

power for living

Thompson on
campaign trail



The one-time teacher,
missionary, and government
envoy leads the
Social Credit Party
in a Christian program

BOB THOMPSON: CANADA'S rising political star

Canada Wide Photo

by Ted Miller

Ottawa's Parliament Buildings

THE ONE-ROOM schoolhouse stood straight and sturdy above the swaying grainfields of Alberta's foothill country. Inside the school a dark-haired young man maintained benevolent discipline over 43 lively students. They ranged from first-graders to tenth-graders, and the teacher dexterously kept or-

der while moving his pupils up the ladder of knowledge. The lower rungs of "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic" led upward to new horizons in history, economics, and science, and the teacher obviously relished his pupil's progress.

For Robert Thompson, the one-room school in Canada's far west was

the first rung on a career ladder that led across the Atlantic Ocean and back to the capital of his country. It took him from school teaching in 1934 to the national leadership of the Social Credit Party in 1961. It also marked a spiritual pilgrimage to a commitment to serve God in public life.

The Social Credit Party, standing for national economic reform and freedom in individual pursuits, rose to prominence on the western prairies in the depression years of the '30s. Despite its name, it is not socialistic nor does it favor a credit economy. As Thompson says:

"Progress demands the peaceful development of the earth's resources and of man's initiative and personality. This can be had only through the application of policies which are positive, realistic, and dynamic, free from the restraint of past prejudice or present privilege. Such policies must encourage individual enterprise, offering a worthwhile reward for the qualities of morality, cooperation, industry, and thrift."

These words and goals helped to strengthen the national position of the Social Credit Party in 1961. Neither the Liberal nor the Conservative Party gained a majority in the elections, and the SCP received 12 percent of the vote, giving it a balance of power in the House of Commons. On closely contested issues, the third party can swing the vote decisively.

A tireless campaigner, Thompson became well known to Canadians through television appearances and

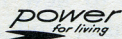
countless speeches before civic, fraternal, and church groups. A stocky, ruddy-faced man who conveys earnest admonitions and smiling congeniality in turn, he is noted for his quality of sincerity. Some of his supporters say he could have received sufficient backing to become Premier of Canada in 1962 if he had been willing to compromise his convictions on certain issues.

Thompson first got into politics when he was 21. He had left teaching to study chiropractic, but entered politics in 1939, the same year he was married. The following year he campaigned for federal office, but World War II soon led him into military service.

Because of his background in education, Thompson commanded a Cadet squadron, part of the Commonwealth Air Training Program. The British needed pilots, navigators, and bombardiers to offset the mighty Luftwaffe. Squadron Leader Thompson labored to train cadets for defense of the Commonwealth.

In 1943 Thompson heard another call: the plea of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia for doctors, nurses and teachers to heal and build up his war-ravaged land. The appeal came through Rowland Bingham, director of Sudan Interior Mission. Believing that the Lord was leading him into this new service, Thompson applied to the government for permission to go, and on June 30, 1943, the request was granted.

With his wife and two children, and leading a nine-member team,



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A man may make mistakes, but he's not a failure until he starts blaming someone else.

Thompson left Philadelphia, Penn., in a Portuguese boat. At Lisbon they transferred to a ship that carried Jewish refugees fleeing Europe. War planes dotted the sky, but the ship was not bombed. From Egypt the mission party traveled by taxi, train, ship, truck, and bus to Addis Ababa, arriving three months after starting!

Thompson promptly went to work. He organized the science department in the first high school. He commanded the training division of the Ethiopian Air Force until the end of the war. Later he became headmaster of a secondary school and Ethiopia's director of provincial education. Emperor Selassie frequently sought Thompson's counsel, and the educator became a close friend of the emperor's family, especially the Duke of Harar.

Thompson was chosen as one of the emperor's representatives to foreign lands. He attended the partition ceremonies of India and Pakistan, and he journeyed throughout the Middle East on missions for Ethiopia.

Post-graduate schooling and teaching back in the United States preceded another stint in Ethiopia. This time Thompson headed a medical-educational team for the Sudan Interior Mission among Ethiopian tribespeople. In 1957 Mrs. Thompson and the children were forced to return to Canada because of illness and injury affecting three of the children. They settled on a farm south of Red Deer, Alberta, that faces the Alaskan Highway and the majestic Canadian Rockies.

When the missionary educator re-

turned, he discovered numerous openings to speak at service organizations and church gatherings about political and religious conditions in Africa and the Middle East. Thompson spent the next two years lecturing across Canada and in 44 states of the U.S.A. Businessmen and politicians took note of his ability and convictions and urged him to run for the Canadian Parliament.

"I had no intention of returning to politics," Thompson says today. "Then I saw the need for Christian men in public service. As William Pitt said, 'Men must choose to be governed by men who are governed by God, or be ruled by tyrants.' I regard political leadership as a responsibility to God and men. I don't aspire to position, but to be a witness to God in public life."

After his election to Parliament, Thompson was named national chairman of his party in 1960. A year later he was named leader of the party.

Attendance in Parliament Monday through Friday and almost endless speaking engagements keep Thompson away from his home and family all but four or five days each month. Only a dedication to their country and to God enables the Thompson family to happily make the sacrifices.

"Canada, to remain a nation such as her founding fathers cherished, and to become a nation such as world opportunities now present, must cling to the basic morals and Christian principles so characteristic of her pioneers," Thompson declares. He predicts: "Through these morals and principles in government, Canada can become an inspiration and a leader to the emerging nations of the world." ■