

Ontario PCs fight their way back

For over 40 years, the province of Ontario was ruled by the Progressive Conservatives; their political supremacy was rarely challenged. Not until the rise of the Liberals in the 1985 election did the PCs begin their political slide, and in September's election their defeat was completed with a stunning victory for the Peterson government. PC leader Larry Grossman was one of the many casualties of the Liberal landslide, and the PC caucus watched their numbers dwindle from over 50 seats to 16. Now the PCs face the task of pulling their party together after an embarrassing defeat, and under the new interim leader Andy Brandt, the caucus is currently reassessing its strategy and policies. Under the Davis government Brandt served as Minister of Environment and Minister of Industry and Trade. Before he became involved in politics, Brandt served as the mayor of Sarnia for six years. *Excalibur's* James Flagal and Jeff Shinder spoke with Brandt about the future of the PC party and the effectiveness of the current government in dealing with issues like Sunday shopping and abortion.

EXCALIBUR: Do you plan to run for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party, and when is the convention going to take place?

BRANDT: We have an unusual situation right now because our leader lost his seat, in the election of September 10th, and those rather unusual circumstances resulted in some rather unusual conditions. To answer your first question, I will not be a candidate at the convention when it is called. Secondly, the timing and the mechanism that's going to be used for the convention is an issue that is presently being addressed by the executive and the caucus of our party. We are having a constitutional review right now, and we have two co-chairmen who are responsible for that constitutional review, and we anticipate that will be done by the end of this year. And then early in the next year there will be some attention given to, number one, the timing of the leadership convention, and secondly, the actual mechanics.

Now when I talk about mechanics, what I mean is whether there will be one person one vote, whether it will be delegate selection, or how that process will actually be carried out. There's a lot of sympathy in our party for the type of approach used by the Parti Quebecois. They had a fairly successful method of having a one person one vote kind of convention. We're looking at that, there are some complicating organizational factors that have to be addressed. But beyond that I happen to like the approach and think it's far more democratic than this business of choosing delegates.

EXCALIBUR: Many analysts believe that the reason behind the PC's poor performance at the polls in the last election was because voters see the party as a bastion of right-wingers, and that the Conservatives lost their ability of capture the political centre of the electorate. How do you think the PC's can change this perception so they can get more votes from the middle?

BRANDT: I think that there is a very broad level of support for conservative principles among the electorate, so I don't think we have to shift dramatically in terms of policy positions more effectively than we have in the past. But I think there were a number of questions that came to play, and they really weren't so much one of philosophical position on the political spectrum about party. I think they related to things like, having been the most successful political party almost in the history of democracy, we have been the government for almost 42 years, longer than the existence of the state of Israel. I mean when you take a look at those factors, we must have been doing something right over that 42-year period, obviously we had our blemishes and imperfections.

I also think we lost because it was a factor of wanting to look at the new guys, if you will, and they had a leader that was somewhat charismatic in Mr. Peterson. He was able to break into a very small bit of the traditional Conservative base and we ended up in a dead heat in 1985. You know, I could argue that we had a couple of seats more than they did and we should have formed the government, but the realities were that we both had almost the same popular vote. Well, they were on a roll and we were on a slide, those two things happened and of course the cruncher came when Mr. Rae and his party decided that they were going to enter into an accord with the Liberals and that sunk us completely.

I think there's a general feeling that we're coming around now, and that we're more effective in the house, we're acting more like an opposition rather than a government in waiting which we acted like for some period of time, because of the way in which this whole thing transpired . . . The attitude among our caucus members, within the ridings, even among our defeated candidates, is

very, very buoyant and very strong. I mean there's a feeling that we can work our way back and the government is currently making enough mistakes that we got some things we can fire at.

After you've been in power for 42 years, you see it was almost a knee-jerk reaction on the part of cabinet ministers on the other side that no matter what question you asked they'd say, well what did you guys do, you were there for 42 years . . . Now, when we ask a question, they've got a two and a half year-track record and we can say, well wait a minute and I can take as an example portable classrooms. I can remember Mr. Peterson getting up and venting his anger and frustration to the government for having 110,000 students in portable classrooms in Ontario. Well, now it's 150,000 in portable classrooms; is that moving in the right direction? Obviously not . . . They also promised they would fund education at the elementary and the secondary level to 60% of provincial participation. When we were the government it was 47%, they said that was unacceptable, provincial funding should be moved up to 60%. Well, here's one they've really wrestled to the ceiling, because they've moved it now from 47% to 42%. I mean we've got a deterioration in terms of the number of students who are in portable classrooms. When you take issue after issue and you break them down, you see that this government is not doing as well as we were three years ago.



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EXCALIBUR: Let's talk about another Liberal policy, their Sunday shopping decision in particular. How do you feel about their move to leave this decision up to the municipalities?

BRANDT: Well, it's a total cop-out. Municipal councils have voted through their association, which is the Association for the Municipalities of Ontario, 70-3 in opposition to the Peterson decision. So they're almost unanimous in their opposition. Joan Smith, before she was the Solicitor General, signed an all-party committee report indicating that there should be a common day of rest. Before the decision was made to pass it on to the municipalities, she was asked that question and said it would be the chicken way out for the province to pass on that responsibility to the municipalities. And of course I confronted her with that in the House and I said, the chicken way out has now become government policy.

