

— Biography — Manning  
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# ALBERTA'S PREACHING PREMIER WHO NEVER LOSES

*Ernest Manning may beat Mackenzie King's 22-year record in office, and his son Preston, 21, could very well succeed him*

by **PETER SYPNOWICH** Star Weekly staff writer

EDMONTON

**A**FTER 20 years of ruling Alberta by something close to divine right, Ernest C. Manning may be preparing to anoint his son as successor. At least this idea came to a lot of Albertans when they picked up their newspapers during the province's recent election campaign and found a large photograph of 21-year-old Preston Manning speaking at one of the premier's rallies. Preston has long been following in his father's footsteps as a radio evangelist on the *Back to the Bible Hour*, but this was his first appearance on a political platform. He was there to introduce his father, but it was apparent who was really being introduced.

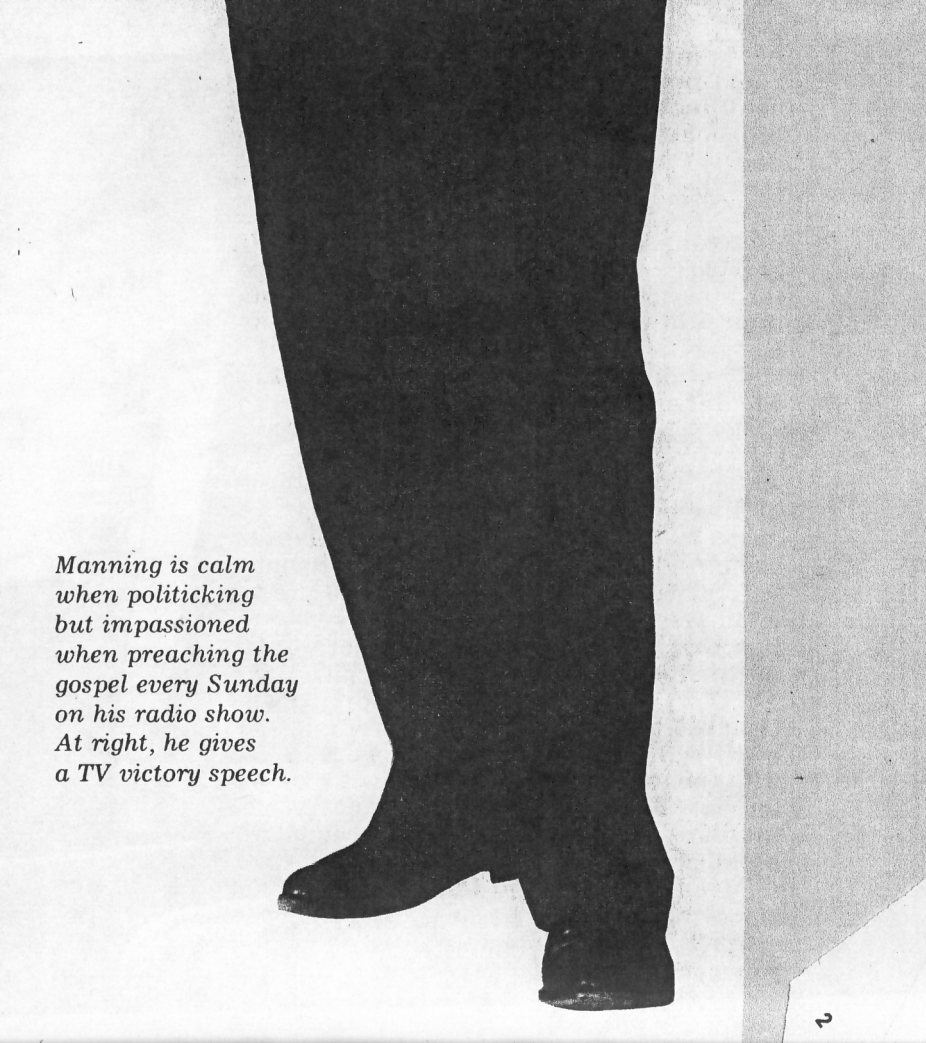
The appearance of a political dynasty, something never before seen in Canada, would not be surprising in a province where politics just hasn't been politics since Social Credit was swept into power by the late William (Bible Bill) Aberhart 28 years ago. And it would be a fitting climax to the career of Bible-punching Ernest Manning, who, since he succeeded Aberhart in 1943 at the age of 34, has routed all opponents in six straight elections and come to be regarded with a sort of reverence by the voters of this oil-rich province.

What is the Manning magic?

