

THE BIG RED MACHINE

STEPHEN CLARKSON

THE BIG RED MACHINE

How the Liberal Party
Dominates Canadian Politics



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Pierre Elliott Trudeau once recounted how his first experience with politics came through his ardently Conservative francophone father. What he remembered best from the election nights of his childhood was Charlie Trudeau's friends damning the Liberals and their all-too-often successful "machine rouge" with round and righteous fury. Impressed by these outbursts, Pierre had visualized this red machine well into his teens as some huge Rube Goldbergian device that whirred, clicked, and threw off sparks with diabolical effects on the electorate.

– CHRISTINA MCCALL, *GLOBE AND MAIL*, 1975

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Preface

The Joy of Winning

Our fascination is chronic. Nothing captures Canadians' political attention more predictably and compellingly than an election campaign. During these frantic weeks every few years, when the entire federal stage is handed over to electioneering, the governing process goes into temporary hibernation, and Canada's political culture enters a special mode. The electorate is courted by the nation's political leaders as they attempt to gain its support and mobilize their own rank and file. From Newfoundland to British Columbia, from the American border to the Arctic Ocean, the citizenry is bombarded with competing messages broadcast over radio and television, printed in the newspapers, sent through the mail, voiced at the doorstep and, more recently, transmitted via e-mail, listed on various sites on the World Wide Web, and harangued about on individual blogs. The media corps changes its criteria for reporting, giving credence to upstart challengers and hardened critics who are generally ignored in times of political peace. Signs and billboards clutter the roadsides. Pledges are solemnly declared and bitterly contested. Accusations are made and refuted. Policies are proposed and opposed. Hopes are raised and dashed.

Orchestrating this bedlam, partisan politics comes briefly into the light of day. An unusual institution, the political party is the vehicle for translating hundreds of thousands of hours of intensive campaigning and millions of separately cast votes into a final decision – the joy of winning and the heady reins of power, or defeat and either political oblivion or the ungrateful task of toiling in opposition.

This book focuses tightly on a single federal party's electoral behaviour during the last thirty years, providing the story of the Liberal Party of Canada's (LPC's) nine election campaigns from 1974 through 2004. In their original form, each of these studies appeared shortly after the actual election as a chapter for the scholarly work that has been published on every Canadian federal campaign starting in 1974. These books gave a complete overview of each election, with scholars describing each of the contending parties' campaign performances, as well as the behaviour of the media and, of course, the voters.¹

It would be an understatement to say that these election volumes had a limited circulation. None enjoyed commercial distribution or widespread media attention of the kind enjoyed by Graham Fraser's *Playing for Keeps* or Rick

Salutin's *Waiting for Democracy* following the dramatic 1988 free trade election. None won prizes as did John Duffy's recent *Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership, and the Making of Canada*, which reviews his selection of important battles in Canadian history. Apart from professional politicians and their advisers, academic specialists in election studies, and students taking courses on Canadian political parties, few would have known of these tomes' existence, and fewer still read their contents.

The reason for revising my own contributions to these studies and putting them together between one set of covers does not lie in their individual merit. After all, each party's campaign in each election is *sui generis*, a unique event that is important in the context of that historical moment, but of little general interest. When put end to end, however, the stories of one party's campaigns may tell us a good deal about that particular organization. And when this party happens to have held power in Ottawa for 78 of the past 110 years, then its campaign practices, communications techniques, and leadership styles should be of greater interest. The LPC's electoral savvy may help us better understand not just how it has come out on top of the heap in nineteen out of twenty-eight elections in the twentieth century, but also what its prospects are for keeping up this winning record into the twenty-first.

These nine elections span two periods in Canada's evolving political economy. The mid-1970s saw the Keynesian welfare state at its apogee as it began its inexorable decline in the face of neoconservatives' demands for a leaner and meaner state. By 2004 Canada had entered a turbulent phase, having experienced almost two decades of liberalized trade on the North American continent and the corresponding cutbacks of the social, cultural, and environmental programs built up under Keynesian governments. Observing the Liberal Party's electoral practices during a broad process of social, economic, political, and ideological change should shed some light on how the Canadian party system itself evolved in the transition from one policy paradigm to another.

The Big Red Machine has two distinct publics in mind. For citizens who are passionate fans of Canada's most popular spectator sport after hockey, it provides a wealth of detail, helping them to understand the inner workings of the Liberal Party in its electoral mode and the general dynamics of election campaigns at the federal level. For specialists, these studies touch on an issue that is the subject of much scholarly debate – the character of Canada's party system, which some consider is undergoing a historic transformation.

These chapters do not appear here as originally published. Because much more research has subsequently been done, they incorporate material that was not available at the original time of writing – most notably, the financial data reported by the parties to the chief electoral officer of Canada and the extensive survey research executed by my political-science colleagues. Besides these works,

I have profited from various papers presented at the annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, articles published in learned journals, memoirs of political figures, journalistic treatments of campaigns, and that work-horse of Canadian political history, the *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs*. Following critiques received by two anonymous peers who read the manuscript's first draft for the University of British Columbia Press, every chapter has been restructured to sharpen its argument and provide more consistency in the treatment of each campaign.

The body of the book now consists of the nine contests themselves, beginning with the campaign of 1974 and ending with the election of 2004. Given the central importance of political leaders in setting the tone and defining the character of Canadian parties, these narratives fall into four sections – Pierre Trudeau's mixed record of success (1974), defeat (1979), and re-conquest (1980) in his last three campaigns; John Turner's two failed efforts of 1984 and 1988; Jean Chrétien's three subsequent victories in 1993, 1997, and 2000; and, finally, Paul Martin's skin-of-his-teeth win of 2004.

These nine essays are preceded by an introduction that, by sketching in the historical background on Canadian party politics to 1974, provides a context for understanding how the federal party system passed through various transformations from Confederation on; how national policies evolved to suit the changing requirements of Canadian society; what kind of organizational and financial base the Liberal Party had developed; why Pierre Trudeau attempted unsuccessfully to introduce democratic practices to the internal workings of the party: in short, how the Liberal Party had come to be what it was at the time of the 1974 election.

The conclusion relates the record of six electoral wins and three losses by Canada's hegemonic party from 1974 to 2004 to the contradictory nature of the evolving party system, with both its internal fragmentation and its integration into a global marketplace.

Before passing to the analysis, the reader should know that I was myself a Liberal Party member for seven years. Having become excited – along with millions of other Canadians in 1968 – by Pierre Trudeau's charismatic sweep to power, I joined the LPC in order to contest the nomination for the Toronto riding of Davenport that had become open on the Hon. Walter L. Gordon's retirement from politics.

Bloodied by this experience, but intrigued by the many social issues facing Toronto at a time when the urban question was becoming extremely contentious, I became active in the effort to create a municipal Liberal Party and found myself elected its candidate for the mayoralty in the 1969 municipal election.² Following this dramatic, albeit unsuccessful, initiation into the practical realities of electoral politics, I remained active in the extra-parliamentary, citizen

side of the Liberal Party, serving on its policy committees at both the federal and provincial levels, and working in its election campaigns.

During these years, I shifted part of my teaching and my research toward parties and elections. By the time I left the Liberal Party in 1975, I was already researching the study in Howard Penniman's first *Canada at the Polls* that appears here as the entry for 1974.

Finally, a word about the title of this preface. Some are attracted to politics to change the world. Others are drawn to the battle itself. For Jean Chrétien, the previous leader of the Liberal Party of Canada who lived and breathed political combat, politics was less about the ends than the means, less about policy than politics, more about the hunt than the quarry. Visiting a classroom of Canadian children in China toward the end of his prime ministership, the "iron man" was asked by a schoolboy what he liked best about his job. "The most enjoyable thing is to win an election. The day after, we have a lot of work to do, but *the joy of winning* an election is something," the veteran politician responded – straight from the heart.³

This spontaneous comment reveals a side of electoral politics that neither scholars nor journalists ever seem to catch. While elections are historical events pregnant with serious implications for the country, they can also be hugely exciting experiences for the combatants. When teams of volunteers, many of whom have worked in campaign after campaign, get back together to do political battle, they manage the tremendous tensions by developing an esprit de corps and enjoying the intense experience. Liberals, in particular, pride themselves on having a good time while they smite their enemies.

