

I would not vote for Margaret Thatcher.

**Excal:** Are more women participating at senior political levels?

**McLaughlin:** I think its increasing, if we talk federally and about our party. One of the reasons it is increasing in our own party, is that we have a gender parity policy.

I think that change has to be coupled by affirmative action as much as by good will. We still have only five [NDP] women Members of Parliament out of 43; that's not enough. We still only have 39 women out of 295 Members of Parliament. If we're going to hold up half the sky, I think we should make half the decisions.

**Excal:** In the last election, the NDP didn't make the significant gains that it had anticipated. To what do you attribute this?

**McLaughlin:** In terms of the national campaign, we did not come out as forceful as we should have on Free Trade, against Free Trade, which is not to say we didn't talk about it. Ed made many speeches about Free Trade and I was there. We certainly talked about it in our constituencies, but I think as a national campaign, we missed the boat and we were unable to turn it around.

At the same time, we have to remind ourselves that we did get 43 seats, more than we've ever had. Despite the fact that we did not get any seats in Quebec, we got 16 per cent of the votes. I was reminded, the other day that, in fact, we got a larger per cent of the vote in Montreal than we got in Metro Toronto. Those are gains in terms of building a political movement, but we have to do better.

**Excal:** Justice Minister Doug Louis recently introduced legislation on abortion into the House of Commons. Some say it goes too far, while others say that it doesn't go far enough. How does this legislation come into conflict with your view that a woman should have the right to choose?

**McLaughlin:** First of all it recriminalizes abortion. Recriminalization means there are penalties, there are legal sanctions, so women and doctors under this bill can go to jail.

I am opposed, as is our party, to the recriminalization of abortion. The bill says nothing about reinstating funding for family planning, planned parenthood, income support for families. It symbolizes in my view, one of those issues [in which] one side is not going to convince the other. It [involves] very strongly held personal beliefs and I respect that.

It's not a compromise; this is not a compromise bill. Abortion is a medical procedure. I think that we must have accessibility [to abortion] across Canada, through the Canada Health Act.

**Excal:** There is much talk about deficit reduction, tax reform and the GST, all of which the NDP has been highly critical of. What can you suggest as alternative solutions to Canada's economic problems?

**McLaughlin:** You can't separate the deficit, fiscal policy, monetary policy, trading policy and tax reform. [We need] a one per cent reduction in interest rates, which are killing our families, killing our small business, which would still keep us in a competitive position with the United States.

A one per cent reduction immediately takes a \$1.5 billion off the deficit. A one per cent reduction in unemployment immediately adds \$2 billion to revenue because people who are working pay taxes. People who aren't working often have to live off the tax base.

We have to look at real tax reform — a minimum corporate tax — something the United States has had in for some time. There is still a large number of large profit making corporations in this country that don't pay any tax. We're still in a situation in this country where a bank teller, in a given year, can pay more tax than a bank. So we're talking about fairness.

We can look at expenditures. Do we need to spend \$9.2 million to convince Canadians that the

Good and Services Tax is a good thing? Should we spending \$2.1 million to say that privatizing the Post Office is going to be great when there are people now who have to drive 60 miles to get a letter? I don't think so.

The other thing about the deficit is, just because you have a mortgage on your house, doesn't mean you don't have a house. Part of our deficit is made up of our assets, and most of our deficit is owed to Canadians.

It's curious that the Mulroney government, which has doubled the debt since 1984, presents itself as fiscally responsible and that this GST is being something absolutely essential to deal with this deficit. The deficit is important. It is important as New Democrats that we address that, but I don't think you can do it in isolation from the other things.

Our party is absolutely opposed to the Goods and Services Tax, because it is regressive taxation. I don't advocate a tax revolt; I advocate we stop this tax. I advocate that Canadians speak up. We're talking about real tax reform where the burden of taxation is equally shared and we are still providing services for our citizens. We can do that in Canada.

**Excal:** The Meech Lake Accord was the focus of the recent First Minister's Conference in Ottawa. It is something which has caused major argument and many divisions across the country. What do you see as being some of the fundamental flaws, and what would have to be done to the accord before you would consider endorsing it?

**McLaughlin:** I support the Distinct Society; I think that's based on a historical reality. I think it is important, I feel very strongly that we're living in Canada and Quebec is a part of it. I want to say that it's Mr. Mulroney who, in my view, must take major responsibility for increasing this rift in the country. Any Prime Minister who comes out and says, "Here's the constitution, take it or leave it. You can't change a word, and if you don't like it, you're anti-Quebec," if that's not destined to tear the country apart, I don't know what is. So we have to look at national reconciliation.

