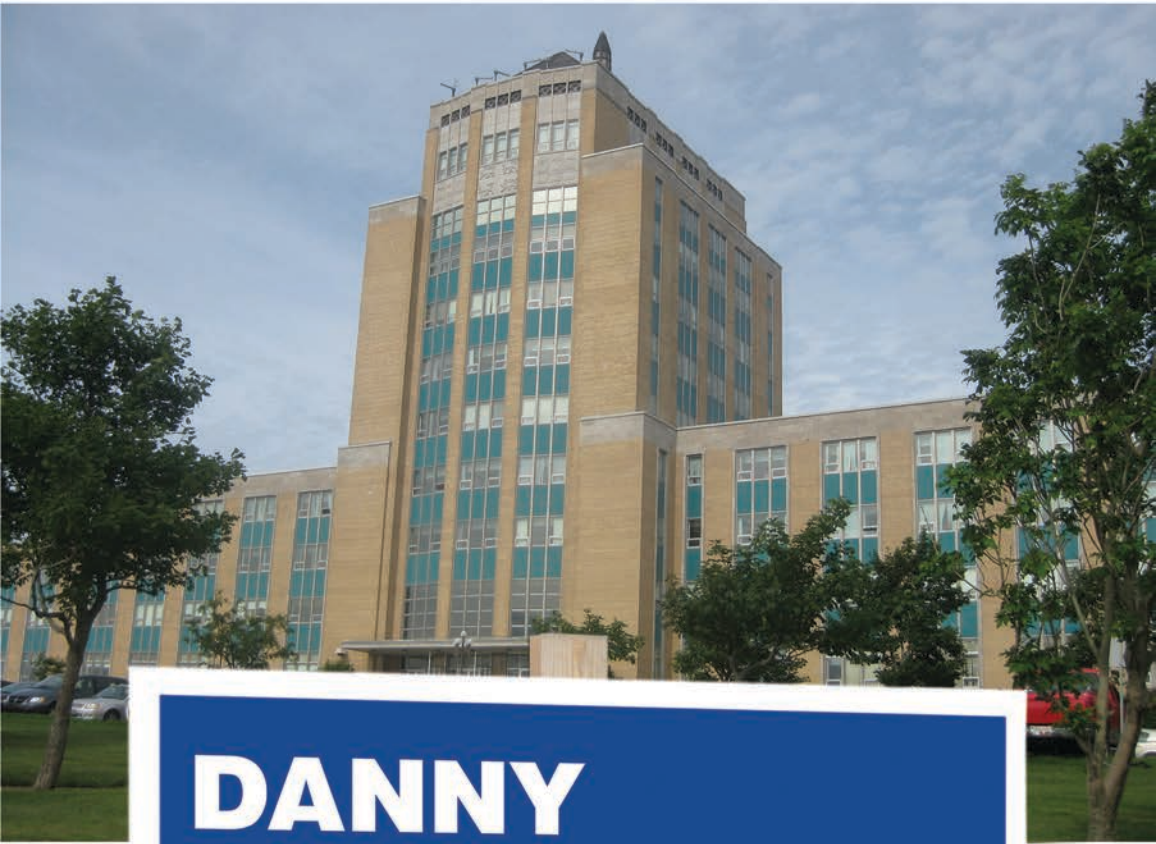


Bill Rowe



**DANNY
WILLIAMS,**

**PLEASE
COME BACK**

Danny Williams,
Please Come Back

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CLAPP'S ROCK

THE TEMPTATION OF VICTOR GALANTI

IS THAT YOU, BILL?

DANNY WILLIAMS: THE WAR WITH OTTAWA

Danny Williams,
Please Come Back

BILL ROWE

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To Danny Williams:

Public life seemed more entertaining
when he was there.

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Author's Note

FROM 2005 TO 2007 I wrote a weekly column for the St. John's *Telegram* and the Corner Brook *Western Star*. Those years were filled with exciting and fast-moving events in Newfoundland and Labrador and throughout Canada: the challenge by Danny Williams to international oil consortiums and his continued battle royal with Ottawa, the federal and provincial elections and by-elections won and lost, the leadership changes in political parties, a tough new prime minister, the scandals, and the terrorist and pandemic scares—that's just a hint at the notable happenings that affected us all. I hope you enjoy this look back at those days—so recent in years, yet so long ago in our quickly changing world. The words occasionally appearing between square brackets are my comments today on what I wrote back then.

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Danny Williams, Please Come Back

A LOT OF PEOPLE miss Danny Williams, and not just because he happened to be a good premier. Many of us miss him because he was provocative and controversial and often so infuriating to opponents that he added wonderful entertainment and amusement to our otherwise humdrum provincial politics.

