

A Eulogy

by Martin Hattersley - March 1996

Former Social Credit of Canada Party Leader.

Our Late Premier – Ernest Charles Manning

It is said that the Greek philosopher, Diogenes, wandered about the earth carrying a candle, looking to find an honest man. I wonder whether, in Ernest C. Manning, later Premier of Alberta, whose funeral took place last month, he might have found one.

My first meeting with Manning was also my first introduction to Alberta – and my first acquaintance with below zero (Farenheit) temperatures. A twenty year old University student, I had flown twenty eight hours from England in a piston-engined North Star, via Shannon, Goose Bay, Montreal, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, and Calgary, finally to arrive in the wooden terminal of the old Municipal Airport in Edmonton, with ringing ears and unsteady step, after an incredibly bumpy ride northward from Calgary in a Trans Canada Airlines DC-3.

Now, I was attending the funeral of my father, and one of the persons at that bitingly cold graveside, as the final prayers were said, was this tall, rather reserved figure in a long black overcoat, the Premier E.C. Manning.

Our family's interest in Alberta was understandable. My father, C. Marshall Hattersley, had been introduced to Social Credit ideas by an accountant working at his law office just after the end of Word War I, soon after the first writings of Major Douglas appeared. Fascinated by the concept of this radical solution to problems of poverty, debt and unemployment in a world of potential plenty, he had himself authored three books as well as numerous pamphlets and articles on Social Credit theory, as well as being the leading light of the English "Social Credit Co-ordinating Centre".

The election of a Social Credit government in Alberta in 1935 was of supreme interest to him – Albertans likely never realized how their experiment in “Economic Democracy” was closely watched in many other parts of the world. From being the bankrupt Cinderella Province of Canada, Alberta had, even by the 1950’s, significantly paid down its debt, developed its human resources with remarkable success and wisdom, and before long was going to be paying an “Oil and Gas Royalty Dividend” to every citizen – shadow of the twenty-five dollars per month that Aberhart had once promised to the electorate.

Add to this the unusual sight of a party led by a politician of extraordinary honesty, who every Sunday morning went on the air with his wife to broadcast “Canada’s National Back To The Bible Hour”, and it was plain that Alberta had something different in the way of government that was well worth looking into.

So in 1952, World War II being over, the Hattersley family sold its possessions and moved out to this land of promise: my father’s aim being to write a book outlining his experience of this new country. I, in the mean time staying in England to complete my University education. A sudden heart attack, however, at Christmas 1952, put an end to this (my father’s) ambition and his life.

After coming myself as an emigrant to Canada in 1956, my contacts with Manning were regular – but somewhat distant. As President of the Alberta Young Social Crediters, I invited him to speak at our convention. As personal secretary to Robert Thompson, the federal leader, I found Manning to be a major factor in the background – doing much to encourage financial support, until the indiscipline of the Quebec wing of the party led to its breakup.

Later, as Leader of the Social Credit Party of Canada, I found Senator Manning a difficult figure either to get hold of or cooperate with. A quiet figure at the back of provincial Social Credit conventions, I remember how he only needed to drop the slightest hint of the way he was thinking, for the whole convention to vote in agreement. A master of the concealed political pre-emptive strike, I often watched with admiration how he undermined opposition efforts to get off the ground in the heyday of his power, and certainly prevented any success

in the Federal Social Credit movement once he had decided it was doomed. As Gladstone is reported to have said – “A good Prime Minister has to be a good butcher”.

For the difficulty of the Social Credit movement was that the analysis and proposals of Major Douglas, though close to the target, were not completely correct, but Douglas would never acknowledge this. His attitude towards Social Credit as a political movement was thoroughly negative, and in fact had made Aberhart and Manning’s task in the difficult early days extremely hard. Besides that, it was actually the Germans and the Japanese, in the years before World War II, who had made the most effective use of Douglas’s concepts to finance rearmament, employment and world trade domination – hardly a commendation to those who had to wage war against the Axis powers.

As a result, Social Credit supporters ranged from anti-Semitic believers in the International Conspiracy, represented by types such as Jim Keegstra, to Baptist supporters of his (Manning) radio ministry, to very orthodox conservative free-enterprisers, with whom Manning allied himself more and more as time went on. Their successors are the Reform Party of today. After all, it was hard to make the “Poverty amidst Plenty” propaganda of 1930’s Social Credit seem credible in the heady oil boom atmosphere of post war Alberta. It might be much easier to do so in the world of the ‘nineties!

So goodbye, Ernest Manning! I have admired you – I have sworn at you. What you made of this Province is a marvelous achievement; what could have been done is perhaps even more. It will be many years before we see your like again.