

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Social Credit member of the constituency of Pincher Creek, Mr. William Kovach, having passed away, a by-election returned a member of the NDP, Mr. Garth Turcott, the first member of that political party to secure a seat in many years. A short session of the Legislative Assembly was held in November of 1966 on which occasion Mr. Turcott, during a speech, made reference to newspaper reports in which suggestions were made that certain ministers and deputy ministers were using their offices to benefit themselves and that a conflict of interest existed in connection with several people whose names he mentioned, I being one of them.

Following his speech, Mr. Turcott, according to the official records of the Legislature, rising on a point of privilege, stated:

"Mr. Turcott

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a question to the Premier and ask him whether his government intends to take any action whatsoever on the charges raised by the newspaper article which I quoted in my Motion."

The remainder of the record reads as follows:

"Hon. Mr. Manning

Mr. Speaker, if it were not for leniency that we properly accord to a new Honourable Member that is not familiar with the responsibilities and rules of the House, I would be strongly tempted to answer his questions with some comments that under the circumstances I will leave unsaid. From time to time everyone in public life knows that politicians in opposition to governments and others, make all kinds of statements founded or unfounded. These are reported in various degrees and various ways, in news media, and sometimes they are blown up as if they were of major importance, depending on the attitude of the media and other times they are minimized and little is said. It is not the responsibility of a Legislature or the government to give credence to unproven unsubstantiated slander and rumors and allegations, made by the opposition or critical politicians and played up in the daily press. If a government was going to start dealing with those things, it certainly would not be giving attention to the public business of the province for which it is elected. The charges that were levelled today, or repeated today by the new Member are well known to every Member of this House, as the malicious and slanderous political propoganda that the Leader of his Party has peddled around this province for months, and as far as the government is concerned we will not regard the slander of individuals and the bandying around of unsubstantiated political allegations as subjects requiring the time and the attention of the government and the House. The Canadian public in recent months have been sickened and frustrated and I think unfortunately disgusted with the type of conduct of our national parliament that has gotten down to this level, where all these types of charges are made supposedly issues of public importance and I can assure the Honourable Member and anybody else who is interested, that as long as we are responsible for the government of this province, we will never lower the dignity of this House to deal with this kind of false and unwarranted accusations.

"Mr. Maccagno (Liberal Leader)

Mr. Speaker, I stand to a point here, because I wish some clarification. Did I understand the Honourable Premier to mention the Leader and his Party. I feel like I am the Leader here, and I hope he wasn't. . . .

"Hon. Mr. Manning

Mr. Speaker, may I clarify for my Honourable friend, the Leader of the Party represented in the House by the new Member for Pincher Creek-Crowsnest.

"Mr. Maccagno

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and if I may—I would like to make this statement because it is an occasion of grave importance. In speaking to the new Member.

"Mr. Dixon (Speaker of the Legislature)

Is it the wish of the House that the Honourable member make this statement? Agreed. Carry on.

"Mr. Maccagno

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I trust that the Honourable Member has fully considered and is clearly aware that as a Member, he is not allowed to impute motives or improper conduct to any Member of this Legislature. The statement that he has made does this very thing and it will be your duty to lay specific charges on the items that you are complaining about. This is your duty, but at the same time, although you have legislative immunity, with that also goes responsibility. May I further remind him as a new Member that any Member that makes these charges, if the charges are substantiated by a Committee that makes a study of them, they are allowed, but if they are not, then of course it is expected that he resign his seat. I make these statements because of the fact that you note we did not stand and we did not make any statement after you read what you did, because we feel that unless you substantiate these charges with something concrete, well then, Sir, we will not be a party to spreading gossip and innuendo, but if you have the facts, Mr. Speaker we are here looking for those very same facts, that it will be our duty and we will present them to this House, but until then they are only innuendo and I will just sit down and conduct the duties I have on me in this House."

The regular Session of the Legislature opened in February of 1967 and again the NDP member, during the debate on the Speech from the Throne, made similar charges to those he had made in the fall session. Rumors had been started years before and it was well known to Mr. Manning and his Cabinet that these malicious innuendos were being propagated by two or three well-known individuals in Edmonton who claimed to be members of the Liberal party and others who were known to be supporters of the N.D.P., as well as certain men connected with the news media.

