

## Some Political Parodies from Alberta's *Common Front*

The Common Front is a confederation of groups and individuals united against the cuts to social services instituted by the Tory government in Alberta in the name of deficit reduction. In Edmonton and Calgary, and apparently in some rural ridings as well, the Front is divided into Community Action Teams, nicknamed CATs, which operate on their own initiative. Calgary's North Hill CAT has discovered the binding value of song. We published what seems to have been their first effort, "O The Tories," in our *Notes* section a few issues back (29.1, March 1995). At the Common Front's First Anniversary Celebration, November 2, 1995, the North Hill CAT was back with a happy-birthday-to-themselves parody of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" printed on a single sheet and what amounted to a small *songbook*: four sheets stapled together, xeroxed front and back. Most of these parodies are credited to "Ted George and partner."

The esthetics of parody would be worth exploring; clever new words attached to a familiar tune offer the pleasure of surprise and sometimes various sorts of *double entendre*. (Many of the latter, many of the jokes in general, will only be



Yvonne Stanford, Ted George, and Peggy Ward, lead the singing at the Common Front's First Anniversary, November 2, 1995. Photo by GWL

clear to those who write and sing the songs. Topical songs, by definition, are for incrowds or will require footnotes!) Perhaps the value of such items can only be perceived in the act of singing them. A good tune can carry a great deal of baggage. (Consider, for example, "They've Got the Whole Province in a Mess" in this collection.) And, of course, the tune's familiarity allows the audience to join in the creative experience; if, from time to time, singers confuse the original words and the new, the resulting hilarity adds to the delight of the experience. An esthetic experience of some complexity may thus be offered in the mask of modesty. Thus Allison Acker of the Raging Grannies told Peter Gzoswki in October that anyone who could sing too well was not allowed in their group; not all of the North Hill CAT were willing to come onstage with Ted George in November, and George himself began by claiming that he was not really a singer.

Herewith are a few of our favorites from the pamphlet.

—GWL

### Ralph Klein (*tune*: "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean")

Ralph Klein he did speak to the people  
Ralph Klein called us all you good folk  
Ralph Klein he did speak to the people  
We think it is all a bad joke

#### Chorus:

Give back, give back  
O give back Alberta to me, to me  
Bring back, bring back, a caring soci-i-ety.

He said we were clearing the deficit  
He said we would clear the debt  
He said we were clearing the deficit  
And there goes our safety net

Our seniors are poverty stricken  
Our health care is bleeding to death  
Our children are uneducated  
The Tories say "Oh what the heck!"

The Common Front is our salvation  
The Common Front is our only hope  
The Common Front is here to fight them  
And help us to laugh and to cope

### Those Were The Days

Once upon a time we had a province  
Where fairness and justice were the norm  
Once upon a time we had a province  
Then the Tories hit us like a storm

*Chorus:*  
 Those were the days my friend  
 We thought they'd never end  
 We'd have health care and education too  
 Then along came Novatel, Magcan and Pocklington  
 The province turned into a great big zoo

Once upon a time we had a province  
 Where a day's work got a fair day's pay  
 Out of Texas came an old idea  
 Now right to work's the buzzword of the day

Once upon a time we had a province  
 Where education had priority  
 Once upon a time we had a province  
 Now McJobs don't need schooling don't you see

**Bye Bye Health Care** (*tune: "Bye Bye Blackbird"*)

Pack up all the sick and poor  
 Show them to  
 The BC door  
 Bye bye health care

Close the hospitals,  
 Lock the doors  
 There ain't no  
 money no more  
 Bye bye health care

Private docs and nurses will be costly  
 Lab tests will be for the ri--ch mostly  
 Pray you don't get sick till we  
 Dump the Tories in the sea  
 Health care Bye Bye

**They've Got the Whole Province in a Mess** (*tune: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."*)

*Chorus:*  
 They've got the whole province in a mess  
 They've got the whole damn province in a mess  
 They've got the whole province in a mess  
 They've got the whole province in a mess

They've got all of our health care in a mess  
 They've got the education system in distress  
 They've got the poor and the homeless living on less  
 They've got the whole province in a mess

They've got the old folks scared, and under stress  
 They've got human rights taking a rest  
 They've got people on welfare moving out west  
 They've got the whole province in a mess

They've got big corporations doing the best  
 They've got the rich folk richer, and paying taxes less  
 They've got Bovar and Magcans splitting the rest  
 They've got the whole province in a mess



Political parodies are not new in Alberta. During the years when the Social Credit Party dominated the provincial government, a group of sceptics gathered outside a schoolhouse where a party meeting was in progress, singing to the tune of "The Old Grey Mare,"

Social Credit ain't what it used to be,  
 Ain't what it used to be,  
 Ain't what it used to be.  
 Social Credit ain't what it used to be,  
 Many long years ago.  
     Many long years ago,  
     Many long years ago,  
 Social Credit ain't what it used to be,  
 Many long years ago.

Here we sit like birds in the wilderness,  
 Birds in the wilderness,  
 Birds in the wilderness.  
 Here we sit like birds in the wilderness,  
 Waiting for our dividend to come.  
     Waiting for our dividend to come,  
     Waiting for our dividend to come.  
 Here we sit like birds in the wilderness,  
 Waiting for our dividend to come.



Readers may wish to peruse **A Toast to Baldy Red: Back Porch Ballads and Parlour Poems** (Edmonton: NeWest, 1991), edited by Sid Holt and GWL, an anthology of Alberta folk and popular poems, and **Ballads of the Badlands** (Jasper: Coyote, 1991), a collection of poems and songs by Arthur Peake, presented by Cyndi Smith, for more political parodies and original items. For a satirical response to contemporary Alberta politics from another perspective, see Bill Sarjeant's contribution to the News column of this issue of the Bulletin.