

THE ALLIANCE RACE

Manning the lifeboats

Preston planned his political career very carefully, says Tom Flanagan, everything except his departure

An eerie symmetry haunts the political careers of Preston Manning and Joe Clark. The two men were born in the same province (Alberta), attended the same university (University of Alberta), and have lived in the same house (Stornoway) because they held the same job (leader of the Official Opposition).

After graduation from university, Mr. Clark became an assistant to Peter Lougheed, leader of the resurgent Alberta Progressive Conservatives; Mr. Manning worked on special projects for his father, Ernest, the Social Credit premier of the province. The first major encounter between the young politicians took place in the mid-1960s when they collaborated behind the scenes on an ultimately unsuccessful plan to merge the Alberta Progressive Conservatives with Social Credit.

Mr. Clark became leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada in 1976. Mr. Manning became leader of the newly founded Reform Party of Canada in 1987 and, the next year, challenged Mr. Clark in his Yellowhead riding in the federal election. Mr. Manning lost, but his 29 per cent vote was considered respectable and helped propel Reform to prominence.

In 1992, Mr. Clark laboured mightily to produce the Charlottetown constitutional accord, while Mr. Manning laboured mightily to defeat it in the ensuing referendum. Mr. Clark never forgot nor forgave him for that.

In 1998, after becoming leader of the Official Opposition, Mr. Manning announced that the Reform Party and he were unlikely to ever win an election on their own. He launched the United Alternative project to facilitate a coalition with the Progressive Conservatives, whose new-old leader was (surprise!) Joe Clark. But Mr. Clark rebuffed the United Alternative, just as Mr. Manning had rebuffed the Charlottetown accord.

Now comes the most striking coincidence of all. In 1983, Mr. Clark resigned as leader of the Conservative Party after receiving a less-than-overwhelming endorsement at a national convention. He thought he would win the ensuing leadership race, but he lost to Brian Mulroney. "Joe never could count," joked Mr. Manning.

Now, Mr. Manning has resigned as leader of the Reform Party to open up a leadership race for the new Canadian Alliance. He undoubtedly thought he could win the ensuing race because, at the time he resigned, there were no other serious contenders. But then Stockwell Day en-



Preston Manning's political path has been strikingly similar to Joe Clark's. COLLEEN KIDD/CP

tered the race, won the first ballot by a convincing margin, and now looks poised to win the runoff tomorrow. "Preston never could count," Mr. Clark must be chuckling to himself.

One last possible coincidence remains to be tested. After losing his party's leadership, Mr. Clark swallowed his pride and went on to play a constructive role in Mr. Mulroney's cabinet for nine years. Will Mr. Manning follow suit if he loses?

Early in the race, Mr. Manning publicly stated that he would run again for the Alliance, no matter who won the leadership. Thus, at least up through the first ballot, the campaign was fought on the assumption that Mr. Manning would emulate Mr. Clark's gracious acceptance of defeat and his devotion to the greater good of the party.

Events of the past two weeks, however, raise doubts about that scenario. Mr. Manning has unleashed his aides, especially Rick Anderson, to conduct a negative campaign against Mr. Day. Mr. Anderson is behaving with the reckless abandon of a man who sees no future for himself in the party. He has predicted that Mr. Day will take the party backward, compared him to the hapless Kim Campbell, insulted his supporters as "instant members," and accused him of trying to intimidate Alliance caucus members.

For the past 10 years, Mr. Anderson has been Mr. Manning's closest adviser and chosen instrument. He did exactly what his leader wanted, and his leader shielded him from the antagonism his actions often aroused among Reformers. What does it say about Mr. Manning's future intentions if Mr. Anderson is now visibly greasing the skids for his own departure?

Mr. Manning would not likely look forward to playing a subordinate role under Mr. Day's leadership. As the founder and only leader of the Reform Party for 13 years, Mr. Manning is used to exercising autonomous judgment. Moreover, he is rather solitary by nature, not a gregarious committee man. It will be surprising if he ends up imitating Joe Clark's example of becoming a good team player and loyal subaltern. Retirement to private life after a decent interval might be the best option, both for Mr. Manning and for the Alliance.

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