

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 1952

Puzzles For B.C. Voters

One of the most confused and confusing general elections is drawing to a close in British Columbia; voting takes place on Thursday of this week. The issues are muddled, in some cases by conflicting statements by candidates in the same parties. Adding complications are two controversial plebiscites on which electors will vote on the same day they choose their legislative representatives. Finally, to make things still more uncertain, the voters will mark their ballots, for the first time in the history of the province, with figures instead of crosses, as the alternative vote, such as we have had in Alberta for many years, is to be used.

Four main parties are in the field, Liberal, Conservative, C.C.F. and Social Credit. Liberal and C.C.F. candidates are contesting each of the forty-eight seats in the legislature, while Conservative and Social Credit are running in forty-seven. Just to add to the general uproar, a new Roman Catholic party—Christian Democrat—has nominated eight candidates, and there are, in addition, five communists, two Labor, one "straight" Socialist and four independents. All this means that virtually every riding will have at least four candidates and in a few of the single member ridings the number runs up to six and seven.

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The intervention of Alberta Social Credit in British Columbia has been one of the more sensational developments of the campaign. The B.C. Social Credit League is reported to have sought the advice and assistance of the Alberta government, the Alberta Social Credit League and the National Social Credit Association, at a meeting held in Edmonton last March. The result was a promise of aid if the election of a party leader in B.C. was deferred until after the election; at that time three candidates were seeking the post—W. A. C. Bennett of South Okanagan, who had been a Conservative and, for the last year, an Independent; Lyle Wicks, provincial president of the B.C. League and a bus driver, and William Chant, former Social Credit member of the Alberta legislature for Camrose, living in Victoria. E. G. Hansell, federal Social Credit member for Macleod was accepted as campaign leader and has been directing organization.

That the Social Credit group has high hopes is seen by its forty-seven candidates. The party is not talking Social Credit at all, judging by reports of meetings, but only promising the same sort of prosperity the Manning government takes credit for "giving" Alberta.

Naturally, its opponents are charging that Alberta would "take over" B.C. if the party were returned to power in the coast province. This undoubtedly is why Premier Manning, speaking to five thousand in a Vancouver audience last week, assured them he had no "territorial ambitions." The control of the B.C. campaign by "outsiders" has certainly reacted against the party.

Two reasons may be ascribed to the determined effort the Social Crediters are making in B.C.: first, the break-up of the Coalition government of Liberals and Conservatives and the resentment over high taxes and especially the high cost of B.C. hospitalization insurance which have created a favorable opportunity for them; second, the hope that a victory in B.C. might start the ball rolling nationally for Mr. Low's Social Credit party.

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For eleven years, Liberals and Conservatives have maintained a Coalition government. They first joined forces to defeat the ultra-socialistic C.C.F. party of B.C.; while they ran under party "tags", they supported coalition policy. In that first coalition, Liberals numbered 20, and Conservatives 12, while the C.C.F. had 14 in opposition. In the 1945 election, the two major parties dropped their distinctive labels and ran as Coalitionists, 39 being elected to the C.C.F.'s seven. In 1949, the old labels came back, and the result was Liberals 26, Conservatives 10, C.C.F. eight and others, three.

The anger engendered between Liberals and Conservatives when the break-up came encouraged the C.C.F., but the party's all-out socialistic program does not appear to be winning the electors of B.C. in great numbers. On the other hand, the C.C.F. is promising a "cheap" hospitalization plan to replace the present unpopular one — unpopular only because of its high costs. This may catch some votes.

A curious situation has developed in the Liberal Party itself over its hospitalization insurance scheme; Premier Byron Johnson supports "co-insurance"—a plan under which a person actually going into hospital must pay initial costs, up to a maximum of \$35—while the party has in its election platform a plank to do away with it.

Conservatives favor "voluntary" hospitalization and Social Crediters say they would abolish the present "compulsory" plan; what they call their Alberta hospitalization out there we do not know.

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Another eruption in the campaign was the introduction of the separate school issue by the Roman Catholics, who in B.C. must pay municipal taxes to help maintain public schools. They have no right to tax-supported sectarian schools because they had not that privilege before B.C. entered confederation in 1871; the public schools of B.C. are non-sectarian.

The four major parties have met this