



**ELECTIONS BRITISH COLUMBIA: THE UNIQUE GUIDE FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTION PARTICIPANTS AND SPECTATORS, by T. Patrick Boyle, Vancouver, Lions Gate Press, 1982, 191 p.**

**T**his book has three ambitious goals: a critique of the democratic process as it now operates in British Columbia; a detailed analysis of recent elections in the province; and an interpretation of political trends. The author's central purpose is to make available to the public information generally not available or available only in an incomplete way. Everyone is to be put at par with political observers, media commentators, politicians and their advisors, "this book gives the voter access to their secret world". While all three goals are worthy, unfortunately only the detailed analysis of election results is met with any degree of success within the text.

The book opens with a brief discussion of a dilemma for all democratic societies — are elected politicians "agents" or "delegates" of the people (elected to carry out the people's wishes or mandated to carry out their duties according to own best judgment)? Such familiar federal examples as the imposition of wage and price controls, abolition of capital punishment, "nationalization" of the petroleum industry, imposition of a new Canadian Constitution and partial Charter of Rights and Freedoms (termed partial because it does not include property rights), and provincial examples of expropriation of B.C. Electric Company and taxation of the province's mining industry are cited to show we are not a true democratic society. What we are, according to Boyle, is a "representative democracy" which means "we are governed by politicians who just happen to get more votes than another set of politicians." In such a system politicians are devoted to political

parties with religious fervour whose interest is merely political survival. Interestingly enough both the politicians and political parties perceive that political survival involves their satisfaction of the voters demands for action and immediate favourable results. Boyle maintains the problem is the fact that no one acts the role of "statesman" presenting sound, long-term, beneficial public policies.

To rectify this the author proposes three electoral reforms for British Columbia. First, there should be a series of run-off elections to ensure majority rather than plurality winner candidates for seats in the legislature. Second, the province should have an electoral boundaries commission (modeled on the federal commissions) to re-adjust electoral boundaries every so often, free from political influences and pressures. Finally, there should be a residency requirement for those seeking seats in the legislature. It is maintained that these reforms will improve "the quality of politicians elected to public office and the manner of their conduct" while in office.

The central problem with this interpretation of the political system is that it perpetuates the all too common myth that governments are indeed elected. The simple fact that governments are not elected but responsible to their parliaments is improperly understood. Most likely the absorption of political norms and expectations from the American system has allowed Boyle to interpret our parliamentary system of government as a representative system. This misrepresentation of how our government in fact operates allows him to criticize government policies because they are not acting in response to the electorate's every wish. The author in his desire to enlighten his readers concerning the operation of their political system has

unfortunately misled them as to its purpose and function. Hardly a good beginning.

Aside from this fundamental error, nowhere in the book is it demonstrated how his intended reforms will improve the quality and behaviour of those elected to the legislature. What does "quality" mean? Why not make a comparison between majority v. plurality or parachuted (a very rare occurrence these days) and resident members if he really believes one set has more quality or act better than the other? While it could be argued that each of the proposed reforms has merit in and of themselves, they are not new and, at best, are mere electoral tinkering. The only way one could possibly think of them as being important would be if one could show they would alter the strength of the parties in the legislature upon which the government depends for power. Again, the misunderstanding by the author of how the system works prevents him from making these points.

The remainder of the book is devoted to the detailed analysis of provincial elections since 1966 (1969, 1972, 1975, 1979) and possible future trends. The second chapter depicts the gradual decline of support for the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties and the narrowing of the gap between Social Credit and New Democratic Party support. To demonstrate this something called the "swing percentage" is calculated. Simply put, it is the minimum percentage of votes needed to change the outcome in each electoral district. This has been calculated for each constituency dating back to 1966 with adjustments made for any changes made in boundaries over the intervening years. Given this amount of work (depicted in numerous tables, graphs, and 24 pages of appendix tables) it is calculated that Social Credit is losing support to the NDP and,

based upon the 1979 election, 15 of their 31 seats could possibly change hands in the next election. Only 11 of the NDP's 26 seats are considered this vulnerable. Given the current five seat majority held by Social Credit and assuming the close seats will be the ones to change, the obvious conclusion to be reached is that the next election will be very close. The problem with this concept is that it says nothing about political issues, candidates, etc., which all have a great deal to do with election outcomes.

The author further weakens the analysis by suggesting that since voter turnout changed very little in the 1969, 1972, 1975 and 1979 elections (averaging around 69%), and since the parties changed office twice, very little changes in voter turnout may significantly alter political party fortunes. It is simply nonsense to suggest that minor changes in voter turnout (less than 1%) have any significance in party fortunes over the past few years. This is particularly true unless it is demonstrated that voter turnout has an effect in the swing or marginally held seats by each party. Many conclusions reached in this chapter are little more than speculations based on faith and instinct and do little to enhance the book's worth.