I watched the 55-year-old premier in action at his final rally of the June 17 election, a small Saturday-night meeting at Stony Plain, a small town west of Edmonton, where the Social Credit candidate was in trouble because of rural resentment against oil drillers. A local standard-bearer introduced the premier as a man who "speaks with no forked tongue." Then, in his throaty drawl, Manning began a lucid, detailed, historical exposition of federal and provincial legislation governing the rights of access for mineral development. The only other sound in the community



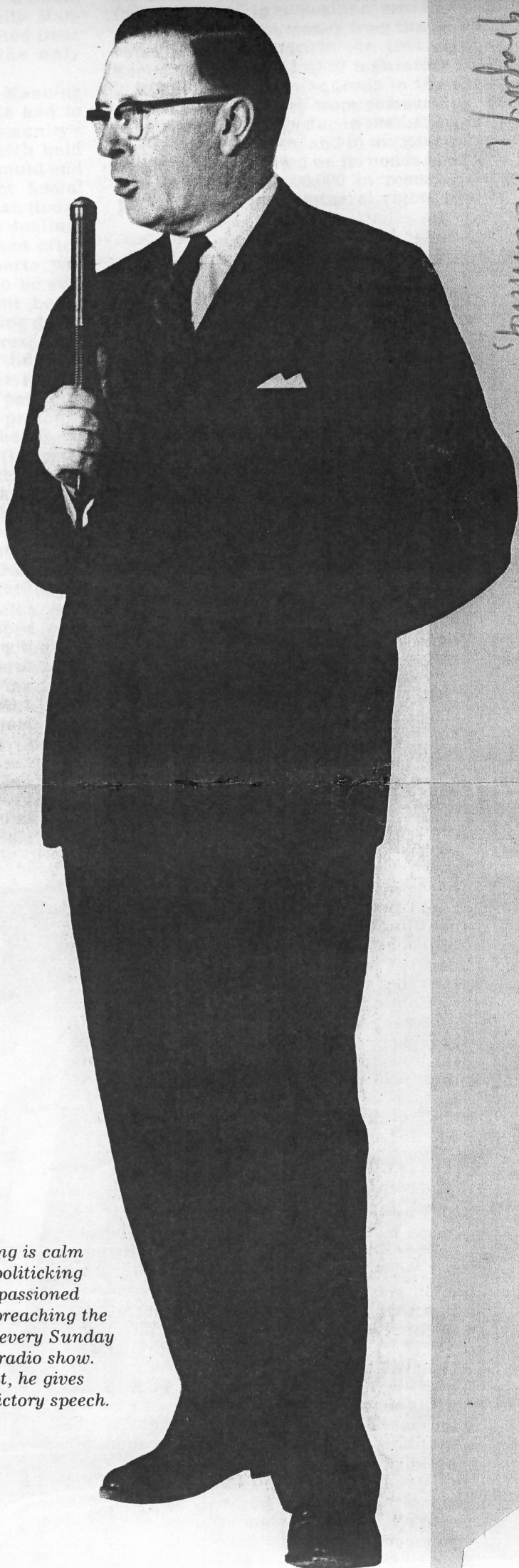
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## **ALBERTA'S PREACHING PREMIER**

*concluded*

hall came from calloused hands slapping at mosquitoes. When it was over, I heard one man say to another: "He sure talks nice."

Down the gravel road from the community hall a group of Pentecostal evangelists shouted praises to the Lord between hot gospel songs over a loudspeaker mounted on a shiny new car. I asked the pastor, a young man who came west from Owen Sound three years ago, what he thought of Premier Manning. "He's a fine man, a man with conviction," he said. Patting the Bible under his arm, he added: "He speaks the truth, the Bible truth."

When the ballots were counted two nights later, the Socreds had won 60 of the legislature's 63 seats, only one less than they previously held when there were 65 ridings. Although it assured Premier Manning of surpassing both the unbroken 21 years in office of Manitoba's John Bracken and the total 22 years of Mackenzie King's federal leadership, the election was, as the Edmonton Journal remarked, "just like a rerun of an old, familiar movie on the late, late show."

There was nothing routine about the amazing 1935 election which put the Social Credit party in office only three years after it was born. The United Farmers of Alberta had held office with 36 of the 61 legislature seats; after the balloting Social Credit held 56 seats—and where before there had not been one Social Credit member, now there was not one UFA member.

The landslide was the work of one man, "Bible Bill" Aberhart, a silver-tongued, 250-pound Ontario schoolteacher who had come west to Calgary and won a large following with his evangelical broadcasts in the early days of radio. In 1932 he was converted to the Social Credit theories of the late Maj. C. H. Douglas, an Englishman who held that unemployment was simply the result of a lack of purchasing power among consumers, that it was necessary only to make purchasing power equal productive capacity. Aberhart began extolling Social Credit on his religious broadcasts, and it spread through the depression-ridden, drought-stricken province like a prairie grass fire.

