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Who will be New Leader of Conservative Party?

Question Asked by J. A. Bradette, M.P. with Interesting Sidelights on Probable Candidates for the Position, as Suggested by Talk at Ottawa These Days. An Interesting Summary of Opinion.

Timmins, Ont., March 15th, 1938.
To the Editor of
The Advance, Timmins

Dear Sir:—I proved to be a bad prophet as to what might happen at the Liberal-Conservative conference which was held on Friday and Saturday of last week. In the several discussions that I had on this subject with Conservative and Liberal M.P.'s, personally I could never visualize that their present leader would relinquish the leadership of his party, at least not until after the next general federal election, which might be held this fall or not later than next year.

My major reason for thinking that way was that when one looks closely into the Conservative ranks, it is easily realized that their present leader is still head and shoulders above any of the potential aspirants to this office, in prestige, poise and ability. I would not say popularity, because it is a well-known fact that with all his fine qualities, he is not a popular man inside and outside of parliament. Another one of my reasons being, as this I know to be a positive fact, that he would have liked very much to cross swords again

as a general election with the present premier of this country, as he is still smarting under the defeat of 1935. Of course in my way of thinking about this matter, I never realized the seriousness of his health condition. Although I knew of his heart trouble that developed during the session of 1934, I never thought that it was as serious as it actually is, and my reason for thinking that way was that I have seen him since and in several occasions, speaking for several hours all in one stretch, with all his usual vitality, force and vibrancy that he always employed in such circumstances, without pause and not even using a single drop of water. Such efforts were almost superhuman, and I naturally concluded that he was again in perfect physical condition. But I proved to be wrong on that conclusion, as his health is now greatly impaired, and so much so that he could not continue for a much greater period of time in his present position.

History very probably will do greater justice to Mr. Bennett than present-day estimations of his work as Conservative Leader since 1927 and Prime Minister during the height of the depression of 1930-35. It is commonplace to state that he possessed outstanding qualities and qualifications, in the fulfillment of the duties of these positions, but still with all these gifts it must be admitted that in some ways, this man no doubt will rank with Canada's great statesmen, his career was almost a tragedy. His capacity for work is unlimited, his knowledge of public problems is certainly very great, his words facile, and his memory a wonderful human encyclopedia, but with all that he could still have been a much greater leader and Prime Minister than he was if only he had not tried to do almost everything himself. He had some good men around him, but he would never give them any

leeway, any kind of latitude in their work and activities, and many a time have I seen his supporters fretting under such a situation. He was not a chief or a general with his friends but he was a near dictator who would not brook any interference from any quarters. No doubt he knows to perfection public opinion only, apparently at least, to flaunt it. He strove with all his might and energy for what he considered Canada's best interests; he certainly never spared himself. During all the time that he was Prime Minister he must have worked an average of at least sixteen hours per day. His car was always parked at the west entrance of the East Block practically day and night. When Great Britain went off the god standard he was under a terrific strain for almost a month. With all these activities he was still the spearhead of his party in the House of Commons. If it is true that he toiled hard for his party, he still worked harder for Canada. He is intensively Canadian at heart; yet withal a tremendously loyal Britisher, a true upholder of the Crown and all that it implies. In the House he is always a great debater, fully seized with constitutional and political knowledge, over an extremely wide range. He has not his equal on the public platform as a most effective and colourful speaker.

Upon whose shoulders will his mantle fall? Unlike the situation in which the Liberal party found itself when Sir Wilfrid had gone, there is no heir apparent to that position, as that place was held by the present premier of this country, when a new leader had to be chosen for the Liberal party.

There is dearth of talent, however, in the present situation. There are several aspirants, all of whom may well qualify. In such a situation, one must remember that many a time the position makes the man. I will review very briefly some of the outstanding candidates for the leadership.

Naturally, not only because I live in Northern Ontario, but mostly for the fact that I am in a position to know his ability and qualifications, Hon. W. Gordon of Haliburton should be a serious contender. He was one of the FINDS of the Bennett administration and he was a revelation to the whole House as a debater and mostly with the administrative qualities that he showed as Minister of Labour, the most responsible department after finances. He is still relatively a young man, not being quite 55 years of age. The only thing that may keep him back from that responsibility would be his state of health which was not very good a few years ago, but which I understand has greatly improved lately. Our section would certainly be happy in such a choice.

Hon. J. Earl Lawson will also be a strong possibility. He is only 47 years of age, and a citizen of Toronto. He is wonderfully gifted as a debater and a speaker. Very alert and rapier-like in his verbal thrusts, he always arrests

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the attention of the House when speaking. He is very clever and legitimately ambitious for higher honours.

