

Following the TV script on the campaign trail

by Martin Cohn

If the political process is being reshaped before our eyes and election campaigns are becoming dominated by the media, then the media is itself being dominated by an intruding force: Television.

ask them if they could recall what he had actually said on the screen. Most were unable to even remember the subject on which he had spoken, said Flemming. But they repeated their earnest compliments nonetheless.

paign that night.

Another example: When Prime Minister Joe Clark spoke in Port Hawkesbury last month, campaign organizers made arrangements for vehicles to stand by to take exposed TV film to Sydney—courtesy of the Tories.

When Broadbent walked through Scotia Square on his way to the Board of Trade, he took time out to shake hands with noontime shoppers. And when he ventured into a cafeteria to greet customers, he was trailed by an invading horde of about two dozen photographers and cameramen. Amid blazing floodlights, blitzy flashes, whirling cameras and wildly protruding boom-microphones, the NDP leader casually asked diners if the "price was right" for their meals.

For the media, the scene was just another in a long line of daily photo-opportunities—the stuff of 30-second clips for the evening news and wire-service photographs. For the voters trapped in the cafeteria, however, the scene was alternately thrilling, boring, fraudulent or terrifying.

The spectacle of the camera mob pressing through the crowded cafeteria, dodging obstacles of tables, chairs, and people, alerted customers of what was to come. As heads turned, some smiled broadly on recognizing the NDP leader. A few sighed, "it's only Broadbent." Three diners at a table bolted out

with a brisk "no comment" before the lights, cameras and leader could focus on them.

But Broadbent was in his element, and obviously relaxed. When he happened upon a French-speaking woman from Quebec, he tried out his heavily accented French. For the French-language TV crews, this was a surprise that caught them unprepared—but it was a chance not to be missed. The opportunities for good French-language conversations to go with the pictures are few and far between on campaign forays into English Canada, especially with the anglophone Broadbent. So she was brought back to Broadbent several minutes later to stage a repeat of their original encounter. As the Radio-Canada crew scrambled into position, Broadbent gamely allowed to his new friend, "Vous avez Radio-Canada over there, oui?" But his bilingual remark was lost in a technical foul-up, and the event went unrecorded. One could almost hear a Hollywood director yelling through a megaphone: "Cut! Get ready for take 3; and, ACTIO!"

Broadbent's combined French-English slipup is understandable, and symbolic of the duplication by dual French and English radio and TV coverage: Much of what is said by Prime Minister Clark or Liberal Leader Trudeau is repeated in French for the benefit of French radio and television audiences. This is done at the request of Francophone journalists, even though they understood perfectly what has just been said in English. The repeat performances, while affecting spontaneity, are nothing other than a second take for French

TV. "Take 2," says the imaginary director through his megaphone.

In the here-there-everywhere style of the leadership campaigns, Trudeau was the only one to stay overnight in Halifax, or to address an audience other than businessmen. Clark was in the city for only eight hours, and Broadbent six hours, before flying out again. Trudeau stayed about 36 hours, and spoke at an old-fashioned political rally to party supporters in Sackville—one of the few so far in the campaign.

If Broadbent's little stroll through Scotia Square stirred a commotion, Prime Minister Clark's walk from the Legislature to his hotel room the week before was almost perilous for the photo-opportunity flock, whose dedication in the line of duty knows no bounds: some of the more determined camera crews challenged Barrington Street drivers with some deft jaywalking; all toward getting better shots of Clark and DREE Minister Elmer MacKay walking purposefully to the Chateau Halifax. Innocent bystanders seemed a touch startled by the zealous cluster, especially when the Prime Minister of Canada—suddenly visible at the centre of the crush—would dart toward them, shake hands and say a quick "Hi!"

All in a flash. Just as quickly, the PM and his media entourage were gone, mysteriously engaged, somehow, in a matter of national importance: the democratic process we call election campaigns.

But what did the leaders say in their speeches?

