

Polls indicate scant Tory progress

Stanfield—'The Alternative'—may have muffed things

By
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It's not so much his personality as poor campaign planning

OTTAWA — As the 1972 campaign enters its final phase, the cumulative evidence of numerous public opinion polls indicates that Conservative Leader Robert Stanfield's intensive and expensive campaign has failed to produce significant results for this party.

Now time is growing short.

There is still a real possibility that the Liberals will fail to maintain their majority at the end of this month, but the prospect of minority government now is no closer, to say the least, than it was at the beginning of the campaign. It is a good deal more remote than it was a year ago.

Without anticipating the outcome of the election, there is sufficient evidence at this stage to justify a start on the post-mortem of the Stanfield campaign.

Little gain

About a year ago, public opinion polls show that the Liberal government was well below the level of public support needed for a majority. Why has the Conservative leader, in a campaign that is obviously crucial for his own future, been unable to develop this potentially strong position under the pressure of an election campaign?

The usual answer to this question has to do with Stanfield's personality,

and lack of political sex appeal.

One of the Liberals' most active national campaigners, Finance minister John Turner, exploits this in a statement that he uses at the end of every speech, and that invariably draws a mixture of laughter and applause from his audiences.

"Don't compare the Prime Minister to the Almighty," he says, "just compare him to the Alternative."

But the "personality" explanation for Stanfield's failure to bring his party ahead in the campaign isn't the whole answer. Last year, when the polls were more favorable to the Conservatives, Canadians had watched Stanfield closely for more than three years, and were fully aware of his political style.

Those who then favored the Conservatives have seen nothing in the past year which would alter their assessment of Stanfield except in a positive way. Almost a solid year of campaigning has, in fact, sharpened his public personality, and made him a more effective campaigner today than at any earlier time in his career.

Campaign flaw

The explanation of Stanfield's problem in this campaign is deeper, more complex, and more serious for his party, than the old "personality" business.

There seems to have been a serious conceptual flaw in Stanfield's campaign which has been reflected and aggravated by the failure to provide him with the intellectual "back-up" required by any major party leader in this day and age.

As a result, the Stanfield campaign has been a curious combination of modern technique and old-fashioned content.

A typical campaign appearance by Stanfield goes something like this:

First of all, there is about 20 minutes of lively music from the six members of "Jalopy" who travel across the country with the leader.

Then Stanfield is introduced and speaks for five to 10 minutes, usually from a few notes. The basic elements of this speech are national pride, government mismanagement exemplified by unemployment and the cost of living, the income tax cut promised by the Conservatives and a pledge to "put Canadians back to work."

After the short speech, "Jalopy" strikes up again, and against the background of this cheerful music, the Conservative leader moves slowly through the crowd and on to the next stop where the performance is repeated with little variation.

There have been few set speeches during the campaign — perhaps only half a dozen in the first month — and minimal discussion of policy. For a



(Gazette) Steve Jensen

ON CAMPAIGN TRAIL: Stanfield during recent Montreal visit.

leader who is popularly supposed to be long on thought and short on charisma, it has been an unexpected and even astonishing performance.

Ineffective

The polls indicate that it hasn't been particularly effective.

At least up to this point, the Stanfield campaign appears to have deliberately ignored the extensive development of policy which has taken place within the party in recent years. Policy statements have been issued by party headquarters here during the campaign, in pamphlet form, but there has been little attempt to draw attention to them

and almost no attempt to relate them to the leader's campaign.

The structure of Stanfield's speech-producing system reflects this almost casual approach to the content of his campaign. It was described as "informal" by one member of the Stanfield entourage.

The few major speeches that have been delivered have been pieced together by a small number of writers and policy advisers in Ottawa and Toronto and then transmitted to Stanfield through Tom Sloan, a former journalist who has been at Stanfield's side throughout the campaign. The frequent short speeches delivered from brief notes on a single sheet of paper are usually worked out

by Stanfield himself in consultation with Sloan.

As far as an outside observer can tell at this stage, this process has failed to produce a clear intellectual concept of the Conservative campaign. It has been, in many senses of the word, a "reactionary" process, responding to events and failing to provide the leader with an opportunity to state his position in detail on many subjects of national concern.

The average voter, of course, has neither the time nor the inclination to formulate this critique of Stanfield's campaign, but the polls indicate that he might be reacting to an intuitive perception of aimlessness and lack of coherence.