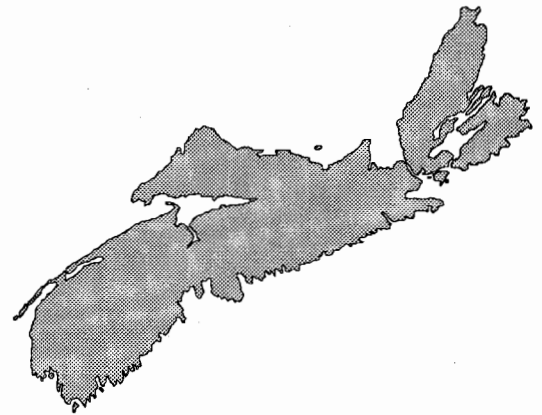


# The 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention

by Leonard Preyra

*In 1992 the Liberal party of Nova Scotia pioneered a revolutionary new approach to leadership selection. Their "tele-convention" combined the flexibility of touch-tone telephones, the high-speed data processing capability of computers, and the audio-visual capacity of television, to enfranchise thousands. It afforded all members of the party the possibility of participating in the choice of leader without leaving their living rooms. This article examines the potential impact of this new mode of leadership selection on the structural and functional capabilities of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and raises a number of larger issues. Will the Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention's method generate even greater demands for participation in other forms? Can and should tele-communications be used to respond to the growing calls for greater democracy, openness, and participation?*



**T**he Nova Scotia Tele-Convention worked as follows: On Friday, formal nominations were moved and seconded and the usual convention warm-up activities held. The next morning between 9:30 and 12:30, candidates were each given a maximum time of 20 minutes for demonstrations and speeches. Official voting commenced immediately after. For the next ninety minutes, over 7,000 registered voters used their (home or convention-site) touch tone telephone to call their preferred candidate's 1-900 number. Once a

connection had been made, that candidate's pre-recorded message was triggered, indicating his name and the message "to vote for me please enter your personal identification number now". Callers then entered their preassigned 8-digit personal identification (PIN) number by pushing the appropriate telephone buttons. The system then acknowledged the vote by either sending the message "Thank you for your vote" or "try again" if the PIN number entered was not accepted. By 2:30 first ballot results were to be announced. Unfortunately (for reasons outlined below) first-ballot voting at the June 6 convention had to be suspended. On June 20 tele-voting resumed and John Savage won a narrow second-ballot victory over Don Downe.

The value of political parties and leadership conventions can be measured in terms of their ability to

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serve at least five important social needs – personnel recruitment, citizen mobilization, conflict resolution, policy formulation, and political communication.<sup>1</sup>

- ① The principal contribution of party leadership selection meetings lies in the personnel screening, recruitment and appointment function they perform. Some may even argue that North American political parties are little more than office personnel agencies. Leadership conventions play an important role in the peaceful transfer of intraparty and legislative authority, and largely determine the quality of legislative leadership. Winning candidates become prime ministers and opposition leaders. Convention organizers and campaign coordinators go on to hold important posts within the party and government bureaucracy. Leadership and candidate selection contests also serve to recruit and train candidates and campaigners, and prepare central and constituency organizations for general elections.
- ② Equally important as the personnel screening, recruitment and appointment function is the integral role leadership conventions play in citizen mobilization. Contestants for the leadership compete to identify, appeal to and involve supporters. In so doing they expand a party's membership, its electoral base, and serve as vehicles for attracting and socializing people into the party and the political system. In this way parties are revitalized and the democratic process is supported.
- ③ Closely related to the task of citizen mobilization is the conflict resolving role parties are expected to play. Leadership conventions serve as forums for the articulation, management, or resolution of conflicts of opinion and interests both within the party and in society at large. The leading contenders, in their struggle for office, champion the cause of particular social interests and seek to aggregate these diverse interests into winning coalitions. In the process of managing these differences, candidates develop and demonstrate their brokering skills, and build compromise. They promote the cause of party unity and mitigate social fragmentation.
- ④ Conventions are also occasions for the formulation of party platforms and public policies. Leadership candidates, in order to demonstrate their mastery of the issues, are forced to defend world views that identify their conceptions of the role of the state, the process of decision-making, the policy agenda or strategies for accomplishing collective goals. They help structure the vote and provide the electorate with choice. In short, leadership conventions provide choices of both candidates and public philosophies.
- ⑤ Finally, leadership conventions also serve a "political communication" function. They serve as a link between leaders and followers. They demonstrate to the party faithful and the attentive public the candidate's communication skills and "winnability". In attempting to persuade voters, generate positive and sustained media

publicity, and publicly dealing with the stresses and strains of a leadership campaign, party voters are given a preview of the candidate's style and likely prospects in a general election.

