



## Out of the political wilderness of French Canada has come

SOME WEEKS after the June 18 election, R  al Caouette was sitting in his summer cottage near Rouyn, Quebec, enjoying his favorite pastime: talking politics with friends until all hours of the night. The conversation swung around to the compulsory check-off of union dues.

One of the group, a worker from nearby Noranda mines, spoke in favor of the check-off. Without it, he said, there is a temptation for workers to "freeload" on the union.

"But you must have confidence in people," said Caouette. "If you've got the answer, others will follow of their own free will."

He squinted through cigarette smoke at the miner and asked suddenly: "Don't you have confidence in yourself?"

"Well, no . . . not absolutely."

"Me," said Caouette, "I have 100-per cent confidence in myself."

The remark was off-hand but delivered with absolute certainty. It explained a great deal about the deputy national leader of Canada's resurgent Social Credit party.

Since the federal election last June, a good many Canadians have regarded 44-year-old Joseph David R  al Caouette (pronounced Ray-al Ka-wet) with confusion verging on panic. He came out of nowhere. At



one moment, he was an obscure French-Canadian politician, deputy leader of a party without a single member in the House of Commons. The next moment, before many French-Canadians realized what was happening, he barged into the national spotlight with 25 Quebec Social Credit Members of Parliament behind him.

He spoke like a demagogue — people even compared him to Quebec's late Premier Maurice Duplessis. He believed, blindly, in an off-beat economic doctrine aimed at the destruction of Canada's traditional monetary system. He spoke for a party plagued in the past by the adherence of religious fanatics, racists and fascists.

In Quebec, the elite was horrified.

On the day after the election, Gerard Filion, editor of Montreal's daily *Le Devoir*, looked down his nose at Caouette and deliberately insulted the voters of his own province.

"Undoubtedly, Quebec is not a province like the others," he wrote. "She is a little more stupid."

Caouette dismissed Filion as an "intellectual."

"Quebec is really two provinces," he explained.

"Montreal is separate from the rest."

"Last June, we won Quebec. The next time, we'll take Montreal."

A Caouette supporter in Rouyn, 400 miles



northwest of Montreal, was more direct.

"As far as we're concerned," he said, "they can put all those Montreal intellectuals into a monkey-cage and charge admission."

As for the rest of Canada, if there ever was a bogey-man calculated to scare it half to death, Caouette was it. Was he a Separatist? Did he want to place crucifixes on every street corner? Why did Quebec Tories, in their campaign literature, call him "Castro" Caouette?

Behind the uproar, the automobile dealer from Rouyn grinned like a Cheshire cat. Everyone else had trouble placing him but Caouette knew exactly where he was. At last, after more than 20 years of struggle, he was right where he belonged. Let others think it extraordinary. He had always known that it would happen.

"Me, I have 100-per cent confidence in myself."

And in Social Credit.

"Ever since that day in the fall of 1939, I have known the answers," he said.

September, 1939, was a momentous month for Canada. On the other side of the world, Hitler was marching into Poland. In the frontier Quebec mining town of Rouyn, Caouette was entering for the first time the weird and always potentially wonderful world of Social Credit.





# RÉAL CAOINETTE:

## Spellbinder From Quebec

By Peter Desbarats

Photos by Louis Jaques  
Weekend Magazine Staff Photographer

*a leader whose oratory entrances some and horrifies others*

He can recall the moment photographically for he has an unbelievable ability to remember dates, names and faces.

He was 21 years old, earning \$23 a week as a travelling grocery salesman in Rouyn. It wasn't much but it was better than his first job as a \$37-a-month bank clerk in his home town of Amos, 50 miles northeast of Rouyn. It was even better than working as clerk for a road construction outfit, the job he had held in 1937 when he married Suzanne Curé, a bright, black-haired Amos girl whom he had known practically all his life. Their first months of married life had been spent in a tarpaper shack on the construction site.

