

Notes on the Liberal Youth Convention

by Mike Marshall

On last Friday evening, all day Saturday and Sunday morning, young Liberals from all over Nova Scotia gathered at Keddy's Motor Inn in Halifax for a weekend of debates, speakers and social events.

Publicly, organizers of the first annual Nova Scotia Liberal Youth Commission Policy Convention expressed some disappointment that only 60 delegates actually registered compared to the 125 youths

drawn from university students in the Halifax area and given little weight in the councils of the senior party.

Unlike the federal Liberal party, which constitutionally ensures youth and women commission input into such areas as policy formulation, the current provincial association constitution gives no such guarantee. A background discussion paper notes, "... the major organizational concept—the District Executive Boards / Provincial Ex-

which will be elected through a series of regional meetings. Mindful of the party's past failings to elect enough youth and women to positions of responsibility within the association, Cameron has "reserved the right to ensure that youth and women are represented . . . by appointment if necessary."

Cameron came to the Youth Commission's Saturday night banquet to announce that he had done just that: he wanted the first three members of his Advisory Committee to be youth members and asked the convention to elect those three representatives at Sunday's concluding Plenary session. The audience, which had expected only a single youth member on the Committee, erupted in applause.

Beneath the congratulatory mood, delegates pondered other problems. Another discussion paper—on working liberal youth—complained that the bulk of active youth members came from the university group. But in Nova

Scotia, only 19,230 people below 25 (the age limit for Liberal Youth) were in post secondary institutions compared to an estimated 140,000 in the workforce. How to reach them?

Part of the problem could be the Youth Commission's attitude. The discussion paper felt the activists drawn from the universities "... provided excellent leadership, however we are fundamentally amiss in not encouraging more working youth to join the Party." If this implied that the university members were to provide the leadership working with the masses, this might not sit well with young people in the workforce.

Rightly or wrongly, many youth earning their own way in the workforce consider themselves as full adults while they look upon students—even in graduate programs—as enjoying a prolonged adolescence.

Again and again this dichotomy could be seen running through the convention deliberations. Housing—crucial to young working adults in their first apartment or thinking about their first home—received not a mention. Work conditions on the job were virtually ignored. "Creating jobs" was a frequent topic, but never a word about what actually went on once young people had their jobs. A prioritized resolution from the

Working class involvement low

Commission's Policy Committee did condemn "... some labour unions for abusing . . . the rights granted to them by law . . .", hardly an auspicious way to "become actively involved in labour unions. . .", as one working paper suggested.

Relations between males and females—one common and overweaning bond between all young people, students or workers—was a heavily debated topic at the convention. But even here, despite the fact that the debate was both informed and reasoned, it once again was likely to appeal exclusively to a student audience. Many marriages between young people fail early on. But their problems: sexual dysfunction between husband and wife; custody and maintenance laws, received no mention.

Instead sexual problems were seen as largely those experienced in the pre-marital state, the normal condition of most students. Rape was a major topic during Saturday afternoon's workshop on Social Development, with panel member Mary Clancy (a Halifax lawyer active in feminist issues) telling of five rapes that have occurred on Dal campus since September 1 and asking why the Mount, with over 600 women on campus, should leave its

campus three quarters in darkness.

However, the talk quickly turned to a lesser known form of rape—'date rape'—and it seemed to draw more of a vocal response from the delegates. It had emerged out of a discussion on the very high percentage of unmarried mothers in Nova Scotia compared to the national average, an issue raised by panelist Sandra Taylor of Planned Parenthood of Nova Scotia.

A male delegate felt that the widespread practise of boys subtly pressuring their girlfriends into having sexual relations when the girls had not really reached their own decision on the matter, meant that contraceptives weren't used and led to the high numbers of teenage pregnancies. He moved a motion that since date rape was so frequent, free contraceptives should be available at high schools to ensure that at least no unwanted child occurred as a result.

A delegate from Yarmouth told of the lack of any Nova Scotia history until the final terms of Grade XII and asked what a student who dropped out before would learn of his provincial heritage. Others worried that the roles of our native Micmacs and blacks failed to reach their proper prospective.

The prospective of the convention—education, schools and student activities—spilled over into the best attended workshop, that on party organization. Panelist Tom Regan, interim president of the Liberal Youth Commission, did raise the need to get into unions and business / community groups to reach the huge potential of working youths, but his call fell on deaf ears. Instead the greatest potential for the Commission seems to lie in the high schools. The university students present, perhaps because they were living away from home, discussed every issue in such general terms as to lack an effective concreteness. But the high school delegates (generally not from high school Liberal youth clubs, but rather representing the constituency organizations) were close enough to activities in their communities to bring a first hand knowledge to issues such as fishing or farming.

But as campaigning politicians keep on coming into high schools seeking the 18-year-old vote, this prejudice should fade and it seems fairly certain that the Youth Commission will gain the bulk of its new members not from working youth—who will probably continue to want to join the senior party—but from high school and even junior high school kids.

[Mike Marshall is the publisher of the Arcadian Recorder, a Nova Scotian community newspaper.]

Cameron promises women and youth representation

who had promised to be there. But privately they were overjoyed by the quality of the debate generated and by the breadth of the areas of the province represented by the delegates.

They admitted that ever since its foundation, the Young Commission had consisted of little more than its eight member executive,

ecutive Board—which assures this limited, but specific, representation, has been ignored and this has had the effect of eliminating an important forum for youth and women."

The new provincial leader, Sandy Cameron, has added yet another new wrinkle to the party executive: a Leader's Policy Advisory Committee



Rum flavoured.
Wine dipped.

Crack a pack of Colts along with the cards.