Given these five functions of leadership conventions – what affect will adoption of the tele-convention have on the Nova Scotia Liberal party's ability to meet these needs?

### The Personnel Recruitment Function

It is generally acknowledged that shifting leadership choice from the legislative caucus to extraparliamentary conventions led to "different candidates being considered, different qualities being appreciated, and different leaders being chosen".<sup>2</sup> There are systematic differences in the political backgrounds and parliamentary experience of leaders selected by caucus and convention. John Courtney, in his pioneering work, *The Selection of National Party Leaders in Canada*, found that when the legislative caucus chose party leaders "there was no doubt but that experience in national politics and service in parliament as a private member, then as a cabinet minister, counted for a great deal when new leaders were to be chosen".<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough at the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention not one of the five candidates had any legislative experience. Mr. Savage, the eventual winner, had last run (unsuccessfully) for a federal seat two decades earlier and entered the Nova Scotia Assembly as Premier. His experience in politics was limited to his seven years as mayor of Dartmouth. Don Downe, the runner up, made his mark as an activist in agriculturist interest groups. He too entered the Cabinet without an apprenticeship in the legislature.

***One election does not make a trend; however, will the adoption of direct democracy lead to the further undermining of the importance of legislative experience?***

This particular selection process not only leaves party leadership open to "capture" by extraparliamentary candidates, it may also leave the party vulnerable to capture by extraparty special interests or "independent" candidates. Candidates had plenty of time to recruit new members or "instant" Liberals between the outgoing leader's March 4 announcement of his resignation and the April 15 freezing of eligible voters lists. Members had until the first day of the convention to register to vote. According to the Rules of Procedure governing the 1992

Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention, in order to compete for the nomination, candidates had to have their nominations signed by a minimum of 50 members of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, select an official agent, and submit a refundable \$5,000 certified cheque as a deposit. It was not required that nominators be voting members, or even that candidates be exclusively members of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party. Rival parties, if they so wished, could easily meet the minimum requirements and field candidates who could disrupt or hijack the process. In fact, 885 individuals registered to vote in the five days before the convention. This potential bloc was large enough to give either of the front-runners a clear first-ballot victory or make kingmakers of also-rans.

In an anti-party, anti-politics age one should not too hastily jump to the conclusion that selecting leaders from outside the Assembly or Party is necessarily a retrograde development. Widening the pool from which leadership candidates are drawn is not undesirable. Parliamentary and party notables should not be allowed to monopolize leadership positions. It is certainly arguable that service as Mayor of a large city or on the Executive of a large interest group like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture could be seen as equivalent to Cabinet experience or political apprenticeship. Furthermore, one could argue that it is precisely because of a tremendous loss of faith in parliamentary institutions and legislative leaders that the sources of leadership are shifting. In addition, leadership conventions frequently are provoked as a result of rifts between leaders and followers within the caucus. Except in cases of death or electoral defeat, it is most often the case that caucus unrepresentativeness or disunity makes an extraparliamentary appeal to party members necessary. This was certainly the case with the Nova Scotia Liberal caucus prior to the 1992 convention.

That being said, the fact that leaders are now more likely to be selected from extraparliamentary organizations does raise the possibility that party leaders in the assembly may be anti-party or extraparliamentary "outsiders" and generally less experienced in parliamentary procedures than their caucus colleagues. This suggests the possibility of internecine conflict within the legislative caucus and between the caucus and rank and file members. It could in the future lead to a much sharper delineation between the positions of party leader and parliamentary leader.

The question of intraparliamentary divisions also raises concerns about the accountability of leaders between elections. When the caucus selected leaders the caucus could also eject them. Writing in 1973, Courtney argued that the shift from caucus to convention had fostered a "plebiscitary mentality" which, had hitherto

remained alien to Canada's political tradition. He concluded that leaders chosen through this new process would be more powerful because they would have a broader base of support than any particular caucus faction or even the whole caucus. Does this further extension of the franchise within parties enhance the power of leaders? Which body is to hold the leader accountable? The constitution of the Nova Scotia Liberal Association does not include a provision for a leadership review. Will the party now have to resort to similar, periodic votes of confidence by the general membership in order to eject or review its leader? It would be indeed ironic if a process ostensibly designed to empower party members served instead to enhance the power and autonomy of leaders.

