

Stuart Smith and Ontario Liberal party show best side in leadership convention

By JULIAN BELTRAME

Saturday 3:00 p.m., the Grand Ballroom of the Four Seasons Sheraton Hotel. Amidst turgid hoopla and a sea of placards, embellished by flawlessly photogenic faces bobbing like a thousand floats on the capacious convention floor, the four candidates and two also-rans filed in.

The MacGuigan marching band wending its way through the hall, the Peterson Hats, and the Stuart placards made for great expectations of an hip-hip-hoorah, "isn't it marvelous, have a drink," convention with the bandwagon effect waiting in the wings for Mr. Right to come forward.

The gritty big-wigs had one dread, having gone an entire campaign without the usual below-the-belt blows, the backroom deals which stink of Habana cigars and without charismatic politics, they must have wondered if desparation would become the mother of slander. They had already meticulously guarded against block voting by arranging the polling stations by alphabetical order, rather than by region. No-one would know who voted for whom; more to the point, no-one could gauge which way any area voted.

Now only six speeches, representing last-gap attempts to influence delegates and win votes, lay in the way of clean convention — a boast the Ontario Liberals had gone too long without for their own good.

After all, a leadership convention is not merely the choosing of a leader, but also a showcase for the party. National television cameras have a tendency to unerringly focus in on an ugly purge as indiscriminately as an engaging smile. A convention is where a party can be exposed as crass and autocratic rather than unrelentingly open.

The Liberals wanted to put on a good show.

With that in mind, Larry Condon, a thousand-to-one shot at best, set the tone for the rest by sticking to issues, in his case clichés, rather than personalities. His brief, innocuous soliloquy, highlighted by such catch-all phrases as "get the people back into government", and "people power", easily drew the most yawns from the delegates and the most snickers from the press gallery.

Condon set the stage for David Peterson. The 32 year-old businessman from London who boasted the best organization, the loveliest wife and an illustrious business career, however, responded with a wooden middle-of-the-road speech solely designed to cover all

the bases.

Pausing where no applause ensued, and lacking the spontaneity he had shown only three hours earlier in a semi-private tête-à-tête with small businessmen in a café, Peterson was easily the most disappointing personality to speak.

He may not have alienated anyone, but he made no friends.

It was left for Albert Roy, the French-Canadian MP from Ottawa, to capture mood of the convention and to nearly, on the strength of one 20 minute oration, propel himself to the leadership. As was to be evidenced the next day, Roy, who came into the convention a distant fourth at best, picked up some 200 votes with his speech and was a mere 100 away from succeeding Robert Nixon.

Roy was 50 votes behind Peterson on the first ballot. Had he been 50 ahead of Peterson, it would have been Peterson's delegates who would have deserted their man on the second and third ballots for Roy, rather than the other way around.

For one electrifying moment, the lanky francophone had the convention in the palm of his hands with his eloquent defense of the minorities' place in the Canadian nation.

"Some members have said that you should not elect me because my father spoke French, and that you should not elect me because I speak French — my friends . . . I am a Canadian."

The applause that followed, totally disproportionate to the import of the statement, left little doubt that the climax of the convention had been reached, that all else would be lacklustre by comparison, and that Albert Roy had, if not won over the convention, won himself a prominent place in the Liberal party.

Dr. Stuart Smith the Glib, seemingly unperturbed by the tumultuous ovation for Roy, wisely chose not to compete with Roy, conceding to him the applause and settling instead for respect.

Speaking softly and gliding easily in front of the podium, Smith complimented the candidates for their integrity, intelligence, honesty and devotion.

"It is really something to see the lack of bitterness, the lack of acrimony, in this campaign. We are a united party. The Liberal party is here to be renewed and to redirect ourselves to the principle of liberalism for which we all stand."

Smith talked not as a man up for election, but as a leader about to lead the party into the next provincial election. The arrogance of a Trudeau, the quick, eloquent, even loquacious style of a Stephen Lewis, the mamas-boy honesty of a Robert Nixon, are all rolled up into one in



Dr. Stuart Smith

the convivial Stuart Smith.

How could the party not hand over the reigns of power to him? How could Ontario shun him in the next election?

So confident was the 37 year-old psychiatrist who was only first elected into the legislature last summer, that he joked with the delegates (Davis to woman: "Have you heard my last political speech? Woman: "I certainly hope so") and dealt mainly with one issue, which he placed as the number one issue facing Canada: the preservation of farmland.

The Davis government have done some "good things" after 33 years of rule, but their one failing, the one thing they will be remembered for, is the imbalance between city and rural living they helped create, Smith told the delegates.

"Food will probably be what saves the whole Canadian economy in 10 or 20 years down the road. It will be for Canada what oil is for the OPEC nations today."

Nothing left to be said but the counting. Mark MacGuigan, the Ottawa Liberal who attempted to parachute into provincial politics, was outflanked and outclassed by the three younger Grits. Desperate for distinction, MacGuigan

tried for all the marbles by gambling on anti-teacher sentiment and calling for an outright ban on strikes in the public sector.

It didn't work. Not even his supporters seemed enthusiastic after the speech and instead of placing a strong third after the first ballot, he found himself a distant fourth. Mercifully, MacGuigan, who everyone wanted to like, dropped out of the running after the first ballot.

