

Where to now?

The pro-choicers are celebrating with caution and pro-lifers are lobbying in protest since the Supreme Court decision Thursday, Jan. 28 struck down Canada's abortion law as unconstitutional. Either way, the decision has been made, the law no longer exists, and until Parliament draws up a new law, things are sort of up in the air.

The old law was struck down as unconstitutional by a 5-to-2 vote because it was decided that arbitrary and painful delays in obtaining abortions threatened a

woman's health.

The highest court in Canada is forcing politicians to deal with an issue that many of them would prefer to ignore. When the ruling first came down, politicians were very quiet about what it would mean, and many of them are doing what they can to work against the ruling. Ontario is the only province thus far that has stated abortions will be covered by Medicare, while other provinces are either saying they will not cover the cost of abortions as a medical service, or using technicalities to make

abortions as difficult as possible to obtain. These tactics, such as making abortions elective surgery, which means being put on a 9- to 10-month waiting list (in other words, no abortions) may not be legal. In BC., Premier Bill Vander Zalm has ruled out medical coverage for abortions unless the woman's life is in danger.

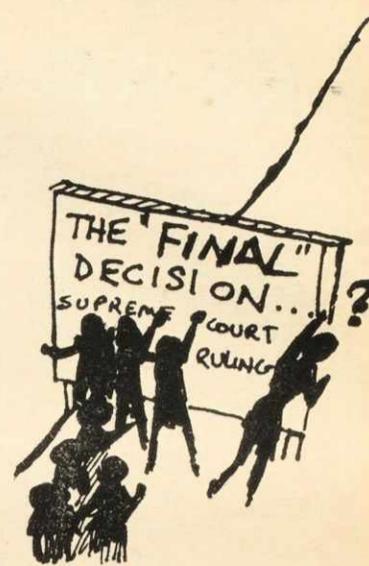
After this Supreme Court ruling, free-standing abortion clinics are legal, and the Canada Health Act guarantees universal access to basic medical services. This is not under provincial jurisdiction.

Here in Halifax, there was a celebration of the ruling Friday, Jan. 29, at the Grand Parade.

Since then, there was a candle-lit pro-life vigil in front of the Victoria General Hospital and approximately 200 pro-lifers protested in front of the Sheraton on the weekend, where Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was attending a Progressive Conservative convention.

It is a confusing situation right now, and pro-choicers are right to be cautious in their celebration and to continue pressuring the government and lobbying so that the new law, when it's finally drawn up, will leave the decision to have an abortion where it should be — with the woman.

Ellen Reynolds



o p i n i o n

Big-time party hacks throw party

by Paul Paquet

I've read my Hunter S. Thompson, I know how these stories are supposed to be written. Don't bother with the whowhatwhy-whenwhere of a Nova Scotia Progressive Conservative Party Convention. Straight journalism would miss the point. Get to the heart of the matter. And the heart of the matter is hard-core politicking of the backroom variety, complete with enough free booze to drown several small Central American countries.

Crashing the PC Convention wasn't terribly difficult. I just walked right in, stopping to gawk briefly at three separate groups of demonstrators, each hoping to give Brian Mulroney an earful. The prime minister sidestepped them all by coming in through the back. Nevertheless, a very persistent group of about a half dozen pro-life/anti-abortion activists hang on tenaciously in minus ten degree weather for another few hours, long after the union-activists have gone home to see if they got on the evening news.

I get in and wander about. When people ask, I tell them I'm the Atlantic Bureau Chief for Canadian University Press. I even toy with the idea of trying to officially register as such so I can get a little blue ID card and hang out with the other hacks in the media room. It then occurs to me that they probably have some kind of Official Hack List, which I certainly wouldn't be on.

So I wing it.

"Are you an observer?"

"No, I'm press."

"Oh. Where's your card?"

"My card? Why, it's... hmmm, it seems to have fallen off."

I make my way into the ballroom for the big rally. PC Youth stages a demonstration of its own, carrying little blue signs and chanting the mantrix names of their leaders in Halifax and Ottawa. These aren't shabby NDP-type demonstrators, either. This is tomorrow's elite, dressed

to the hilt and impeccably groomed. The atmosphere in the ballroom is uncontrollably sedate.

John Buchanan enters the ballroom amid wildly contrived cheers. Everyone, though, is waiting for the Main Attraction. I head out into the halls and wait for Brian. A number of grim-faced Security Clones pace about, looking more like lawyers and accountants than like gorillas with guns. A couple of news guys and a few dozen party hacks hover about. I fiddle around with a camera I brought along as part of the disguise. Actually, the flash doesn't even work, but this seems like the thing to do anyway.