Apart from the implications this process has for the "career paths" of future leadership candidates, tele-conventions also promise to be far more expensive and thus discourage many candidates from competing for the nomination. Even if one could hold the "per capita" costs of electioneering down, the tremendous increase in absolute numbers of members involved cannot help but raise candidate costs. To reach these masses of voters, candidates will have to take advantage of television and new campaign technologies. The costs of this type of campaign may be prohibitive. It may not only discourage potential candidates but it may also drain resources away from party and election fundraising activities, and, if leadership campaign contributions continue to be channelled through the party organization, the public treasury. The expense limit set for the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention was a relatively modest \$125,000 and none of the candidates exceeded it. Still, one gets the impression that the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention will prove an aberration because leadership candidates were not given the time to digest the electioneering implications of the new mechanism.

Apart from the impact direct democracy will have on the qualities of leaders selected, the new style of convention will also affect the personnel recruited by leadership contenders. Ironically, as parties move from being "cadre" to "mass" organizations with respect to leadership selection, campaign activists will more likely be "professionals" rather than "amateurs". Technologically speaking, tele-democracy obviates the need for labour intensive, party activist based, tactics of signing up new members, getting out the vote, and foot, phone and flyer canvassing. The expansion in the need for information gathering, analysis and communication, rather than bringing forth an army of partisan volunteers to recruit members or get out the vote, will result in campaign managers hiring nonpartisan computer

systems analysts and pollsters to target and track voter moods; advertising agencies, marketing consultants, public relations experts, and media managers will help formulate strategies to appeal to them and fax, direct mail, tele-marketing and interactive technology will be used to get them to vote for the leader of their choice.

Furthermore, the possibility that candidates may be able to move a large number of votes almost exclusively on the basis of a great speech and floor demonstration at the convention, will lead them to replace party activists with professional demonstrators and theatrical production crews. The convention center will be transformed into a television studio. Experts will be hired to create visually arresting settings and framing with careful attention to candidate placement, camera angles, lighting, colour and sound coordination, and symbols. Of the five candidates, Don Downe's organization was well ahead of the others in recognizing the tele-convention for what it was. In the future these events will most likely be professional and centrally choreographed extravaganzas.

The importance of the convention itself and media, particularly television, coverage of it, will also force candidates to employ increasing numbers of media monitors and "spin" doctors to shape and react quickly to fast changing media impressions and campaign dynamics.

The trend toward technocracy will not be restricted to candidate campaigns. Tele-conventions of this type will also lead to a professionalization of the convention organization. For example, the final (July 10) report of the Chief Executive Officer to the Convention Co-Chairs quite properly celebrates a 99.87% accuracy rate with regard to the distribution of PINs. Still, his report acknowledges the miscounting of PINs, PINs (10) not accounted for, and individuals (6) receiving two PINs. And we have not even begun to look at the production aspects, and vote buying and multiple voting possibilities of PINs.<sup>4</sup> In order to oversee the receipt, distribution and replacement of Personal Identification Numbers and preventing code-breakers from compromising the anonymity and general integrity of the PIN process the party will have to employ experts who are familiar with the technology.

### Citizen Mobilization

The evolution of political parties is linked squarely with the extension of universal suffrage. In order to organize masses of new electors, political party organizations were transformed from cadre to catch-all bodies.<sup>5</sup> Leadership selection gatherings have kept pace with this march of democracy. During the past century, power

over leadership selection has passed from the Monarch, to outgoing party leaders and their advisors, to caucuses, convention delegates, and on toward one member to one vote. More people are entitled to vote for the leader now than ever before. The history of leadership selection in the Nova Scotia Liberal Party reflects this trend. Before 1930 the legislative caucus and/or the outgoing leader selected a successor. At the first party convention on October 30, 1930, 488 delegates voted. The next convention, in 1954, saw 512 present. Some 617 delegates were there when Earl Urquhart won the leadership in 1962. By 1986, when Vince MacLean the outgoing leader at the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention was chosen, 2000 delegate attended.<sup>6</sup>

Equally as significant as the dramatic increase in the number of members brought into the selection process is the nature of participation itself. The Party's rank and file is involved directly rather than through representatives. Under rules established at the 1986 convention, each of the 52 riding executives selected two people from each polling subdivision within the constituency to vote at constituency meetings where convention delegates were selected. These constituency delegates, along with ex-officio representatives of the caucus, party organization and various clubs and commissions met in one place and voted for a leader. The litany of complaints about this mode of leadership selection is familiar to most people and need only be mentioned in passing here – complaints about indirect voting and participation, the size and manipulation of ex-officio delegate contingents, winner-take-all delegate selection meetings, multiple votes for members of clubs and commissions, the cost of convention attendance, packed meetings and recruitment of instant Liberals and the like. At the June, 1992 Convention, any card carrying member as of April 15 (16,687 eligible) and anyone who by the day the convention began had paid a \$25 (from home) or \$45 (at the convention) voting fee could vote.