Face it: there's limited entertainment value in watching a premier and her government decide where sewer pipes are going to be laid or roads paved, or what schools are to be closed or hospital rooms opened. These are all vital matters, yes, but any reasonably competent team of bean-counters can perform such tasks.

True political genius lies in turning the often petty sphere of provincial politics into activities that keep people's ears and eyes glued to their radios, newspapers, and televisions. Danny Williams both fascinated and exasperated people during much of his political career. And mostly he did it by declaring political war on anyone who dared to cross him.

Some of his more entertaining wars were those he declared on "enemies" outside the province:

Liberal prime minister Paul Martin dragged his feet on his commitment to increase our share of offshore oil revenues. Danny's reaction? Unholy war! Martin was bombarded with verbal artillery for months on end until Danny gained Martin's unconditional surrender.

Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper reneged on his writ-

ten pledge to remove our non-renewable resources from equalization. Again, total war! In the following federal election, Harper had to retreat from here with seven Anything But Conservatives (ABC) hounding him in the House of Commons. And this province underwent the surreal experience of a Cabinet minister from a competing province, Nova Scotia, being appointed to represent us in Ottawa.

Danny started negotiations with a multinational consortium of oil corporations for a better provincial share of our offshore resources. When the talks broke down, Danny went on the offensive once more—this time a war of attrition against “Big Oil.” And while the cheerleaders for Big Oil were labelling him a commie in the media during the raucous stalemate, he stared down the rich and powerful conglomerates, and won.

Quebec premier Jean Charest and the premier of New Brunswick dared to enter into a hydroelectric deal that might benefit their two provinces, but harm ours. Danny launched an attack, and his vigorous war of words in New Brunswick utterly defeated the scheme.

When the government of Quebec tried to employ on the Lower Churchill the same strong-arm tactics they had used with such success on the Upper Churchill, voila: the war of the Anglo-Saxon route broke out! And Danny concocted an undersea transmission deal with Nova Scotia that bypasses Quebec altogether.

A comical skirmish against aliens from another planet occurred when Danny took on superstar Paul McCartney and his then-wife, Heather Mills, on Larry King Live over the seal hunt. He drew to the attention of these extremely knowledgeable protesters that Prince Edward Island, where they were speaking from, was not in fact in Newfoundland, as they firmly believed.

But it wasn't only outside foes who felt the cuts of Danny's verbal sabre. A fair number of adversaries seemed to spring up inside our borders too.

When, early in his reign, negotiations with the public service unions broke down, Danny drove them out on strike and, after a battle royal, legislated them back.

Trying to impose some rationality on the fishery, he inflicted a raw material shares system (RMS) on crab fishermen, causing fierce protests and enraged picket lines. He had to pull in his horns on that one, though, suffering one of his infrequent defeats.

When Madame Justice Margaret Cameron, Danny's chosen commissioner, severely questioned his communications director and his chief of staff at her inquiry into botched breast cancer tests, Danny attacked her publicly for picking on members of his staff. And later he would react to a communications fiasco from Eastern Health with the argument that "they should be shot over there."

Having previously suggested that St. John's mayor Andy Wells was in dire need of "a good shit-knockin'," Danny later attacked a Supreme Court judge publicly for daring to criticize in his decision the same mayor's credentials as Danny's nominee for head of the Offshore Petroleum Board.

The most bizarre of his many combats happened when Danny retired as premier, and was soon engaged in a public slanging match with his own hand-picked successor, Kathy Dunderdale, and her colleagues, his own former Cabinet ministers. He even refused to attend the tribute dinner they had arranged for him. Apparently, they hadn't pushed hard enough for Danny's nominee as vice-chair of the Offshore Petroleum Board, Elizabeth Matthews. Danny's attack came to a glorious climax with the accusation that his former colleagues were hiding their cell-phone numbers from him.

But that wasn't the end of his spats with his former colleagues. His public sense of outrage and betrayal when they refused point-blank to spend tax dollars on his American Hockey League franchise was a marvel to behold.

Frequently, to add to our entertainment, Danny would join our great comedian Mark Critch of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* in lampooning his own words and actions as premier, actively participating in his own satirical skewering. How could you not grow nostalgic for a premier like that?

Danny Williams, please come back.

BILL ROWE

JULY, 2011

Telling It Like It Is

WHENEVER PEOPLE ARE POLLED on the professions they most respect or trust, it seems that politicians, lawyers, bureaucrats, and journalists regularly end up at the bottom of the list. So far I've been all four.

I'm counting on those humbling experiences to provide me with some insights for these columns. Maybe, though, the results of those polls show only that the majority of people are dopey and unthinking. Those very professions that people claim to despise—aren't they the ones that have been most responsible for developing the prosperity, democracy, rule of law, and freedom of expression we enjoy here in the western world? Therefore, don't politicians, lawyers, bureaucrats, and journalists deserve the greatest respect and trust of all? The ordinary people are out to lunch again as usual, right?

