

P.E.I. election shows Tories still prime target

OTTAWA — The political pendulum is swinging back.

That's the message of the Prince Edward Island election in which the Liberals under Joe Ghiz ousted the Conservatives and defeated Premier Jim Lee in his own riding. Such provincial elections are the means by which Canadians restore the balance after the voters inadvertently overdo an electoral change.

In September 1984, after the Mulroney sweep in the federal election, there wasn't a Liberal government anywhere in Canada.

Since then, the voters have cut back the majority of the Tory government of Newfoundland, giving the Liberals a much stronger opposition position.

They've toppled the Tories in Ontario where a deal between the Liberals and New Democrats put the minority Peterson government into office.



They routed the Parti Quebecois to hand Quebec back to Robert Bourassa and the Liberals.

They re-elected the New Democrats in Manitoba, an astonishing comeback considering the virtual unanimity of the pundits a couple of years before in predicting the Tories would regain power.

After the Prince Edward Island result, the Tories hold only five of

the 10 provinces and three of the others — including the central provinces with the bulk of Canada's population — are in Liberal hands.

All this is natural in Canadian politics. It doesn't mean that Brian Mulroney is a particularly bad prime minister or that the voters would, if given a chance, put John Turner in his place.

The Liberals have a long way to go federally, as the latest Gallup poll suggests.

But the common sense of the nation, which resists giving too much power to any one party, is reasserting itself.

Eventually the forces now in play will defeat the federal Tories. How long they'll take to work is not known. The sharp swing of the pendulum that carried John Diefenbaker to overwhelming victory, then reversed itself to carry him to defeat, may be repeated.

But if Mulroney's political wishes come true, the Tories will not only defeat the federal Liberals but replace them as the natural majority party. Even so, the forces that led to federal Liberal defeats in 1957, 1979 and 1984 will be at work, chipping away the foundations of Tory power.

It's fascinating how these forces operate to maintain democracy and preserve alternative political parties.

One way is in the governing party itself. As the Mulroney government has demonstrated, a big majority is a temptation to arrogance. It leads directly to appointment of a cabinet that makes mistakes because it is too big. And too many party people clamor for patronage appointments.

Even though the voters themselves put the government into office with a huge majority, they quickly tire of its swagger. A party

that was close to the people begins to isolate itself and to enjoy too much the pleasant perks of office. It begins to talk bureaucratic jargon instead of ordinary speech.

The government's mistakes create enemies. Pensioners, for example, will not soon forget that the Mulroney government tried to remove their inflation protection. The voters become uneasy about the monopoly of power in the hands of a single party. They want their provincial government to "stand up to Ottawa." And this is difficult for a government of the same political stripe as the federal administration.

Federal and provincial governments of the same party may try to overcome this disadvantage by trying to time announcements of federal largesse for provincial elections. But the tactic always seems cynical. And whatever the

province gets, the opposition can always demand more.

The Mulroney government, with its rhetoric of restraint, is particularly vulnerable to this kind of political auction.

As provinces fall to the opposition party, its political credibility rises. And it gains access to provincial patronage, one of the forces that can hold a political party together in times of adversity.

It would be a mistake to read too much into the Prince Edward Island result. There were local issues, a revitalized provincial Liberal party and a lacklustre Tory premier.

But the national significance of the upset shouldn't be underestimated either. The forces that keep Canada from becoming a one-party state continue to work to redress the unbalanced result of the 1984 federal election.

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Long road ahead

Don't hold your breath waiting for the governments of Canada and the United States to sign a free trade agreement — it could take years.

Despite the expressed interest by both Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in seeing such talks go ahead, even the preliminary step of deciding what will be within the realm of negotiation, who will do the negotiating, and what levels of government will be represented and how, is certain to be a lengthy process.

Despite the high drama of this week, with everyone waiting to see if the talks would be vetoed by the U.S. Senate finance committee, the trade talks that may eventually come about will be long, dull and boring.

But they are necessary.