***The 1992 Convention with its 16,687 eligible voters was undoubtedly a great leap forward in terms of sheer numbers enfranchised, and it was very much in keeping with the trend that was established at the turn of the century.***

The extension of the intraparty franchise combined with the introduction of telephone voting has enormous implications for citizen mobilization and participation. Senior citizens, people with financial or physical

## Participation in Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention

Constituency	Incumbent Party	Eligible Voters April 24, 1992	Registered Voters June 20, 1992	Percentage Voting June 20, 1992	Registered to vote by telephone *	Registered to attend convention *	Votes by Phone June 1, 1992
Cape Breton							
Cape Breton Centre	Lib.	247	144	58	130	19	111
Cape Breton East	Lib.	313	136	43	121	18	103
Cape Breton North		159	83	52	79	14	65
Cape Breton Nova	Lib.	130	43	33	38	6	32
Cape Breton South	Lib.	406	136	33	125	23	102
Cape Breton Lakes	Lib.	417	249	59	226	19	207
Cape Breton West	Lib.	842	571	67	513	30	483
Inverness North	Lib.	487	164	34	143	18	125
Inverness South	Lib.	272	151	56	138	33	105
Richmond	Lib.	643	263	40	245	28	217
Victoria	Lib.	437	173	40	151	35	116
<b>Cape Breton Total</b>		<b>4,353</b>	<b>2,113</b>		<b>1,909</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1,666</b>
Average		(395)	(192)	(51%)	(174)	(13%)	(87%)
Halifax/Dartmouth							
Dartmouth East	Lib.	326	185	56	176	77	99
Dartmouth North	Lib.	239	147	61	132	63	69
Dartmouth South		229	158	68	146	75	71
Halifax Atlantic		174	87	50	79	29	50
Halifax Bedford Basin		424	172	40	145	65	80
Halifax Chebucto		246	126	51	108	44	64
Halifax Citadel		738	276	37	231	95	136
Halifax Cornwallis		413	266	64	242	118	124
Halifax East		296	138	47	120	51	69
Halifax Needham	Lib.	223	82	35	68	32	36
Halifax St. Margarets		195	89	45	86	31	55
<b>Halifax/Dartmouth Total</b>		<b>3,503</b>	<b>1,726</b>		<b>1,533</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>853</b>
Average		(318)	(156)	(49%)	(139)	(44%)	(56%)
<b>Others/Total</b>		<b>8,831</b>	<b>3,612</b>		<b>3,124</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>2,375</b>
Average		(294)	(120)	(41%)	(104)	(24%)	(76%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>16,687</b>	<b>7,451</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>6,566</b>	<b>1,672</b>	<b>4,894</b>

\* These figures as of June 1, 1992. Constituency specific records were not tabulated by the Party after June 1.

Note: Voting at the first tele-convention held on June 6 was suspended when the telephone system broke down during the first ballot. (See footnote 4). A second vote was held on June 20.

disabilities, parents with young children, geographically isolated constituencies, and similar groups of people who were effectively disenfranchised because they were often unable to attend or get selected as delegates were suddenly empowered. While it is worth noting that approximately 60% of those eligible chose not to vote, large numbers of people did get involved; many of whom had been previously shut out of the system.<sup>7</sup> In short, the

1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention represents both a quantitative and qualitative change in the numbers and nature of the participants.

One noteworthy change that will undoubtedly alter the degree and form of intraparty participation and mobilization is the shift away from the constituency to individual bases of representation. Under the old system, even though the numbers of delegates kept increasing,

each constituency was always equally represented. Under the 1992 regime constituencies are largely irrelevant. Candidates have to aggregate and mobilize individual voters rather than constituency delegates. This raises questions about the extent to which this shift in emphasis offers incentives or disincentives for membership recruitment and citizen mobilization. Under the old system, because each constituency sent the same number of delegates, serious candidates were forced to stage membership drives in almost all constituencies to be competitive at the convention. We have no data on how many new members each candidate brought into the process; however, one suspects that more effort was devoted to getting currently registered or recently lapsed members involved rather than socializing or recruiting new members.

Table 1 shows there were great disparities in the amount and nature of political participation at the constituency level. Using Cape Breton and Halifax-Dartmouth constituencies as bases for comparison, one can see that Cape Breton accounted for 4,353 (26%) of those eligible to vote compared to Halifax/Dartmouth's 3,503 (20%). Among registered voters, Cape Bretoners had a 387 vote edge over the Halifax-Dartmouth contingent. A sizable difference given that only 377 votes separated the finalists on the second ballot.