In July of 1964 I had become the unwitting victim of some of these men and had been threatened by them that my reputation would be destroyed unless I was prepared to tell them stories concerning my Cabinet colleagues, which stories, when publicized, would bring about the fall of the Manning government. This night I shall never forget. In only a matter of minutes following this unpleasant meeting, I conveyed the entire story to the Premier, who, in turn, called the Commissioner of the R.C.M.P. and the publisher of *The Edmonton Journal*.

This conspiracy became well known and *Maclean's Magazine* went so far as to send one of their foremost writers, Mr. Arthur Hailey, to Alberta where he spent a number of weeks checking thoroughly upon this story and other rumors, as well. His story for all to see appeared in *Maclean's Magazine* on November 16, 1964 under the title "The Premier and the Plotters."

For some time Mr. Manning's home and mine were patrolled at night by members of the R.C.M.P. During this time members of my family and I received threatening telephone calls from unknown individuals at all hours of the day and night.

Expecting that the NDP Member would repeat his former charges against me during the Throne Speech debate, I prepared myself well with documentary evidence to be able to prove how unfounded his anticipated charges were. I had, months before, supplied Mr. Manning with this same material. During the weekend preceding his speech, in which Turcott made specific charges against me and the ex-Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Hinman, I received a phone call from a well-known Edmontonian, telling me that he had been informed that Turcott was "going to take off on me" unless I was prepared between that time and midnight Sunday to meet Mr. Ed Leger, a City of Edmonton alderman, in the basement of whose home the July, 1964 meeting to which I have referred, took place and whose name was prominently mentioned in *Maclean's* magazine, and Mr. Neil Reimer, then leader of the NDP, to answer certain questions and give them the assurance that I had no intention of running in the next provincial election. My telephone caller, posing as a friend, told me that he strongly advised me to meet with these men, answer their questions and give them that assurance and if I did so, Turcott "will be called off." This call was repeated several times over the weekend, even as late as nine on Sunday evening. I assured my caller that I was not interested in meeting with these people and it was none of their business whether I ran for office or not. I stated further that if Turcott made charges against me he would find himself in a position where he would have to prove them.

Turcott accordingly delivered his address and in closing stated that he believed he had produced sufficient evidence against certain people to warrant an enquiry. According to the official record he ended his speech as follows: "Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to let the form of the enquiry be established by this House but I do ask that the terms of reference be wide enough so that the truth may be established once and for all and, further, Mr. Speaker, let this enquiry be called without further delay. Now normally, Mr. Speaker, I would have requested or made a motion for an amendment to the Speech from the Throne which would mean a vote of confidence. However, I would prefer to give the government a chance to institute the enquiry I have requested and I ask that this be done."

When he resumed his seat, I anticipated rising in my place to make his the shortest political career in Alberta's history, as I knew I was quite capable of doing, and at the same time taking advantage of such an opportunity to make the people of the province entirely aware for the first time of the events which had taken place in Mr. Leger's basement in 1964 to which I have referred. I was restrained, however, from doing so, by Premier Manning who rose promptly, the record reading as follows:

"Honourable E. C. Manning

Mr. Speaker, I rise merely to make a brief statement with respect to the address we have just heard from the Honourable Member. I think all Honourable Members of the House will appreciate that merely reciting documents out of context does not in itself constitute either accusations, and certainly not proof, of anything either improper or any impropriety. I think the Honourable Members who have listened to what was said today will appreciate that that is the circumstance so far as anything that has been read. Any implications otherwise have been those implied or read into these statements by the Honourable Member speaking.

"The suggestion I would like to make to the House, because even these things if they have no foundation in fact, are readily misinterpreted and misconstrued. I think the Honourable Members will appreciate that these matters are not the type of matters that properly lend themselves to any worthwhile or constructive examination in a general debate such as the Throne Speech debate. For this reason I would like to propose to the House that they do not debate these matters in the Throne Speech. I am only making this as a suggestion—and I think that the House might then consider if there is any conclusion that the matters need to be pursued further that they would either be pursued by an appropriate Committee of the House or by some other form of investigation. I am not prepared to say this at this time that there is any need for that, because certainly there has been no evidence produced in the Honourable Member's statement that establishes in any way anything improper or any impropriety.

"I stress again the only impression in the House is that which the Honourable Member himself wished to leave, based on newspaper articles, newspaper statements and documents taken in the majority of cases completely out of their context. I make this, therefore, as a suggestion to the House."