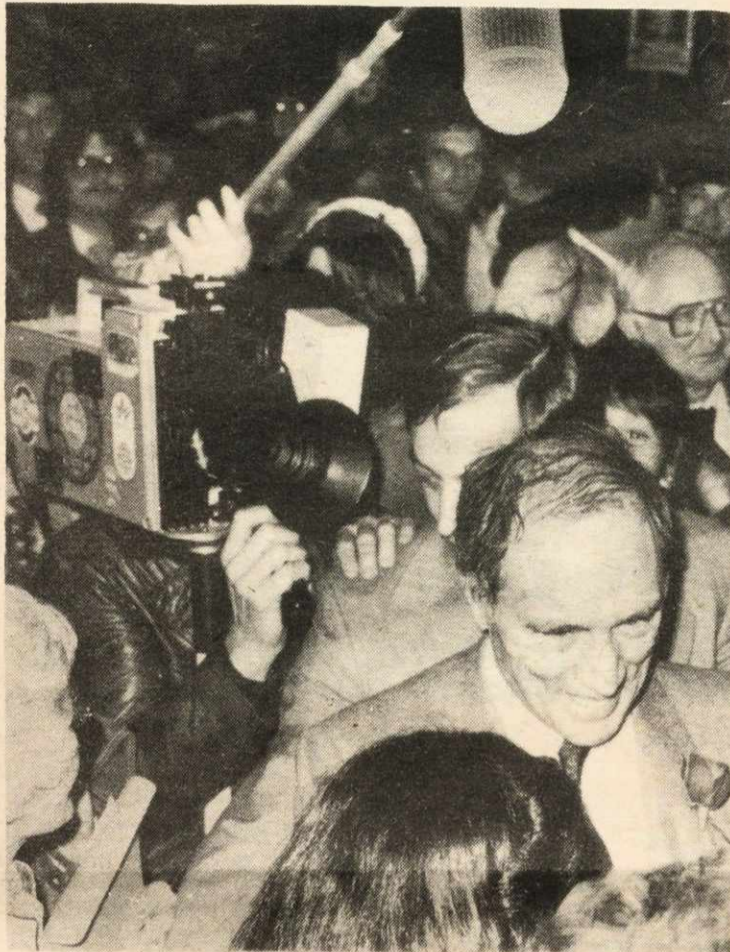


Photo by Martin Cohn

Trudeau campaigning in Sackville. Note the cameraman's right hand hitched to a Liberal supporter's shoulder in front of him. Everyone plays a supporting role for T.V.

For the estimated 150 reporters and TV technicians flying coast to coast on the campaigns of the three major party leaders, the tab is over half a million dollars for air and bus travel alone. Though print reporters are in the majority, their access to the pulse of the campaign is ebbing amid the steady encroachment of television.

The ubiquitous, steamroller camera crews and photographers that trample through crowded rallies and dog politicians through winding corridors, are at times more of a spectacle than the political events they try to cover. Indeed, the distractions of the television drama being played out on every campaign swing can obscure the raison d'être of elections, and the issues that supposedly guide them.

Television lends itself to baby-kissing scenes and pictures of adoring crowds; catchy one-liners and smooth sounding slogans often make the evening news. This is not to say that TV journalists ignore issues of substance in their reports, but one wonders what viewers really retain—is it the expressions and walking styles of the leaders; or the actual reportage accompanying the pictures?

Former Halifax Liberal candidate Brian Flemming has remarked that on being complimented for television appearances by voters, he would

For newspaper reporters, the emphasis on television is a recurring theme. When Ed Broadbent boarded an elevator on his way to the Board of Trade in Halifax last month, a campaign aide played traffic director to the media: "This elevator (Broadbent's) for TV crews; room for one more camera over here. . . ." So while the leader's elevator was reserved for the network cameras, lowly print reporters had to wait for the next car up.

If the aide's priorities were sensible in terms of getting good pictures of his leader, the cameras-first, reporters-second segregation was symbolic.

At times, the degree of cooperation between TV reporters and campaign organizers is astonishing: After giving his luncheon speech, Broadbent left Halifax at mid-afternoon to fly to Sydney. But TV journalists covering the speech were hard pressed to finish reporting and editing their stories in time to catch the NDP campaign plane for the flight to Cape Breton.

So campaign organizers made arrangements for TV reporters to stay behind and finish their stories in time for supertime newscasts—no problem. The NDP people simply sent their chartered DC-9 back to Halifax—empty—to pick up the stragglers, and they rejoined the cam-



Broadbent, Halifax NDP candidate Alexa McDonough and the cameras: "Vous avez Radio Canada over there, oui?" The T.V. crew wasn't ready.

Photo by Martin Cohn

continued in the ranks of the students so they will blame each other for fee increases (1) to weaken resistance, and (2) disguise the attacks on foreign students and on all students.

While the rich claim that with differential fees the foreign students will be "paying their share of increased costs," the fact is that, even

the largest increases in foreign students' fees do not generate a minute portion of the revenue generated by smaller increases in the fees of Canadian students. While the rich claim that foreign students take jobs away from Canadians, the fact is that most foreign students take jobs in their home countries

after completing their education. In launching its attacks on foreign students the state tries to accuse Canadians of being racist when in fact it is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Canadian state that is racist and not the people.

Students should firmly oppose differential fees for foreign students.