

Voter Psychology
by Lloyd Robertson

"A lawyer is a politician in its larvae stage."

The joke works because politicians and lawyers are members of the least trusted occupations in Canada. It does not help the reputation of either that lawyers who are not appointed judges by politicians often become politicians themselves.

Who votes for these untrusted politicians anyway?

The first prime minister of this country, John A. Macdonald, also founded our first kickback scheme. A percentage of the millions paid to the Canadian Pacific Railway found its way back to Macdonald's Conservative Party. He lost one election over the scandal but the voters forgave him and re-elected him in the next.

The voters were not so forgiving to "Lyn' Brian" Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives who were reduced to 2 seats in 1993. The party fell apart with its western wing renaming itself "Reform". Many western voters apparently believed these politicians had actually reformed.

Squeaky voiced Reform leader Preston Manning kept blaming the media for only finding racists in his party but not in other political parties. But finally even he knew that only another name change was in order.

The media has aided the Reform Conservatives by calling them the "Canadian Alliance". The name is a lie. This party is no more "Canadian" than the "Canadian Liberals" or the "Canadian New Democrats". And there is no alliance. The Reform party had hoped to woo the other conservatives but the "progressive" ones turned them down. But their voters have yet to catch on.

Political name changing in Saskatchewan is old hat. Here the right wing party has alternated between calling itself Conservative and Liberal for the past 50 years. Up until the last provincial election the pattern was consistent. The right wing would form a government. It would get discredited and lose an election to the NDP, It would then change its name and get elected again. After large numbers of Premier Grant Devine's Conservative cabinet were charged with fraud the "Liberal" leadership under Linda Halverstock thought it was their turn at the public trough.

But the discredited old Conservative leadership along with some Reform Conservatives, formed the "new" Saskatchewan Party. Many Liberals, seeing that the "new" right wing party was now going to be "Saskatchewan" and not "Liberal" became Saskatchewan Party members.

The rump Liberal leadership was so angered by what they saw as "back stabbing" that they formed a coalition with their old enemy, the NDP.

The federal Liberals have not had to change their name, not because they are more honest but because they are smarter. They took the program of the Reform Conservatives and slashed social

spending. Then they talked like New Democrats and warned the voter of the danger of the Reform Conservatives.

Rick Laliberte, elected as a New Democrat, joined these Liberals, he said, to fight that danger. In fact, Laliberte's move helps ensure that Stockwell Day, or someone like him, will be prime minister some day. If "Reform" by whatever name it goes by is the only alternative to the Liberals and the Liberals fall into disfavour, as some day they must, then the voters will have no other choice.

The voter is manipulated by greed and fear. We want to get something for nothing as when the Conservatives promised to eliminate the provincial sales tax or the Liberals promised to end the G.S.T. Or we are motivated by fear, as when the right wing party attacks minorities or the NDP warns us of the attack on medicare.

In politics the voter is the mark. Any swindler knows that the mark wants to believe the lie, that is why the swindle works. The voter may end up believing that politicians are dishonest but it is the voter who has made the politician. The voter punishes politicians, not for being dishonest, but for being stupid enough to get caught. The game will go on until the voter changes the rules.