***Will this new process create "marginal" ridings where leadership candidates, in order to maximize benefits or minimize costs, will concentrate on densely populated areas, ridings around the convention site, or constituencies with greater numbers of voting members, or where the party is strong?***

Within regions too there were strong disparities. Cape Breton Nova for example sent only 43 voters while Cape Breton West registered 571. Thirty-three percent of those eligible participated in the former compared to 67% of the latter. This being said however, this is no more undemocratic than the old system which (all other things being equal) would effectively have given the two ridings 30 delegates each even though one represented 528 more voters. In other words each Cape Breton Nova delegate would have represented only 1.4 voters while in Cape Breton West the ratio would have been 19 voters per delegate. Nevertheless, constituencies themselves are marginalized in this process, and if constituencies are

used as a basis for measuring participation, there are staggering differences in the rates of political mobilization to be found.

Much the same types of discrepancies are found when the site of participation is emphasized. It is arguable that the new mechanism sets up three substantively different tiers of participation in the leadership convention process: 55% of the eligible members who did not even bother to register for voting privileges; 26% of the registered voters who were physically present at the convention site; and 74% of the participants followed the proceedings on television and voted from some other place. In other words, members had access to differing (live or televised) channels or communication and potentially could have based their vote on differing sources of information and perhaps even contributed to the outcome in different ways.

### **Social Integration**

Probably the most ignored aspect of the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention is the philosophical shift it represents from the "socially engineered", collective oriented, gathering to a market driven, individual centred competition. Under the new system there is no provision for weighing or apportioning for constituencies, clubs, commissions, or ex-officio delegates. The new system creates no particular need to form constituency organizations, clubs, commissions and the like, to appeal to, or deal with particular collectives or their delegates. Socioeconomically under-represented or weaker groups, like women, youth, aboriginal people, rural voters, and the Nova Scotia Liberal Party itself will have to leave it to the invisible hand of the marketplace to resolve questions of equity, representativeness, or responsiveness to the needs of differently abled social interests. The voter registration system in its present form does not even provide enough information to rate the convention on this score.

One frequently cited advantage of this shift from indirect to direct democracy is that it eliminates the distinction between elected and appointed delegates. The process is also less open to elite manipulation. However, leaving party notables and representatives of special interests out of the process may undermine the brokerage function of conventions. David K. Stewart, in his study of leadership conventions made special mention of the brokerage role played by ex officio delegates at Maritime provinces leadership conventions:

At most conventions, the behaviour of the ex officio delegates can be seen in terms of brokerage politics. With their votes, ex officio delegates acted to mitigate potentially divisive splits between religious and ethnic

groups. In some cases their votes also mitigated regional divisions. Certainly their behaviour never exacerbated such divisions. Such behaviour should not be lost on party activists who wish to eliminate ex officio positions or even conventions themselves. Ex officio delegates in all likelihood make a substantial contribution to party unity.<sup>8</sup>

Not only does this shift from indirect to direct democracy undermine the process of collective bargaining that previously existed between party leaders and interest group representatives, the speed at which decisions are made in the new communocopia also deprives power brokers and coalition builders of the time they need to aggregate and accommodate interests. Identifying, reaching, and achieving consensus among 7,000 diverse and dispersed voters in the half an hour between ballots is virtually impossible.

One should not, however, wax too lyrical about the virtues of delegated conventions and the superior abilities of ex officio representatives as far as achieving compromise and consensus. Leadership conventions, especially for parties out of government, usually occur when party organization or legislature leaders themselves are seen divided, discredited, or generally incapable of dealing with the question of leadership succession. This was certainly true of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party in the closing days of the MacLean era.<sup>9</sup> It was because of the failure of so called party brokers to resolve their differences that the convention became necessary. The party needed a leader with a renewed and broader mandate and a convention that would unify or at least reduce the antagonism between members, or at least divert attention from problems at helm.

The point remains that eliminating ex officio and other institutional leaders, while returning power to the "people" does make identifying and reconciling group conflicts, and channelling social conflicts through the party system, more difficult. These groups may find the new process frustrating and express their concerns and defend their interests through other means.

### **Policy Formulation**

At the Nova Scotia tele-convention the principal vehicle for the formulation and articulation of distinct policy choices was the "policy forum". During the month preceding the convention the five candidates squared off in 10 regional debates. The 52 constituency associations were discouraged from staging parallel candidates debates that would distract media and public attention from the officially sanctioned ones. Candidate forums were designed to introduce party candidates and members to each other in a local or regional setting, generate media attention and afford candidates an

opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of and concern about a broad range of issues.