So I am for control of Sundays, I am not for a complete shutdown of Sundays (for instance keeping open restaurants and con-

venience stores). I think there is a modest happy balance that can be achieved, but I don't think this government has any hope of achieving it through this policy, which is simply to brush the problem off and pass it on to local governments.

EXCALIBUR: The recent Supreme Court decision on abortion has created a lot of contention across the country. In response to the ruling, the Liberal government has decided to allow OHIP to cover the cost of abortions. How does the PC party feel about that decision, and how would the Conservatives approach the issue?

BRANDT: Well, I think there's even a stronger societal issue that has to be addressed, and that is that we have now very clearly defined through the Supreme Court decision the rights of the female as they relate to the unborn child. In other words, abortions are allowed and are a legal right in Canada. The problem is, that the Supreme Court very casually alluded to the rights of the fetus.

In some jurisdictions they have the trimester approach where for the first 12 weeks, the rights of the mother to an abortion are almost wide open. That's the way it is in Great Britain and that's the way it is in the United States. The next 12 weeks it becomes somewhat more complex, and the last 12 weeks it becomes almost impossible. Clearly, even those who fall into the category of pro-choicers do not agree with abortion being performed at nine months less a day. But yet the Supreme Court decision allows that. So I think we have to address these issues: one, the rights of the unborn child; secondly, the rights of father; and thirdly, the question of under which conditions these particular procedures will be allowed. And there are a number of them: 1) in a hospital; 2) in a public clinic associated with a hospital; 3) or in a private clinic such as the Morgentaler style clinic, and under what circumstances would they be allowed to operate.

Once having made the determination that

the procedure will be allowed in private decision like Morgentaler's, I see no reason why you shouldn't have to fund it. So I don't disagree with what the government has done, but I think there has to be standards established to make absolutely certain that the quality of service and the level of the service being provided to the female who goes to a clinic, public or private, is in fact of the best standard available to medical science.

EXCALIBUR: You've talked about the rights of the father, and other parties involved. Do you mean that legislation should be rewritten in order to, for example, establish that the father must also consent to the abortion, before it can be conducted?

BRANDT: I don't think there's any choice, but to do exactly what you've talked about. Certainly the question of the rights of the unborn child are going to have to be defined by either the legislatures (provincial) as a health matter, or by the Parliament of Canada as a Criminal Code matter. So the

government is going to have to address itself to that issue, and therefore it's going to have to rewrite some of the laws and it may specifically have to rewrite this law as part of the Criminal Code.

It's going to be a highly complex question, and if you ask as a follow up what time frames I would agree to, I haven't seen all the evidence yet, so I can't give you a particular answer to that, other than some are suggesting that at the time of the recorded brain waves of the child, something of the order of 20-25 weeks there's a measurable electronic response that you get from the unborn child. The Charter of Rights indicates, and this was decided by a Supreme Court decision in Saskatchewan, that for purposes of being protected as a human being under the Charter, it is not until the moment of birth that you receive those protections. So up until the ninth month, there is no protection for the child under the current Charter. So I am suggesting to you that there should be some protection at some stage prior to the nine months less a day extreme example that I gave you. But you and I both fully appreciate the fact that the current decision says there are no limitations, right straight through from the point of conception literally at the point of birth the child can be aborted. Well, I'm having difficulty with that one.

EXCALIBUR: What can the government realistically do in order to deal with the increasing number of people now applying to post secondary education. And how can it address the past decade of university underfunding?

BRANDT: What the government can do is live up to some of the commitments which the government has already made. There are tremendous stresses on the system right now which is the result of the exploding enrolments which has gone up very, very quickly, and outmoded facilities in some instances that are just simply not going to meet the needs of the 80's and the 90's. So, one of the things which the government is going to have to do, without question, is establish education as the priority that they said it was. I mean it's one thing to establish education by way of lip service as a priority, and one thing to really mean it.

I can tell you that my caucus took a list of all of the major issues of the day, went through all of them very carefully, and we had a dramatic vote in my caucus to see which issue they felt was the highest priority, and I am very comfortable in telling you that it was education. We feel that we've got to have a very well established and very clearly defined policy priority in the education field, and that means the whole matter of education has to be looked at, not only the capital expansion, but the whole question of student housing has to be looked at. We have a government, currently, which said that we're going to give you five million dollars, 5,000 housing units; how many of those housing units have you seen under construction yet? When is it going to get started? Was it mentioned in the throne speech? Answer—no. Are they going to be 500 over ten years, we don't know. Will all 5,000 of them be built in the year 1997, in other words will the whole 5,000 come at the end of the ten-year time frame, we don't know.

We've asked these questions in the House on your behalf. We will continue to push them, I can tell you the only satisfactory response to this is that the 5,000 units is unacceptable as is the five million dollars. It should be almost double that number and it should be front end loaded, in other words it should be in the first three or four years, you can't do it all in one year, but I do think that there has to be a commitment on that front in the early stages, like in the first three or four years in a phased programme.

Number two, there's going to have to be a level of transfer in terms of funding for universities that will indicate in this fiscal year an increase of about 10%. Now that's not as much as you need, but according to the university community it's a figure that is realistic. You are currently seeing only a 6.7% increase, watered down because of other fixed responsibilities it came down to about 4.5% . . . Education is our top priority, and this is not political B.S., because if we are going to be competitive in the years ahead, if we're going to do the things that I think we're capable of doing as a province or a country, we have absolutely no choice but to invest more money into education.