The turning-point in Caouette's career came on the September day in 1939 when he walked out of a grocery store in Rouyn and spotted an old schoolmate across the street. Lionel Houle, "on the road" for a meat-packing firm, was sitting in his car reading a newspaper. It was Vers Demain (Toward Tomorrow), published by a new Social Credit organization in Quebec, the Union des Electeurs. To this day, Caouette remembers that the name "Gerard Magny, Amos," was printed on the subscription mailing sticker on the front page.

Houle gave Caouette a lift home and the newspaper as well.



"Some new nonsense," he said. "You might as well keep it."

"I walked into the house," Caouette recalled, "and started to read. My wife said, 'Supper's ready,' but I didn't hear a thing. I didn't eat until I had read every word."

"After supper, I read it all again. I read most of it aloud to my wife. I don't know how many times I read that paper in the next couple of days."

"You can't realize how I felt. Suddenly I found all the answers to questions that I had been asking myself for years. It was all perfectly clear."

It was love at first sight and Caouette has lived in the arms of Social Credit ever since. His faith never wavered, even in years when Quebec Socreds celebrated on election night if one candidate saved his deposit. It became as much a part of him as the Roman Catholic religion is.

In the fall of 1940, he attended his first Union des Electeurs meeting in Rouyn and took an active part in the question period which followed the speech.

"We asked questions for hours and hours," he said. "Boy, did we want to learn!"

"There were two Franciscan priests there and I remember going up to one of them after the



meeting and saying, 'What did you think of that?' He told me that 90 per cent of it was perfect and the rest was better than anything the old parties were saying."

On June 15, 1941, Caouette delivered his first public speech to a Socred study group at Bellecombe, a small town about 13 miles south of Rouyn. From then on, he was a frequent speaker at Union des Electeurs meetings throughout northwestern Quebec.

The political platform had been his goal since childhood. As a boy in Amos, he had travelled to political meetings with his father, Samuel Caouette, for 35 years a district colonization inspector and Liberal organizer. Later, he would climb atop an overturned washtub in his backyard and repeat the speeches for neighborhood children. In high school, he memorized entire speeches by Honoré Mercier, Quebec's premier from 1887 to 1891 and a leading French-Canadian nationalist of his day.

Caouette and Social Credit became synonymous in Rouyn. People said, "Hi, Social Credit," when they met him on the street. So closely were the man and the party identified that his employer, a wholesale grocery dealer in Val d'Or, received visits from worried organizers of rival parties. The dealer



Continued on Next Page





Family man Caouette visits hospital where son Roger, 23, is recuperating from a broken leg. From left are daughter Andrée, 12, Roger, Mr. and Mrs. Caouette, and son Gilles, 22.

## Caouette / Continued from Preceding Page

called in his salesman from Rouyn and laid down the law: No Credit.

"Between being a slave and a free man, I'll always choose to be a free man," Caouette said, according to his own recollection.

The boss gave him a polite handshake and the sack. That same evening, Caouette walked down the street from his home in Rouyn and bought out a small grocery business. The purchase price was the estimated value of the stock, \$76.

He spread the word around his brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and every Socred supporter in town and soon the business was grossing up to \$6,000 a month, including feed sales. In 1944, Caouette sold the store to a brother-in-law and went to work for Remi Joyal, owner of Joyal Garage Ltd. and a staunch supporter of Union des Electeurs.

His military draft notice caught up with him at this point but Caouette ignored it successfully until the end of the war.

In 1945, the death of the Liberal member for Pontiac constituency forced a by-election. Joyal gave Caouette six weeks' paid vacation during the campaign and the 27-year-old candidate was off and running under the Union des Electeurs banner. His standard opening on the platform was something like this:

"I've got 40 minutes so just hold on, boys, and let's see what the Liberals and Conservatives have been doing to this country..."

He criticized Members of Parliament for increasing their indemnity by \$2,000 a year at the previous session.

"They know how to vote for themselves but when it comes to voting for the people... ah, that's another question," he said.

