



## Interview

# Frank Hanley: Independent

*Frank Hanley was a member of the Montreal City Council from 1940-1970 and for four years was vice president of the city of Montreal Executive Committee. He was first elected to the Quebec Legislative Assembly in 1948 and was re-elected five times as an independent in St. Anne. In this interview Mr. Hanley looks back on his political career and comments on his experience on both City Council and the Quebec Assembly. Mr. Hanley was interviewed for the **Canadian Parliamentary Review** by Lynda Steele in November 1985.*

### **What did you do before you ran for public office?**

In my youth I was city and provincial featherweight boxing champion representing the YMCA. I had always loved horses and had worked for some local chaps exercising their horses. One fellow, Mike Grant, used to do a lot of horse shoeing and I can remember taking horses from his stables, four at a time, through the streets of Montreal. I loved horses and decided to become a jockey. I rode in Maryland where my trainer was George M. Ridge. I got a lot of experience because as a novice I was given the tougher horses to ride. After riding in the States for a few years I got too heavy to continue as a jockey and came back to Montreal. For exercise I used to go down and dance on Peel Street – ten cents a dance. During the depression I was on welfare but we had to work for it by doing various jobs for the city. I shovelled sidewalks, did some construction work and other manual work. I got married in 1932.

### **How did you get into politics?**

A friend of mine. Mr. Couturier, got me interested in politics. We were both working for the city at that point. There were no unions in Montreal then and there were a lot of objections to the working conditions. One day Mr. Couturier said to me "Frank let's get into politics so we can object to these conditions." So, we formed the St. Anne's Businessmen's Association. We were pretty active in the area and we made lots of friends. In 1940, I was delegated to run for city council and I won by acclamation. Camillien Houde was the mayor of Montreal at the time.

### **How did you get along with Mayor Houde?**

Great! Just after I got into city council there was talk that the garbage men wanted to go on strike. Apparently, they did not want to have to work after hours when there was a bad storm. Well, another councillor, Honoré Parent, called me up and said "Frank, go down and see if you can settle the strike." So, I went down and we talked and we agreed on a compromise whereby two men took back the horses they used for work while the other men were allowed to stay in the back and drink their beers. Then next time it would be someone else's turn to put the horses away. So it was all settled over a bottle of beer! This got me on pretty good terms with the mayor.

As for Houde himself, he was the greatest mayor we ever had. He ran a city with a heart, a city with a soul.

He took care of his people. And he ran things with good common sense. Montreal in those days was an open city.

### **What do you mean by "open city"?**

Well, he closed the book on regulations. Montreal had prostitutes but they were all in special, segregated areas where they didn't bother anyone — just like the government is thinking of doing now. And we allowed the gamblers and bookmakers to make their livings too. We did not tax the gambling joints, for instance. We did not make them pay for a licence. Instead we just raided them once a month and made them pay a thousand dollars fine each time (which was actually like paying for twelve licences). Montreal was a busy city. It attracted lots of Americans too. And with regard to violence, Montreal from the 1940s-1960s was the cleanest town in North America!

### **In 1948 you were elected to the Quebec National Assembly. Why did you choose to run as an Independent?**

I guess that is the Irish in me...we are just naturally "agin" any elected government! And when the government is elected, I do not join them, they join me. Besides, I do not like being dictated to. I felt I had more power and more influence as an independent. Let me tell you something – I worked for what I got in St. Anne's. I worked day and night. I believe I got more at city hall and more in Quebec as an independent. If you are going to work for your

constituency, you try to use your own common sense and judge what you should do. I figured this was the best way to get all I could, not for me but for my constituents.

**But which party did you support when it came to a vote?**

Well, I voted with the party in power naturally. Why would I do anything else?

**Can you describe your relationship with Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis?**

I was very friendly with Duplessis and we got along very well. Duplessis had the people behind him. He was the best Prime Minister I have ever known. He was very charitable and very good to the minorities but he just was not liked by the English. You know, they could never revive the Union Nationale after Duplessis died.

**Did the Union Nationale put up candidates against you?**

I never really had a strong opposition. Duplessis supported me and did not put anyone strong against me. One time the Union Nationale did decide to run a lawyer. I heard later, after he had lost the election, that Duplessis had said to him "We do not want you to run against Hanley, we only want you to walk!" Then, another time the Liberals decided to try and get me out. They actually told the people that the Pope wanted me defeated. Well, when Duplessis heard that he put his money in to back me and made sure I did not lose.

**What was the Assembly like in the 1950s compared to today?**

Oh, it is not the same now. I would not want to be a member of the assembly today. Then, it too was run with good common sense. Today there are too many professors and stuff shirts. Of course, in those days, you only made two thousand dollars a year if you were in the Assembly, not like the salaries you get today. But then that was not too important because I never liked money much anyway.

