

*"Watersheds,"
continued from page 19.*

PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS UNDER STRAIN

Unity among the public sector unions has also proved taxing to maintain. Not only are they without experience in "common front" coalition bargaining — to use the Quebec term — but the intense political stress in May and June to stop the government from passing the social contract legislation was succeeded by a breakdown of coordinated strategy in July. Some unions bargained local agreements, some refused, and some said they were refusing while

"... the conflict that pitted public employees against the government had repercussions within the labour movement as well as within the larger political arena."

quietly returning to the table. In several of the biggest unions, this conflict has revealed the severe structural weaknesses inherent in the union's organization. Internally, all the public sector unions will be grappling for some time to come with what their inability to stop this legislation has to tell them: about their internal structures, about their ability to mobilize their members, about the effectiveness of getting their message out to the public.

UNIONISTS DIVIDED ABOUT NDP LINK

Where union members are concerned, opinion seems to divide into three groups: those who, appalled by what they see as betrayal, will simply turn their backs and walk away from the NDP; those who feel that the party has suffered an unexpected hijacking, and changing the provincial leadership will return it to being the party of labour; and

finally, those who point to Quebec in 1982, to federal politics in Australia and New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This last group wonders whether something is not inherently flawed in the relationship of labour's party to its constituency once it attains electoral power. They wonder why it is that when social democrats obtain the governance of capitalist economies they so often attempt to solve the inevitable budgetary crises they have inherited, at the expense of public employees, and why they so often seem both inadequate at financial management and so easily converted to economic neo-conservatism.

Although some union members are looking at new structures of group representation and accountability within the NDP as a corrective here, some of the hardest questions remain: how to integrate the political and industrial representation of an increasingly fragmented working class, how to constrain a party to remain accountable to its collective as well as individual constituents, and how to keep social democratic parties true to their vision in the increasingly chilly climate for social democracy. In Quebec, these questions surfaced, and they deformed the political and trade union links in 1982-83. It looks very much like 1993 will be the year of rupture in Ontario.

Professor Carla Lipsig-Mummé is Coordinator of Labour Studies and Director of the Centre for Research on Work and Society, York University. ♣

DOING POLITICS DIFFERENTLY

Ordinary Canadians and the federal election

by Jamie Cameron

A federal parliamentary election has been called for October 25, 1993, one year less a day after a referendum vote yielded a resounding "no" to proposals for constitutional change on October 26, 1992. To what extent has that exercise in "direct democracy" altered "the way we do politics," as Kim Campbell once put it?

Last year's process of constitutional reform brought "ordinary Canadians" onstage for perhaps the first time in our political history. The voices of those Canadians played a prominent role in public debate throughout that process.

The term figured prominently during the Renewal of Canada Conferences, which took place early in 1992, months before the Charlottetown Accord was negotiated. In nationally televised sessions, "ordinary Canadians" shared the limelight with various members of the "chattering classes."

Then *Maclean's* magazine decided to conduct its own experiment in constitutional negotiation. The magazine joined a team of ordinary Canadians, representative of all regions of the country, with a handful of prominent citizens and an American expert on negotiating skills. At the time, the differences separating provincial and federal officials conducting the formal negotiations seemed intractable.

Maclean's wondered whether ordinary Canadians, with a little guidance, could achieve an agreement our elected officials had failed to produce. Their report gave us reason to believe they could.

When the Charlottetown Accord was reached, our parliamentary representatives concluded that its propos-

als for constitutional change should have the public's endorsement. The national referendum, conducted by the provincial government in Quebec and by the federal government in all other provinces, gave every citizen a direct stake in the nation's destiny.

There can be no doubt that the referendum exposed a cranky and deeply felt mood of public disaffection. Many attribute the negative outcome of October 26 to that mood, and not to a rejection of the accord itself.

Yet there is another side to it. Those who participated in the process, such as myself, were at times overwhelmed by what we saw as a burgeoning ethic of civic participation. Canadians from all walks of life, who had previously paid little or no attention to the constitution, engaged in heated discussion about any and all aspects of the accord — the Canada clause, the future of national day care, the amending formula — on radio talk shows, at public forums, in taxis, over games of bridge and golf, and at the office.

Low-budget advertisements prepared by ad hoc No committees provided a compelling example of the power of civic participation. Ads which at times were filmed by home video cameras and written by unpractised hands exposed the overt manipulation of the Yes campaign's highly venerated commercials. For ordinary Canadians who had been invited to participate in the impor-

tant process of constitution-making, the message from the Yes campaign was that their concerns would not be treated with respect.

If it was the worst of times for those who believed in the accord, it may nonetheless have been the best of times for democracy in Canada. In the past ours has been a passive political tradition. The national referendum thrust ordinary Canadians

"The national referendum thrust ordinary Canadians onstage during a rare and historic moment in Canadian politics. One year later, one wonders where those Canadians will be during the 47 days of this election campaign."

onstage during a rare and historic moment in Canadian politics. One year later, one wonders where those Canadians will be during the 47 days of this election campaign.


Earlier this year, leadership-hopeful Kim Campbell promised to change "the way we do politics." Change is likely to be seen later rather than sooner, and it is unrealistic to expect a repeat of the referendum's wave of public participation. Still, there are signs that the concerns of ordinary Canadians will be both heard and respected in this campaign.

Disaffection with the three nationally established parties has encour-

aged the emergence of alternative voices — that is, the Reform and National parties, as well as the Bloc québécois — which will compete for votes at regional and national levels. In addition, though they will not be inclusive of all leaders, the carefully negotiated series of leadership debates will be held before a live audience. In being permitted both a presence and a degree of structured participation, that audience can influence the dynamic of the debates.

Meanwhile, restrictions on third-party advertising, which would have effectively channelled virtually all civic participation through partisan channels, will not be enforced, pending appeal from a successful challenge under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The leaders and party candidates have expressed interest in alternative methods of campaigning, such as town hall meetings, which are more spontaneous and participatory than some of the staging of the past. Finally, the tone of the campaign can be influenced by the way it is covered in the press; the media can help us change the way we do politics by adjusting and varying its own coverage, as it did so well during the referendum.

Jamie Cameron is Director of York University's Centre for Public Law and Public Policy and is an Associate Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University. 

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D. Paul Emond

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