CANADA'S 1968 ELECTION

It seems unquestionable that the chief ingredient in the formula of political elections under modern capitalism is a photogenic leader who has what it takes to capture the imagination of the voters. So far as issues are concerned, there no longer exists the cleavages in political philosophy that marked off one capitalist party from another and the answer to the question of which way one should vote — to most voters — is: choose the party whose leader does justice to a Hollywood type of image. The Canadian election of 1968 has proved the validity of this assertion. Seemingly unable, for many years and for several elections to locate such a figure within its borders, the political powers-that-be in Canada have finally succeeded — for the first time in four elections — in providing Canadian capitalism with a strong, majority government. The answer to their prayer was that debonair and dashing, girl-kissing, Kennedy-type hero figure, Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

WHO IS TRUDEAU?

It would seem a strange question to ask about a man who has become almost a household word, a subject of good natured humor and the Prime Minister of Canada. Yet as little as a year ago the name Pierre Elliott Trudeau meant little to most Canadians. True, he had held the Justice portfolio in the Pearson Government and had gained some attention because of the introduction of more lenient laws concerning consenting adult homosexuals and streamlined divorce laws. "The state," said Mr. Trudeau, "has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." But even this hardly explains his sudden rise to national fame. Politics in Canada have been taken so lightly in recent years that a significant percentage of the population have found difficulty in naming the Prime Minister. And, in fact, Trudeau had not been — until recently — a candidate for leadership of the Liberals.

But once he had entered the arena and the Canadian television and newspaper industries went to work on him the question: who is he? became of no great consequence. The main task was to create a mania, a *Trudeaumania,* that would sweep the nation — and the working class in particular because it constitutes the overwhelming majority of this and of all nations and is the section that does the necessary work — off its feet. The mass media did its job admirably and Canada's capitalist class, or at least a large section of it has demonstrated that it has the power and the means to create a Prime Minister. Should the millions of workers who support Mr. Trudeau believe that he is the dog and his capitalist supporters the tail, and that he will wag the tail in the interests of those who do the work, they are due for a rude awakening.

THE ISSUELESS CAMPAIGN

So far as issues were concerned there was little attempt in the campaign even to fake some. Despite the efforts of his rival capitalist politicians to smear him on personal issues, Trudeau found his newly manufactured image to be all that was necessary to defeat his opposition. The fad of kissing the Liberal leader spread like wildfire among young girls and Trudeau kissed his way across Canada and to victory. Even in Quebec, where he was denounced by the Separatist Movement as a *vendu* (a sell-out), he read the signs correctly. Despite an election-eve rumble by a group of French-Canadian separatists, an ostensible attempt to introduce violence and even do bodily harm to Trudeau and other politicians during a parade in Montreal, the cult of the personality triumphed. Issues, even where one did exist, proved to be of minor importance.

The Conservative Party, led by Mr. Stanfield of Nova Scotia, had little going for it. The total lack of an important issue it could present together with the failure to get the Stanfield figure across to the youth as a counter hero to Mr. Trudeau resulted in a Conservative rout, a devastating and shattering defeat. The voters took them up on their own slogan: "Sock it to me," and did that very thing.

The New Democratic Party and the Communist (sic) Party were never in a worse position. Their one-time bold planks of recognition to mainland China and national Medicare had found their way into the platforms of the avowedly capitalist parties. And the old nationalistic cry of Canada's professed internationalists: "Kick U. S. capital out of Canada" had lost its appeal. Even that old stalwart Tommy Douglas (N.D.P.) had run out of his old fire and his party was reduced, despite increased support by unions, to a faded image and to faded hopes.

As for the Social Credit Party, it is reasonable to say that hopes are dead. Having long abandoned talk on their theories of printing-press finance, this election saw some Social Creditors go over to the Conservative Party. It can be expected that Social Credit will soon disappear as a Federal Party.

STANDING (SITTING DOWN) IN THE WINGS

An incident of the Federal Elections of 1968, slightly noted by the press, but of some significance to the working class, occurred in Victoria, British Columbia. During an all-candidates meeting the speaker for the Socialist Party of Canada, Larry Tickner, sat it out during the singing of "O Canada" and "God Save the Queen." This incident separated the socialists from the *professed* socialists. While the socialist was sitting the N.D.P. and the Communist candidates stood up for capitalism and its symbol of patriotism.

An interview of the socialist candidate by the press on this affair went as follows:

Question: Aren't you proud of your country?

Answer: Well, ma'am, you see I don't own any countries. They belong to the people who own the means of production, the capitalist class.

Question: Aren't you proud of being a Canadian?

Answer: Well no, ma'am. Although I was born here, in a sense I am not a Canadian. To be proud of being a Canadian means you are proud you're not something else or that you regard yourself as something basically different from an American or a Chinese or an African. This is contrary to all socialist theory and ideals. Socialists aim for a society where the world will be our country and all men will be our brothers.

Question: You mean you wouldn't fight for your country?

Answer: No, I wouldn't. As I said before, it is not my country and any war is fought over the rights of the capitalists; and the foreign capitalists have the same objective as the capitalists in this country — the objective of getting markets away from the other guy and making profits. Our objective should be to get the productive apparatus away from the capitalists and make them serve the needs of all mankind.

Question: Well, I don't agree with you but I admire you for your guts.

Answer: Thank you very much but it is not a matter of guts. It is a matter of *understanding* and the recognition of social needs.

L. TICKNER, S.P.C.

THE SOCIALIST STANDARD
OFFICIAL ORGAN
of the
SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
12 Issues $2.00 6 Issues $1.00
Sample copy free on request—Literature Agent, 295 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Mass. 02115.

$15.00 WILL GET YOU A LIFETIME SUBSCRIPTION TO THE WESTERN SOCIALIST