Brian is late. People are stirring. The Big-Time Party Hacks inside the ballroom are padding out their speeches, or so it seems. Standard poli-babble is often hard to distinguish from unadulterated bullshit.



Finally Brian swings by, routinely enthusiastic, shaking the hands that are thrust out at him. I pretend to take a few pictures.

"Did anyone see my flash go off? No? Rats!"

But I do get what I was looking for. A middle-aged executive type has turned to his wife, giddy with excitement, hand outstretched and immobile.

"This touched him!", he squeals.

I make a quick note of the incident, because This Is What It's All About.

John winds down his polemic and announces, "Let's have a great big Nova Scotian round of applause for the prime minister of our country, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney!"

Suddenly the music switches from Maritime Traditional to Synth Metal. Van Halen's "Jump"

blares out as Brian rushes the stage. For a moment I can see a vision of Brian, decked out in animal skins and spandex, hair permed and halfway down his back, regaling a thousand immaculate PCs with his version of "Panama", the crowd responding with the Hitler Youth-style fist-waving endemic to rock concerts. The image is not incongruous.

I don't catch much of the speech. I could just as easily have pretended to have been there and made something up without being too far off base. Brian makes a stand on Ethics. Brian thinks Free Trade is a good idea. Brian is going to make the Maritimes rich again. So on and so forth.

One of the cops does his best to keep an apparently intoxicated man away from the festivities. I watch this carefully because I have visions of Chicago, 1968, running through my



mind. The cop, however, managed to engage the gentleman in conversation, which probably served the purpose far better than cracking his skull open would have.

But watching this exchange, as it turns out, leaves me in a prime position to greet the Prime Minister as he leaves the ballroom.

I begin wondering what I should say to him when he shakes my hand. A number of tantalizing possibilities present themselves.

"Taxation is theft, Brian."

"NATO kills, Brian."

"So what's the deal on these Quebec ridings, Brian? Can you get a franchise or what?"

The Prime Minister, however, has developed a patter of his own.

"So who are you gonna vote for

when you grow up?"

"There sure are a lotta Newfoundlanders here tonight."

Finally it's my turn. I thrust out my hand to meet the leader of a major industrial power. It's the moment of truth, my one opportunity to directly input the system.

"Best of luck, sir."

"Thank you."

Fink.

Hjaving cowered away from my one big chance, I head up to the hospitality suites to avail myself of the free booze and see if I can spot some hard-core politicking instead.

The secret, it seems, is not to have too many drinks in one suite, because this exposes your gluttony. So I have scotch and water, screwdrivers, and beer in one, rum and coke, more screwdrivers, and wine in another, and so it goes.

I decide to start interviewing people before my sobriety completely disintegrates, and look for The Young People, the ones who do all the scut work that is beneath the Big-Time Party hacks. Many of the under-30 crowd weren't even PCs, but interested observers hoping to acquire insights. They were disappointed. No insights here.

One particularly distressing delegate was named Kim. She vehemently denied the fact that being baby-sat by Brian influences the way she votes. Surprisingly, I believed her. Indeed, it astonished me that anyone living in the jaws of the political system could escape the cynical land-mine that naturally comes with so corrupt a territory.

Kim hopes to end up in Ottawa someday, and our interview is punctuated by friends passing by and saying hello. Kim is already well on her way. She's heavily involved with the PC Youth in her riding and has attended leadership seminars where she was taught organizing skills that could be passed on to her fellow partisans. It all sounds

vaguely "Moonie-esque" to me, but I don't say so out loud. Political virginity and integrity are far too rare as it is.

I accidentally spill some red wine on my notes and decide to wander. General intoxication seems to have seeped its way throughout the Sheraton. I find an argument about free trade. Lots of huffing and puffing. I notice again just how expensively these kids are dressed. I make note of it and move on. I remember interjecting with some kind of anarchist slogan before I left, perhaps to compensate for missing my big chance with Brian.

As I'm staggering downstairs, I find myself smack dab in the middle of several drunken Board of Trade types, jabbering about the "drug epidemic". When the first lull appeared, I told them, sotto voce, that from my experience among today's youth, I could personally vouch that deranged reefer addicts were deflowering good Christian virgins.

That's what I intended to say, anyway, although I think my lips were unable to handle sotto voce. Everything must have come out like "deranged refer ads defwing good Chist vegins", since I got no response from them at all, not even a puzzled stare. Looking back, this is probably just as well. Going out of one's way to be a jerk is pretty reprehensible, even under the guise of discovering truth.

By this time great waves of inebriation were besieging what was left of my voluntary motor reflexes. I could see room for things to get really ugly, so I picked myself off the hotel corridor and headed home. All the while it kept occurring to me that, in some undefined way, staggering down Barrington Street at two in the morning was what the political process was Really All About.