Wilful leader
maintained
tricky balance



Calgary Herald Archive

**Ernest Manning was
Alberta's longest serving
premier for 25 years.**

on Jan. 1, 2009.

It's amazing how much difference one year can make. This fall, we would do well to lend an ear to Alberta's longest serving premier.

He was in cabinet when Alberta went bankrupt in 1936 and defaulted on its payments to the big banks in Toronto. How's that for western independence?

In today's money, Alberta was \$2.5 billion in debt, with no chance of making payments anytime soon. And things looked dim for a decade.

From this calamity, a man emerged. Saskatchewan born, he took the province by the hand and guided its steps for 25 years as premier. It is to a shy man from Rosetown that we owe many of the programs and services that make Alberta what it is today.

Though William (Bible Bill) Aberhart is known as the unusual founder of the Social Credit Party in Alberta, and the first premier of a unique political movement, it was his successor who ruled the province longer than any other man in history.

Ernest C. Manning was premier for 25 years. He was the wilful leader who walked the narrow path between powerful ideological opponents on the left and the right.

The socialists hordes in 1955 — OK they were the Liberals and the CCF (today's NDP) — took 40 per cent of the popular vote in the election and wanted more government ownership of the oil industry.

Manning held the day with his 46 per cent of the vote — and 37 of 61 seats.

The oilpatch capitalists, on the other extreme, tried to maximize their profits during the post Leduc oil boom that began in 1947.

Manning fought them off, too. As the premier who repeatedly raised the royalty rate, he stood up to Big Oil in a way that has been the trademark of other premiers, in-

cluding Lougheed and the current resident of the office.

But balance is always tricky.

The Social Credit government, for example, handed out "citizen participation dividends" in the late 1950s — even though voters wanted it spent on public programs instead. (The \$20 handouts would be worth about \$155 today).

And Manning's government created a unique pipeline company in 1954 that was neither government owned, nor the profit-making tool of the international oil companies. It was called the Alberta Gas Trunk Line and is today part of TransCanada Pipeline.

His hesitancy to get government into business also explains why Alberta residents have always paid health care premiums — a shame in a province with so much wealth.

As the stock market gyrates, it is worth listening to the stories that need retelling every generation. Especially for people who grew up with the wealth. For 50 of the last 60 years, Alberta has run surplus budgets. As a result, most of us know nothing about living with need.

When the free market system stumbles — as it does from time to time — we all need to review its underlying assumptions.

If we are headed into hard times, we may once again need a leader who can impose the government's will on the economy.

These financial hiccups could prove to be temporary, and the stock market may once again take off at a high clip. Will our leader then take his foot off the brake and stomp on the gas?

Either way, leaders in Alberta are always an interesting combination of ideologies and pragmatism.