

# Classic political battle unfolding

by PETER CALAMAI  
 Southam News Services  
 CROFTON, B.C. — One of the oddest contests in the current federal election is happening in a riding that doesn't make sense.

Imagine Vancouver Island as a leg; then the constituency of Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands will be a sock with toes sticking through for the two urban Victoria ridings.

On a map, the 'sock' constituency seems an orderly rearrangement of two previous constituencies, uniting the southern portion of Nanaimo-Cowichan - The Islands with the Malahat section of Esquimalt-Saanich.

On the ground, it is a cartographer's joke — a sea-girt region with the Malahat mountain isolating north from south and east from west, where four-fifths of the population are strung in a 'U' along two highways and which includes the real B.C. lotus land — the idyllic Gulf Islands.

In this setting is being waged a three-way election battle that could become a classic in political science textbooks: ecology versus national trends versus nostalgia.

Nostalgia and loyalty explain why New Democrats gathered recently in this coastal pulp town at yet another Appreciation Night for retiring MP and socialist pioneer T. C. (Tommy) Douglas. Politics explains why the Rev. Jim Manly was also here, working the crowd as the NDP candidate in the 'sock' constituency.

"There's quite a personal following for Tommy on the Island," explains Manly, who hopes to inherit some of that support through side-by-side campaigning with Douglas.

The United Church minister has larded standard NDP campaign fare with quality-of-life concerns. Manly says: "The one thing that will really get out the 'yogurt culture' people on the Gulf Islands are environmental issues, like 2-4-D spraying or tanker traffic."

It's not only island-dwellers who worry about spills from ships bound for refineries in near-by Washington State; most of the riding's 59,000 voters live within minutes of the sea.

"Pollution dangers from supertankers are the natural issue here," says Robb Ferguson, who edits and publishes the weekly Juan de Fuca News in the southwestern community of Langford. "But can David create it?"

David Anderson, former MP from Esquimalt-Saanich and ex-leader of the provincial Liberals, hasn't got much choice. If environmental concerns aren't uppermost with many voters, the 40-year-old maverick Liberal and ecological crusader is dead in the political water.

This knowledge bestows a desperate bravado on Anderson's campaign and likely accounts for uncanny fatalism detectable in the candidate himself.

"The environment is an issue that has in some sense declined to a sort of check-off item, like motherhood. It bugs me that so many environmentalists don't want to get contaminated with politics."

Anderson has some cause for bitterness; as a Liberal backbencher in Parliament from 1968 to 1972, he fought his own caucus and the Trudeau government to toughen Canada's

stance on issues like oil tanker pollution and flooding of the Skagit Valley.

For his pains, the one-time diplomat was lured to the leadership of the provincial Liberals in B.C. with highly-placed pledges of federal support. After winning the only new provincial seat taken by a Western Liberal in the '70s, Anderson watched his caucus defect to the Socreds whom the federal Liberals were courting.

"I believe the Liberal Party is on the verge of disaster nationally because it has been ignoring its provincial branches and instead making political deals," he says.

If Anderson needed any more cause for bitterness, he received it last fall when the Liberal hierarchy in Vancouver unsuccessfully promoted another candidate for the nomination in Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands; the same bosses have so far failed to direct visiting cabinet ministers to the riding, although only Anderson and Environment Minister Len Marchand remain from the 16 Grit MPs elected in 1968.

Not surprisingly, Anderson downplays the Liberal Party in his campaign and tells a bar-room inquirer that Prime Minister Trudeau will step aside within two years, probably replaced by John Turner. Campaign brochures will appeal for support across partisan lines, as the most effective voice in energy and environmental matters.

"If the Liberal Party took him seriously on the environment, you'd think he would have had more impact on the government," says Don Taylor, Progressive Conservative candidate in the riding.

Taylor, a 47-year-old high school teacher is credited (by himself, among others) with rebuilding the Tory organization locally and running a tough campaign against Tommy Douglas in 1974. His confidence now can be credited to the national neo-conservative mood plus a tested campaign machine and projections of the 1974 vote into the new boundaries that give the Tories a comfortable first, with the NDP edging out the Liberals for second.

"We haven't seen much of Tommy in the riding, but the

NDP provincially are spending loads of money," Taylor says, suggesting the New Democrats are counting on carry-over to the expenses-limited federal campaign from unrestricted spending provincially.

So far, the Tory campaign

has been pitched towards the anti-Trudeau mood prevalent in B.C. but Taylor says he'll soon be stressing Joe Clark's positive — if non-specific — pledges to get Canada moving again.

Both New Democrats and Liberals publicly concede the

frontrunning spot to the Conservatives, although with the NDP it's privately considered a tactical advantage to be seen as the underdogs.

But David Anderson has no such solace in his lonely quixotic quest.



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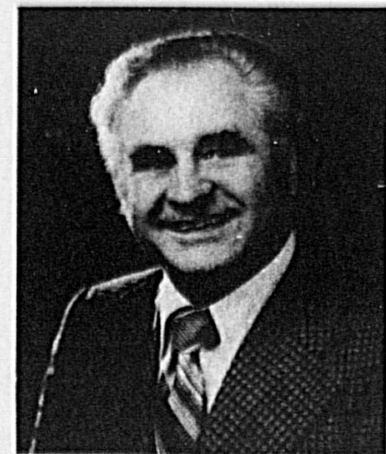
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