One thing worth noting about the policy forums is the fact that they effectively separated the "policy convention" from the "leadership convention". At the convention proper the only issue on the agenda was selecting the leader and the only opportunities there for the articulation of policies were presented during candidate nomination and acceptance speeches on the night preceding the vote, and the less than twenty minutes each candidate was allowed for speech making immediately before the first ballot. At the convention itself, as at previous conventions, the leading candidates used images, slogans and elaborate demonstrations to distinguish themselves rather than focusing any attention on discussion and debate of their policy positions.

While it is true that convention speeches reflected style over substance, the same could not be said about the 10 policy forums. Although, in keeping with the anticollectivist thrust of this convention there was no consistent or coherent discussion, or specific forums, addressing issues of particular importance to youth, women, aboriginal people, and other groups, a wide range of topics was introduced during the policy forums. The well-attended forums provided the candidates and voters with a cost-effective way of participating in the campaign and discussing policies. Unfortunately, because the debates were overshadowed by the May 9 explosion at the Westray coal mine and a triple murder at the McDonalds restaurant in Sydney, and because there were no significant differences between the leading candidates, the forums did not attract much media coverage or public interest. The tightly scripted question and answer sessions, and the large number of candidates involved, also left no room for debate between individual candidates and left little room for spontaneity.

### **Political Communication**

The 1992 Convention was a television producer's dream. Earlier conventions were fairly predictable because delegate counts could be used to determine whether one was attending a coronation or competition. At the tele-convention the large numbers of people involved, their relative anonymity and isolation from the process created a dramatic and suspenseful effect that most conventions lack. Furthermore the importance of demonstrations, speeches and television audience forced candidates to provide good "visuals" to meet the needs of that medium and its voting viewers. Brief speeches sandwiched between entertaining demonstrations, high-speed voting and the tallying of votes, all

compressed into less time than it takes to complete a Stanley Cup playoff game, made this a true "made for television" event. The CBC provided seven hours of live television coverage of the June 6 convention. Beginning with the first candidate's demonstration and speech and continuing through to the suspension of first ballot voting. It continued coverage on June 20 (with the resumption of first ballot voting) and stayed on until the leader was chosen.

Despite its "infotainment" appeal, this form of convention presents several problems to both parties and voters. Probably the most significant development on the political communications front is the shift from an unmediated to a mediated convention. At previous conventions, most communication between candidates and voters and between voters was "face to face". Voters generally met candidates at constituency events or were physically present at conventions. With over 7,000 voters, approximately 75% of whom were not at the convention centre, face to face interaction between candidates and voters was no longer possible. It is indeed ironic that this mode of *direct* democracy should serve to reinforce the importance of *indirect* means of communication. The 5,000 remote voters, 87% of Cape Breton voters, would get almost all of their convention day information from the CBC – the only network carrying full time live coverage of the event. Apart from the fact that voters would be making their decision based on differing sources of information, the party and candidates have effectively lost a great deal of control over the selection and presentation of convention day information. The CBC as intermediary could have substantially affected the coverage and outcome of the convention.

Notwithstanding the fact that the CBC in its coverage of this convention was serving a dual role as news and public affairs reporter and channel of intra-party communications, interviews with CBC organizers and reporters confirm that the CBC treated the 1992 convention as it would any other convention – as a news and public affairs program. Although it guaranteed coverage of the event, the CBC gave no assurances to the Nova Scotia Liberal Party about the editorial content or style of coverage. To underline this focus on the news value of the event, the CBC used partisan politicians like Alexa McDonough, leader of the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party, Russell MacLellan, a Liberal Member of Parliament and Joe Stewart, a prominent Conservative Party stalwart, who also happened to be a voting member at the Leadership Convention, as commentators. Apart from the predictably charged descriptions of candidates and speeches by panellists, coverage by CBC reporters at the convention were just as

opinionated. John Savage, even before the speeches began was frequently referred to as the "frontrunner" while Drish and Hawkins were written off as "fringe" or "single issue" candidates. Jim Nunn, CBC anchorman, found Savage's speech "flat". Parker Barss Donham, one of the colour commentators said that Savage, in his speech was trying to shake off the impression that he was arrogant by giving a "humble" speech. George Hawkins was vigorously and publicly criticized by CBC reporter Glennie Langille for his blatantly sexist demonstration and subsequent comments about "the girls" in his floor demonstration. Donham thought Drish's speech was "a remarkable piece of political theatre" and "pretty darn funny". When Drish publicly castigated Harry Flemming, one of the CBC reporters, for claiming that Drish was not a credible candidate and for dubbing him "Candidate Moonbeam", Fleming attacked Drish directly and had to be pointedly reminded by his anchorman "You're not in this race Harry". Dan O'Connell, the reporter covering the Don Downe campaign was effusive in his praise of Downe's convention speech. O'Connell felt Downe had given "the speech of his life". He reported: "That was quite a barn burner wasn't it?"... "What we've got here today is a man who looks good, sounds good and today he hit all the right buttons".

