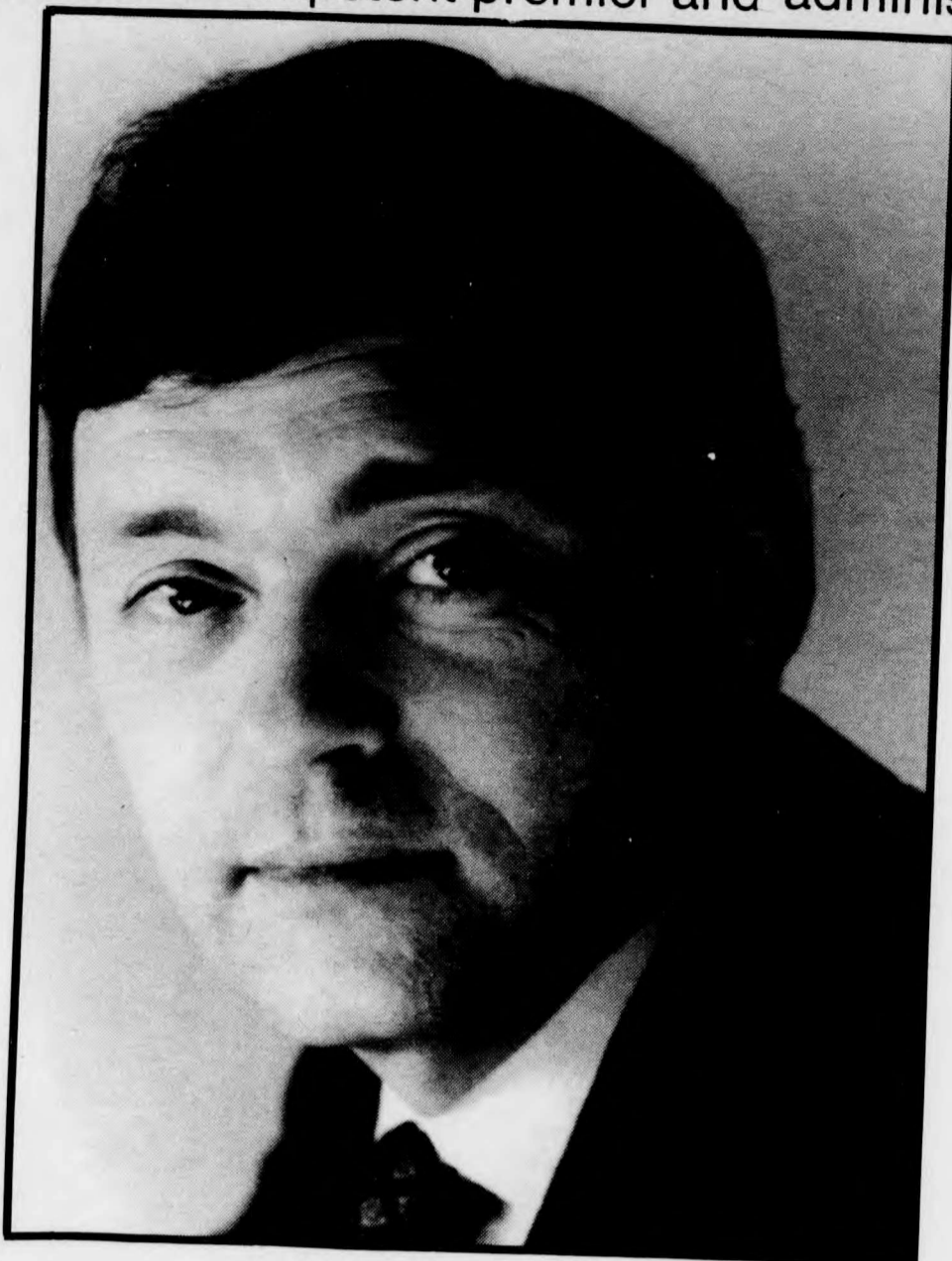


Dennis Timbrell:

Ontario has "the most incompetent premier and administration this province has seen"



by Ken Turriff

Dennis Timbrell, a serious contender for the leadership of Ontario's Progressive Conservative (PC) party, was at York last Thursday to address a meeting of the York Progressive Conservative Campus Association.

