

Rejoinder: Class Still Counts

MARTIN ROBIN

Professor Sproule-Jones' "revisionist" paper which, in its first part, sets out to prove that voting behaviour and party support in British Columbia cannot be explained in class terms, explains very little. For one thing his methodology is suspect. Even to my untrained eye, it appears obvious that the admission that his results may have been produced by an inadequate regression technique which "did not test any relationships between the independent variables . . ." is a serious one. More important, some of the "evidence" which he does bring forward reinforces, rather than refutes, the class explanation which he seems anxious to discredit. He points out, for instance, (page 37) that "transportation and communication, craftsmen, production, process and related workers" favoured CCF/NDP, while (page 40) small and medium-sized businessmen supported the Socreds. This differs little from my earlier suggestion that the core support for the two parties differs in a class way, with the preponderant weight of the Socreds coming from the "possessing classes" and that of the CCF, from the working class. I have never suggested, as Professor Sproule-Jones implies, that each of the major parties relies exclusively on its core support. On the contrary, it is obvious that the Socreds, like all previous ruling parties, have successfully enrolled sections of the working class in a governing coalition, although the Socred leadership, from the top down, has been remarkably devoid of working men and labour leaders. It is equally evident, without engaging in any quantitative gymnastics, that the CCF/NDP has made excursions into the sections of the middle class and count many schoolteachers, social workers, lawyers and small businessmen among their supporters. When Professor Sproule-Jones suggests, as he does on page 42, that the Socred success is based upon winning support from a sizeable proportion of the electorate who perceive "the policies of the party instrumental for their own values," I heartily agree. But I fail to see why this is unrelated to the elector's class position. Surely Frank McMahan, a sensitive man with feelings in all of his possessions, perceives the utility of Social Credit in preserving what he owns. Likewise, the hardhat miners, loggers or construction workers who ignore their union

leaders' exhortations and vote Socreds, may equally perceive the Socreds as instrumental to their well being; as a robust growth party which creates favourable investment and employment conditions.

Political perceptions in British Columbia are based upon intensely material concerns. The way you earn a living, what you possess, where you live, has to do with class. "The flow of information" from the politician to the voter is not the simple, direct, single step which Professor Sproule-Jones prefers. It is mediated by groups, regional, ethnic, and especially class, which the Premier and his colleagues have successfully manipulated and integrated into a governing coalition which counts as supporters not merely the lotioned company men in the boardrooms, but many grizzly hardhats in the beerhall.

One further note. Professor Sproule-Jones' brief excursion into the critical election of 1952 is fraught with error. It is incorrect to conclude that "there were two distinct voting cleavages, a cleavage formed by the voters supporting the old parties, and a cleavage formed by voters supporting CCF and Social Credit." For one thing, the cross support between the Liberals and the Conservatives was meagre and ineffectual. In Columbia, Fort George, Kamloops, Nelson/Creston, North Okanagan, Omeneca, Rossland/Trail and Yale, the Socreds either led, or were a close second to the Liberals on the first count. In all of these constituencies, subsequently won by the Socreds, those Conservatives who expressed a subsequent partisan preference slightly favoured the Liberals. But the Socreds had so eroded the Tory primary support that the redistributed Conservative vote was miniscule and ineffective. And there was heavy plumping among the Conservatives. More significant was the support of Liberals and Conservatives for the Socreds in Delta, Dewdney, Peace River, Salmon Arm, Similkameen, Vancouver Burrard and Point Grey, where the major Socred competitors, who either led or closely followed them on the first count, was the CCF. In all of these constituencies, the Socreds won on subsequent counts through vote transfers mainly from Liberal voters. The Socreds won the election because they gathered Socialist votes in areas where they ran closely on the first count against the free enterprisers, and free enterprise votes where they competed with the Socialists on the first count. The old Coalitionists hated the Socialists; the Socialists hated the Coalitionists. Both groups, the expropriators and expropriated, the establishment and the anti-establishment, preferred the novel parvenues to the old enemies.