***The shift from unmediated to mediated forms of communication will change the relationship between the party and the media along with the style of interaction between candidates and voters.***

Non verbal communication also has the potential to play an important role in this type of convention. During its coverage of candidate speeches the CBC broadcast pictures of numerous empty seats in some camps, supporters moving from one camp to another, banners and placards appeared in rival camps. That the symbolic effect of television was recognized by the leading candidates was graphically illustrated not only in the floor demonstrations, but also in the fact that all television reporters and cameras were immediately surrounded by swarms of placard waving delegates jockeying for position once they went live. These attempts to symbolically project mass support for particular candidates become particularly significant when one considers that a local candidate may well be able to create an illusion of strength by bringing large numbers of supporters to the convention site without



having nearly as much overall support. For example, the Halifax-Dartmouth bloc at the Halifax Convention Center was almost three times that of Cape Breton despite the fact that Cape Breton had registered 387 more votes overall. Apart from projecting and feeding off "home filed" spectator support, local candidates may also be able to capitalize on "home team" coverage provided by the local media. Empty seats or an effective demonstration may not tell much of the whole story yet they can create a bandwagon effect. A great deal can be stage managed.

Whether or not CBC coverage of the convention made any difference to "at home" voters is another story altogether. If studies of past conventions are any indication, media coverage or even convention weekend activities do little to change voter perceptions of candidates as far as first ballot voting is concerned.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the main assumptions in this paper is that party leaders, and the means by which they are selected, are important. This study also assumes that however one feels about tele-conventions, the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention process is very much in keeping with the democratic and technological ethos of the times and will probably be emulated.

Growing calls for individual and group empowerment and institutional inclusiveness make it inevitable that new methods of meeting these challenges will emerge. The question for students of politics is not how can these developments be resisted? but how do we meet or balance the demands for empowerment and representativeness with the qualitative requirements of a truly participatory democracy? Will political parties and interactive technology be the vehicles that will take us there? The 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention represents a brave new attempt at tackling these questions.

Undoubtedly the greatest strengths of the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention lie in the numbers of people eligible to vote and the direct and accessible avenue of participation it offered. Still, questions can be raised about the elimination of the constituency as a basis of representation, disparities in the forms and rates of participation, and weakening incentives to mobilize or recruit new members. One advantage of the new process is that it mutes territorial or rural – urban cleavages in the sense that it diverts attention to cross-constituency issues and voting interests. Nevertheless, the constituency for electoral purposes needs to have its role reaffirmed. Going back to the delegated convention based on constituency representation is neither attainable nor

desirable. Perhaps voting and the tallying of ballots could be conducted at "mini-conventions," at the constituency or regional level. A big-screen television, a bank of touch-tone telephones, and an electronic link-up with the central convention site may be all that is needed.

Also with regard to membership recruitment, the party ought to consider freezing and publishing the list of eligible voters and registered voters much earlier in the process in order to secure the process against "capture" by extra party interests or "instant" party members, and to allow candidates to target supporters, or at least to set up a self-regulating system where rival candidates can scrutinize these lists to weed out any inaccuracies and potential improprieties.

The elimination of constituency, ex officio and other delegates from party clubs and commissions, has also weakened party brokers and champions of particular interests in the process. One way of getting around the "problem" of ignoring special interests, is to create parallel committees of correspondence or computer "bulletin board" caucuses to link like-minded members who would ensure that the concerns of disaffected or marginalized groups would be addressed by leadership candidates.

The brokerage function may also be strengthened by having a second (and final) runoff ballot one week after the first. At the moment, the speed at which voting is conducted does not allow much time for sober reflection, conflict resolution or coalition building. Third and subsequent ballots do little more than sharpen the divisions within the party.<sup>11</sup> The time gained with the adoption of a runoff ballot a week later would be time well spent on the systematic mobilizing and resolution of conflicts within the party. It would also heighten and prolong media and public interest in the selection process.