The men and women who collectively make up the Big Red Machine don't fight elections to proselytize for liberalism, whatever they may mean by their party's label. Most especially, they don't fight them to lose. As a party activist from Cape Breton once put it, "You can't turn off the Big Red Machine; you just shut it down for maintenance." After decades of experience, the essence of the Liberals' approach to political campaigning can be summed up in Chrétien's telling phrase. It's about the joy of winning.

Reader, read on.

Acknowledgments

Three groups made possible the studies that became this book.

First come the politicians, primarily active Liberals, who helped me in my research, particularly on the 1974 and 1979 elections, whether in informal conversations or formal interviews. Many of these people are identified in these chapters' references.

Second are the many colleagues with whom I have discussed and from whom I have learned over the decades, most notably the dean of party analysts in Canada, John Meisel at Queen's University, and his former student, Jon Pammett, who combines speed with quality in editing each federal election's scholarly volume.

Third, I need to recognize the students I recruited in the 1980s and 1990s to help me carry out the research during each subsequent campaign. In a class of their own are three of these recruits, whom I engaged once I had decided to turn these studies into a book. Tracey Rynark reworked the financial data provided by the chief electoral officer of Canada to provide comparable statistics for every election for which they were available. Priya Suagh started the process of turning the independent election studies into chapters for a stand-alone monograph. Vivek Krishnamurthy took on the final phase of standardizing the chapters' approaches, chasing missing data in the tables, tracking down errant bibliographical references, and helping me incorporate suggestions made by the UBC Press readers.

Over the years, grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada helped make possible some of my research.

This book would not exist without these substantial contributions, but my late partner, Christina McCall (with whom I fell in love as we discussed the Liberals' 1974 election campaign) is the one with whom I most enjoyed discussing Canadian politics and from whom I gleaned the greatest insights about the Liberal Party in all its big-red-machine guises for the past three decades.

THE BIG RED MACHINE

Introduction:

Party Systems and Liberal Leaders

In the age of the Internet, some say that there is no use for history. Why should there be, when change has been so rapid in the last two decades that even the meaning of some common words has evolved beyond recognition? “Reform,” for instance, once described efforts to redress economic injustice and foster well-being by expanding the state’s capacity for enacting the requisite social measures. Spelled with a capital letter in the 1990s, “Reform” became identified with the political movement dedicated to roll back government, curbing its capacity to address social ills.¹ The connotation of “liberal” has mutated just as radically over the decades. Quite apart from the peculiarity in Canadian usage that distinguishes between “big L” Liberal, Liberals, and Liberalism designating the party, its members, and its ideology and “small l” liberal, liberals, and liberalism referring to a more general attitude, those who share it, and the philosophical basis of their beliefs, the concept has morphed from a description of the anti-government, pro-market, *saute-qui-peut* thinking at the turn of the twentieth century to its market-regulating, generous, big-government opposite a hundred years later.

Those for whom history has become irrelevant would do well to fast forward to the campaign narratives that begin with the next chapter, on the federal election of 1974. Those readers who still think chronologically and are interested in the more general implications of electoral behaviour may wish to have their memories refreshed in the following sections, which trace the roots from which the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) springs and provide the electoral context on the eve of the 1974 campaign.

Specifically, this introduction introduces the *party system approach* as the context for analyzing the evolution of partisan politics in Canada. First, it reviews the LPC’s tumultuous evolution from radical movement to governing party by establishing how the imprints left on the country by its various leaders have reflected not just its party system but also the evolving character of Canada’s political economy. It then shows how these leaders would not so often have occupied the prime minister’s office had they not profited from the peculiar bias

of the country's electoral system, which favours the winning party. Next, it describes both the attitudinal make-up of the LPC's supporters and the organizational foundation of its apparatus by the time Pierre Trudeau came to power. Finally, it summarizes the impact on both party practices and member morale of Trudeau's flirtation with and betrayal of the notion of participatory democracy.

This saga of dashed expectations will prepare us to consider a disturbing paradox when we reach the conclusion, where we will review the reasons for the Big Red Machine's persisting dominance over Canadian party politics. The LPC's continuing hegemony has much to do with its remaining the most autocratic in the field, even while demonstrating such democratic qualities as higher participation rates, a better gender balance, and younger, better-educated activists than its rivals.

Canada's Successive Party Systems

If history is to be something more than an accumulation of seemingly unrelated events, we require some organizing principle to group disparate phenomena into meaningful categories that can be compared with one another, for it is through the comparative method that much of what we know in the social sciences has been learned. The dominant analytical framework for understanding the evolution of Canadian partisan politics is the *party system approach*, which was developed independently in the 1970s by David Smith² at the University of Saskatchewan and R. Kenneth Carty³ at the University of British Columbia. Their central notion divides the history of Canadian party politics into three functionally distinct periods – or systems – each of which possesses certain unique characteristics that distinguish it from the others. The first, the *clientelistic* system, spanned the period from Confederation in 1867 to the end of the First World War. The second, the *brokerage* system, lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s. The third, the *pan-Canadian* system, was born in the political and social tumult of the early 1960s.

Over the past decade, political scientists have discussed at length whether a fourth party system has emerged to supplant the pan-Canadian one. The leading proponents of this thesis, the scholarly trio R.K. Carty, Lisa Young, and William Cross, assert in their *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* that the 1993 federal election was a watershed marking the transition from the pan-Canadian system to a fourth, regionally balkanized party system.⁴ James Bickerton, Alain Gagnon, and Patrick J. Smith make a similar argument in *Ties That Bind*, although they contend that the shift to the fourth party system began with the election of Brian Mulroney in 1984, not with Jean Chrétien's electoral triumph nine years later.⁵

This book plots a middle course between the Bickerton and Carty positions. The Trudeau section, which covers the elections of 1974, 1979, and 1980, looks at

the Liberal Party at the height of the third party system. The Turner section, on the elections of 1984 and 1988, covers a period of transition. Finally, the Chrétien and Martin sections, which deal with the elections of 1993, 1997, 2000, and 2004, assess the Liberals in the putative fourth system.

From Radical Movement to Governing Party

Dominant though it became in each of these four party systems, the Liberal Party's origins predate those of Canada itself. Surprisingly for a party that ultimately helped build and manage the capitalist state, it emerged to express the grievances and demands for social justice and economic freedom of those oppressed by the oligarchic power structure that prevailed in the British North American colonies during the first half of the nineteenth century. Following the military suppression of armed rebellions led by the firebrand William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada (later Ontario) and Louis-Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada (later Quebec) during 1837, the anti-establishment, Protestant, and anglophone Clear Grits⁶ and the anticlerical, Catholic, and francophone Rouges developed a reform movement focused on achieving their goal of destroying the power of the incumbent colonial aristocracies – the Family Compact and the Château Clique. To be liberal in their tumultuous times was to profess with John Stuart Mill the equality and dignity of the individual and to believe with Adam Smith in a free-trading marketplace unconstrained by such mercantilist regulations as tariffs. Committed to peaceable, electoral means, Canadian Liberalism's nineteenth-century history records long decades in parliamentary opposition spent espousing these reform principles under leaders who were generally unsuccessful at the polls.

Wilfrid Laurier and the Clientelistic Party System

Although they were effective in expressing the dissatisfaction among Queen Victoria's North American subjects, neither George Brown, Alexander Mackenzie, nor Edward Blake – the first three parliamentary leaders of the Liberal faction in Canada – achieved the balance between principle and pragmatism needed to gain, wield, and hold on to political power.

George Brown personified the paradox of what was more commonly called “reform politics” in the nineteenth century. He was unrepentantly partisan, to a degree that few twentieth-century politicians would dare emulate. A natural fighter who nursed grudges, Brown used his Toronto newspaper, *The Globe*, to trumpet the interests of his reform-minded confederates in the Province of Canada, which grouped Upper and Lower Canada into a single colony in 1841. Perceived by many as being anti-Catholic and anti-French, Brown was nevertheless able to hold together like-minded “Reformers” from both linguistic communities in opposition to the Conservatives (Tories) led by John A. Macdonald:

It is true that Mr. Brown knew the value of party organization, and, if we do not mistake, could connive at arguments in a campaign that were not presented from the housetops, and found lodgement in the voter's pocket rather than in his intellect ... No man ever knew Ontario better than George Brown. He searched every corner of the province for candidates. He knew the tendencies, sympathies and prejudices of every constituency. He knew who might win here and who must fail there.⁷

Thanks to these skills, Brown even succeeded in forming a short-lived government with A.A. Dorion, the leader of the Rouges, in 1858.

