

Rejoinder: No Death-bed Repentance from this Straw Man

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It is not very often that the proverbial straw man in an academic exercise gets the chance to speak up during the process of his own destruction, so the opportunity is welcome. In starting to mow down what he calls my anti-elitist theory explaining Social Credit support, Professor Sproule-Jones in his "summary" says far more about it than did the original article. Nonetheless, after several caveats have been issued, the trial is worth examining in his terms although I fear my own conclusions are that the foundations for his prosecution are themselves woefully shaky in methodological terms, and he must content himself with a Scottish verdict of Not Proven.

First, the two caveats. The major, almost obsessive focus of the original article was the political culture of British Columbia, not the electoral behaviour as such of her voters, and the comments on that subject are few and scattered. Next, the original article speaks of the Social Credit *government* as a form of "institutionalized protest against established social elites," and that is not specified as a general characteristic of the Social Credit *electorate*, although the critic treats it as such.

Still, the anti-establishment coalition idea is interesting. Has the critic really demolished it? The answer is no, not so far as one can safely conclude from the data presented here. While manipulation of the basic data may well be statistically competent, the data themselves are basically inadequate. In their original state, neither the occupational statistics nor the electoral figures are matched geographically as required. Ingeniously, the author tries to overcome this by fitting polling subdivisions into census tracts and goes on from there. But this is a very difficult enterprise in itself and we are told nothing of the researcher's success in dealing with it. The point is critical: in how many cases do his combinations of polls account for 95 per cent or more of the census tract, in how many cases only 90 per cent, 80 per cent, and so on, and what are the acceptable statistical margins within which he is working here? There are two problems: first, getting artificial voting areas for which you have reliable occupational data, and second, getting enough reliable cases to guarantee

the representativeness of the findings for the whole B.C. electorate. Prof. Sproule-Jones tells us nothing about these matters and until he does, it is hard to take his statistics seriously, no matter how sophisticated may be his subsequent manipulation of them.

Taken as they are, the author's findings really seem to give some support to the anti-elite coalition idea with respect to two groups, the professionals and the businessmen (although admittedly not the strongest here.) But, because no relationship is found with respect to the remaining groups in the postulated coalition, the managerial and the lower middle class, he discards the notion. Here again there is basic trouble with essential data — the occupational classifications. All are very coarse and one should use extreme care in generalizing about them. For example, the "labourers and primary workers" are assumed to be the "unorganized ranks of the working class." The Canadian census identified 28,700 persons in this category in B.C. in 1961 (Bulletin 3.1-12); more than 70 per cent of these people worked in manufacturing, construction, transport, and communications industries, many of which are unionized in British Columbia. Had the writer refined this category on the basis of the readily available data on unionization by industry, he might well have discovered some of the relationships he was unable to find using the coarser screen. The situation is similar with the "managerial" grouping; it includes fully ten per cent of the entire labour force in B.C., everybody from forest industries presidents to credit managers, to dress store buyers, to post-masters, to purchasing agents.

The general methodology employed may well be suitable but if the author wants to use it very much, he surely must establish the significance and representativeness of his electoral-occupational units of analysis, and he must refine much more closely than he has the general occupational categories into the sub-groups reported in the general Census of Canada bulletins.

The author's alternative explanation is an academic version of the popular one and for all of that, it may still be a reasonable one. Unfortunately, it too is based primarily on personal observation and is no more supported by the data supplied in this article than are the class and anti-elitist explanations. The author refers to a Saanich survey which is relevant but we know little or nothing about it, and particularly about its representativeness, and comment is impossible. Despite the author's assertions, we still do not have studies testing the two-step flow of information in Canadian terms. Neither do we have evidence cited (other than that of Robin and Black) demonstrating the presence or lack in

British Columbia of social structures mediating political and electoral information; Mr. Bennett told us he had a special pipeline to the Deity and now Prof. Sproule-Jones tells us that the premier has a similar direct line to the voters.

Well, maybe, but . . .

On the general question, there is acceptable evidence, I believe, that class feeling is stronger in British Columbia than it is in most other parts of Canada, there is evidence of Social Credit's constant representation of itself as anti-establishment, and there is, equally, good evidence of the ideological tone which Mr. Bennett likes to give the electoral battle. Little of this evidence, however, has been subjected yet to rigorous quantitative analysis from which superior explanations can be deduced.