

# From Day dream to nightmare

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## What went wrong

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It's only nine months since IStockwell Day won a decisive victory over Preston Manning for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance. Party membership had exploded to more than 200,000, and enthusiasts were hyping Mr. Day as the next prime minister. Now the Alliance is badly split, and observers are saying Mr. Day can't survive as leader. What went wrong?

Many point to the string of gaffes attributed to Mr. Day as proof that he never had what it takes to be the leader of a national party. Yet, without denying the importance of his mistakes, recall that Mr. Day spent 15 successful years in Alberta politics, including seven in the Cabinet; and he capped it off with a highly praised stint as provincial Treasurer, where he was second in importance only to Premier Ralph Klein. By any normal standard, he proved himself a competent politician.

All party leaders make mistakes — all the time. It's a tough job and nobody does it flawlessly. So why have Mr. Day's mistakes been so costly? Consider the double leap

own office. The rebellion in caucus is only the latest and greatest in a series of similar events.

Mr. Day's personnel difficulties were compounded by even deeper problems of political culture. Although its image may be in the media, the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party is not highly ideological. Under Don Getty and Peter Lougheed, it was markedly centrist. Mr. Klein seized on balanced budgets, debt reduction and tax cuts, but he has never had a full conservative agenda.

The internal culture of the party emphasizes loyalty, team play and pragmatism, not adherence to abstract principles. The external culture is a kind of generic populism, in which the leader says to the voters, tell me what you want me to do. In a very real sense, the Alberta PC Party is the Ralph Party. That's where Mr. Day learned his politics.

In contrast, the internal culture of Reform/Alliance is more like that of the NDP. Commitment to principle is prized above everything else, even above winning. Populism is a theory of representation and party organization, not simply a posture of open-mindedness toward ordinary people.

Alliance members would overlook a great many gaffes if they saw Mr. Day as an ardent exponent of their core beliefs. As leader, however, he has not given that impression. During the election

campaign, he appeared to back away from the flat tax, from private-sector reforms in health care, and from the party's policies on direct democracy. Since then, he has not identified himself fervently with any Alliance principle.

In a sense, he tried to adopt Ralph Klein's personal style, which works so well in Alberta. But there is a crucial difference. Mr. Klein earned the trust of voters by imposing fiscal discipline on his profligate province in the early 1990s. It was a hard, nasty battle, which sorely tested Mr. Klein's toughness and commitment. Winning that fight gave him the right to say to voters, you can trust me.

Mr. Day, however, has not won anything at the federal level except the Alliance leadership itself. By not championing party principles clearly and decisively, he did not give Alliance members the reasons they need to keep on supporting him, thus making it possible for party insiders to topple him.

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