The paradox in Brown surfaced when, as chair of a committee of the province's legislature, he helped develop a constitution for the proposed federation of the British North American colonies. Despite the strength of his partisanship, Brown's desire to ensure that the new federal parliament would be organized according to the principle of "representation by population" led him to treat with partisan enemies such as Macdonald and the conservative Quebec Bleus to attain his goal.⁸ In 1864 Brown went so far as to join Macdonald in a coalition government to provide the Confederation project with enough political support to pass in the Canadian legislature, even though this meant abandoning his ideological confreres among Dorion's Rouges. Ultimately, it could be said that Brown "had no reverence for party except as an instrument of reform, and that he ranked progressive measures far above stagnant office-holding."⁹

Alexander Mackenzie became Canada's first Liberal prime minister not because of his credentials as a Grit reformer, but because of what he was not. Specifically, Mackenzie was not John A. Macdonald, and as such was blameless in the Pacific Scandal that swept from office the new Dominion of Canada's first government in 1873.¹⁰ Like Brown, Mackenzie came from Clear Grit politics in Ontario to the stage of the newborn nation. He expounded the principles of nineteenth-century liberalism concerning taxes and free trade, once declaring in the House of Commons that "there is no policy more consistent with what we call the Dark Ages of the world than that of protection as principle. There is no principle more consonant with the advance of human freedom, no principle more in accordance with the great prosperity that prevails in our time than the absolute freedom of commerce."¹¹ Unfortunately for Mackenzie, many electors felt that protection was the cure for, rather than the cause of, their economic woes. Since his advocacy of free trade principles coincided with a severe economic downturn in the late 1870s, the Dominion's first Grit premier was easily defeated in 1878 by a rehabilitated John A. Macdonald, who promised to introduce a bundle of protectionist measures that came to be known as the National Policy.

Edward Blake, who led his party from 1880 to 1887, was the only federal Liberal leader never to become prime minister. A brilliant but nakedly ambitious man who had served as the first Liberal premier of Ontario in 1871-2, Blake switched to Dominion politics in 1872 and soon made it known that he would only continue to serve in the national party if he could be its leader. When Blake did attain that position in 1880, the opportunity for success was ripe. Macdonald's National Policy was seen to be failing, and cost overruns on the Canadian Pacific Railway were pushing the national treasury toward bankruptcy. Thus, much of the blame for the Liberals' failure to displace the Tories was placed on Blake's shoulders, as he did little to attract new recruits from outside Ontario and could not match Macdonald in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate.

In these first decades of Canadian nationhood, the party system operated on the "clientelistic" principle by which party leaders, as patrons, delivered material benefits to their supporters, the voting clients who kept them in power. Although clientelism persists to some extent even in our contemporary party system, in the era before universal literacy and mass communications, electoral candidates had difficulty appealing to the imagination of the electorate and were forced to solicit votes by making a more direct appeal to their material interests. Only briefly having held power, however, Liberal politicians did not have access to the material means with which to build a solid political apparatus that could rival the patronage-dispensing machine that Macdonald had constructed over his long years as prime minister. Following his death in 1891, and thanks to the incompetence of Sir John A's several successors – four within the five years of the 1891-6 ministry – an opportunity opened up for the Liberals to switch places in the House of Commons with their long-time rivals.

This fascinating reversal took place in the 1896 election, when the Liberal Party broadened its formerly restricted appeal to become the national political formation that would govern Canada for most of the next century. As Hugh Thorburn observed, it was "only when the Liberals abandoned their reformist posture as defender of the agrarian underdog and spokesperson for reform did they succeed; but once they patterned themselves on Macdonald's Conservatives they beat the Tories at their own game – and they have, with notable gaps, continued to do so."¹² The credit for this transformation goes to Wilfrid Laurier, who took over the Liberal Party's leadership in 1887. Turning his back on the Rouges, republican, and anticlerical principles he had championed in his youth, Laurier now declared himself a Liberal in the more pragmatic style of Sir William Gladstone – the greatest of nineteenth-century British crusading politicians.

The party's political fortunes started to change in 1893, when Laurier convened his party's first national convention. Previously, Grits had met with local notables in regional or provincial conclaves, proclaiming policy resolutions that

were often in conflict with those passed by other Liberals congregating elsewhere across the Dominion. At his groundbreaking convention, Laurier manoeuvred his supporters into passing resolutions that created a single set of planks to be used in his next electoral platform.

Beyond ideological coherence, he developed partisan muscle. Opening the Reform Club that year in Ottawa, Laurier declaimed, “It is not enough to have good principles; we must have organization also. Principles without organization may lose, but organization without principles may often win.”¹³ In two sentences, Laurier defined the Liberal Party’s ethos for the twentieth century, a stance subordinating principle to pragmatism. Under him, the party ceased to be a hard-line group of radicals representing the regional grievances of their constituencies. He saw policy flexibility as the keystone of electoral success and accordingly set his party on its new course. His election in 1896 was to prove the watershed in Canadian Liberalism’s long history.

Wilfrid Laurier’s primary achievement in the 1896 election was to win Quebec’s support, and so wrest power there from the Conservative Party, despite the hostility of the Catholic Church hierarchy to a liberal political philosophy that it considered radical and dangerously atheistic. Laurier went on to win the next three elections by unapologetically adopting Macdonald’s fourfold formula for success – a nationwide coalition of supporters, an expansionary role for government, an intimate connection with business, and an accommodation between the French and the English. Tempering his silver-tongued orations about Liberal principles with plentiful doses of steely-eyed opportunism, he built his electoral coalition in English Canada on the organizational backs of Liberal provincial premiers whom he brought into his cabinet as patronage-dispensing power brokers for their regions. He endorsed the aggressive immigration policy of his Manitoba minister, Clifford Sifton, who was bent on settling what he saw as the empty Canadian West. He entered into the same kind of transcontinental railway-building collaboration with the Grand Trunk and Canadian Northern that his caucus had denounced in the 1880s when sponsored by Macdonald with the Canadian Pacific Railway. And he kept his hand on every aspect of party activity, particularly appointments to government jobs and the allocation of government contracts – patronage that he used in order to maintain his party in power by securing the support of the ambitious and rewarding the fealty of the faithful.

In this calculated pursuit of clientelism, Laurier reinforced the nation-building that characterized Canada’s first party system. Politicians did not just get elected to an office in those days. They created the offices and staffed them with their own partisan supporters as the Canadian government’s embryonic structure took shape. One telling example: Laurier invited a reliable industrial-relations specialist – trustworthy because he was the son of a loyal Liberal partisan in Toronto and the grandson of the great firebrand William Lyon Mackenzie – to be his

deputy minister of labour, instructing him to create a federal department to manage the problem of growing working-class unrest. The young man's name was William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Mackenzie King and the Brokerage Party System

By the interwar period, the rise of meritocratic norms had led to the professionalization of the Dominion bureaucracy, a development that deprived the parties of their direct role in recruiting government personnel. This left politicians with the more public role of “brokering” between the various, and very often conflicting, provincial interests within a federation that, by 1905, had grown from four to nine provinces. By the Great Depression, the two-party system that had existed since Confederation had become a two-plus-two system, with two “old” parties that could credibly aspire to form a government (the Liberals and the Conservatives) and two “new” parties that brought to Ottawa the angers of their class (the left-wing Co-operative Commonwealth Federation – CCF) or their region (the right-wing Social Credit from the Prairies).

After being elected leader at the Liberal Party's second national convention following Laurier's death in 1919, Mackenzie King went on to prove the most enduring prime minister in Canadian history. His long tenures as party leader (1919-48) and prime minister (1921-30 and 1935-48) coincided with this second party system, which encompassed years of rapid urbanization and industrialization, emerging class conflict, disastrous depression, and mobilization for total war. Where Laurier had done battle with only one rival party, King saw new, more radical formations emerge on his left and his right, both regionally and nationally. In the mould of his mentor, however, King's style of politics was at once conservative and reformist. Reluctant to make new departures or take bold steps in policy matters, he was nonetheless ready to head off electoral threats from the left by adopting the forward-looking, social-justice planks of the CCF's social democrats.