**C**AOUETTE won the election with a slim majority of 1,033 votes. He was the first and, until this year, the only Social Credit member ever elected to Ottawa from Quebec. He sat through three sessions of Parliament beside 13 Social Credit members from Alberta with whom, he said, he felt "very comfortable." But he was frequently at odds with the Speaker and members of other parties, particularly a group of young French-Canadian Liberals led by the member for Montmagny-l'Islet, Jean Lesage, now Premier of Quebec. Less rambunctious members used to refer to the Liberal French-Canadian section of the House as "Little Chicago."

Caouette's first speech precipitated an extraordinary outburst in "Little Chicago." At the end of his address, he refused to offer customary congratulations to the member who had seconded the address in reply to the Speech from the throne. The Liberal member in question, he said, occupied a seat "stained with the blood" of Social Credit party workers. Lesage immediately demanded a retraction and received, instead, a repetition of the charge from an apparently confused Caouette. Subsequent pandemonium masked the fact, obvious in Hansard, that Caouette never did retract the accusation.

Although most sections of Hansard make dull reading, a trip through the official record of parliamentary debate with Caouette is a carnival. On May 7, 1947, there was this typical exchange:

**CAOUE**TT: The Union of Electors stood for the removal of income tax on all incomes under \$3,000 per year. Personally, I have received thousands of petition cards and signatures...

**SOME HONORABLE MEMBERS:** What a farce!

**CAOUE**TT: My honorable friends opposite should open their ears and shut their big mouths if they wish to understand.

**GAUTHIER (Portneuf):** Why don't you shut yours?

On another occasion, Caouette was quoting extensively from Pope Pius XI's encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno," when a voice from "Little Chicago" inquired, "Did you read it in Latin?"

"My honorable friend should read it in French," he retorted, "in order to get it through his thick skull and grasp its true meaning."

**W**HEN he wasn't advocating a national dividend of \$20 a month for every Canadian, the member for Pontiac was urging Parliament to repeal the sales tax and restore the five-cent soft drink. Seconds after disposing of soft drinks, he was saying such things as:

"... therefore, it was Hitler who put an end to the 1929-1939 depression and brought prosperity to the world, since we enjoyed its benefits only during the war."

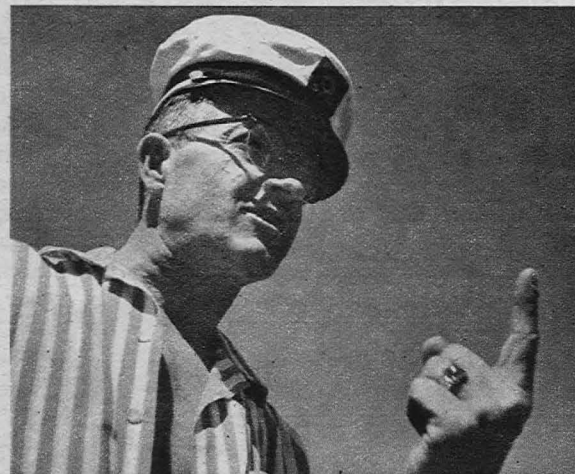
Caouette enjoyed his years in Ottawa.

"I spoke French most of the time in the House," he said, "but many of the English-speaking members used to come in from the lobbies to hear me."

"I remember Mr. Diefenbaker coming up to me after a speech one day and saying, 'I didn't understand a word of it but, boy, you were good.'"

Caouette even recalled the "Little Chicago" gang with a trace of fondness: "I've always liked hecklers. They give me the pep to go like a lion."

Caouette claims that he knew his days in Ottawa were numbered more than a year before the 1949 federal election. In 1948, he said, Premier Duplessis sent two emissaries to Ottawa to confer with him. According to Caouette, they offered to give the Union des Electeurs six seats in the 1948 pro-



Relaxing at summer home at Lac Dufault, north of Rouyn, Que., Caouette is never averse to a political discussion — even during a vacation.

vincial election if the party didn't place candidates in any other constituencies.