Mr. Manning's suggestion, being agreeable to the Legislature, made it impossible for me, Mr. Hinman, or anyone else, to reply to the charges and innuendos Turcott had made. The remainder of the official record for that day continues:

"Honourable Arthur Dixon (Speaker of the House)

For the Benefit of the Members of the House I would like to stress that once the documents are tabled, they become the property of the House, and therefore it is in the hands of this Assembly what they wish to do with those documents.

"Mr. M. Maccagno (Leader of the Opposition)

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will have to make this observation that it is certainly impossible to even try to analyse what the Honourable Member has just read, and will concur with the Honourable Premier to the point where I certainly would want a copy of those documents in my possession, and given the time to study them, and for the information of this House if, upon reading these documents and examining them with proper Counsels on our own side we feel that a Committee should be called, I will have no hesitation at all in recommending that by proper motion. I think it is only fair that I make this statement.

"Honourable Mr. Manning

Have the documents been tabled in triplicate, Mr. Speaker, as required, so they can be available to the Honourable Leader?

"Mr. Turcott

Mr. Speaker, I regret that I only have one copy of my documents. I will have to have them re-photostated and obtain the three copies necessary. I apologize.

"Honourable Mr. Dixon

Well, in order to abide by the Rules of the House, the documents must be tabled now, and the request for

extra copies could come through my office and we will see that the request will be granted."

The following morning Mr. Manning phoned me at my office and asked me to drop in to see him a few minutes ahead of our Cabinet meeting so that we could discuss briefly what might be the best thing to do concerning the "stupid charges made by Turcott." This I did and was more than surprised when Mr. Manning started his conversation by saying: "What do you think, Alf, about us setting up a Royal Commission in order to settle these rumors once and for all?" I replied that in my opinion I should answer Turcott that day as I had wished to do as soon as Turcott resumed his seat and added that if after my speech the members believed a Royal Commission should be held, I would welcome it. Mr. Manning argued that the conspirators, of whom we were all well aware, for whom Turcott "had been made the goat" would continue with ugly rumors concerning all the Cabinet ministers and deputies whose names had been mentioned, unless a judge put a stop to it through the vehicle of a Royal Commission. I stated again that I thought it was only fair that both Mr. Hinman and I should be permitted to present the facts on the floor of the House where the charges were made and pointed out that even Turcott had not asked for a Royal Commission, but had stated instead that a form of the enquiry should be decided by the government.

The Leader of the Opposition had expressed himself in like manner and had made it plain that the appropriate standing committee of the Legislature should review the charges.

The recommendation to announce the setting up of a Royal Commission was accepted by the Cabinet almost without discussion. Certainly on this occasion when I was the Cabinet Minister concerned, I believed that the decision should rest entirely with the other members of the Cabinet and consequently made no comment one way or the other. I can truthfully say, however, that had the situation been different and another Minister had been in my position, I would have argued strongly that that person be given every opportunity of speaking on the floor of the House before a Royal Commission was called.

About the time the Session was ending, discussions again took place regarding the possible date for an election and though it had been, as I have already said, tentatively agreed that the fall of 1967, after the completion of Centennial celebrations was past would be the most appropriate time, another suggestion was advanced by the Premier. As had been his practice on previous occasions he had had a poll taken, the results of which indicated that an early election should give the government fifty-four seats. This information was conveyed to our Caucus and a decision was made to hold the election soon, the actual date to be left to the discretion of the Cabinet.

So far as I was concerned, personally, it meant that I would enter the election campaign under a cloud, as certainly it was not possible to convene a Royal Commission, hold its hearings and receive its verdict in so short a time. When I volunteered the statement that I could see no need to rush, seeing that we had decided upon a fall election and that we had thought that the Royal Commission would have rendered its verdict by that time, and that I disliked entering an election campaign under a cloud, the Honourable Mr. Patrick said: "What are you worrying about, Alf? Even the angel Gabriel couldn't beat you in Rocky Mountain House."

A few days later the election date was set for May 23. Not only was this Centennial year, but May 23 happened to be the day upon which the Town of Rocky Mountain House planned what undoubtedly was the greatest event of its long history—the first-ever canoe pagaent had been planned as a part of the Centennial celebrations and canoes from all over Canada had been entered in a race leaving Rocky Mountain House on May 23 and journeying to Expo at Montreal. It was known that the facilities of the Town would be strained to overflowing and arrangements had been made by the Town's Centennial Committee to billet visitors expected to number in the thousands at every available home throughout the district for many miles surrounding the Town.