While the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Convention on the policy formulation dimension clearly favoured "style over substance," both because of the separation of policy forums from convention activities, and because of its use of television, the policy forums, did attract large numbers of party members and did generate discussion of a variety of policy issues. With regard to media appeal, the policy forums present a dilemma. Policy conflict and controversy will generate media attention but hurt party unity. Policy consensus will help party unity but hurt media coverage. Still, there is room for improvement. Policy forums specifically aimed at targeted groups should be introduced. The current format emphasizes regional issues.

The shift from an unmediated to mediated convention also represents a real challenge to parties, candidates and the media. What is the proper role of the media in this

new process? Should a public agency serve as an agent for intra-party communication? What are the implications for candidates and voters of relying on the media? How will the new process affect the flow of information and leadership campaign communication strategy? Clearly the party and the media ought to arrive at guidelines for covering future tele-conventions.

The medium is more than the message. Different processes result in vastly different outcomes and change the ability of institutions to meet social needs. It is important that we understand, and sometimes counterbalance, the impact of these interacting social forces, while harnessing the enormous potential of these converging technologies to create more effective and efficient democratic institutions.



## Notes

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1. See Anthony King. "Political Parties in Western Democracies," in *Polity*, Vol.2, No. 2, 1969, pp. 111-141, for a more detailed discussion of these party functions.
  2. See R.K. Carty, Lynda Erickson and Donald E. Blake (eds), *Leaders and parties in Canadian Politics: Experiences of the Provinces*, Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 4-5 and 19-31.
  3. John Courtney. *The Selection of National Party Leaders in Canada*, Toronto: MacMillan, 1973, p. 225.
  4. Further evidence of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party's need for professional expertise with regard to this new computer technology can be seen in the failure of the first tele-convention held on June 6. According to official accounts of the June 6 fiasco, telephone voting broke down because many could not get through and many of those that could did not get the "thank you" or "try again" message. Over attempts, according to Maritime Telephone and Telegraphs count, approximately 10,000 calls in one 18 minute span overloaded the system. All this is understandable. Still, the party had no capacity to verify MTT's assurances, and test demonstrations, that the system could handle approximately 78,000 calls an hour. To make

matters worse, when apparently partial results, which MTT had assured the Nova Scotia Liberal Party did not exist, were intercepted by a cellular phone eavesdropper and leaked to the CBC, the party had no way of knowing whether the "results" were a record of telephone calling attempts or actual votes. Even though it was afterwards accepted that the leaked information recorded calling attempts and not votes, the actual first ballot outcome was remarkably similar to partial information released two weeks earlier. At the second convention independent auditors, systems analysts and chartered accountants were brought in to monitor voting results but they too still had to "trust" MTT. Candidates themselves will undoubtedly have to employ tele-communications and computer experts as scrutineers at future tele-conventions.

5. See Maurice Duverger's classical treatise, *Political Parties*, New York: Methuen, 1978.
6. I am grateful to Doug Vaisey, Reference Librarian at Saint Mary's University, for helping me find this delegate information.
7. See A. Adamson, B. Beaton, and I. Stewart, "Pressing the Rights Buttons: The Nova Scotia Liberals and Tele-Democracy", paper presented at the 1993 Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association in Ottawa, Canada. According to their survey data, representation of women and poorer members was marginally affected by the new system. However, representation of youth delegates fell from 14.5% at the previous (1986) convention to 5.7% in 1992 - a potential difference of as much as 656 voters. Retirees on the other hand saw their numbers grow from 6.7% in 1986 to 22.9% in 1992 - a surge of perhaps 1206 votes. Party neophytes were similarly strengthened. Does this voting scheme empower some candidates and groups while weakening others?
8. David K. Stewart in Carty, *et al*, 1992, 76.
9. There were deep divisions within and between the party organization and the caucus. At the time the convention was announced, the legislative caucus of 22 was evenly split over the issue. Of 24 party presidents who had commented on the leadership question, 12 had called for MacLean's resignation, six supported the leader, and another 6 were undecided.
10. According to Adamson *et al.*, over 90% of those voting had made up their minds before the convention-day speeches began.
11. They certainly do not appear to significantly influence the outcome of conventions. An analysis of the results of 122 provincial party leadership conventions from 1961 to 1991 reveals that only 35 conventions (28%) required more than one ballot. There were only four cases where a candidate who was 2nd on first ballot went on to win. On only two of 122 occasions did someone who stood third on the first ballot go on to win the leadership. See John Courtney, "Provincial Party Leadership Conventions and Votes: 1961-1991", in Carty *et al.* pp. 227-242.