Dr. R. J. Manion will certainly be heard from on that occasion. He is 57 years of age, but looks much younger. He has eighteen years' experience as a Federal Member and several years' experience as a Cabinet Minister in the department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment, Postmaster-General and Department of Railways and Canals. He has a brilliant war record and holds the Military Cross. He has also made his mark in literature. He is a strong debater in the House and very colourful on the stump. If he does not get the leadership it will likely be because he is a Roman Catholic, but the opinion is held by many however, that this is not a disqualification, especially when taken with the fact that Mrs. Manion is a French-Canadian. He would likely be the most acceptable candidate, for Premier Duplessis of Quebec, who is certainly a Conservative and would be willing to co-operate with the Federal Conservatives if they chose a man that could agree with most of his viewpoints. No doubt Mr. Duplessis will be a power to be reckoned with in the Province of Quebec during the next general Federal election. Up to two or three months ago, he was considered here at Ottawa as a one-termer, just a flash in the pan, but things in his favour have happened since. He has won a bye-election in Bagot; he was mostly the cause of the defeat of J. E. Grogan, in the last Quebec City mayoralty con-

test, who was an old-time Conservative, had been elected as a Duplessis and then broke off with a few others to form the Parti National. It is also frankly admitted that it was due to Duplessis' influence that G. Heon has been elected as a Conservative candidate in Argenteuil just a few days ago in a federal bye-election. All these events show that he is certainly a big political factor in his province.

Under these circumstances it would seem that it would be a good Conservative policy to have him on their side, although some of the rash and sometimes narrow promises that he made to be elected might prove to be very embarrassing to Federal politics, but on the other hand if he could be appeased there will be less likelihood of his forming a new party Federally. Again I repeat that Dr. Manion would be the most likely man if chosen leader of this party to be acceptable to Mr. Duplessis, although in such an alliance it is very likely that any gain made in Quebec would be offset in the other provinces.

Mr. Denton Massey, M.P., Toronto, aged 38, is certain to cut a big figure in the race for leadership. He is tall, handsome, and a very fine speaker. He built a fine reputation as leader of the famous York Bible Class of Toronto with a membership of thousands of young people. He holds degrees in science and engineering from Toronto and Yale Universities and the Massachusetts Institute. If youth on the one hand and the women's vote on the other are to be given special consideration he may easily be the man to beat.

Erick F. Willis, Man., who is now the Provincial Leader in that province, is another mentioned. He was for several years an M.P. He has a fine presence, is a good speaker, and he showed during his first campaign as a provincial leader in his own province.

The name of Hon. W. D. Herridge is often mentioned. He is 50 years of age and a resident of Ottawa. The fact that he never was an M.P. will likely be against him and from the comments that I heard about his last speeches, he will not get the support of the orthodox Conservatives.

Senator Arthur Meighen will certainly be a factor. He resides in Toronto and is now 64 years of age. So far he has not said a word, but many believe that he would accept the leadership were it offered him. He has been twice Premier and was the head of the famous SHADOW GOVERNMENT, for a few months in the hectic days of 1926. He has been defeated three times at general elections and always against Premier King. He would not be human if he were not tempted to attempt a come-back but it is generally thought that he is fairly satisfied with his present safe haven as Conservative leader in the Senate and also with his multiple business interests.

Senator A. D. McRea, Vancouver, was national organizer in 1930 and a great factor in the victory at the polls that

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year. He is a multi-millionaire; he has already indicated that he is not a candidate.

A person who would have a large following is M. A. Macpherson, 47, Regina, former Saskatchewan attorney-general, but if the reports that I heard about him are correct, his health, due to war services, is not of the best, and would not allow him to stand the strain of that position.

A name that is often mentioned is that of Hon. H. H. Stevens, M.P., Reconstruction Leader. He has no doubt very great qualifications as a leader, unbundled energy, and a very forceful debater. He will likely be welcomed back into the fold after the nomination of a new leader, but the leadership at the moment seems definitely beyond his prize. With all his ambition, he must regret bitterly his petulant ambition of 1935. Every one here is in agreement that if he had not bolted in '35 the leadership would naturally fall into his lap.

Col. Drew, a very colourful figure in Ontario, who to my viewpoint is a coming man, will cut some figure, although he almost burnt his bridges with the party last fall, during the last Ontario election. He has a strong personal following in his native province, but his references in the West Hastings provincial bye-election to the French-Canadians, which he has since denied, and his differences with the Ontario party will work to his detriment, at a national convention.

Hon. W. G. Ernst, a lawyer, 41, Nova Scotia, is a young man that was singled out for his ability by Hon. Arthur Meighen during the election of 1926. Will in all likelihood get quite a large support from the Maritimes on the first ballot. He is a wonderful speaker and has a pleasant personality.

A man that may cause a surprise is Hon. J. L. Bowman, lawyer, 58, Dauphin, Man. He is very unassuming but he possesses wonderful qualities. When he replaced Hon. Black as Speaker of the House he proved to be solid and capable. He has everything to gain in

being better known, and the West very likely will be solidly behind him at least at the early stage of the vote.

A name that is well known in Ontario and which is often mentioned is Hon. Howard Ferguson. He will certainly be there, but he will not likely allow his name to stand.

This is the list of candidates most often mentioned. What about a dark horse? Anything may happen at a convention but here is no likelihood of surprises, at least from all omens that could be seen at the moment. Whoever will be chosen will fall heir to a very responsible position, with his party at low ebb at the present time, and the very likelihood of becoming Premier of his country. Such a position carries great honour with it but also some heavy responsibilities and exacting duties which take heavy toll on the recipient. Such a convention is of national importance and the eyes of the country will be focused on it.

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