Both nations have been practising protectionism for more than half a century, and the result is a tangle of tariffs that will take great patience to unwind.

In Canada, provincial and regional concerns have resulted in the erection of tariff structures that supposedly protect special-interest groups such as

the nation's auto manufacturing industry, prairie grain farmers, Quebec textile plants and even the beer industry.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Canada has the highest overall tariff barriers of any nation in the free world.

They have been erected over decades to protect Canada's growth industries, but they also apply to things we don't produce in this country — things such as plastic models and specialized sports equipment, for example.

The U.S. has similar tariff structures, and reciprocal moves to dismantle them will be a boon to consumers in both nations.

But will both governments have the courage to actively seek freer trade by chopping tariff structures in the face of the possible threat to the survival of some industries and the loss of jobs that would occur?

That concern — and the tremendous loss of revenue that would result from eliminating tariffs and duties on imported goods — will have a far greater impact on the outcome of trade talks than any campaigning by special-interest groups.



Canada-U.S. trade discussions: what matters is the outcome

OTTAWA — History was made Wednesday as free trade talks between Canada and the U.S. got the formal go-ahead for just the second time in this century.

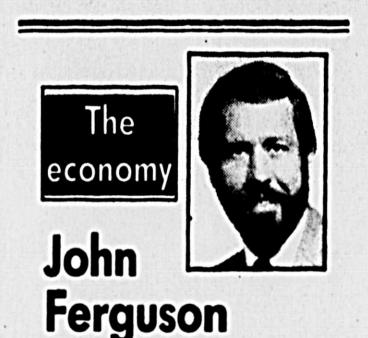
And while the matter may have only squeaked past the finance committee of the U.S. Senate, it really makes no difference whether the talks were launched by default (because the vote was a tie and therefore not recorded as a negative vote) rather than by a thumping majority.

The point is, Canada and the U.S. now are in the finals and it's the outcome of the trade talks themselves that is important, not the enthusiasm, or lack thereof, with which they were launched by U.S. legislators.

The U.S. senators, as representatives of regional interests in their country, were merely playing the role that the provincial premiers have been playing in Canada, trying to ensure their constituents don't get sold out by a free trade agreement.

And the reluctance of some senators merely showed they have similar misgivings about throwing open their borders to free trade as do some Canadian premiers.

The U.S. senators have concerns about a long list of Canadian exports into their markets, includ-



ing Prince Edward Island potatoes, Saskatchewan uranium, British Columbia lumber, fish from Nova Scotia, hogs from Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and steel.

But then our premiers are nervous about protecting agricultural marketing boards, about keeping the Autopact off the bargaining table, about regional development grants being considered unfair subsidies to industry, about competition from U.S. beer and wine and about protecting Canadian cultural industries.

The Americans don't like Canadian interprovincial trade barriers and provincial purchasing rules that favor local suppliers.

But then neither does Brian Mulroney who said in a speech last week that "some of the most damaging protectionism in North

America exists across provincial borders."

And neither do Canadian manufacturers like U.S. Buy America laws which favor domestic suppliers, including legislation such as the U.S. Surface Transportation Assistance Act which requires federally funded public transit systems to have 50-per-cent U.S. content.

The list of irritants on both sides could go on and on.

And it shouldn't be surprising that complaints like these exist between two countries with two-way trade totalling more than \$160 billion, the largest bilateral trading relationship in the world.

But ironing out these differences and finding ways to significantly expand trade are what the talks are all about.

Considering that we have a \$20-billion trade surplus with the U.S., it's certain their trade worries would have to be addressed even without free trade talks.

Canadian opponents of free trade may try to argue the narrow Senate vote means Canada will have to give up a lot more at the bargaining table.

But had the finance committee given overwhelming support to trade talks, the opponents of free trade would have claimed that just proved the Americans were itching

to take Canada to the cleaners.

In fact, Wednesday's squeaker merely confirms what we already knew: that the negotiations are going to be long, complex and extremely difficult, with a lot of give and take on both sides.