There are two things that need to happen with Meech Lake: clarification of certain sections and Federal Spending Powers. I have talked to constitutional experts that have absolute opposite interpretations of that section. It needs clarification.

Canadians want to know things, like [whether] medicare, which in every part of this country you go to, will be intact; that we can have national standards for a child care programme for example. It's one of the things that holds us together and it is a principle of justice in this country. It may not have to be changed, but it definitely has to be clarified.

The Unanimity Provision for the northern territories, clearly isn't fair [in] that the elected leaders in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories should not have a say in the constitution of our country. One third of Canada, in geographical land mass and the people who live there, should have a say in Canada.

We have to also acknowledge the rights of our First Nations, Aboriginal rights, [and] Aboriginal self-government. It's absolutely essential.

We have to insure that the rights of women, gained in the last constitution, are clearly intact. Again, its another one of those sections that's open to a lot of interpretation. I think those things can be done through a parallel accord perhaps, without undermining the whole accord. I think [Newfoundland premier] Clyde Wells is being absolutely destructive in saying, "Let's throw the thing out and renegotiate." I mean that's what he's been quoted in the papers as saying. It's tough in this country. It's tough to bring different regions of this country together. It's easy to say, "That wasn't good enough; let's start again."

But we know in fact it's not that easy. So I support that we build on what we've done. If the 1990 deadline has to be extended, then extend it.

There's nothing constitutional that binds us to 1990 at all. Let's extend it and keep talking. It's worth it. It's worth preserving this country.

**Excal:** As the potential federal NDP Leader, how might you appeal to Quebec to improve your Party's support in that province?

**McLaughlin:** As I said earlier, we did get 16 per cent of the vote, which is the highest that we've gotten, but you're right; the proof is in whether or not you win seats, and we didn't. But in Quebec we're building a political movement. I know what it means to build a movement. You're building brick by brick.

There will probably be, next week, a bi-election called in Chambly in Quebec. The first thing as leader, I'd want to see us work hard to see what we can do in winning that riding. It is very important to have someone from Quebec from within the party.

The other thing that we do have is the Quebec Committee. We are integrating the Quebec Committee which works with caucus, so that all the critics, all the spokespersons for various portfolios, can consult with our Quebec colleagues, not just from a Quebec perspective, but a national perspective from Quebec's point of view. So those are some of the things we can do. There's no magic answer.

**Excal:** How proficient are you in French?

**McLaughlin:** Well, I can certainly function in both languages. I do media interviews in French. The Quebec Committee, of course, meets in French. But I can certainly improve and I will do that. I think that's essential. Quebec is not going to be very interested in a party whose leader cannot communicate.

**Excal:** Will the NDP ever form the Official Opposition, or ever form the Federal Government?

**McLaughlin:** That would be my objective. I think you have to be realistic. Five years ago in the Yukon, if anyone had said we would be the government, everyone would have fell down on the floor laughing. It was Tory territory, and that was that. Erik Neilson had been the Member of Parliament for 29 years. In the last five years we've had a New Democratic [Territorial] government elected and re-elected; we've had a federal Member of Parliament elected and re-elected. So I guess I come from a place where I'm optimistic that change can take place.

**Excal:** Has the NDP ever considered a one member — one vote party leadership system?

**McLaughlin:** When Ed resigned, it really did come as a surprise. I said, look, here's a time to do something different, either one person one vote, or travelling nomination meetings, or travelling election meetings. I regret it wasn't explored and seen as a serious option at that time.

The feeling, I think, was, [that] the time is limited. That really disturbs me a lot, both from a practical point of view, [and] from a democratic point of view. I get a lot of support from women, from young people and, interestingly, from senior citizens, all of which groups cannot afford to go to conventions.

Now, personally, I'm not very happy about that, because it may affect my chances of election. But in a broader sense, I'm somebody who feels that the party has to reflect the values that we purport for society to reflect. We really have to change that. Never again can we have a process that cuts out people from participating in this decision, in this way.

We are the party of working people and I think we're forgetting that. If we don't empower our own members, we can't really talk seriously about empowering Canadians.

**Excal:** Do you feel confident that you'll be leading the NDP to that extent?

**McLaughlin:** Will I win the leadership? I'm seriously in the running. I'd say I'm in the top group. But I'll tell you, until that vote starts and probably after, I'll be working right up till the end.