

Stockwell could ^{GM} carry the day ^{March} _{13, 2000}

He may be just the man to lead the Canadian Alliance, says Tom Flanagan

According to the old proverb, you should be careful what you wish for, because it might come true. Preston Manning wished for a leadership race to jumpstart his new Canadian Alliance; now, with Stockwell Day poised to enter the contest, Mr. Manning has got not only the race he wanted, but a formidable opponent who could take his job away.

In some ways, there's little to choose between the two men. Mr. Manning expresses his views in a more original and eclectic way, but he and Mr. Day both endorse the policy package approved at the recent United Alternative assembly. Neither proposes to reposition the Canadian Alliance. Thus the contest between them will revolve around a comparison of personal attributes. Which man will be better able to communicate the party's policies and attract the additional voters needed to win a national election?

Mr. Day, 49, had a varied and undistinguished career before becoming a member of Alberta's Legislative Assembly in 1986. Now provincial treasurer, he has shown himself able to borrow ideas from elsewhere and make them work — notably his radical plan for a flat tax.

Mr. Manning, 57, son of Ernest Manning, the Social Credit premier of Alberta from 1943 until 1969, has been steeped in politics all his life. He's been leader of the Reform Party since 1987 (he was in a consulting firm with his father before that) and became leader of the official opposition in 1997. The types of experience are different — one in government, the other in opposition — but it's hard to say which one is superior.

Both men also share the political problem of being evangelical Christians. The media have become bored with probing Mr. Manning's beliefs and proclaiming them intolerant and patriarchal, but they will surely subject Mr. Day to the same treatment as the campaign unfolds. And Mr. Day, it must be admitted, has made it easy for them with a long series of ill-judged remarks. The worst of these, which has involved him in a \$600,000 defamation suit, was his criticism of a lawyer for defending a client against a child-pornography charge. Advantage here to Mr. Manning, who makes no off-the-cuff comments in public.

What about brainpower? Mr. Manning is more intellectual and widely read than Mr. Day. I wouldn't be surprised to see him reading *War and Peace*; he's a fan of Leo Tolstoy. He had the vision to found the Reform Party and then to force its transformation into the Canadian Alliance. Mr. Manning would have an advantage here, except that as a political party becomes larger and more mature, the leader's individual intellect matters less than his ability to spot talented people.

And Mr. Day can take ideas off the shelf and put them to work, whereas Mr. Manning has to make every idea Prestonian.

Indeed, because of Mr. Manning's need for intellectual autonomy, he sometimes drives away capable people whom he sorely needs. He lost the loyalty of Stephen Harper, one of the most highly regarded Reform members of Parliament; Mr. Harper left in 1996, frustrated by Mr. Manning's unwillingness to take his advice. And Mr. Manning fired Randy White, the most effective House Leader that Reform had yet found, for displaying less than absolute loyalty.

Mr. Manning has also had major problems managing his Commons caucus and the Reform Party's executive council. He set an unenviable record by expelling or suspending five MPs from caucus in six years, and he lost three of the top four officers in the last executive council.

Stockwell Day's record, in contrast, is that of a good team player, and there is reason to believe his personality will lend itself better to managing both caucus and executive council. Social conservatives in Alberta regard him as their Great White Hope in Cabinet, but he doesn't expend his political capital fighting unwinnable battles, and in fact has delivered little to this group; his achievements are in the fiscal realm. Mr. Day is extroverted and gregarious (perhaps his is a calculated spontaneity — for one photo op, when he removed his shirt, his T-shirt sleeves were already rolled up to reveal the biceps). By contrast Mr. Manning is introverted and reserved. That Mr. Manning doesn't build strong personal ties with very many people is a large part of his continuing difficulties with caucus and council.

Most people who get into politics — in all parties — have personalities closer to Mr. Day's than Mr. Manning's; hence the supposition that Mr. Day will experience fewer problems in political management. If that prediction comes true, Mr. Day as leader will be able to devote his full attention to selling the party to the voters, whereas Mr. Manning has had to chew up large amounts of time fighting rearguard actions against erstwhile supporters within his own party.

These same personality factors have limited Mr. Manning's ability to reach new voters. The few people who get well acquainted with him know that he can be kind, thoughtful, and funny in his laconic way; but his personal qualities don't project well in the mass media, especially on television. It may not be fair, but it is true that he turns off many potential voters, who perceive him as stiff, awkward and, worst of all, untrustworthy. Ever since the departure of Brian Mulroney, Mr. Manning's individual poll ratings have put him at or near the bottom of the pack for na-

tional party leaders.

Mr. Day's quite different personality will give him a chance to reach the numerous voters who have some sympathy for Reform's policies but have not developed trust in the party and leader. Of course, he won't appeal to everyone. Those on the ideological left will quickly realize that he stands for the same policies as Mr. Manning, and will reject him for that reason. But he doesn't need to appeal to everyone. In the past two elections, Reform got about a fifth of the vote, just under 20 per cent. If Mr. Day can bring another 20 per cent on board, he will become prime minister. Even if he can get only another 10 per cent, he will establish the Canadian Alliance as Canada's second party, ready to move into government when the Liberals falter.

Mr. Day's supporters see this as a simple situation that any sports fan should recognize. Your team has come a long way but has never been able to win the championship. At some point, you fire the coach and hire a new one. You don't know that the new one can win, but you're sure the old one can't.

Or, to put it in biblical terms that both men would appreciate: Mr. Manning is the Moses who has led Canadian conservatives within sight of the Promised Land, but he can't seem to get over the last mountain range. Maybe Mr. Day will be the Joshua who can finally capture the walled city of Ottawa.

But this will not be a cakewalk for Mr. Day. All human beings have limitations, and Mr. Day's, whatever they may be, will emerge under greater public scrutiny. He now has the advantage of being relatively unknown, compared with Mr. Manning, whose weaknesses have been on display during 13 years of leadership. After a three-month campaign, the comparison may be more flattering to Mr. Manning than it seems at the moment.

Mr. Manning, moreover, is a tenacious, cunning, and experienced campaigner. He showed his mettle on March 9 when he upstaged Mr. Day's campaign launch with his own announcement that he will resign as Opposition leader to spend all his time on the campaign. This immediately upped the ante for Mr. Day, who had been toying with the idea of campaigning on weekends while remaining provincial treasurer. He better rid himself of that idea: a part-time candidate will not beat Mr. Manning.

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