VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Aug. 27 [1972]—This huge, rugged province is in the midst of an exuberant election campaign that is testing an old style of politics as well as the appeal of one of Canada's most durable leaders.

Premier W.A.C. Bennett, as fiery at the age of 71 as he was when he took office 20 years ago, is running for another term, against three aggressive challengers, each at least 30 years younger than he.

Like the three opposition candidates here, the Premiers of Canada's nine other provinces are all now in their thirties or forties, and most of them came to office by defeating older incumbents during the last. three years.

But British Columbia, which views the rest of the country from the far side of the Rocky Mountains, has always done things differently, and its Premier is widely expected to win an eighth term next Wednesday, insuring another period of his special brand of government.

‘Socialist Hordes’

“The socialist hordes are at the gates of British Columbia,” Premier Bennett thundered at a party rally the other night, drawing the cheers of an enthusiastic crowd that included pensioners clutching colorful banners and wizened old women with provincial flags stuck in their hairnets.

This area has a high percentage of elderly people, drawn here, as to California, by the mild climate in which snow is rare and breezes from the Pacific can be balmy year‐round. But pervading even the cosmopolitan chic of Vancouver, it also has a lingering frontier spirit, in the buccaneer tradition of the men who came here 100 years ago looking for gold, and Mr. Bennett's ringing defense of “free enterprisers” has wide appeal.

The cabinet minister who introduced the Premier at one recent rally warned that the New Democratic party, his prinicipal opposition, “would cast you out of your home and out of your businesses.”

Then, to thunderous applause, Premier Bennett proclaimed that the opposition leader, David Barrett, was “a socialist in sheep's clothing” who was “in bed” with the Communists.

Broad Coalition Opposed

Mr. Barrett, a 41‐year‐old legislator who was educated as a social worker in St. Louis, Mo., heads a broad coalition that includes many labor union members and intellectuals. It also has two black candidates for the Assembly, a rarity in Canadian politics.

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“We're a people's organization, a Rooseveltian group who still think it's possible for people to get together and get things done,” Mr. Barrett said at a recent salmon barheque in the valley of the broad Fraser River, which winds down from the mountains along the United States border.

The New Democrats received one third of the vote in the last election. With several parties in contention, even Premier Bennett's party has never gotten a majority of the popular vote.

But the years in office have built up the personal power of the Premier, who is keen and alert despite his age, and some now regard the way he runs the party and the province as dictatorial.

Banned Liquor Advertising

Last year, for example, the Premier, who neither drinks nor smokes, engineered a ban on all liquor and cigarette advertising in British Columbia, and his control of the budget is said to be almost absolute.

Despite Premier Bennett's constant warnings against socialism, his years in office have moved the province great strides toward a welfare state, with homeowners’ grants and elaborate pension and health‐care schemes. Soon after the election, his campaign advertisements promise, he will increase aid to young people and the handicapped.

The opposition advertisements urge the voters to “tell them enough is enough,” arguing that the 20‐year Bennett administration, a period of great growth, has been marked by too much unrestricted, business‐oriented exploitation of British Columbia's rich resources.

“Growth nuts,” is the term that Mr. Barrett, the opposition leader, applies to those who would develop for development's sake. The emergence of this issue here reflects an increasing feeling across Canada that blind development of this country's vast mineral and forest reserves is not automatically to be regarded as a good thing.

Rather Have Salmon

As David Anderson, another candidate for premier here, put it: “We view the United States and we say, do we want that kind of development? We can say, for example, no, we don't want that new dam, we'd rather keep the river for salmon.”

When Premier Bennett's Social Credit party took office in 1952, his province was poor and backward, its towns isolated from one another by mountains and inlets that cut across a land more than twice the size of California.

He developed the mines and sawmills and built roads, rail lines and ferry systems with a gusto that even his adversaries admire, and now this is one ofl the richest provinces and Its 2.2 million people enjoy an extremely high standard of living.

“But that time has passed,” says Mr. Anderson, who is leader of the Liberal party, “and I honestly don't think Bennett can adjust to the new era when you don't just automatically say yes to every development project.”

Mr. Anderson, a 35‐year‐old bachelor who resigned a seat in the federal Parliament to make this race, has won the support of many environmentalists with the personal battle he has been waging against the proposed oil pipeline across Alaska.

Part of the argument against the pipeline, which has been waged in a series of court tests in the United States, is that tankers picking up oil at its southern end might spill some of it along British Columbia's spectacular shoreline, a concern of all the candidates here.

The fourth contender in the race is the Progressive Conservative party, led by Derrill Warren, a 33‐year‐old lawyer.

The party has not been a significant factor in provincial politics for years, but Mr. Warren is leading a vigorous campaign this time.

Tall and rangy, he literally runs from door to door passing out brochures. He runs because “there's so much ground to cover,” he explains, but he also concedes such athletics emphasize that the Premier is more than twice his age.

Little Choice for Many

Because his party is perhaps the closest to Premier Bennett's ideologically, Mr. Warren emphasizes that he can be an alternative for conservative voters, with the slogan “No, you do have a choice.”

But to many in this picturepostcard land, there seems to be little choice, despite the opposition. Some of these turned out when the Premier spoke one recent evening in Powell River, a sawmill town 80 miles northwest of Vancouver, where mountains thrust abruptly out of the still blue bay, scenery reminiscent of the fjords of Norway.

At the back of the decorated high school basketball court a middle‐aged woman in a faded print dress listened as the Premier proclaimed from the stage that one of his social welfare programs had been better for the people here than anything comparable “in all the history of democracy.”

Tentatively waving a tiny banner as applause and cheers roared back up to the Premier, the woman explained: “Mr. Bennett takes awfully good care of us, you know. I think we'd better stick with him.”