"In those days, I would have accepted the deal," he said. "After all, it would have given us six full-time Social Credit workers in Quebec."

"But the leaders of the Union des Electeurs, which seemed to be going pretty well at that time, insisted on running a full slate of candidates. All of them lost."

As a result, according to Caouette, Duplessis' National Union organizers worked strongly against Social Credit in the 1949 federal election by striving to assure the election of the Liberal candidate. The results give some support to this story. The Conservative vote in Villeneuve riding, created when Pontiac constituency was split in the 1947 redistribution, dropped from 7,487 in 1946 (in Pontiac) to 958 votes in 1949. The Liberals increased their majority slightly — enough to defeat Caouette, who nevertheless polled 10,980 votes as a Union des Electeurs candidate.

Caouette stuck with the Union des Electeurs but with less and less enthusiasm. In 1956, when the Union was enjoying a brief flirtation with Liberals, he ran provincially as the Liberal candidate in Abitibi East, losing to the National Union candidate by about 2,000 votes.

He ran federally in 1957 and 1958 in Villeneuve but without success, coming in third in 1958, fewer than 2,000 votes behind the Liberal winner.

The years between 1949 and 1958 were lean years politically, comfortable years personally. Caouette took over the Joyal Garage in Rouyn and built up the business until it reached an annual volume of more than \$700,000 in good years. Among his 22 employees were two younger brothers, Paul, now 36 and his sales manager, and Conrad, 39, in charge of the garage's stock room. The oldest brother, Maurice, 53, was mayor of Rouyn and chairman of the school board until he resigned recently on the advice of his doctor.

Réal eventually sold 50 per cent of his business to his two brothers and four senior employees. With his father-in-law, a skilled carpenter, he built a frame cottage on the shores of Lac Dufault, a few miles north of Rouyn. Every spring Réal, his wife, their two sons and daughter emigrated from their winter home beside Joyal Garage to the summer "estate."

There he assumed the role of a true "père de famille." Dressed in yachting cap and shorts, he scooted about the lake in his 60-horsepower outboard. He likes fast boats and big cars — speed, apparently, is the only thing that can divert him from business or politics, his only vocations and diversions.

**I**N 1957, at the annual congress of Union des Electeurs in Three Rivers, Caouette became the centre of a small underground revolution. Leaders of the Union, at this time, were showing signs of the para-religious idealism that had pervaded Social Credit in Alberta only a few years earlier. Premier E. C. Manning eventually clipped the lunatic fringe from the movement in Alberta but the same ideas had taken root firmly in Quebec. Meetings of the Union des Electeurs opened with recitations of the rosary by members wearing white berets and carrying white flags. Speakers fulminated against an international conspiracy led by such "world plotters" as bankers, Communists and members of the Masonic Order.

The party's Quebec organizer, Mrs. Gilberte Coté-Mercier, began to appear to her followers as something of a latter-day Joan of Arc. In 1957, Solon Low, then national Socred leader, referred to the Quebec movement as "a commercial affair based on fascist tactics and thriving on suspicion and racial prejudice."

Two weeks after the Three Rivers congress, Caouette and 10 other dissatisfied Socreds met in Montreal's Sheraton-Mount Royal Hotel to outline a new policy. Caouette's "Ralliement des Creditistes" was born on June 4, 1958, at a convention in Quebec City attended by about 150 delegates.

The new leader of a brand-new party started to work immediately on the 1962 election campaign. He had watched the spread of private TV stations across Quebec with growing fascination. He knew that William Aberhart, the first Socred premier of Alberta, had used radio

Continued on Page 22





Strategy for the forthcoming session of parliament is discussed by Robert Thompson, Social Credit national leader (holding up brochures), and Socred deputy national leader Caouette (with cigarette pack). With them are some of the 26 Quebec Socreds elected in the June 18 federal general election.