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Only a "Bible Bill" Aberhart was capable of putting the world's first Social Credit government into office. But keeping it there, for a period unmatched by any other Canadian political party, was the work of a young Baptist who had been Aberhart's first student at his Prophetic Bible Institute when it opened in Calgary in 1927.

**A**S a farm boy with his English parents at Rosetown, Sask., Ernest Manning sent away to Sears-Roebuck for a mail-order radio and thus became a regular listener to Aberhart's broadcasts. His inquiring mind was intrigued by Aberhart's contention that the Bible prophecies were being fulfilled in the events of the day. Like Aberhart, he became a fundamentalist who believed the Bible was all the word of God, every syllable. Later, when he went to live with the Aberharts in Calgary, he became a fervent Douglasite who believed Social Credit was the answer to the country's economic ills.

Manning was swept into office with his mentor; at 26 he became the youngest cabinet minister since William Pitt the younger was made chancellor of the ex-

chequer at 23 in 1782. The next year Manning married Muriel Preston, the Bible Institute's pianist and organist. When their first son was born, he was named William Keith after Aberhart. Now 23, Keith Manning is a cerebral palsy patient in Red Deer hospital. He and Preston are the only Manning children.

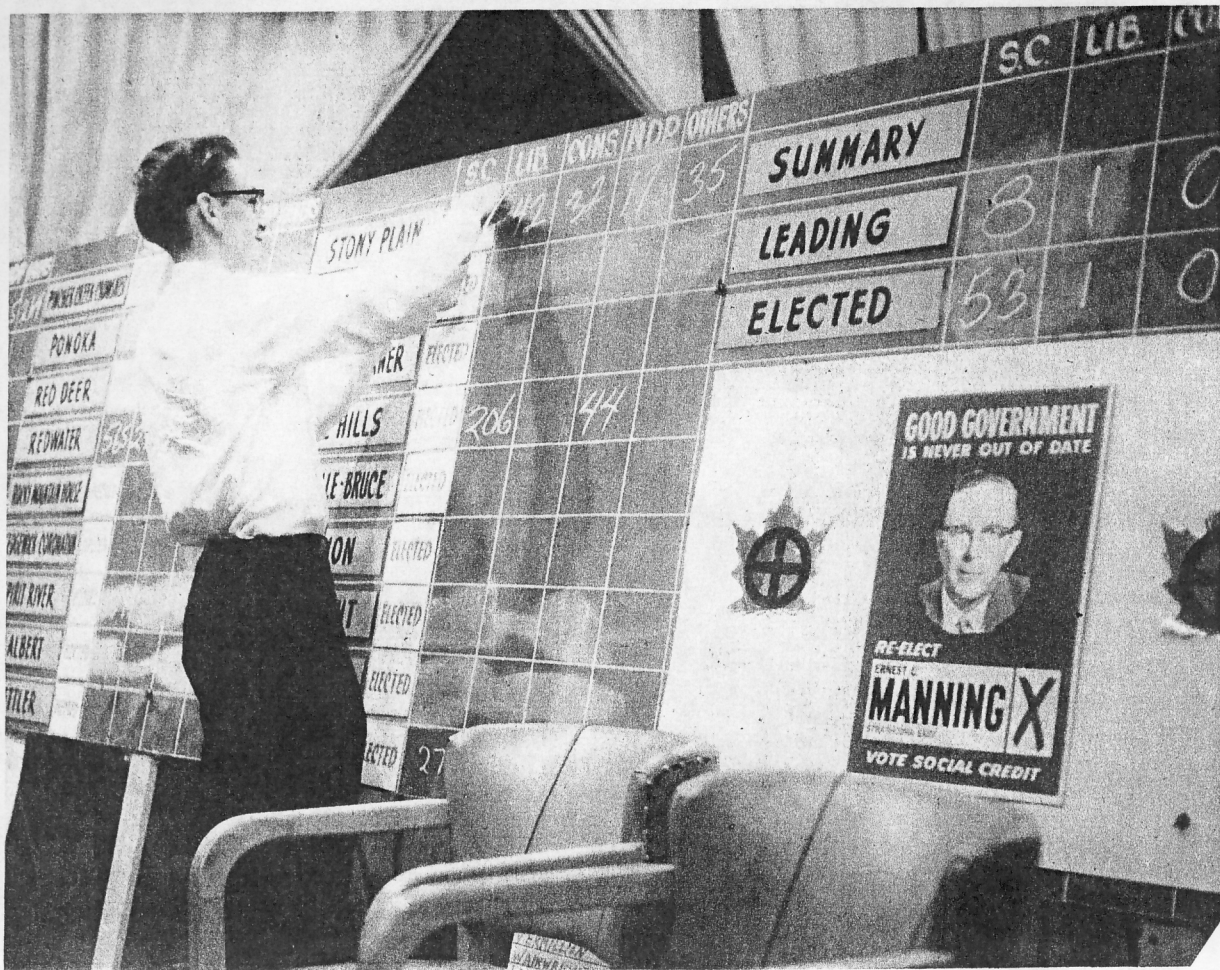
As trade and industry minister, Manning was a Daniel in the lions' den; he had to bear the brunt of the business community's distrust of this weird doctrine which held that simply printing more money would end the Great Depression. The night Social Credit was elected one businessman (today a multi-millionaire who has close dealings with the government) got drunk and cried beside his radio, convinced Alberta was ruined. His worst fears seemed to be confirmed when the new government began passing radical legislation outlawing debts, suspending mortgage foreclosures, controlling the press—altogether 13 of these bills had to be disallowed by the federal government. Aberhart arbitrarily paid only half the interest—and none of the principal—on all outstanding government bonds. He issued a script as currency—certificates on which the holders were supposed to paste tiny two-cent stamps every Thursday at midnight, thus giving them value—but stores refused to accept them.