Timbrell was an MPP and cabinet minister when the PCs were in power under Bill Davis, and later, Frank Miller. He has already launched an unofficial campaign for the party's upcoming leadership convention expected for this spring.

In his speech to a dozen or more Young Conservatives, Timbrell opened by saying the Tories have an opportunity to win the next provincial election. He emphasized the importance for the next leader of the party to be seen as credible, experienced, and to have a very broad basis of support in every sector of Ontario.

He also emphasized the need for a united party. "If we come out of the next leadership convention divided, then we're going to hand the next election to the most incompetent premier and administration that this province has seen," he said. Timbrell acknowledged it was no secret he was considering running for leader. He said the Conservatives could be in the middle of a provincial election next year at this time, and stressed that the time for the party to organize itself was now.

The latter portion of Timbrell's speech was aimed at criticizing the Peterson government's record. He focused particularly on the issues of health care, the civil service and the housing crisis in southern Ontario.

With reference to health care, he said, "I remember when people came to Ontario for health care from the US and other provinces. Now we're regularly shipping heart surgery patients off to the Cleveland Clinic, we shovel off to Buffalo our critically ill new borns, and the Princess Margaret has closed its doors to new patients."

In his criticism of the Liberal's handling of the civil service, Timbrell indicated that at least 10,000 employees have been hired to work in the civil service since Peterson became premier. When totalling up the cost for salaries, benefits, office space, telephones, fax machines, cars, etc., the average cost per each staff person between \$50-60,000 thousand a year, or a grand total to the taxpayer of between \$500-600 million a year in additional costs, said Timbrell.

"We left to Peterson, four and a half years ago, the most efficient and the leanest government bureaucracy; and today its one of the worst."

Criticizing the government's inaction in the housing crisis, Timbrell asserted, "The only thing that's assured about housing in Ontario today is that there isn't enough of it and what there is, is not affordable." Timbrell sees rent control as one of the major causes of the problem. "I don't want to refine the rent control system. I want to work towards the day when we can just forget the rent control system and be done with it."

Timbrell's solution to the housing crisis would be to introduce a housing allowance so anyone paying more than 30

per cent of their income on rental housing, especially those with fixed incomes, would get an allowance to help them with the difference. By abandoning the rent control system, Timbrell predicts developers will again start to build rental housing. This will result in the restoration of competition in the rental housing market and will solve, over a period of time, the problems of availability and affordability. Timbrell sees his housing allowance plan as a way to alleviate the need for further low income housing projects. "I will never ever build another public housing project in this province. I would help people to afford to live in the community where they want to live," he added.

After Timbrell gave his speech, he fielded several questions from the group including two on what the Conservatives, if in government, would do in the areas of the environment and university funding.

In the case of the environment, Timbrell advocated giving financial assistance, on occasion, to companies to meet environmental standards. "We may well have to, as a government, get involved in low interest loans to some companies. That's a tough one because I don't like giving money away."

With regard to post-secondary education funding, Timbrell said there were no easy solutions. Cutbacks in transfers to universities and colleges would not only have to be stopped, but reversed. The key, he said, is to bring universities, colleges and even high schools into a closer working relationships with the private sector.

Excalibur had the opportunity to talk with Timbrell after his speech.

Excal: A leadership convention is imminent. You are not only said to be a contender along with Richard Harris and Dianne Cunningham, but a favorite to win. How do you react to that?

Timbrell: I wouldn't be so presumptuous to claim that position. I do believe, should I enter the race, that I bring to it the experience both as a businessman and a cabinet minister, in eight portfolios, that allows me to speak with authority and conviction on the issues facing Ontario today.

E: Are you anxious for a leadership convention?

T: I think it's important for the party that we get it over with as soon as possible because we could all be into an election next September. So, the more time we have, the better.

E: From what areas do you feel that you have the strongest support for a leadership bid?

T: It is very broadly based, the youth, all ages, all sectors, among teachers, municipal politicians, physicians, nurses, farmers, every part of Ontario.