## Caouette / Continued from Page 4

in the 1930s to create a vast personal following in a relatively short time. Caouette wanted to do the same thing through television.

In 1958, he started his first series of weekly 15-minute telecasts on CKRN-TV in Rouyn. The response in the initial weeks was disappointing.

"Television experts told me that I had to speak smoothly and quietly on TV," Caouette explained. "They said that I had to talk as if I were sitting in a living-room, chatting with friends. They sat me in a chair and told me to speak softly.

"Well . . ." he lifted his hands and shoulders in a typical Gallic gesture of hopelessness, "nobody was watching at all.

"So one day I said, 'Never mind the advice.' I threw away the chair. I forgot about this nonsense of speaking to friends in the living-room. Most of the people out there weren't friendly. They were Liberals or Conservatives. They were the enemy. I had to go after them the hard way. I had to fight."

**C**AOINETTE fought and ratings zoomed.

He mastered the art of looking directly into the lens of the television camera when he spoke. This gave his eyes an almost hypnotic quality. Viewers had the impression that his eyes could follow them about their own living-rooms. He never had to look down at a printed text. His notes for a 15-minute telecast usually consisted of two or three sentences scrawled on a scrap of paper or the back of a cigarette package.

As Ralliement groups came into being in other areas, their first target was to collect enough \$14 annual memberships to buy time on private television stations. Caouette travelled regularly from Rouyn to a film studio in Quebec City where he would punch out half-a-dozen 15-minute television appearances in an afternoon. Within a few years, the filmed speeches were being carried by 10 TV stations covering a sickle-shaped swath of Quebec from Rouyn east to the Lake St. John region, south-east to the St. Lawrence North Shore area and the Gaspé Peninsula, west to Quebec City and south to the Eastern Townships. Social Credit victories in the province on June 18 followed this pattern almost exactly.

By 1961, when the national party held a leadership convention in Ottawa, Caouette estimated that there were 14,000 dues-paying members of the Ralliement in Quebec. Rumors circulated through the convention that Premier W. A. C. Bennett of British Columbia was backing Caouette for the national leadership but the job went to Robert Thompson, a chiropractor and educator from Red Deer, Alta. Caouette was elected deputy national leader, a unique two-headed leadership arrangement that possessed obvious advantages in Quebec.

Despite his standing in his own party, Caouette failed to attract widespread attention in his own

province until about a month before the June 18 election. Only then did reports of huge Socred meetings in rural Quebec begin to reach newsmen in the larger centres. Reporters were hurriedly sent to investigate and their stories confirmed rumors that something was brewing in the backwoods.

Wherever he went in his Chrysler Imperial — and he never stopped moving — Caouette drew thousands. He could attract an audience of more than 1,500 people in a town of 2,000 population. In Quebec City, his audience two weeks before the election was triple the size of those that turned out to hear Prime Minister Diefenbaker or Liberal Leader Pearson. During every speech, young Socreds moved through the aisles with collection boxes. When Caouette moved into an area, it usually meant money in the bank for local Ralliement groups.

There was much about Caouette that reminded newsmen of the late Premier Duplessis. His nose, for one thing, is an astonishing replica of the famous Duplessis beak. He has the same ability to speak to Quebec voters in their own language, using everyday terms and folksy parables. This led many English-speaking observers to assume that Caouette was preaching a brand of French-Canadian nationalism during the campaign.

**A**T a Socred rally in Quebec City, for instance, a reporter from Detroit turned to a bilingual Canadian newsmen in the middle of a rousing Caouette speech and shouted in his ear: "Great Scott, what's he saying? I haven't seen anything like this since Castro!"

The Social Credit leader, his arm waving, sweat flying from his face, wasn't saying anything that couldn't have been repeated safely at a tea party for Liberal women in central Ontario. He said that taxes were too high. Interest rates were excessive. Conservatives and Liberals had failed to give Canadians economic security. There was usually only a brief reference to Social Credit's expand-the-money-supply doctrine.

