"Dave Barrett, British Columbia’s controversial Social Credit party premier ..."

A man named Frank Riley wrote that in an article on western Canada last year. Later, in the same article, he described someone as "keen to get enough British Columbians off their butts to throw the Social Credit party out of office" because of its social policies. And in another article he described how "well-to-do owners of mining properties (were) protesting tax policies of the Social Credit provincial government".

Frank Riley is a U.S. newspaper columnist and an associate editor of Los Angeles Magazine. He wrote these two articles for the Saturday Review, a prestigious New York-based magazine. They were published last November 2 as part of a cover story on "Canada: Restless Upstairs Neighbor."

How does an experienced journalist manage to tour western Canada, study it in enough depth to write authoritatively about it, and still confuse the Social Credit and New Democratic parties?

His answer follows. He says it was a slip. Perhaps it was. But this doesn't explain how no one at Saturday Review who saw Riley's articles before they were published had enough knowledge and alertness to spot this error. If a mistake like this can slip through, what confidence can a reader have in anything in this magazine?

At least Saturday Review had the grace to publish, in its January 11 issue, the following letter about Riley's confusion, together with his reply.

THE LETTER

"As a former United Statesian, I enjoyed your features about Canada, especially the Canadian west. ...But though Frank Riley (‘From the Prairies to the Pacific,’ November 2) may commendably have left his acquisitive-ness behind, he should have brought along a few smidgens more of his inquisitiveness: His referring repeatedly to British Columbia's incumbent premier and government
as 'Social Credit' suggests that he went through the province with his eyes and ears closed. Dave Barrett and his New Democratic party 'socialist horde' themselves ousted in 1972 the Social Credit government which, under a man named Bennett, had run the province in their own strange way since 1952. They may be mere labels, but Social Credit right-wing conservatism and the NDP's brand of socialism are so far apart on the political spectrum, and their differences so fundamental, as to make Riley's egregious slips hilarious -- and sad."

William E. Messenger
Vancouver, B.C.

THE REPLY

"What can I say? After an incredible lapse happens on the way to the typewriter keys, you can only bow your head to the winds of wrath such as have come my way from Mr. Messenger and others. My sin is made more mortal by the fact that British Columbian events have been so closely interwoven with our personal lives since the late Sixties, when young friends, and then subsequently a near and dear member of our immediate family, moved there as a consequence of Vietnam and much else that was happening in the United States. I have heard them talk for hours about British Columbia politics. When I next hear from them, Mr. Messenger's letter by comparison will seem positively forgiving."

Frank Riley

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