Duplessis kept a firm hand over the assembly then and he knew how to get what he wanted. I remember once when he wanted to pass a bill for a luxury tax to be imposed on jewellery. Duplessis got all the members into the assembly and kept the session going for hours. Finally, when he could see

that most of the members of the opposition were asleep he called the vote on the tax bill. He was a smart man and he knew how to manage his ministers too. Anytime one of his ministers was asked a question, Duplessis would point to the minister to sit down and he would get up and answer for him. He always answered for his ministers. Perhaps Brian Mulroney could learn from Duplessis and do the same thing. Look at all the trouble he would have saved himself!

**Electoral practices were also quite different, were they not?**

When we started, we had to pay for our own expenses in Quebec City – from \$2,000 a year. Those who could afford it, paid it themselves. For those who could not, Duplessis gave us money under the table to help us with our expenses. At that time the taxpayers did not pay for an election. Duplessis had a system whereby all the government contracts would give ten per cent towards the election fund. When he called an election, the Union Nationale paid for the election. Now, the system has been changed, whereas the taxpayers pay. And, you still have the "slush" fund where the money left over goes into the party's account. So, you see, Duplessis's method was not bad because our taxpayers never had to pay. Look at the parties now. They have millions of dollars in their fund but the taxpayers will still pay for the election of all the candidates.

As I mentioned, Duplessis helped us out. He used to call me up and ask me how much I needed for expenses and he would give it to me. In 1960 his successor, Antonio Barrett, asked me how much I needed and I said \$35,000. He was shocked. He said the Minister of Finance only got \$25,000. But, I got it anyway!

I did run into some problems at one point with the money I was given. You see, I was given the money to do with as I needed and I did not have to pay tax on it. Well, there was a lot of people more in need that I was. I had people every week coming to my door asking for money and such. I guess I probably gave about one hundred dollars a week to these people. Then, six years later someone snitched and the income tax people came to see me. They said I owed \$32,000 which, of course, I did not have. Instead they said they would take my house. That's what happened. So, we moved and bought a small house in Greenfield Park.

**You left politics in 1970, but not voluntarily.**

I only slipped once in my campaigns and that was against George Springate of the Liberals. Fear of separatism was the main issue at that time and George worked hard on that theme. I was not that worried about it; I thought the election would be a cinch but the people were scared. I guess I was just over confident. So, when the people threw their support behind Springate, I lost.

But you know, even though I lost the election, I had the best time of my life that night. I had devised a plan where I would get Jack Webster and Pat Burns (two controversial radio show hosts) together in one room. I asked each one separately to meet me in a big hotel room where a bunch of us were waiting for the election results. Of course, I did not tell them the other would be there. Well, when the two of them arrived I locked the door behind them and we enjoyed the greatest battle of all times. What a terrific night!

**Why did you run for the Liberals in the 1972 federal election?**

I didn't run for the Liberals. I ran as an independent. Let me explain what happened. In 1972 there was a federal election, so the people said to me "Hey Frank, how about shaking up your federal member. Why don't you run?" Now, I have had Quebec and I have had city council, so I was not really interested in winning but I was willing to rattle them a little. So I got a van with "Official Liberal Candidate" on it...which, of course, I was not! Now, I was driving along Dorchester Street by the CBC and I see all kinds of people gathered around. Apparently the Prime Minister was being interviewed at the CBC. So I figured I would wait and shake hands. Well, Pierre Trudeau arrives, looks at my van, shakes my hand and says "Gee, I hope you make it." The next day in the Sunday papers there is a picture of Trudeau shaking my hand wishing me luck in making it to Ottawa thinking I was the official Liberal candidate. Well, you can imagine the ballyhoo in the Liberal organization of St. Anne's.

Now a few days later I am sitting in a restaurant on Peel Street when a friend of mine comes in and tells me Trudeau is nearby at a meeting. Well, I went down to see him along with forty or fifty other people. Pierre comes out, I am right there, and his limousine is around the corner. He



*Frank Hanley and friend*

says to me "Frank, come here, follow me." We get into his limo, he rolls the window up and he says to me "You little bastard, you trapped me." I said, "Oh, no Pierre, *you* said it!" And you know the funny thing? I damned near won that election!

**Was it not difficult being involved with both the Quebec Assembly and city council at the same time? How did you have time for that plus your other organizations and committees and family life?**

It was not unusual for someone to be involved in both the provincial legislature and city council; actually it was good for the city to have a

member of its council in Quebec City. It was good to know exactly what was going on there in the legislature. And the time... Well, I had to find the time. I was away at meetings and banquets and my wife never complained in 53 years of marriage. My children later became involved with me in my pursuits and they are still interested in politics although my grandson swears I'll never get him into the game.

**So you are still involved in politics?**

Oh yes. I am the President of the Progressive Conservative Party organization here in Montreal and I

worked for Brian Mulroney when he ran for the leadership of the party. I was with him right from when he first got going in politics. A little while ago when the government was considering a reduction in payments to the senior citizens, I wrote Brian and advised him not to do it. I told him he would have a lot of people upset with him. He wrote me back saying he would reconsider, which he did.

It has been over a year since the election and I have never asked for any reward although I was made a Census Commissioner and that will be a pretty big job. I do not know anything about it yet but I guess I will learn. So, I am keeping busy still with politics and various organizations. I do like to be involved you know!