Social Crediters demanded that Aberhart fulfil his election pledge to pay \$25 a month to every man, woman and child in the province, and Aberhart had to quell a revolt in his ranks. Social Credit slipped to 36 seats in a 56-seat legislature after the 1940 election, and the movement seemed destined to meet the fate of the UFA and other new parties which had faded away after two or three elections. Then Aberhart died. Manning, acclaimed his successor, declared he would not turn his back on "the crusade for social justice and economic security," but one of his first acts was to renegotiate the government's defaulted bonds and resume regular payments on them. When

the first socialist CCF government was elected in neighboring Saskatchewan, the Alberta business community began to look on Social Credit in a new light. Manning found himself in a position envied by all politicians: He got money from the rich and votes from the poor. In the 1944 election Social Credit won 51 of 57 legislature seats.

If there were any squeaks in the Social Credit machine, they were removed by the discovery of oil at Leduc in 1947. Prosperity has come to Alberta, and to the government which once defaulted on its bonds has come more than \$1,300,000,000 in revenue from provincially owned mineral rights. Unlike







other governments, this administration has been embarrassed by too much money. Its debt was wiped out 10 years ago, and since then it has maintained a progressive program of road-building, educational endowments and other projects, steering clear of the welfare state, for Premier Manning hates socialism almost as much as sin. On top of this, the government has paid out more than \$20,000,000 in "citizens' participation dividends"—cheques for \$20 in 1957 and \$17.50 in 1958 went to every one of the province's 1,374,000 residents who was over 21.

**T**HE despair of the opposition parties can be understood by talking to J. Harper Prowse, who led Alberta's Liberal party for six years before giving up the struggle. Prowse did better than any of Manning's opponents; in the 1955 election, after Liberal charges of maladministration in real estate deals, his party won 15 seats and Social Credit went down to 37 from 51. But in 1959, after those "citizens' participation dividends," the total opposition was cut to four members, with Social Credit holding 61 seats.

"We had good candidates and a better organization than they did," recalled Prowse during an interview in his Edmonton law office. "But people just said, 'I'm voting for Mr. Manning.' Out in the country, there are people who will tell you in all



Now 55, the Social Credit premier, above left in his office, has maintained a progressive program of road-building and education grants. His son, Preston, posting election results (left), is deputy leader of the University of Alberta Socreds. Mrs. Manning and premier arrive at a political meeting (above).

seriousness, 'Maybe Mr. Manning didn't put the oil there, but God didn't let anybody find it until Mr. Manning was there to manage it.'"

Despite his popularity, Ernest Manning is something of an enigma. He's not a colorful political figure—he has always said he dislikes politics and the limelight. Pale, erect and ascetic-looking, he neither smokes nor drinks. Orvis Kennedy, Social Credit's national organizer and one of his few close friends, says no one calls him "Ernie." He belongs to no social clubs, spending as much time as possible in seclusion at his 320-acre farm outside Edmonton.

