

Conservatives party

by Paul Webster



The Agony of Victory

Dal photo: Michael Devanport

Thursday, Friday and Saturday last week saw nearly 3000 Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives congregate at the World Trade and Convention Centre for a leadership convention.

With Clair Callaghan, Roland Thornhill and Tom McInnes as serious rivals, Pictou County farmer and current Industry Minister Donald Cameron won the contest on the third ballot.

Cameron, 44, is generally credited to be the candidate with strongest support from the Party's internal establishment. He is a close friend of Brian Mulroney's and is perhaps best known for the CBC documentary which suggested he helped a friend win a \$5 million contract for railway construction in his riding.

The convention was generally credited to have pulled the party together at a time when it is reeling from former Government Services Minister Michael Zareski's allegation that the candidates "aren't open, they aren't honest and they don't have integrity".

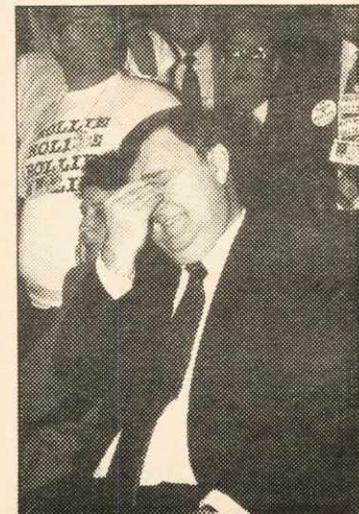
At the convention Saturday Halifax Citadel delegate Robert Damberg characterized the candidates by saying "I don't think there's a lot of difference between them. Each one is a PC... the differences are relatively insignificant. I judge on who will be a good premier, who will run a good chance of getting elected".

Discussing the actual process pursued by the Tories in the convention, and their anxiety to present a squeaky-clean nomination and balloting system, Damberg said "overall the process is as good as we can devise. I have no pressure on me to vote one way or another."

When asked how he decides who to support Damberg said "I think of educational policy, social policy, environmental policy in making my final decision. I think both of who I'm voting for and who stands behind him, who his advisers are."

The leadership conference involved much more, however, than simply electing delegates and voting on Saturday. Thursday night the Party threw a massive "Tribute to John Buchanan".

Buttons were sold saying "Thank You John and Mavis" to the man whose twelve-year tenure as Premier ground to a halt last November in a mire of patronage allegations, lack of popular support, distrust and a controversial Senate appointment which saw Buchanan go to Ottawa to support the GST Bill opposed by 85 per cent of Canadians.



The Thrill of Defeat

Dal photo: Michael Devanport

Thursday and Friday nights saw parties thrown in the candidates' hospitality suites. Donald Cameron was the only candidate not to serve free alcohol to his guests. Visitors to Tom McInnes' suite got an early warning of the Attorney General's anthemic theme music which was played all day Saturday at full

volume in the Convention Centre.

According to several delegates, their decision not to support McInnes was partly based on the aggressive tactics displayed by his Toronto "handlers" who played the song over and over on a privately-controlled PA system, inescapably dominating the convention process.

According to many observers, the leadership convention revealed many deep problems with the PCs. As one delegate noted, nobody at the convention seemed to know what (if anything) was happening. "I could stay home and watch it on TV and find out more about what's going on."

The lack of female leadership candidates revealed that the Party will continue to be very male-dominated. Only 40 per cent of delegates were female. 52 local PC women's group Presidents were denied the ex-officio voting status they expected. As Kings South riding women's group President Kirsey Herron said on the first day of the convention "There are many oversights that happen to women in this party and in general."

Micmac leader Dan Paul, who was present at the convention as an observer, noted the absence of any native leadership voices at the convention. Similarly, only a handful of black people were amongst the thousands at the convention Saturday. Among the demographically unrepresentative and disproportionately white male white PC crowd assembled for the convention it was also remarkable to note the lack of people under the age of forty.

Spicer's quest

by Marie-France LeBlanc

In early November members of the Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future unveiled a do-it-yourself blueprint for Canadians to help in reshaping the nation. This difficult and complex task, it was said, would be performed by the non-partisan panel fanning out across Canada to consult small groups of Canadians on the future of the country.

The idea set out by Keith Spicer, Chair of the Commission, was to have individual commissioners sit down with groups of 15 to 20 Canadians and listen to their ideas and concerns. The information would then be collected, sorted and assimilated into a final report due July 1st.