King's success has been ascribed by his critics to his uncanny talent for blurring political issues so as to maintain support among such ideologically opposed groups as farmers in the West, who demanded free trade, and manufacturers in central Canada, who demanded tariff protection. His genius for obfuscation was epitomized by his vacuous but successful 1935 campaign slogan, “King or Chaos.” Historians have paid less-grudging tribute to his shrewd recognition of the importance of sustaining his party's support in Quebec, especially during the Second World War. With his Delphic position, “conscriptio if necessary but not necessarily conscription,” he successfully walked the tightrope between English-Canadian militarists and French-Canadian isolationists during the hostilities, forestalling the armed suppression of rioting that had almost destroyed the party's Quebec wing in the previous global war.

King also had Laurier's talent for attracting strong politicians with regional power bases to his cabinet, where he made savvy use of their abilities and connections. He straddled the political middle ground by impressing the business communities in Montreal and Toronto with the government's managerial competence and its responsiveness to their concerns, while leaning slightly to the left on social issues in order to appeal to the broader electorate. In wartime, he craftily used the CCF's surging popularity and a parallel increase in labour militancy to push his pro-business caucus members into accepting the welfare programs – unemployment insurance, family allowances, and pensions within the framework of a moderately interventionist state – that his supporters in the extra-parliamentary National Liberal Federation endorsed as party policy, at his behest, in 1943.¹⁴ In short, he fashioned “a party drawing support from all regions, all classes and all cultural groups.”¹⁵

It was during Mackenzie King's second decade as party leader that the membership wing of the Liberal Party began to assume its present form. Formerly a loose association of citizens who identified with the vision of the party's leadership, the National Liberal Federation (NLF) was reformed in 1932 by King when he was the opposition leader striving to make an electoral comeback. He felt the party organization should be more directly connected to the party's grassroots. While the party faithful had previously been members of the NLF by virtue of belonging to a provincial Liberal organization, individuals wishing to belong to the reformed NLF now had to pay membership dues of \$1 per year for this privilege.¹⁶ In return, members could look forward to receiving a copy of a new party magazine, the *Liberal Monthly* (which despite its name was published only bi-monthly from 1933 to 1936). One dollar per year bought the rank and file little real influence over the party's internal operations, policy outlook, or leadership selection process – all of which remained under the collective thumb of the prime minister and his ministers. As Reg Whitaker observed, Mackenzie King “never gave the slightest indication that he harboured any belief in intra-party democracy, especially when the definition of party extended beyond the cabinet and parliamentary caucus.”¹⁷

While his democratic credentials may have been lacking, there is no question that King was a highly skilled political recruiter who was able to attract progressive intellectuals to the federal civil service and draw on their nation-building ideas for his partisan needs. Between 1939 and 1945, these civil servants ran what was essentially a centrally planned economy in close co-operation with the cabinet and a handful of capitalists from Montreal and Toronto who had come to Ottawa to help steer the country through the Second World War. Proximity, patriotism, and the sense of mission that came out of this wartime environment produced the tightly knit Anglo-Canadian elite that dominated early postwar Canada. Though some of its members leaned to the left (the civil servants),

some steered to the right (the businessmen), and some zigzagged around the middle (the elected politicians), their networks had developed – in the crucible of their intense wartime collaboration – a consensus about what became the framework for postwar Canada’s mixed economy and welfare system. By the late 1940s, the “mandarins” in Ottawa had become so influential with Liberal politicians – and by extension with their allies in business who returned to more entrepreneurial pursuits after the war – that their Keynesian economic ideas and pro-American orientation became the main pillars of Liberal government policy for the next quarter-century.

King’s hand-picked successor, Louis St. Laurent, was much admired in bureaucratic and business circles when he became party leader – and ipso facto prime minister – at the Liberals’ 1948 leadership convention, because he espoused the continentalist economic views most powerfully advocated by C.D. Howe, his American-born “minister of everything.” Howe felt Canada needed American capital in order to exploit its vast natural resource endowment. Canada also needed the American market, which, as a rapidly expanding and rearming economy, was sufficiently secure to guarantee its northern neighbour’s continuing prosperity, given Great Britain’s failure to regain its pre-war capacity to buy Canada’s staple exports. But St. Laurent was not Laurier in modern dress. Burdened by office and prone to depression, he became a sad old man, captive to his cabinet and the astute bureaucrats who served it backstage. His regime saw the erosion of King’s governing formula and the beginning of the Liberal Party’s persistent estrangement from western Canada.¹⁸ St. Laurent had always been bored by the petty brokerage of provincial demands that fuelled the second party system, and, on his watch, the Liberal Party hierarchy grew increasingly insensitive to the electorate. The party’s regional fiefdoms continued to be controlled by cabinet ministers who supervised with great diligence the dispensation of patronage and the selection of candidates at the local level. But, disposed as they were to leave the running of their departments to their trusty deputy ministers,¹⁹ they were mostly indifferent to broader issues of ideology and policies for national development.

During the second party system’s four decades, the Liberal Party’s fusion with the Canadian state and the business community was almost taken for granted. Hardly anyone at the time bothered to object when Cockfield, Brown, and Co., the government’s advertising agency, paid the salary of the party’s national director. It was taken for granted that the Liberals’ fundraising efforts consisted primarily of systematically dunning those companies that secured government contracts to supply weapons or build infrastructure projects such as the St. Lawrence Seaway, a process that was supplemented by corporate cash raised on St James Street in Montreal and Bay Street in Toronto.²⁰

While fundraising practices that today would be considered unethical, and even illegal, were not enough to convince the public to oust the Liberals after

twenty-two consecutive years in power, the desire for a change in national direction ultimately led to St. Laurent's defeat in the 1957 election at the hands of John Diefenbaker, whose Progressive Conservatives managed to eke out a minority government. The next year, the Liberals would suffer humiliating electoral defeat under their inexperienced new leader, the former diplomat Lester Pearson. Diefenbaker won 208 of the House of Commons' 265 seats, reducing the politically green Nobel Peace Prize winner to leading a rump of just forty-nine MPs.

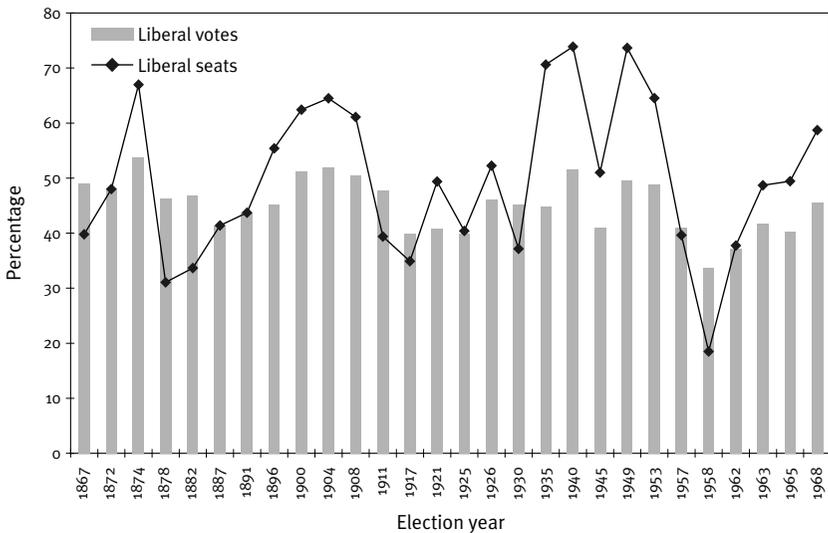
The Election System's Bias

Although public opinion had begun to turn against St. Laurent and the Liberals as early as 1956, one important factor contributing to the magnitude of Diefenbaker's 1958 victory was Canada's plurality or "first-past-the-post" electoral system.²¹ Despite capturing 33 percent of the popular vote in the 1958 contest, the Liberals won a mere 19 percent of the seats in the House of Commons, whereas the Diefenbaker Conservatives captured over 78 percent of the seats in Parliament with just over 53 percent the popular vote, making this the largest electoral landslide in Canadian history.²²

As much as the Liberals suffered in 1958, there is no question that they have been the chief beneficiary over the last century of an electoral system so favouring