Manning's restraint on the political platform contrasts with his passion in the pulpit. When he makes his *Back to the Bible Hour* broadcasts each Sunday from the Paramount theatre on Jasper Ave., his voice is charged with emotion and he thrusts his fists upward as he talks of the "eternal immutability" of the Bible. His program, which is financed by contributions from 1,500,000 listeners over 14 stations from Victoria to Halifax, is a fast-paced mixture of preaching and gospel songs. It opens with a quintet singing *In the Sweet By-and-By* and a sonorous voice cutting in to say, "This is Ernest Manning with another *Back to the Bible Hour* . . ." Mrs. Manning plays the piano. Preston delivers a four-minute sermon to young people. The shy premier shouts to the theatre audience, "Reach out and shake the hand of your neighbor, it will make you feel good," and the audience mills about in a flurry of handshakes and smiles.

The enigma of Ernest Manning stems more than anything from his two contrasting public roles, religious and political. The contrast is especially evident when you hear him, on Saturday night, talk of the "great era of resources development and industrialization" under his administration and boast that Alberta is "the most progressive and advanced province in Canada," and then, on Sunday afternoon, you hear him warn that "every step which man calls progress takes him farther and farther away from his Creator."

from his creator.

I asked Premier Manning about this contradiction during a 75-minute interview in his spacious, broadloomed office in the parliament building. How can you mix religion and politics? He replied, as he has replied to the same question many times before, that there is definitely a place for religion in politics, but politics has no place in religion. Then which role, preaching or governing, did he think has given him the most influence? "A large number of people started listening to our radio work simply out of curiosity, because I happened to be in government," he said. "It's equally true that my feeling in spiritual matters undoubtedly influences how people feel toward us in public life. You just can't separate these things into two compartments."

The premier left no doubt as to which role he considers most important. He said he enjoys any kind of public speaking—"I like audiences"—and also administration—"I like the analysis of problems"—but his preaching comes first. "The most important sphere of life is helping people realize the importance of spiritual experience."

Manning sees the "gathering shadows" of Armageddon approaching with the spread of communism, the growth of internationalism in business, the development of communication and transport, the establishment of the United Nations, the increasing trend toward world government. "The pieces are falling into place," he said. "The fascinating part of the Bible prophecies is all these

predictions that there will come on this earth a universal dictator known as the Anti-Christ, that he will gain domination over all kindred tongues, that no man will be able to so much as buy or sell without giving allegiance, until ultimately this Anti-Christ will establish a universal materialism. . . . This situation is going to build up to a world tyranny, a godless kind of tyranny, which will only end with Christ's personal return to this earth. And, of course, Armageddon is the clash between Him and those earthly forces. . . . Christians will be removed from the earth before Armageddon. . . . By Christians I mean only those who have had spiritual rebirth."

Premier Manning sees another crisis closer at hand because of mounting taxation and budget deficits.

Canadians, he said, will turn more and more to the basic concepts of Social Credit. Canada is going through a painful transition period which will result in a complete realignment of political thinking, he said. Two main political groups will emerge, one comprising "collectivists" and the other people adhering to "all the fundamental principles of Social Credit."

**P**REMIER MANNING wouldn't say much about the split in Social Credit at the national level—he and national leader Robert Thompson are at odds with Quebec's Real Caouette. I asked the premier about Caouette but he declined to say more than that he didn't always agree with the *Creditiste* leader. At one of his campaign coffee parties, however, the premier was more explicit; he told a questioner that "the irresponsible statements of this man Caouette" were partly the cause of Social Credit's setback in the last federal election.

When I asked Premier Manning if he himself had any plans for entering federal politics, he gave the answer he has given on past occasions—if a situation arose where he considered it his duty to enter national politics, he would do so. Conversely, he had no plans for retirement.

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This raised the question of young Preston's future, and I asked if he thought his son had an aptitude for politics.

"Yes, he has an aptitude for public life. He has a good analytical mind and great interest in people. He has a deep concern for his country and society."

Premier Manning said it will be Preston's own decision as to whether he enters politics. But there's little doubt his look-alike son already has made up his mind. I spoke to Preston, an honors student at the University of Alberta, on election night during the Social Credit victory rally in Edmonton's Alberta College auditorium. He said that, after three years of studying physics and a year as deputy leader of the campus Social Credit club, he plans to switch to political science or economics.

"I'm interested in public life—not so much politics as administration," he said. "The real challenge is actually running a government."

Preston blushed and declined to answer when asked bluntly if he would like to be premier of Alberta. "I'm not following in my father's footsteps but I'm trying to walk in the same direction," he said. "I'm more interested in coming up with an answer to the problems, the obvious defects in our economy before getting elected."

Young Preston is plainly ambitious. Who knows? Maybe Alberta has produced not just another Manning, but another Major Douglas or even another Aberhart. ●