



INSIDE POLITICS

with DOUGLAS FISHER MP

Renegade In Power: 'Authentic'

TWO YEARS AGO I attempted a book review of Arthur Hailey's novel on Canadian politics, *In High Places*. It did not come off, although there were many drafts. My difficulty centred on the insight Hailey gave of the below-the-surface rivalry and personality clash within the parties and the Cabinet. All this aspect of the Hailey story circled around the power and scheming of the prime minister.

The melodrama and corn of *In High Places*, the improbability of the story line, were awry for Ottawa. Yet the novel had a gleam of the real thing. Ottawa politics is much more than the debates and legislation of Parliament, much more vivid than the routine of the big bureaucracy. The heart of it is the prime minister: the King, the Bennett, the Pearson, the Diefenbaker. Hailey sensed this. So has Peter Newman.

Around the prime minister there is a moving kaleidoscope of anecdote and rumour. One hears about dozens of incidents of many interpretations of every action from diet to temper to health to favorites. John Diefenbaker is not a self-effacing man. He expresses strong opinions; he has many moods; he is intensely personal. His presence and his actions, great and petty, almost demand a response. Throughout his premiership, the responses came from all of us inside politics.

Much of the criticism rolling around Peter Newman's *Renegade In Power* is really shock that so much of this unofficial Ottawa comes through the weird subsurface word of the caucus, the campaign trail and the deadly jealousies. How accurate is Newman? I think "authentic" is a better word than "accurate." I am a nosy person who shared with Newman and many others an obsessive interest in the Diefenbaker years.

I have listened to dozens of Tory MPs and talked with most of the cast: the Pearkes, the Grosarts, the Brunts, the executive-assistants, the deputy-ministers, the newspapermen. So has Peter Newman. Out of it he has grasped the uniqueness of the period. This is the overwhelming presence and influence of the contradictory personality of John Diefenbaker on even the minor issues and people. This makes his book "authentic."

Unfortunately, it also makes much of the book debatable. This debate may cause partisan to miss the straight, sound journalism of chapters such as *The Bill Of Rights*, *The Servile Press*, and *The Fiscal Sins*. There is nonsense about, that an accurate portrayal of the period and its dominating figure must wait until the papers and documents are available. In fact, this argument is irrelevant. *Renegade In Power* is not an encyclopedia on the Diefenbaker years or even a source-

limning this prime minister. He is too immediate, too flamboyant for state papers to be significant. He took us over a high divide into a colorful scene, much like the American circus at Washington. The traditional British screen of dignified sanctity disappeared, I believe, forever. At least, Mr. Pearson and his Cabinet and his followers are carrying on as though it is the same plot, in the same place, for the same audience.

It is obvious that Peter Newman has received detailed information from at least two members of the Diefenbaker cabinet on how it operated. Certainly three or four executive-assistants to cabinet ministers have unburdened to him. None of the information was mysterious or unknown. It has not been "the thing to do" to use it. Newman has, and I say "Bully for him." He has opened up the basement of Canadian politics. Hereafter, there will have to be much quicker evaluations of performance and the pressures at work on the prime minister. We have in the open now the mid-20th century North American practice of politics as it is. The situation may not be pretty but it exists.

Let me illustrate the validity of Newman's approach with several examples from his book. They may seem petty. He notes the remarkable increase in the use of ice cubes by the Members during the Government crisis last January and February. MPs do drink liquor, so do cabinet ministers. Some drink heavily, others less, but during times of stress on the Hill interminable arguments and visitations go on in the rooms. This was the most notable period for drinking that I witnessed in the past six years on the Hill. Important? No. But interesting, and an integral part of the whole.

Some say Newman has been unnecessarily harsh to Ministers such as Pierre Seigny and Noel Dorion. Most of us were aware, through much more gory detail than Newman gives, that these two men were mistrusted by their chief. It was right to describe them as they were. The other day I heard one loyal Diefenbaker Minister characterize Newman's account of the cabinet crisis and the notorious caucus where George Hees pledged eternal loyalty as "wildly inaccurate." Perhaps it is, as he remembers. But I was given descriptions of both the crucial cabinet meeting at the Diefenbaker home (where Douglas Harkness announced his departure) and the caucus where Gratton O'Leary unrolled his emotional appeal for unity in the party. These came from witnesses. They square with the Newman account.

TRUTH AND FICTION are often inseparable. Hailey's fiction and Newman's fact have this in common. They give a dimension to our politics.