Figure 1

Effects of the first-past-the-post system in Canada, 1867-1968



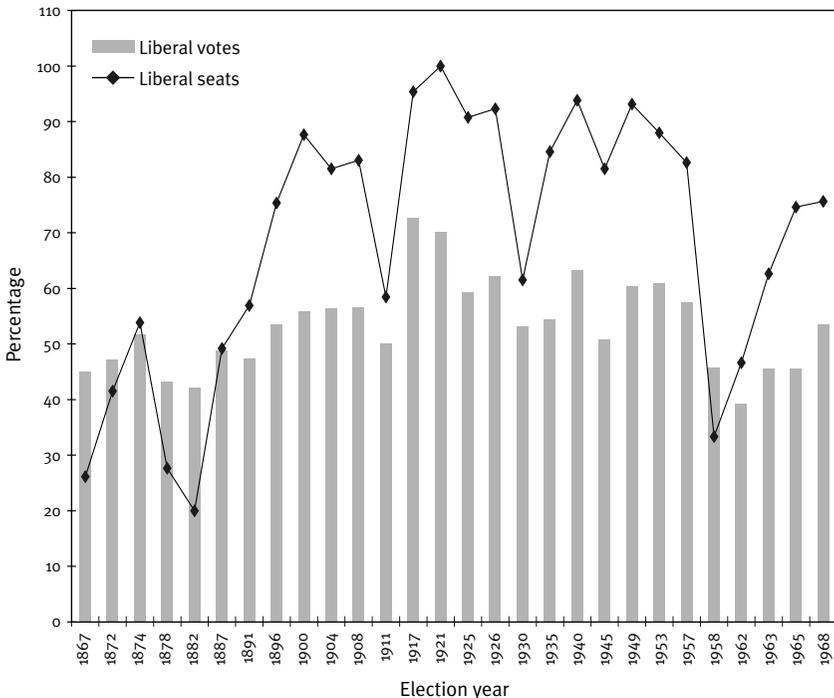
Source: Aggregated from J.M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

the party in power that the system has been christened “one-party dominance.”²³ As can be seen from Figure 1, prior to the 1974 election the Liberal Party had received a higher proportion of seats than votes in eighteen out of twenty-three elections since 1896, getting over ten percentage points more seats than votes in eight of those contests. This discrepancy between votes cast and seats won is considerably larger under the plurality system than it would be under some variety of proportional representation.

The most powerful illustration of the winner’s premium is in the province of Quebec, where, as Figure 2 shows, the Liberal Party had historically received 50 to 60 percent of the vote, yet had generally made off with some 70 percent of the seats. Only once in the course of twenty-three elections had the Liberals received a smaller proportion of the seats than of the votes cast in the province. This was in 1958 – the great Diefenbaker landslide. That year, voting support for the Liberal Party was 46 percent, which, in an adverse national swing, only yielded the Liberals twenty-five of the province’s seventy-five seats. During the

Figure 2

Effects of the first-past-the-post system in Quebec, 1867-1968



Source: Aggregated from J.M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada’s Federal Elections* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

1963 and 1965 elections, however, the same 46 percent of the provincial vote yielded forty-seven and fifty-six seats – 63 percent and 75 percent of the total seats from the province. This simple illustration points out how unpredictable are the returns in seats from a given level of votes, and how the fortunes of a party often depend more on a few hundred ballots cast in key marginal ridings than on large swings in the whole electorate. It is the parties' awareness of how a small shift in the vote may determine their fates that accounts for much of their election campaigns' intensity. A two-percentage-point shift of the popular vote can lead to a thirteen-percentage-point gain in seats, as it did in Ontario in 1968, when these extra seats made the difference between a minority and majority government for Pierre Trudeau.

The effect of exaggerated wins or losses resulting from the electoral system, combined with the fragmentation of the Canadian political system along geographical, historical, religious, and even ethnic lines, has been to increase the unevenness of political party representation in the federal Parliament. For example, whereas the Liberals have been historically overrepresented in Quebec, they had managed to win an average of only 9 percent of the seats available in the Prairies over the last ten elections before 1974, despite having drawn nearly a quarter of the votes in these three provinces.

Many academics and politicians have attempted to develop alternatives that reduce the distortions created by the present plurality system in the partisan composition of our parliamentary representatives. Nothing has ever come of any of these proposals, however, for no party in power has ever been willing to do away with an electoral system that allows it to win large parliamentary majorities with the support of only a minority of Canadians.

Pierre Trudeau and the Pan-Canadian Party System

Once the provinces began to rival the federal government in their technocratic capacity and interventionist zeal at the end of the 1950s, the federal parties lost their brokerage role to what became known as “federal-provincial diplomacy,” whose periodic first ministers' conferences captured an inordinate amount of the national media's attention. Instead of brokering inter-regional conflicts, the parties developed a “pan-Canadian” mission, by which they performed an integrating function from coast to coast through policies aimed at constructing a national identity (multiculturalism, bilingualism, and the adoption of the maple-leaf flag) and societal cohesion (medicare, pensions, and other social security measures).

This shift in partisan politics away from the regional concerns of the second party system to a national agenda focusing on issues that mattered to Canadians as individuals was facilitated by new communications technologies, most especially television. Unlike “cool” print and radio, which were the media of choice for electioneering during the first and second party systems, respectively, the

“hot” medium of television allowed the parties to make the same emotive appeals to the voters’ nascent sense of a Canadian identity from coast to coast to coast.²⁴ By the end of the 1950s, Canadian elections were no longer fought on the region-by-region basis on which campaigns had been waged since Confederation. Instead, they became country-wide contests in which three national political leaders – their personality-enhancing images transmitted by television’s hot images – appealed to a single pan-Canadian electorate sharing the same basic concerns, irrespective of their regional, provincial, or ethnic loyalties. This tectonic shift in the way elections were contested would result in the most dramatic shake-up in the internal workings of Canadian political parties since the birth of radical parties in the 1930s.

Lester Pearson, who had made his mark internationally as minister for external affairs under St. Laurent, was the leader who saw the Liberals through the transition from the second to the third party system. Serving as prime minister from 1963 to 1968, “Mike” kept Canada on the path of collective security in foreign policy, which, in practice, meant close collaboration with the United States, primarily in the North Atlantic alliance (NATO) but also in such disastrous adventures as the Vietnam War.²⁵ At home, Pearson’s attainments were similarly ambivalent. The broad system of social welfare first dreamed of by Mackenzie King was completed, but at the cost of further concessions to the increasingly demanding provincial governments who, more and more, were calling the tune for Ottawa. Meanwhile the economy, increasingly dominated by American multinational corporations, continued on its path of satellitic integration with the United States. Its vast resource endowment supplied American industry with cheap raw materials, while its manufacturing sector was little more than a tariff-protected network of inefficient, US-owned “branch-plants” assembling US-made components into finished products for sale only in Canada. That this most unpolitical of Liberal leaders managed to establish his control over a rebuilt party organization was largely thanks to the organizational skills and reformist convictions of his close friend, adviser, and eventual cabinet colleague, Walter Lockhart Gordon.

Gordon applied his dual talents as an experienced management consultant and a self-assured policy reformer to restructure, reorient, and reanimate the Liberal party after its 1958 debacle. He cleared out the deadwood in the party’s national organization, reduced the influence of the party’s old regional chieftains, created centralized advisory groups for the leader, and supported the efforts of an energetic group of young Toronto Liberals, known as Cell 13, who talked idealistically about bringing democracy to the party’s internal operations. Gordon’s efforts in English Canada were mirrored in Quebec by an energetic reformer named Maurice Lamontagne, who brought a measure of internal democracy to the party’s organization in that province and who cleaned out the

corrupt party machine that was widely known as “la poubelle – the garbage can – de Montréal.”²⁶

On the policy front, Gordon also helped to ensure that progressive ideas on foreign-policy independence, social welfare, state-supplied medical care, and economic intervention were ratified by resolutions passed in January 1961 at a policy convention in Ottawa – the first the party had seen fit to hold since 1919, and only the second since 1893. He then based the party’s manifesto for the 1962 election on these resolutions.