The first step in this plan to draft a whole new constitutional proposal, came to Halifax in mid-January. Yet the format of the meeting was somewhat different than expected. Mr. Spicer and his commissioners had arranged for invitations to be sent out to a small number of well educated professional Haligonians. When 200 people showed up, the Chairman was somewhat taken aback. The end result of the assembly was rather positive, but the organisation and original intent left a bad taste in many Nova Scotians' mouths.

"We are now fighting to suppress the elitist impression left by Mr. Spicer's visit, so that we may go on and fulfil the Citizen's Forum mandate" said John Curry a moderator for the Spicer Commission. This mandate, he said, is to "collect and focus the views of citizens into their vision of the future" and "to improve the climate of dialogue, by lowering the level of distrust that slows progress on so many vital issues".

Curry, a recent Political Science graduate of Dalhousie University, has been hired by one of the 10 provincial coordinators to elicit interest and recruit volunteers within the University community, who are willing to hold discussion groups. His role, then, is to act as moderator and ensure that the formal report, which consists of 14 questions, is passed on to the

Citizen's Forum head office in Ottawa.

The questions, in the report, range from "What are the major issues facing this province in the 1990's" to questions about group views on aboriginal self-government or ethnic diversity: the last two questions ask "What does being a Canadian mean to you" and "What are you willing to do to preserve this?"

"This is not just a report," stresses John Curry, but rather "an attempt to change people's apathy towards Canada". This unprecedented attempt at grass roots democracy, it is hoped, will allow Canadian's to regain control of their own future. "The process in itself is valuable, and will hopefully allow Canadians to regain a sense of their identity".

Dalhousie students have had a very skeptical response to the Forum's pleas for participation. Many are bothered by the elitism which was originally conveyed, others do not feel that they can spare the time right now. In response to these objections Curry said "If you cannot take the time to attempt to stimulate dialogue in a rational and peaceful way, then you do not have the right to complain about the state of the nation".

Some question the validity, necessity and timing of the forum. Is it simply a Progressive Conservative ploy to increase its severely waning popularity? Many also question the lavishness of this endeavour - the Forum reportedly has a 10 million dollar budget which it reportedly uses unsparingly on "inflated salaries" and "glitz".

These doubts are not appeased when the national Forums actions are examined. There are continual reports of organizational difficulties such as a constantly changing directional focus, and of subsequent aversion of any continuity which the provinces are attempting to establish. However, these national problems notwithstanding, it would appear that the Nova Scotia instalment of the Commission is making a genuine effort at turning a "worthwhile but frustrating" concept into a real venue for citizen participation.

Dal grants sanctuary

by Marie-France LeBlanc

War news dominates the media. One cannot turn on the television set or pick up a newspaper without being bombarded with reports of coalition force attacks or human interest stories based on the war.

The effects of this news blitz, the voyeurism which comes with it, and the reality of war itself have raised many emotions among Halifax students. This has led Dalhousie University's Chaplaincy center to open a special house on campus where students can go talk about their fears of, or caused by, the war in the Persian Gulf.

"The war is a catalyst to many emotions" says Jim Anderson, a Lutheran minister who is also the project's facilitator. "The 1990's are a time of great uncertainty and the war has simply added an extra stress and fear. This house is a safe space where students can come, no matter what their views are, and someone will listen to them. It is a place to discuss what is true, and

to sift out what is going on," says Anderson.

The house, which is located at 6143 South Street, has not been set up for any political reasons or as a base for the peace movement. It is a place where individuals can go to resolve their anxieties over the war.

"The war is a catalyst to many emotions"

As of yet, the response has been somewhat limited to that of volunteers who are offering their services. This, Reverend Anderson says, is a positive first step for "these volunteers are as much here for themselves as they are to help others". Most of the volunteers have family and friends in the Gulf,

and being a part of this project allows them to deal with their own fears and anxieties.

In the following weeks the house hopes to hold workshops on stress management and coping. As well, the Chaplaincy service hopes to get other faith groups involved in the project so as to have a wider base of services to offer to those in need.

To date, the establishment of this sanctuary has received nothing but support from the University community. The University itself supplied the house, rent free; the student council "adopted a room" - that is, it supplied the furniture for one of the rooms - and, in conjunction with the Student Union, it provided the house with start up funds.

"There are many people out there that need a place to go where no one will scream at them, or fault them for what they are feeling" says Jim Anderson, "hopefully these people will feel that they can drop in any day between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm, or call at 492-3272."