E: Do you think that you'll be able to retain the youth support that you had in the last convention?

T: Yes, every indication is that this is the case. I've been really pleased with reactions on a number of campuses this fall and I'll be on a number more. I've been really pleased because many of these folks will be candidates, if not in 1990, then certainly in 1994 or 1995.

E: You ran in the last leadership convention and narrowly lost to Larry Grossman by only 19 votes. Have all the internal party wounds healed yet?

T: Yes, I think so for the most part. If there is anybody who still harbours any resentment or anger, then they've got a problem, not the party. I think that for the most part that's virtually all behind us. Changing the system from a delegated convention to "one member-one vote universal suffrage" has helped to do that. I believe the new leadership election process is forcing the party to be much more open, much more democratic, and that's for the good.

E: Do you predict that there will be any wounds after the next convention?

T: I hope not. I would hope that everybody keeps the focus where it should be, on the horrific shortcomings of the present Peterson administration. And if we can do that, attacking Liberals, not fellow Conservatives, then I think we'll be in a much stronger position come next spring... to successfully challenge their government.

E: You have often been referred to as a "Red Tory" or at the least a moderate. How do you see yourself?

T: A moderate, I'm a fiscal conservative. I'm tight with a dollar. I don't believe in a lot of government; I believe in having enough government. I don't believe in excess; I believe in having a lean administration. I would put a hiring freeze on and roll back the totally unworkable padding of the public service of this province that's gone on in the last four years.

In order to retain the fiscal flexibility to be innovative on social programs, you've got to be able to have fiscal responsibility to introduce new programs such as the rental allowance program that I think is essential. In my mind it makes a hell of a lot of sense because the present system is just digging us a deeper and deeper hole. I've always considered myself to be a moderate, a fiscal conservative, with a very strong social conscience.

E: What has been the extent of your political involvement while having been in private life?

T: I never left politics. I've always stayed involved. I chair the Multicultural Advisory Board of the Conservative Party. I've been involved in fund-raising. I was active in the campaign to change the party constitution to bring in the "one member-one vote" system. I left the legislature; I didn't leave the party.

E: The PCs took an awful beating at the polls in the last provincial election, falling to a distant third place. To what do you attribute this?

T: The tide went out. People were ready for a change and we got bowled over. More and more people in Ontario, after seeing what Peterson and his government have delivered compared to what they promised in the 1987 campaign, are saying "We've been taken. This is not a government we deserve."

E: Do you think that people are ready for the Tory Party to make a return to provincial power?

T: I do. I really think that we have a good shot of winning the next provincial election.

E: Have the circumstances that the provincial PCs now find themselves in acted as a catalyst for party renewal or reform?

T: No question about it, the last couple of years has been cathartic for the party. It has forced us to look at issues like the way we choose leaders, to look at how we are perceived by people in Ontario, how we want to be positioned as a party. I think we've made good use of the last couple of years.

E: Will we see a provincial Tory Party in the 1990s which is drastically different from that of the 1980s?

T: Probably, because the needs of the 90s are different than they have been in the 80s. In the early 80s, we started off with a very deep, very severe recession. In the 90s, the overriding question is "How do we keep the quality of life in Ontario, or improve the quality of life and keep Ontario competitive in the world market place?" That demands some new policies, some innovative policies. The 90s are different. We will adapt our principles, our fiscal conservatism, with the strong social conscience to the needs of the 90s in the next century.

E: What will be the role of the party's next leader?

T: I think the role will be as it's always been, one of being a catalyst, someone that is the sponsor of dialogue, to identify good people to bring along as candidates, as cabinet ministers, as riding presidents, as organizers, you name it. And to be the person who will consistently strive to maintain the public's trust and confidence in that person and the party.

E: Will you be that person?

T: Well, we'll see. Once the date is set and the rules are finalized, I'll make my announcement.

Timbrell confided to *Excalibur* that as a politician, he is often asked if he is a lawyer. In fact, he says he's not. Timbrell once attended York but quit before he got his BA. The reason? Politics of course! He was elected as a North York alderman at only the age of 23, elected to the Ontario Legislative Assembly at 24 and appointed to cabinet at 27.