With a view to modernizing the Liberals’ campaign techniques, Gordon named as national organizer the Toronto advertising salesman Keith Davey and hired the American pollster Lou Harris – who had been central to the recent presidential victory of John F. Kennedy – in order to adopt American electoral techniques, which combined opinion polling with advertising and image-making. As if these efforts were not enough, Gordon recruited a new fundraising team and acted as the Liberals’ campaign strategist. In what was still a two-plus-two party system, Gordon received the credit for reducing Diefenbaker from an overwhelming majority to a bare minority in the 1962 federal election and then for winning the Liberals a minority of their own in 1963. As Pearson’s first minister of finance, Gordon also led a fight to limit the growth of foreign control in the economy, but his proposal in the 1963 federal budget speech to introduce new tax measures to obstruct foreign takeovers of Canadian companies earned him so much hostility from an already continentalist business community that he lost his pre-eminence in the government and left the cabinet in 1965.

Though it is always difficult to encapsulate the ideology of a party at any particular time, assessments by political scientists Gad Horowitz and John Meisel succeed in capturing the position of the Liberal Party before its 1968 change of leadership:

The Liberal Party has continued to speak the language of King: ambiguous and ambivalent, presenting first its radical face and then its conservative face, urging reform and warning against hasty, ill-considered change, calling for increased state responsibility but stopping short of socialism openly, speaking for the common people but preaching the solidarity of classes.²⁷

The Liberal Party is notable for its sympathies with the United States and for its willingness to accept the increasing integration of Canada in the English-speaking part of the North American community ... At the same time the Liberals have shown an unmistakable enthusiasm for collective security in international politics, based on vigorous participation in the United Nations and in regional pacts like NATO.²⁸

Attitudinal and Organizational Foundations of the Party

Its long record of dominance, its broad geographic distribution of electoral support, and its parliamentary representation helped make the Liberals the most broadly supported political party throughout the various ethnic, religious, occupational, and class groupings in Canadian society. Opinion surveys confirmed that, by the late 1960s, they appealed more effectively than any other party to members of all occupations, apart from farmers. John Meisel summed up his analysis of the 1965 and 1968 federal election data with this observation:

In Canada, as a whole, the Liberals continued to receive above-average support from Catholics, people with high-ranking occupations, a higher class self-image and more years of formal schooling. They also drew a somewhat disproportionately large number of new Canadians, particularly those who arrived since the end of the Second World War, and they continue to be strongly favoured by French-speaking Canadians, by younger rather than older voters, by the most urbanized segments of the population and, ever so slightly, by men.²⁹

Meisel's attitudinal analysis of the electorate indicated that Liberal voters – despite the fact “that a sizeable portion of them live in Quebec – showed themselves to be the most progressive, liberal, secular and politically interested, and to feel politically effective”:

The support for Mr. Trudeau's party varied directly with religiosity, moral liberalism, interest in foreign affairs, greater importance being attached to the central government, interest in the election, a sense of efficacy, general optimism about the future and economic expectations; it varied inversely with authoritarianism, respect for law and order ... and cynicism.³⁰

In short, when Pierre Trudeau burst onto the political scene, Liberal voters, more than those of the other parties, included the most industrialized, urbanized, technocratic and managerial Canadians. In terms of its supporters, therefore, the Liberal party could be thought of as being the most progressive or modern, in the sense of appealing to those elements in society who felt at home in the so-called “advanced,” urbanized and highly technological world usually associated with urban North America.³¹

Learning of the advantage that the Liberal Party enjoyed in the distribution of its geographical and social support, its history of electoral success, and the clear dominance it had exerted over the government of the Canadian federation, a newcomer to the country in the 1960s might well have expected that its organization would be highly developed, enjoying a broadly based, active

membership, a sophisticated structural framework, and a deeply entrenched political culture. In reality the opposite was true. The size of the party's membership varied considerably not only from region to region, but even from year to year. In more traditional political cultures, such as that of the Atlantic provinces, where society was not as highly urbanized as in central Canada, the actual paid-up membership of the party organization was low, while the extent of party identification by citizens was extremely high – to the point where a taxi driver in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, could indicate to the tourist the political affiliation of virtually every household on any street. In urbanized areas like Toronto or Vancouver, riding-association membership fluctuated enormously. When a nomination race was hotly contested, hundreds, and in some cases even thousands, of new members could be recruited by candidates signing up citizens to support them at the nomination meeting.³² Once the nomination effort ended, however, the active membership would drop to its core of just a few hundred, supplemented by the winning candidate's immediate supporters.

Since national parties in Canada were federal organizations made up of provincially organized components, and since the different regions of the country were often in very basic opposition to each other (industrial areas historically wanted high tariffs and other forms of government protection while rural provinces pressed for free trade; poor provinces favoured a strong federal government able to redistribute national income in their direction but rich areas demanded local autonomy and lower taxes), the internal workings of national parties were often notable more for dissension than solidarity. Prime Minister Pearson, for instance, was barely on speaking terms with Ross Thatcher, the Liberal premier of Saskatchewan, who opposed the welfare-state direction in which the federal party was moving. At the same time, Pearson was being urged by Joey Smallwood, Liberal premier of poverty-stricken Newfoundland, to increase federal spending on social services. From a third side, he was under extreme pressure from Jean Lesage, the Liberal premier of Quebec, to hand over operational responsibility for whole areas of federal jurisdiction. At the 1973 national meeting of the party, rank-and-file western delegates attacked their federal government for keeping down oil prices to favour the Maritimes, whose own deputations inveighed against the excessive nationalism of their central Canadian confreres, who for their part wished to slow down the influx of foreign capital into the country's industrial heartland.

More astonishing to the outside observer than the ideological and geographical divisions within what John Meisel famously called this "omnibus party" was its organizational underdevelopment. Having originally been spontaneous operations set up just at election time to coordinate campaigning, Canadian parties were long characterized by their structural impermanence. It was only in 1932 that the Liberal Party first established a permanent central office. Since it was

closed down from 1940 to 1943 due to the war, the Liberal Party's "permanent" central office was just over thirty years old by the time of the 1974 election.³³ None of the Canadian parties approached any of their British or American counterparts in the size and sophistication of their head offices and professional staff. That the Liberal Party under Lester Pearson was thought to be the best organized, most rationalized, efficient party organization in its use of public opinion polls and fulltime staff – "Canada's most American party" – should be taken as a measure of the more underdeveloped state of the other parties than as a comment on its institutional maturity.³⁴

Even by 1974, when the Liberal Party headquarters occupied a whole floor of a small Ottawa office building, where it employed a full-time staff and had developed a considerable communications capacity, the party organization was anything but coherent. Confusion over their lines of authority characterized the party's operatives, not simple chains of command. Far from following a rational, bureaucratic model, the party bore some similarity to what Samuel Eldersveld called a "stratarchy":³⁵ a collection of power centres, often overlapping, sometimes even conflicting with each other. The party's national headquarters in Ottawa could not reign supreme over other branches of the party when it had to rely on cash transfers from the autonomous provincial Liberal associations in order to finance its operations.³⁶ Moreover, it had to compete for influence with the authoritative Prime Minister's Office, the cabinet ministers' departments, and the caucus – the Liberal members of Parliament who were not in cabinet but who commanded a staff of researchers with a government-funded budget. Outside Ottawa, the centres of power multiplied in geometric progression: each province had its own party organization, with regional and district sub-organizations enjoying varying degrees of autonomy. Lowest in the hierarchy came the individual riding associations, which numbered 264 in 1974. Small though their capacity may have been to influence and control the actions of the federal party, they were jealous of their autonomy when it came to exercising their major function: nominating candidates at election time. Since the overwhelming bulk of the personnel staffing the party's power centres in the provinces, regions, districts, and ridings were unpaid volunteers, their turnover was frequent, thus further decreasing the continuity, cohesion, and influence of the grassroots. This weakness of the rank and file increased in areas where the party was not electorally successful and so offered little prospect of patronage or advancement to attract ambitious recruits.

The kaleidoscopic nature of the Liberal Party's internal organization was a manifestation of its failure to evolve from its simple beginnings as an electoral alliance into a "modern" mass structure. This is not to deny that efforts had been made to democratize the party and expand its mass base. In 1957 Diefenbaker had ousted a party whose finances depended on kick-backs from corporations

with government contracts, whose election platforms were elaborations on the government's record and were designed largely by civil servants, and whose organizational tasks were undertaken regionally by individual cabinet ministers. Defeat left the party with neither funding to fuel its machine, nor policy direction to attract new recruits, nor a structure that could marshal its forces for a counteroffensive. Accordingly, during the Pearson period, Liberal activists worked with some success to have considerable power removed from the hands of the leader and placed under the control of the party executive, elected at its biennial convention.

