

## David Orchard at Harbour Centre: Churchill or Cassandra?

—Donald Grayston

In July, in response to an article in *The Globe and Mail* about the possible departure of Joe Clark as leader of the Progressive Conservatives, I wrote an only half-kidding letter to the editor suggesting that since the NDP was looking for a new leader, that under Alexa McDonough it had become an increasingly 'blue' party, and that the departure of many to the Alliance had turned the Conservatives into even more of a 'red Tory' party than they had earlier been, that now would be the time for the NDP and the Tories to unite and choose David Orchard as leader.

The appearance of this letter generated a phone call from the Orchard organization (Citizens Concerned about Free Trade-Campaign for Canada), and this in turn to an appearance of David Orchard at Harbour Centre on July 23, 2002 co-sponsored by the Institute under the 'human rights and democratic development' rubric in our mandate.

For those unfamiliar with him, let me say that David Orchard is a fourth-generation Saskatchewan farmer (an organic farmer since 1975) who in 1985 began to organize against the free trade agreements entered into by the Mulroney government. In 1998 he was the runner-up in the Tory leadership race, and in 2000 ran, unsuccessfully but respectably, in John Diefenbaker's old riding in Prince Albert. Since then he has continued as a nationalist gadfly in the Conservative Party, and his articles warning of economic and political threats to Canadian sovereignty have appeared in many papers.

Orchard is a modest, sincere, well-informed and well-spoken man of strong conviction. A reference he made to Winston Churchill suggested to me that he sees himself in the tradition of Churchill in the thirties, one who warns the people about unending disaster

Photo by Don Grayston



whether they will listen or not. On the strength of about ten days of publicity, about 200 people, half of them in their teens and twenties, came to Harbour Centre to hear him—an instructive testimony to his appeal.

His theses are those that he repeats wherever he goes across the country: that Canadians are losing—perhaps have lost—ownership of the greater part of the economy to Americans; that the Liberal government is gradually surrendering Canadian sovereignty to the Americans; that no national party other than the Tories has the capacity to form a national government; and that if those who share his concerns will join the Tory party, as he has, there is still a chance to maintain the sovereignty of Canada as the northern neighbour of an increasingly angry and anxious United States. Here I should emphasize that there was no note of gratuitous anti-Americanism. Rather, he believes that under past Conservative administrations—the Mulroney period excepted—Canada has managed both to retain sovereignty and be a good neighbour to the United States, and that this should be our objective for the future.

He shares the feeling of Karin Litzcke in a recent article that Canada, having dealt with its budgetary deficit, is experiencing a 'democratic deficit'—a phrase much used this year by Paul Martin ("Paul Martin on the campaign trail—or not," *The Republic of East Vancouver*, Issue 42, 11 July 2002, p. 4). Litzcke's point is that Martin did not as finance minister, and thereby "part of the small group of people who make the

decisions in Canada," appear to be at all concerned about the "democratic deficit" about which he is now speaking. But the phrase is a good one, because it describes the perception of many about our present federal political situation, one in which the Liberal government appears set to govern forever because of the weakness and dividedness of the opposition

parties.

The deficit, in Orchard's view, can, in the classical view, be made up if enough people will involve themselves in the political process and work in that process to defend our sovereignty. The immediate goal would be the defeat of the Liberals by a Tory government; the next step would be the abrogation of NAFTA, something which the agreement itself permits on the basis of six months' notice.

As an individual, he is an unusual person—transparently sincere and classically patriotic—to find in national politics in a time of widespread public cynicism. I believe that it will be interesting and instructive to follow his 'Campaign for Canada' and to see whether his identification with Churchill turns out to have substance, or whether the figure of Cassandra, from an earlier time and struggle, would be a more appropriate parallel.

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