The Honourable Mr. Holowach, whose department was responsible for all of Alberta's Centennial arrangements, pointed out that Rocky Mountain House that day would be hosting many Centennial dignitaries, including some Federal Ministers. The Town had likewise made preparation for a real Western show, including a stampede attracting world champion contestants. Despite these known facts, a Proclamation was issued declaring May 23 to be election day. I felt like a ball player on whom the count was now strike two, ball three and was wondering whether the next happening would be a strike or a ball.

For this I did not have to wait long. I received a telephone call from Dr. Robert Thompson, leader of the Social Credit Party for Canada in whose federal riding the Rocky Mountain House provincial constituency is situated, telling me that a man who had been one of my good workers continuously since the Social Credit movement first began, William Sinclair of Rocky Mountain House, was, in all probability, going to accept a nomination and run in the Rocky Mountain House constituency as an Independent, with the backing of the Liberals, Conservatives and the disgruntled Social Crediters who were angry, chiefly because May 23 had

been chosen as election day. Dr. Thompson urged me to speak to Mr. Sinclair and to endeavor to dissuade him from his action. I replied that as a staunch believer in democracy, I thought the choice should remain William Sinclair's and that as far as I was concerned I would tell the voters the facts as I knew them to be and would be content with their verdict. The daily newspapers with the possible exception of the *Red Deer Advocate* gave me no chance whatever of winning the election. The people of the Rocky Mountain House constituency had the choice of an NDP candidate, Mr. Gilbert Farthing, an Independent, Mr. Sinclair, and me, Social Credit.

When the ballots were counted on election night, the NDP opponent had lost his deposit, while the Independent had saved his by about two hundred votes, thus becoming only the second man out of eighteen I had faced in nine successive elections to save his deposit. Of the total votes cast, I had won about fifty-four per cent.

As was our custom, a Cabinet meeting had been called for the morning after the election, May 24, and driving up the highway in the early morning, I could not help but wonder what awaited me, remembering that Mr. Manning had told me in October that if I ran for office and won, I would not be in the Cabinet.

After a short Cabinet meeting, I was invited to Mr. Manning's office, there, I knew, to hear my fate. Mr. Manning commented on the tremendous accuracy of the poll which had indicated that the election should give us fifty-four seats and actually we had won fifty-five. I commented that I expected they had counted me out. Mr. Manning then informed me that the people who had taken the election poll had taken a similar one concerning the various departments of government and had arranged their results in the order in which the greatest amount of criticism occurred. He told me that the Department of Welfare was receiving from the public such an amount of criticism that the second one to it did not even come close, and indicated, without actually saying so, that the Department of Municipal Affairs was near the bottom, if not in fact at the bottom, in the amount of criticism received. He told me that it was his desire that I should now leave the Department of Municipal Affairs, take over the Department of Public Welfare, be ruthless where necessary and restore to the Department the type of direction he was sure it required and knew I could give.

He also stated that he was well aware that I had been the chief Cabinet critic of policies followed by my predecessor and I would now have an opportunity of changing them in keeping with the views I had expressed.

Assuring Mr. Manning that I would do my utmost to bring about the results he wished to see in that Department in the same way as I had done in other departments, I left his office and on June 29 was sworn in as Minister of Public Welfare, this being the sixth time I had taken the oath of a Cabinet Minister.

The White Paper in its entirety had been presented to the Legislature during the spring Session of 1967 and the newly formed Human Resources Authority set about to devise programs designed to implement some of the recommendations. After being sworn in as Minister of Public Welfare, I became automatically a member of this Board under the Chairmanship of the Honourable Mr. Strom, then Minister of Agriculture.

In July, Mr. Manning's book "*Political Realignment*" became public and on October 31 Order in Council No. 2070/67 was passed which ratified the Agreement of April 1 between the company known as Systems Research Limited and the government which had officially appointed Erick Schmidt as a Special Consultant to the Executive Council. At the time of this writing Systems Research Limited is a private company in which Erick Schmidt is the major shareholder, the three minor shareholders being Professor of Sociology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Charles W. Hobart; Professor of Sociology at the University of Calgary, F. H. Tyler and Edmonton lawyer, David Murray Bowes.