Wrong. Our western democracies, where freedom and prosperity are thriving, at least compared to, say, North Korea or Zimbabwe or Iran, ultimately depend on the wisdom and decent instincts of the people as a whole. In my opinion, their greatest wisdom and best instincts are revealed precisely when they show scant respect and trust to politicians serving only themselves, to faceless bureaucrats known only to themselves, to professions who regulate themselves, and to journalistic know-all's answerable to no one but themselves.

People correctly view these groups as too influential and powerful and potentially controlling to receive unconditional trust. Ordinary citizens are absolutely right to feel a healthy disrespect and distrust for them, to subject them to the utmost scrutiny, and to make them prove

their bona fides every day of the damned week.

I'd like to take my own cue from that attitude in these columns. An earlier newspaper columnist said he wanted to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. That's a bit too messiah-like for my taste, but I do want to try and subject those with power over the vulnerable to a good probing and a proper scrutiny. And since I am a former or current member of these privileged gangs myself, please feel free as readers to do unto me what I am doing unto them. Meanwhile, here's a sample of some questions I will try to deal with head-on.

How does John Efford compare with earlier federal ministers like Don Jamieson, John Crosbie, and Brian Tobin? Is he productive or useless or positively dangerous?

Among elected former premiers like Joey Smallwood, Frank Moores, Brian Peckford, and Clyde Wells, how does Danny Williams stack up? A giant in a gallery of pygmies or a man just lucky by nature who fluked into the right issues at the right time? Is he wasting his luck and talent down here among us provincial mere mortals? Shouldn't he leave this petty little stage after the next federal election, run for the national Tory leadership to knock off Stephen Harper and the Belinda Stronach-Peter MacKay duo, and become prime minister of all the Canadas?

Talking about leadership races, what happens to all the money that candidates raise? You don't know? Join the club. I don't either. Should candidates who want to become a leader, and hence an actual or potential premier or prime minister, give us a transparent accounting of the money they got, what pockets it came out of, and what pockets it ended up in?

Quebec separation: Are the revelations of the Gomery Inquiry into the federal Liberal sponsorship scandal in Quebec final proof to the other nine provinces of our need to ask Quebec to leave Canada for the good of herself as well as us?

Other separation questions need to be asked, too: If Labrador di-

vorced Newfoundland and became its own separate territory, would that be in the best interests of each part? And while we're at it, is the idea of Newfoundland separating from Canada sensible in any way at this stage, or just a cute but moronic notion?

These and a hundred other issues will be dealt with here. As you read these columns, you may call me a stunned or contrary bastard, but I'll try to make sure you can't fault me for sitting on the fence.

▲ APRIL 9, 2005

We Love You, Quebec, But Please Leave

KNEE-JERK FEDERALISTS WHO WANT Quebec to stay in Canada at all costs are worried sick by this Gomery Inquiry into the federal Liberal sponsorship scandal in Quebec. They fear that all the federally sponsored corruption in La belle province will enrage Quebecers into separating. My worry is the opposite. I fear that the other nine provinces will miss this opportunity to tell Quebec what we should have politely told her decades ago: Please go.

I say that not in aversion but in fondness and admiration. I consider Quebec a superb part of this continent. Her culture, style, arts, internationally acclaimed films, her progressive social policies, her splendid metropolis, the only world-class city north of the States—let's face it: Quebec makes the rest of Canada, including Ontario with its up-and-coming Toronto, look like an intellectual, social, and cultural Gobi Desert. So why would I want this paragon, this veritable Eden, to leave? Because the move would be excellent for Quebec and Canada alike.

Separatist Premier Bouchard said he wanted Quebec to be a normal country. I'd go further than that: Quebec would not only be normal but would become one of the great small countries of the world. And

Born in Newfoundland, Bill Rowe graduated in English from Memorial University and attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, obtaining an Honours M.A. in Law.

Elected five times to the House of Assembly, Rowe served as a Minister in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and as Leader of the Official Opposition. He practised law in St. John's for many years, and has been a long-time public affairs commentator, appearing regularly on national and local television, as well as hosting a daily radio call-in show on VOCM and writing weekly newspaper columns.

Rowe has written four books: *Clapp's Rock*, a bestselling novel published by McClelland and Stewart and serialized on CBC national radio; *The Temptation of Victor Galanti*, a second novel published by McClelland and Stewart; a volume of essays on politics and public affairs published by Jespersen Press of St. John's; and the critically acclaimed book *Danny Williams: The War with Ottawa*, which appeared on the *Globe and Mail's* bestsellers list in 2010. He is a member of the Writers' Union of Canada and has served on the executive of the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador.

He is married to Penelope Ayre Rowe CM of St. John's. They have a son, Dorian, a daughter, Toby, and three grandchildren.



PRAISE FOR
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