

Canada Watch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE 1999 ONTARIO ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The Harris second term: Is the revolution over?

In this special issue of *Canada Watch* we have assembled a range of commentators from varying viewpoints to analyze last year's Ontario election campaign and the prospects for the second term of the Harris government.

As a number of our commentators point out, the election campaign was essentially a referendum on the first term of the Harris government. The implementation of the 1995 "Common Sense Revolution" (CSR) program, with its

BY PATRICK J. MONAHAN

Patrick Monahan is a professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University and co-editor of *Canada Watch*.

emphasis on tax cuts and smaller government, had provoked an unprecedented wave of protest and social division in Ontario. The 1999 campaign provided the opportunity for vocal opponents of the CSR agenda to throw the

Harris government out of office after just a single term.

In early 1999, Harris's prospects for re-election looked uncertain at best. Polls indicated that the government was running second to the opposition Liberals under Dalton McGuinty, who seemed poised to capitalize on the opposition to the government's controversial program. Recent electoral history in the province (with successive majority governments

The Harris second term, page 118

Ontario's new conservative coalition

Between 1985 and 1995, Ontario elections produced a revolving door of short-lived governments, with each of the major parties having a turn in office before being unceremoniously ushered out by what one disappointed ex-premier called a "cranky" electorate. In 1999 the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris that was elected in 1995 seemed set to follow its Liberal and New Democratic Party predecessors through the exit, since it had ruffled many feathers with its radical right-wing agenda (the "Common Sense Revolution" (CSR)) and seemed to lack widespread support. Instead,

BY SID NOEL

Sid Noel is a professor of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario.

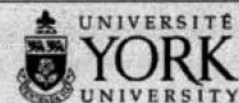
Harris and his party accomplished what the others could not: they won a second straight majority government.

The government's re-election—which ensures it a run of at least eight straight years in office—is a sign that the period of revolving-door government in Ontario is over. It may also indicate a return to the historic Ontario norm, for, despite occasional interludes of electoral

Conservative coalition, page 120

FEATURES

- The Harris second term: Is the revolution over?
by Patrick J. Monahan, page 117
- Ontario's new conservative coalition
by Sid Noel, page 117
- Ontario and the global challenge
by Peter Woolstencroft, page 119
- The 1999 Ontario election
by E. Jane Armstrong, page 122
- The NDP and the election
by Judy Rebick, page 124
- Political communication and public discourse
by Fred Fletcher, page 125
- Money and the 1999 Ontario election
by Robert MacDermid, page 128
- Defeating Harris: The glass is half full
by Andrea Calver, page 129
- Setting a new course for education and training in Ontario
by David Lindsay, page 131
- The Harris legacy: A conjecture
by David Cameron, page 134



from page 117
going down to defeat in 1990 and 1995) seemed about to be repeated.

How did Harris manage to pull a victory rabbit out of the electoral campaign hat on June 8?

While our commentators offer a variety of answers to that question, one common theme emerges: the government was able to reassemble the coalition of voters that had brought it victory in 1995. As political scientist Sid Noel points out in his analysis, that coalition comprises older voters, more male than female, with above-average incomes and education, many of whom are employed in information-based occupations. Although stereotypically concentrated in the 905 code area surrounding Toronto, their presence is also significantly large in other suburban areas and in small-town Ontario. For this group of voters, as Environics vice-president Jane Armstrong argues, economic and fiscal issues assume primary importance. The government's performance on these issues enabled it to overcome widespread dissatisfaction with its handling of health care and education.

While the Conservative election victory cemented the reforms implemented in the first Harris term—particularly the 30 percent cut in provincial income tax rates—the question is what to expect for the next four years. Again, although our commentators offer a range of opinions on this question, it is apparent that the government's agenda will be much more modest and narrow in the second term than it was in the first.

In part, this is attributable to the 1999 "Blueprint" campaign platform, which pales in comparison with the 1995 CSR manifesto. While promising an additional 20 percent cut in provincial income tax rates and "law and order" initiatives such as a crackdown on "squeegee kids," the 1999 platform offered little on the key issues of education and health care. Indeed, in an attempt to blunt criticism from its opponents, the government's main message was simply that it would spend more money in these key areas.

The 1999 platform offered little on the key issues of education and health care.

Since the government's campaign platform was the product of extensive polling and opinion research (as both Fred Fletcher and Robert MacDermid point out in their commentaries), the government clearly believed that this message of "more spending" was necessary in order to secure its re-election. But the result is that the government lacks a mandate to implement any further restructuring in these areas, which will make implementation of significant change extremely difficult.

One cannot help but contrast the initial six months following the 1995 election to the corresponding period in 1999. In 1995, the government hit the ground running, calling the legislature back into immediate sitting. By late July, less than 60 days after the election, it had tabled a "mini-budget" imposing major cuts in proposed government spending, particularly in the welfare area. In contrast, in 1999, the legislature was not called back into session until over four months after the election. The short fall sitting featured a modest legislative agenda before the legislature went back into recess.

Thus, all indications to this point are that Mike Harris's second term is likely to be much different than his first. Yet the issues and challenges facing the government—particularly in the area of education and training—appear even more pressing today than they were four years ago. As many of our commentators suggest, how the government responds to those challenges will continue to be keenly watched, not only in Ontario but across the country. ❁

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Daniel Drache, *Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, York University*

Patrick Monahan, *Osgoode Hall Law School, York University*

MANAGING EDITORS

Cheryl Dobinson

Joanne Rappaport

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Chuck Smith

COLUMNISTS THIS ISSUE

Patrick J. Monahan Fred Fletcher

Sid Noel Robert MacDermid

Peter Woolstencroft Andrea Calver

E. Jane Armstrong David Lindsay

Judy Rebick David Cameron

PRODUCTION

WordsWorth Communications

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION

Canada Watch
227 York Lanes, 4700 Keele St.

North York, Ontario M3J 1P3

Phone (416) 736-5499

Fax (416) 650-4321

www.robarts.yorku.ca

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES (6 ISSUES PER YEAR)

Institutions: \$75

Individuals: \$35

Students: \$20

(Outside Canada, add \$10)

Canada Watch is produced jointly by the York University Centre for Public Law and Public Policy, and the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies of York University.

Copyright © 2000

Centre for Public Law and Public Policy;
the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies

Printed in Canada

ISSN 1191-7733