The Reagan administration negotiators would have been tough bargainers regardless of the views of the Senate. And you can be assured that the Canadian negotiators will be just as tough.

But both sides will have to come up with a deal that is politically acceptable, meaning that whatever trade agreement is reached will have to pass muster with the U.S. Senate and with the Canadian provinces and with the voters.

The optimists in the government think the trade talks can be wrapped up within two years, but others think it could be three years or longer.

But whether a deal is negotiated by 1988 or not, the issue is certain to loom large in the election Mulroney is likely to call that year, also a presidential election year.

And as they did in the election of 1911, the voters will get to pass judgment on free trade with the U.S.

Mulroney will be betting that things will go better for him than they did that year for Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Birthday greetings

On May 17, The Citizen is celebrating its 70th year of publication and bringing to the citizens of Prince George the world and community news. On behalf of the citizens of Prince George, my council and myself, it gives me pleasure to wish The Citizen owners and staff a very happy birthday and compliments for a job well done.

Over the years, The Citizen has been a significant contributing force in all aspects of Prince George life, whether it be business, education, health, development, tourism, sports or politics. The management and staff of "our newspaper", both past and present, is to be congratulated on providing Prince George readers with a paper of continuing high standards and quality. It is our sincere wish that the Prince George Cit-

izen continue to be a leader in our community and that many more happy birthdays will be celebrated in years to come.

E.W. Mercier,
Mayor

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A whole lotta shakin' going on

CHARLES GORDON

down on television.

The same goes for home runs, goals, foul shots and long putts for par.

Sometimes Americans shake hands in the traditional way. Sometimes they slap hands. Sometimes they do the high-five. Sometimes they tilt their hands up and do the old '60s power shake. Usually they do that if they are sweaty and hot from working in the dust.

If you watch the commercials on American television, you'll know it: Americans even shake hands when arriving for work.

Canadians view this with alarm — not just shaking hands

on arriving for work, although that's alarming in itself, but the whole phenomenon. If the Canadian culture is going to be bargained away in talks with the Americans, does that mean we will have to shake hands all the time?

Will we have to high-five the bus driver in the morning, power-shake the postman, slap hands with the woman who sells us a Dani?

There is cause for concern, although there is no reason to

worry about the woman who sells the Danish. If you watch the American commercials carefully, you will notice that women never shake hands. They seem able to go about their business without getting into that. Whether this is discriminatory is difficult to know.

Certainly if incessant handshaking comes to Canada, we will find out, because someone will take the lack of women shaking hands on TV commer-

cials to the Human Rights Commission.

It is not likely the commission will rule that discrimination exists. People who have studied handshaking know that men who do it are not only being introduced to each other, not only congratulating each other. They are giving each other their bond, their word.

That's what the commercials are all about: Americans getting their word, giving each other their word, then going to have a beer on it. Once they get inside to have a beer, they have to shake hands with everyone in the place, because that's the way American men are. It's a

wonder they have time to drink anything at all.

American women, for whatever reason, are smarter. Either they don't give their word, or else they are able to give it without shaking hands. When they arrive at work, they usually just say "hello." When they pick up the dry cleaning, they don't slap hands with anyone there.

Who knows what happens when they greet their husbands at the end of a day. She wants to kiss. He wants to shake hands. Some couples will compromise — kiss one day, shake hands the next. But not all will. This may be why the institution of marriage is in such trouble in the United States.

(Charles Gordon is a columnist for The Citizen, Ottawa.)

OTTAWA — The big thing in American culture is shaking hands. Americans do it all the time, even in beer commercials.

Especially in beer commercials, actually. Why Americans do this is anybody's guess. A Canadian can go an entire day without shaking hands with a single soul, unless he has the misfortune to be formally introduced to someone.

But Americans shake hands constantly. Just turn on your TV and watch.

They shake hands when someone comes into a room. They shake hands before the game and after it. They shake hands when one of them scores a touchdown. They shake hands when a perfect stranger scores a touchdown and they shake hands when a perfect stranger 3,000 miles away scores a touch-