"You've got nothing to lose," Caouette told Quebec voters. "Why not try Social Credit?"

Far from being a French-Canadian nationalist, he preached national co-operation between English and French. He never used the word "nation" in the Quebec sense, as did many candidates of the older parties. The word, in French or English, always meant the confederation of 10 provinces when Caouette delivered it.

"I am not for national unity," he said, "but I am for national understanding.

"You can't make an Englishman out of a Frenchman or a Frenchman out of an Englishman. But you can make each into a great Canadian."

Canadians in other provinces saw television, newsreel and newspaper photographs of a man who

looked frighteningly like a dictator. He stood on the platform in an extra-erect stance, his chest pushed out, his head rearing high and back. His arms jabbed through the air and his voice required no help from public-address systems.

When he entered a hall for a meeting — he was frequently late — audiences shouted down local speakers and chanted for Caouette. He rarely spoke for more than 40 minutes but by the end of each speech he would be soaked with perspiration. His suitcase on the campaign trail bulged with dozens of drip-dry shirts.

He almost never ate a full meal until after midnight. He seemed to be able to subsist on tomato juice and squares of processed cheese. He often would speak at three or four meetings a day, sleeping in the back seat of his car while a party worker took the wheel.

"I can sleep better in a car going 70 miles an hour than anywhere else," he said.

This is the picture that Canadians glimpsed briefly in the final weeks of the 1962 campaign. It looked like a dangerous combination of demagogue and dynamo. But the picture was incomplete.

To understand anything about Caouette, you have to travel to the mining and timber country of northwestern Quebec and see him in his own setting. You have to meet his father, his four brothers and three sisters, an extraordinarily happy, lively and united clan. You have to see him walking down the main street of Rouyn or Val d'Or, hailed by almost every passerby, joking with Liberal and National Union organizers, talking, talking, always talking about Social Credit. There is always a wisecrack, a slap on the shoulder and a quick handshake. He never stops campaigning.

You have to sit with him in a motel room at night after a successful rally. His black homburg, jacket and grey vest — the official "uniform" never varies — are thrown across the bed. He has taken off his shoes and socks, loosened his suspenders and unbuttoned his shirt.

He pours a small shot of cognac into a tumbler and fills it with hot tap water. Talking and smoking have left his throat raw, but he doesn't stop doing either.

He will sit on the edge of the bed hour after hour, swapping political stories, debating monetary theory, going over the events of the night's meeting in minute detail. If the meeting was successful, his sense of excitement and elation will make it impossible for him to sleep until shortly before dawn.

"They say that I'll quiet down in Ottawa," he laughed.

"Ha! I'll fight harder and harder."

**T**HIS is not a simple man to understand: prosperous in his own right, he is able to express French Canada's sense of economic injustice; a good family man, the politician within him craves movement and continual excitement; a sincere Canadian, he is becoming inevitably a symbol of French-Canadian nationalism for many; a near-fanatical believer in Social Credit, he likes nothing better than a good argument.

Some time after the June election, Caouette was sitting in the garden of his summer cottage, dipping at random into cardboard boxes brimming with mail. He came across a letter from the Queensland Division of the Australian Social Credit Society. After congratulating him on the Socred showing in Quebec, the president of the division wrote:

"We would like to know what approach you used . . ."

There is no formula. In the spring of 1962, Caouette spoke and French-Canadians were ready to listen. Thousands were ready to vote for an economic theory none of them really understood. They were ready to follow a leader whose career, until then, had been an almost uninterrupted story of defeat.

Taking a tip from Quebec, Social Credit will launch a stepped-up national television campaign this fall. One of its main "stars" will be the fiery deputy leader. Caouette himself is convinced that he can "fight" on television as effectively in English as in French.

What impact he and his "boys" from Quebec will have on the national scene is today one of the most fascinating of all the questions that hover about Canada's political future. ◀