Cell 13, the group of reformers from Toronto who took control of the Liberal Party under Walter Gordon's aegis in the late 1950s, intended to remedy the party's failings with a more democratic strategy. As one of the group's intellectuals put it,

their new concept of the role of a political party – the Liberal Party of Canada – is the recognition that the Party's main function is not restricted in fact to the election of Liberal Party members until a government is formed and thereafter to merely maintain the government in power ... [but includes] the recognition that the organization Party ... should be interested in not merely obtaining power but the use and exercise of this power. It is not enough to talk of democratizing the Party without ensuring that its role for policy making can be effective.³⁷

This statement expressed the desire to create a party organization that was built on a broad base of members who had a constitutionally defined role in deciding its policies. However, the party would still remain dependent on corporate largesse rather than rely on its individual members in order to finance its electoral machine.

Although the loss of power in 1957 had motivated activists to press for reforms, such as writing a new party constitution and holding a policy convention in 1961 to produce a member-made platform for the next election campaign, electoral victory in 1963 blunted the cutting edge of reform within the party.³⁸ The Liberals' recapture of power in 1963 had far more to do with the organizational talents of Walter Gordon working quietly behind the scenes than with the speeches of party delegates debating their policies in a convention under the public's eye.³⁹ Nevertheless, the rejuvenation of the federal Liberals was not simply a matter of this distinguished business consultant bringing sound management principles to bear on the political planning of a rusty machine that did little more than drag voters to the polls on election day and dispense patronage thereafter. As a result of Walter Gordon's fall from grace after his 1963 budget debacle, continued internecine bickering within the caucus, and the cliff-hanging

uncertainties of running a minority government, the party's reformers could still complain by 1967 that "the party wing has not solved the problem of continuing policy development within the Party structure. There are still no signs of new initiatives or structural innovations for policy making in the Party."⁴⁰ The only real sign of significant change was an amendment to the party's constitution that made the leader answerable to the regular party convention and "accountable" to the delegates' secret ballot vote on whether a new leadership convention should be called.⁴¹

Seduction and Betrayal: Participatory Democracy from Above

The leadership convention necessitated by the retirement of Lester Pearson in 1968 caught the imagination of the Canadian public more than anything that the Liberal Party had done for decades. It appeared to be a moment of decision that would shape the party's direction for many years to come. As is normal for parties that have enjoyed long years in office, there was no lack of serious candidates for the leadership. Most prominent was Paul Martin Sr., a long-time cabinet workhorse who was holding down the same external affairs portfolio that both Lester Pearson and Louis St. Laurent had used as their springboard to the political summit. Most powerful in his corporate backing was Robert Winters, who had been minister of trade and commerce and was then a major figure among the country's captains of industry. Not to be discounted as serious contenders for the leadership were Paul Hellyer, who had made his national mark as defence minister by integrating the three branches of the armed forces under a single uniform, and Mitchell Sharp, the articulate minister of finance who had succeeded two years earlier in rallying the party's continentalist wing to defeat the "economic nationalists" supporting Walter Gordon. Then there was the handsome, ambitious, but younger John Turner, who would certainly try for the leadership a second time if he failed to win on his first effort. The economist, businessman, and nationalist intellectual Eric Keirans alone injected some pointed discussion of policy issues into the leadership campaign.⁴²

That all of these substantial Liberal figures were outdistanced by a political neophyte who had been first elected in 1965 and had but a year's experience in the cabinet indicates how successfully Pierre Elliott Trudeau managed to appeal to the desire for renewal that was again beating in the breasts of the party's rank and file. Excited by the press attention Trudeau was getting for his tough-love approach to Quebec separatists as minister of justice, Liberal delegates ignored the stories they had heard about his past disdain for their kind and rallied to his campaign by the hundreds.⁴³ A virtual unknown to the party's grassroots in November, Trudeau went to the April 1968 leadership convention in Ottawa as the candidate to beat.

The choice of Pierre Elliott Trudeau as Pearson's successor at that convention first appeared to be a dangerous departure from the governing party's prudent tradition of leadership selection, but the change of style masked continuity of substance. That he was a Quebecker confirmed the Liberal Party's alternation between anglophone and francophone leaders, recommitting it to that electorate whose support was so crucial to its national dominance. The choice of this former radical, albeit millionaire and intellectual, reaffirmed the Janus-like stance of a centrist party with a record of co-opting personalities and policies from the left while maintaining a more conservative approach when in office.

Trudeau proceeded to stage a brilliant, if ambivalent, election campaign two months later, exciting radical aspirations with his themes of "participatory democracy" and a "just society," while remaining fiscally conservative by rejecting the notion that the state could play Santa Claus.⁴⁴ The campaign was cleverly stage-managed by professional political handlers who saw the vote-getting value of Trudeau's daredevil persona. In between his philosophical speeches with their titillating bilingual touch, he was encouraged to do jackknife dives into hotel swimming pools and backflips on trampolines, to kiss every pretty girl in sight, and to be as provocative in his rhetoric as need demanded. The decisive victory that came to the party on June 25 was almost anticlimatic. Years later, Keith Davey described the campaign as "not an election at all, it was a coronation. It didn't teach Pierre Trudeau anything about politics or about the Liberal Party. All he had to do was to show his face and make his speech about the Just Society and participatory democracy and all that jazz. He didn't need the Liberal Party to win and he didn't know what the Liberal Party was about."⁴⁵

Although his rousing electoral success in 1968 has rightly been attributed more to his charisma than to any burning desire among the electorate to get more involved in the processes of governance, Pierre Trudeau's prior selection as party leader was largely the result of his more specific allure to the many Liberals who still felt isolated from the decision-making mechanisms of their own party. Thus, after June 25, 1968, when activists could contemplate four years of secure power, the party leadership returned to its unfinished agenda of the previous decade: increasing the power of the rank-and-file members of the extra-parliamentary party vis-à-vis the cabinet and caucus.

To be sure, "participatory democracy" was an unusual slogan for any Canadian prime minister to use when addressing his followers, and particularly unusual to be heard in the Liberal Party, whose prolonged tenure in federal office through the twentieth century had owed next to nothing to the involvement of party members – let alone ordinary Canadians – in policy making. As a veteran of the campaign waged in the 1950s to make provincial politics in Quebec more open and democratic, however, Pierre Trudeau was clearly committed to bring-

ing participatory democracy to the Liberal Party.⁴⁶ In order to provide substance to this commitment, he gave Senator Richard Stanbury, the party's new president, a mandate to design an ambitious new policy-making process.

Because they understood that the party's attempts at policy making earlier in the 1960s had suffered from an elitist reliance on experts, inadequate input from the ridings, undemocratic procedures at the policy convention, and a leadership that was arbitrary in its acceptance or rejection of grassroots views, Senator Stanbury and his federal policy committee created an elaborate battle plan designed to address the democratic deficits of the old process. The whole policy operation was to be stretched over two years to allow enough time for party members to respond to the proposals received from an array of experts at the first stage of the three-phase process – a “thinkers’ conference” held in November 1969 at Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia. At this salt-spring spa, the party leader told his participating activists,

Our concept of a political party, which is attuned to the needs of our society, is ... one which reaches out to absorb the ideas and to reflect the aspirations of all Canadians ... [to] encourage the widest possible participation by those interested in questions of public policy.⁴⁷

We are like the pilots of a supersonic aeroplane. By the time an airport comes into the pilot's field of vision, it is too late to begin the landing procedure. Such planes must be navigated by radar. A political party, in formulating policy, can act as a society's radar.⁴⁸

The second phase of the process would allow the best part of a year for discussions at the grassroots level, giving the ridings, the districts, and finally the provincial party associations plenty of time to act as society's radar by submitting resolutions on issues that concerned them. Third, a redesigned policy convention would give delegates the chance to make policy without being deterred by caucus discipline or cabinet control. Finally, the resolutions that were passed in convention would be drafted into a platform for the next federal election campaign.

