Gordon Miller - elected 1976 - re-elected 1977

James Allan congratulates Liberal victor Gordon Miller

Veteran Tory Allan, 80, defeated after 23 years

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HALDIMAND-NORFOLK

By BRUCE STEWART
Spectator Staff

The impossible happened in Haldimand-Norfolk last night as 32 years of Conservative power crumbled and 80-year-old James Allan suffered his first political defeat.

Most people hadn't given Liberal candidate Gordon Miller much more of a chance of upsetting Mr. Allan than the many other candidates who had lost to Mr. Allan in his 56-year-old political career.

The Liberal had been beaten by more than 9,000 votes the last provincial election and the New Democratic Party was expected to take some Liberal votes this time.

Mr. Allan has held the riding for 23 years.

But Mr. Miller, a 51-year-old Jarvis area farmer, staged a hard-working campaign, knocking on most doors in the large riding.

As the first results started trickling in last night, Liberal supporters began to sense they had a chance at an upset.

Mr. Miller and Mr. Allan were involved in a close battle all evening but Mr. Miller finally pulled ahead to stay.

When it was all over, Mr. Miller had almost 2,000 more votes than the veteran Conservative who has served as provincial treasurer and Minister of Highways.

Although NDP candidate Norman Walpole was far behind the other two candidates, he still managed to improve his party's showing over the last election.

Mr. Allan made his way to Liberal headquarters about 20 minutes after admitting defeat at 9.30 p.m. and congratulated Mr. Miller.

Mr. Allan said that he had felt a definite backlash against both the provincial government and regional government throughout the campaign.

"People kept telling me that regional government wasn't working and that they didn't like what it was doing," Mr. Allan said. "But I still think that it will work if it is given a few years."

A restrained Mr. Miller paid tribute to his Conservative opponent.

"I only hope that I can do half the job that Jimmy has done over the years for this area," Mr. Miller said. "I have nothing but respect for Mr. Allan."

Mr. Miller promised his cheering supporters that he would do everything he could to help the Port Dover fishermen who have been having problems the past few weeks.

"Even though Bob Nixon won't be forming the government and he has been rejected by the people of Ontario, I will work hard for the people of the area," he said.

Mr. Miller relied heavily on Mr. Nixon's program during his campaign and said he was obviously disappointed in the provincial outcome.

John Roxburgh, campaign manager for Mr. Allan said that Mr. Allan's age surfaced time and time again during the campaign.

"I tried to overcome this by telling the people all the contacts Mr. Allan had at Queen's Park and all the good he could do for the area," he said. "But I could tell that most of them weren't listening."

Mr. Roxburgh said he also felt the provincial trend of a protest vote against the Conservatives.

Conservative supporters in Simcoe accepted the results philosophically, holding out hope that a younger candidate would have a good chance of reclaiming the seat.

Mr. Walpole said he had been prepared for any result but admitted that he hadn't expected to win.

"We improved our party organization greatly this time," he said. "I had hoped to pick up a few more votes than we did but I'm satisfied."

This was the second campaign in a year for the 39-year-old school teacher. He was NDP candidate in the last federal election.

"I think I will just take it easy for a little while and spend some more time with my wife and family," Mr. Walpole said.

Veteran Liberal Elmo Ridle ran against Mr. Allan in his first campaign in 1951 and was on hand for the Liberal victory last night.

"I didn't really think I would ever see the day," he said. "But there is no question that regional government cost Mr. Allan his seat. Nobody hates him, he has just been around too long."

Mr. Miller will have to resign his seat on regional council to take up his new role as the provincial member of the legislature.

The final results last night showed Mr. Miller with 13,987 votes compared to 12,018 for Mr. Allan and 4,910 for the New Democratic Party candidate.