That left Michael Houlton to try to sabotage, not only himself, but the Liberal party, by charging that the party had changed the rules to keep him from speaking, and had not allowed him to participate in the draw for speaking positions. He wanted the convention to vote on his eligibility, the chair ruled him out of order, so undaunted loveable-Mike put it to a vote himself, but his phrasing proved to be more than a little baffling.

"I want everyone in this room who believes in true democracy to stand up?" By this time one fifth of the delegates had left, of those remaining some forty hesitatingly stood up wondering what they were voting for. Had Houlton asked for a re-affirmation of motherhood, it is doubtful he would have received it.

But Houlton took last place philosophically. "As a friend of mine once said," he remarked, "the last shall be first and the first last." By this time the cameras had gone off, and Michael Houlton was only talking to himself.

What could have been an albatross around the party's neck, turned out to be just a bad but fleeting dream, because of a controversial editorial decision by the C.B.C.

Sunday 3:00 p.m., the podium of the Grand Ballroom. Stuart Smith, swarmed by placard-wielding delegates and flanked by his tall, winsome wife strides to the platform. He has just been announced as the winner over Peterson on the third ballot by a slim 45 vote margin.

On stage he can hardly contain his elation as he shuffles his feet, gazes at the ceiling, and kisses his wife reflexively, trying to funnel his thoughts to the satisfaction of one overwhelming question — "what do I say?", perhaps wondering what a rookie MP was doing accepting the leadership of the Ontario Liberal party.

As one veteran Grit reported, the Liberal party had switched from the old generation to the young without incident and without acrimony. The party was alive and well, youthful, exuberant, with a gregarious, bumptious leader in Dr. Smith.

Letters To The Editor

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Excalibur, room 111 central Square. They must be double-spaced, typed and limited to 250 words. Excalibur reserves the right to edit for length and grammar. Name and address must be included for legal purposes but the name will be withheld upon request. Deadline: Mon. 5 p.m.

Excalibur editorial was "facile, ill-advised"

I have been associated with York University in several capacities since enrolling as a Glendon undergraduate in 1963. Accordingly, I have had a reasonable opportunity to observe student-faculty relations and to evaluate student attitudes at this institution. However, in all my years at York I have never witnessed such an ill-advised editorial as "If at first you don't succeed — unionize" (January 8, 1976).

It would be an easy matter to pick apart the facile "arguments" which you present. The nonsense about unionization promoting mediocrity, the paranoia about the right to strike and the absurdity of the recommendation of a voluntary pay cut could be dealt with individually and in detail. After all, your arguments do nothing but plagiarize the word and the thought of management and ownership throughout the long and bitter struggle to defend workers rights in industrial society.

However, rather than repeat the obvious responses to your fatuous positions, I would like to speak to the core of the matter. You appear to accept the illusion that professors are professionals, that they have some greater moral obligation to serve "society"

than other citizens and that their status of "professionals" places them above the kind of organization which is appropriate to ordinary working women and men.

To all of this I must curtly reply: "Stuff and nonsense!"

Unionization merely encourages professors to recognize that they are workers with no more structural freedom than any other people involved in a wage-labour system.

When Professor Butler says the union is inappropriate because "we are not producing an industrial product here", he is fallaciously suggesting that the issue of unionization relates to the product rather than the conditions of labour. He is seeking to distinguish between a "profession" and other forms of employment.

But anyone who prattles on about professionalism is indulging in the most abject form of self-delusion and mystification. Professors are not professionals. They share none of the characteristics of professionals. They do not control conditions of entry into their occupation; they do not determine their own salary schedules; they do not control their con-

ditions of employment. Unlike doctors and lawyers who are professionals and, hence, have two of the strongest unions going, professors merely engage in the rhetoric of professionalism without holding any of the power that is associated with it.

If you don't believe me, read the Financial Post (December 27, 1975) wherein Jean-Luc Pepin lists all the occupations in Canada which the Trudeau government acknowledges as professions; professors are not included.

Unionization offers a measure of job security in an occupational situation in which professors must wait an absurd length of time (up to six years) for "tenure". It offers a degree of worker control in an occupational situation in which more and more of the decisions are being made by the university administration and government. It offers the possibility of decent wage increases in an occupational situation in which salary increments have lagged far behind inflation (despite your incredible statement "that professors at York earn an average salary of over \$21,000").

Moreover, unions stand opposed to two

positions which you allege that they would promote: the measurement of performance and "professional objectives" (a management tactic) and the suppression of dissent (I suppose none of you remembers Professor Pope . . . but that's another matter).

As for YUFA, I hope this will not be taken as a slight but elementary school teachers, secondary school teachers and community college teachers have largely abandoned the rhetoric of professionalism in favour of trade unionism. I hope that professors will quickly follow and that the caveat about an "open shop" will shortly be dropped.

As for Excalibur, I am confident that there will be bitter complaint when student fees are pushed skyward. I am further confident that when this happens the faculty union will be generous in its support for students who only see "oppression" when it kicks them in the teeth (or pinches them in the pocket book) and who can only respond to the issue with the rapid rhetoric of pious self-indulgence.

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