Chapter three lists the provincial electoral districts, names the person and party holding each seat, lists the members of the provincial cabinet and their portfolios (as of 1975) and assigns the members of the opposition special areas of expertise and government critique. It also reproduces three excellent official electoral maps of the province (interior, greater Vancouver and Victoria). Chapter four provides detailed election results for each district since 1966. A brief sketch of the settlement pattern, population size, geographical boundaries, occupational profile, etc., is also provided for each district. Given the swing percentages it is suggested Atlin, Surrey, Skeena, Dewdney, Burnaby-Willingdon, Kamloops, Shusway-Revolstoke and Columbia River are key constituencies to watch in the next election.

Taken as a whole, the book opens with a weak, theoretical discussion, then drops it entirely as it trails off into trend speculations and a straightforward presentation of facts and data. While the latter may be of interest to the novice as well as the more sophisticated observer of B.C. politics, little else is provided which would en-

hance the reader's understanding of what actually goes on.

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**STANLEY KNOWLES, THE MAN FROM WINNIPEG NORTH CENTRE, by Susan Trofimenkoff, Saskatoon, Western Producers Prairie Books, 1982, 226 p.**

**T**his book offers a ray of hope to those who fear that the Canadian House of Commons is becoming redundant. The Hon. Stanley Knowles has been a member of Parliament since 1942, except for a gap from 1958-1962. He has always been in opposition, a constant and feared critic of whatever government has been in power yet he has been successful in affecting policy and legislation. He has played a major role in bringing about significant change in Canada and he has worked vigorously to ensure that the House conducts itself properly. This "biographical memoir" describes these achievements and helps to explain those forces which have influenced Knowles' behavior and led to his passion for social justice. Professor Trofimenkoff has based her book in the main on a series of interviews with Mr. Knowles, augmented, by research in Hansard and in Mr. Knowles personal files.

Stanley Knowles was born in Los Angeles in 1908; the elder son of working class Maritimers who had settled in the United States. The Knowles family was devoutly Methodist and the Church, as has been the case with so many social democrats in Canada, was an important part of the family's environment. Knowles' mother died early and his father, a thoughtful and active worker in the Church, encouraged his son's religious and intellectual development. Mr. Knowles Sr. was a "social gospeller" and no doubt his views which emphasized action as well as belief had a profound effect on his son who early in life realized that changing the world inevitably meant public action.

Mr. Knowles Sr., however, was a man who was ill-treated by the economic system. In the midst of the depression, at age 58 and after twenty years of loyal service to his employer he was fired — without a pension, without severance pay, unemployment insurance or other benefits. While he did subsequently find menial work, he died at age 60 and his son is convinced that the trauma of his having been fired hastened his father's death. It is small wonder that the son concluded that the country's social conscience needed to be pricked so that economic and social change would be brought about.

Stanley Knowles initially selected the Church as the institution through which he would work to effect change. After graduating from Brandon College and United College, he was ordained a minister of the United Church of Canada in 1933. He served as pastor of several United Churches in Winnipeg and at the same time took an active role in the C.C.F. party. Not surprisingly, his political activities and his stress in the pulpit on the social rather than the personal gospel upset many members of his congregations; even though services were well attended. In 1940 he became provincial secretary and organizer of the Manitoba C.C.F. and his days as a parish minister came to an end. He had come to the conclusion that the Church was not the institution which would be instrumental in bringing about the kinds of change he thought desirable and he turned to other means. It is to Knowles' credit and to the credit of the United Church that he and the Church never formally separated and thus from time to time Rev. Stanley Knowles officiates at weddings, funerals and baptisms.

In 1942, after several unsuccessful attempts at both the provincial and federal levels, Mr. Knowles was elected to Parliament as the successor to J. S. Woodsworth in the constituency of Winnipeg North Centre, bringing with him the zeal of his days as a crusading minister and the memory of a much loved parent who had been a victim of the system. In his maiden speech he managed to mention pensions, defend the rights of workers under war time conditions and to suggest that Humphrey Mitchell, the then Minister of Labour, resign. He was soon put down by the Speaker for a minor breach of the rules and thus learned his first parliamentary lesson — know the rules. Out of his interest in and knowledge of the rules there developed a keen interest in the institution of Parliament itself and in how to make it work well in spite of its obsolete rules and the even more obsolete attitudes