Unfortunately for the cause of extra-parliamentary party democratization, each part of this plan to correct the deficiencies of the old policy-making process fell victim to new difficulties of its own. Stretching the process to two years assumed, to start with, that those party members who attended the thinkers' conference would communicate the experts' views back to their ridings, which would respond to these challenges during phase two. This hope was unrealistic. Of the fifty-four delegates from the Toronto & District (T&D) Liberal Association who attended the thinkers' conference in British Columbia, only six

attended the phase-two regional and provincial conferences before going to the final policy convention. Of the 154 T&D delegates to this final convention in October 1970, 25 percent had been to no previous conference in this process, and 40 percent had attended only one such conclave.⁴⁹

The concept of a second phase that would articulate the ridings' views also assumed that the grassroots of the party were anxious to contribute to party policy. In actual practice, the party's grassroots turned out to be disconcertingly shallow, with only a minority of its federal riding associations actually submitting resolutions for the final policy convention. The several thousand pages of analysis presented at Harrison Hot Springs enjoyed little circulation in the ridings, and a paperback selection of these fifty-nine papers was not available for the delegates' use until after the final policy convention had adjourned.⁵⁰ When riding presidents in the Toronto district were interviewed, more turned out to be hostile than favourable toward policy activities in their constituencies. "Policy is for nuts," said one contemptuously, revealing a distinctly authoritarian political culture in the ranks. The decision-making process within the party had little credibility among riding executives, who continued to suspect that the policy conventions were controlled by the party's elite. In any case, they had no expectation that their government would listen to the party's opinions.⁵¹

The third major assumption underlying the Liberals' policy process was that a final convention would be able to aggregate the various conflicting views and proposals advanced during the first two phases so as to provide the parliamentary wing of the party with a coherent policy charter for use in the next general election. In many respects, the Liberals' policy convention in 1970 did mark a milestone in the history of party policy-making. Resolutions received from the ridings and the regions were collated and edited by task forces of the federal policy committee and mailed as draft resolutions to the delegates some weeks in advance of the convention to allow them time to discuss the resolutions with fellow party members and their communities in their home ridings. The procedures at the convention in Ottawa further encouraged delegates to amend these drafts or suggest new resolutions for consideration, and the convention's format gave the delegates substantial capacity to resist any attempted manipulation by the party's hierarchy. When Edmonton publisher and bookseller Mel Hurtig, the task force chair for international relations, complained that the nationalist thrust of his foreign-policy resolutions had been emasculated by party hacks in Ottawa before being circulated to the delegates, the convention proceeded to restore the original meaning of his resolutions despite the disapproving presence at the debate of the ministers of external affairs and national defence and of Pierre Trudeau himself. Since delegates voted in secret and at their own convenience on printed ballots (rather than by show of hand in crowded plenary ses-

sions), there was little chance for them to be swayed by eloquent or influential party leaders in their private decisions on the four hundred resolutions that they had before them.

The separation of the convention into distinct operations – considering the draft resolutions in concurrent forums, debating the amended material in plenary sessions, and voting on written ballots after the debates – increased the productivity of the convention and reduced the time lost over procedural wrangling. Yet for all its procedural advantages, the Liberals' convention technique developed a number of flaws that created ambiguities and thus undermined its impact. For example, delegates had to vote on resolutions that had different meanings in their English and French versions. Contradictory resolutions were passed that allowed both economic nationalists and their continentalist opponents to claim victory.

The Liberal Party's Trudeau-inspired exercise in participatory democracy ultimately came to grief not on a question of semantics but on the issue of power. Even before grassroots-authored resolutions favouring a guaranteed annual income were debated and passed, the prime minister made clear in his "accountability session" with the delegates that he was not prepared to implement such a major change in his government's approach to welfare. On November 23, 1970, the day following the phase-three policy convention, Trudeau took pains publicly to repudiate a convention resolution directing his government to establish a review board that would monitor civil rights during the application of the War Measures Act to deal with the terrorist *Front de libération du Québec*. The leader thereby himself invalidated the fourth crucial assumption on which his participatory process had been based: that the party leadership would listen and act if the membership expressed itself on policy matters in a responsible, representative, and therefore legitimate way.

Once the convention was over, the party lost most of its influence over the leadership in Ottawa. Party president Richard Stanbury continued to meet with the ministers in a periodical "political cabinet." A consultative council continued to mail out resolutions for the delegates to vote on. Staff in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) continued to monitor activities in the party across the country. Nevertheless, the extra-parliamentary party's policy output could not compete with the weight of other political inputs: the continuing influence of the ministers' own policy departments; the constant pressures from corporate and other interest groups; the daily advice from editorials in the media; the insistent demands coming from alert members of the caucus; the regular public-opinion polling by professional researchers; and above all, the hourly advice coming to Trudeau from his clique of confidants in the PMO. When the cabinet told the party policy chair to forget his proposed electoral charter that had been

drafted as planned from the convention's resolutions, there was nothing for him to do but pick up his text and make as dignified a retreat as the aborting of three years' hard effort made possible.

Pierre Trudeau's promise of participation and Senator Stanbury's implementation of an elaborate policy process had generated unprecedented activity within the Liberal Party's ranks. Despite the imperfections in the process, many hundreds of Liberals had devoted substantial energies to developing what they considered a relevant and progressive policy platform for their party. When it became clear that none of their policy positions would be adopted for the 1972 election campaign platform, the morale of the party core fell noticeably. By December 1972, the most active members of the Liberal Party in Ontario showed a striking level of unhappiness with their political involvement. When asked the simple question, "Are you satisfied with your activity in the Liberal party?" 46 percent responded, "Dissatisfied." Far from constituting the base for a vibrant, participatory political culture, card-carrying Liberals felt as alienated as ever from the internal workings of their party.⁵²

This widespread discontent among the party's rank and file was an important factor in the near-disaster suffered by Trudeau in the 1972 election campaign. In Ontario, for example, 55 percent of Liberal activists surveyed reported that campaign workers' morale was worse than it had been in the 1968 election campaign, and 67 percent recounted that it was harder to recruit volunteers in 1972 than in 1968.⁵³ What little manpower the Liberals did manage to attract was not used as effectively as it could have been, due to a lack of coherent leadership to direct the campaign at the national level. The two campaign co-chairs, Robert Andras and Jean Marchand – the ministers of manpower and regional expansion, respectively, were too busy fighting re-election battles of their own to devote sufficient attention to the larger task of organizing and supervising the campaign in all twelve provinces and territories. In the end, Andras and Marchand's failure to provide the campaign with leadership was not the decisive factor in the Liberals' poor showing in 1972. Whatever decisions they did manage to make were "consistently overruled by members of Trudeau's own staff [in the PMO], mainly Ivan Head and Jim Davey, who had no experience with electoral politics other than the coronation election of 1968."⁵⁴

Planning badly at the national level, Liberal headquarters in Ottawa failed to produce a strategy paper for the provincial campaign chairs, while the ridings were understaffed by volunteers because so many Liberals had been alienated by Trudeau's attitudes and policies. Although the Liberals' campaign slogan, "The Land Is Strong," was trying to meet Trudeau's staff's insistence that he was running not an ordinary election campaign but a "dialogue with the people," they failed to address economic problems that were troubling the electorate. As Christina McCall wrote, "Trudeau and his closest staff members felt that he didn't

need to worry about the party. 'The people' would understand. They didn't seem to realize that 'the people,' like the party, were puzzled by his seeming indifference to the feelings of large blocs of Canadians."⁵⁵

Widespread grumbling about the prime minister's evident lack of interest in ordinary citizens' concern about unemployment and inflation further eroded his public support, though this problem, too, was ignored by Trudeau's supporters as a media-induced chimera. They seemed to believe that all he would have to do to win a new mandate when the time came was to present himself on the hustings, hold a dialogue with Canadians, and wait for the Liberal votes to come pouring in. Their surprise was palpable on October 22, 1972, when they found themselves clinging to power by a scant two-seat edge over the Progressive Conservatives, whose own unglamorous leader, Robert Stanfield, had conducted a dogged campaign devoted to economic issues.

Unfortunately for Stanfield, his miss was to prove as good as the proverbial mile. Pierre Trudeau proceeded to shed his philosopher-king pretensions, to abandon his dreams of turning Canadian politics into an Athenian agora, to recruit the partisan hacks he had previously spurned, and, with their tutoring, to learn the trade of partisan politics so well that he could run and win decisively less than two years later.