

PREMIERS MEETING

Premiers confident about council

by CHRIS MORRIS
Canadian Press

CHARLOTTETOWN — Canada's premiers are vague on details of their new Council of the Federation, but confident the new alliance will make the country work better.

The provincial and territorial leaders arrived in Charlottetown on Thursday night to begin a meeting to formalize the council, which appears to be a more structured approach to squeezing money out of Ottawa.

"There's nothing behind-the-scenes about it," Saskatchewan Premier Lorne Calvert said when asked if the council simply would be a backroom vehicle for getting more federal funds.

"It's quite up front, particularly around the health file."

The premiers were unable to give details as to what the council will look like, how it will work and what it will do, preferring to talk about how important it will be in reshaping federal and provincial relations.

"It's a not a chapter but a page in Canadian history," said Calvert. "It will provide an opportunity to build a better relationship with the national government.

"The fundamental role must be to make Canada work better for Canadians."

Calvert said the council, which will be made up of the premiers and a secretariat, may not be situated in one locale. He said it might have a moveable office that could be shifted to different capitals.

Alberta Premier Ralph Klein said he doesn't know if the resolutions passed by the council have to be unanimous — a tall order considering interprovincial bickering in the past.

"That's a good question," he admitted.

The premiers are optimistic they will be able to forge a more co-operative relationship with a federal Liberal government headed by Paul Martin, who will soon take over from Prime Minister Jean Chretien.



CP photo

From left, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, Quebec Premier Jean Charest and Manitoba Premier Gary Doer walk to a dinner meeting of the Council of the Federation meeting in Charlottetown on Thursday.

Martin to purge party of some MPs: report

by LOUISE ELLIOTT
Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Paul Martin supporters are targeting some Liberal MPs in a bid to purge the party of any pockets of dissent against his leadership, insiders say.

Martin denied the charge Thursday. Party sources and MPs said numerous Liberals are being targeted in their home ridings by challengers vying for local nominations at pre-election meetings expected early next year.

The movement took stride after Martin's very first day as Liberal leader last month when he announced he would halt the current practice of protecting sitting MPs.

He said it is an attempt to make the process more democratic. Critics say it's a way to make room for favoured candidates and get rid of those who failed to support Martin in his lengthy leadership struggle with Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

"It's a co-ordinated and determined effort," said Ontario MP John Bryden, who feels he is under attack for remaining neutral in the leadership race.

"This is the Liberal establishment trying to make sure that absolute Martin loyalists are in place. . . I haven't sufficiently passed the Martin loyalty test."

Bryden said he was told of a movement to push him out by the same local organizers who backed Martin's leadership bid.

One potential challenger even came forward and told of being solicited by pro-Martin organizers to take him out in the upcoming nomination meeting, Bryden said.

Martin denied there was program to purge some members of the party while saying the Liberals are looking for new candidates.

"Essentially we are a democratic party and a democratic party says you win your nomination. There's no doubt in my mind the vast majority of the members of Parliament who have worked very hard are going to be able to hold their seats, most of them uncontested," he said in Vancouver late Thursday.

"What we have said is obviously that there has to be a democratic opening for people and that they should be able to take it.

"We'd want to see new candidates, we want to see new people coming forth we want to see very much increased numbers of women candidates running in winable ridings."

With Martin moving swiftly to put his own stamp on the Liberal party, many Liberals are bracing for a top-to-bottom overhaul. There has already been at least one firing at Liberal party headquarters in Ottawa, nearly every face in Chretien's 38-member cabinet is expected to change, and now MPs are fighting to keep their seats.



AP photo

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien chats with Queen Elizabeth II prior to their meeting in Abuja, Nigeria on Thursday.

Chretien, Queen meet for final time

ABUJA, Nigeria (CP) — Prime Minister Jean Chretien and the Queen had their final official meeting Thursday of a long relationship dating back 35 years.

Chretien, 69, met for just over half an hour with the Queen, 77, in a private tete-a-tete on the eve of the Commonwealth heads of government meeting.

"It was a very good meeting, as usual," Chretien said of the private audience, from which his officials were excluded. "She was very gracious. I've known her since 1967."

It is only the Queen's second visit to Nigeria. Her first was in 1956 — four years before the African country's independence from Britain. But she has visited often with Chretien in Canada and abroad during royal visits and Commonwealth events over his 40-year career in federal politics.

Chretien has regaled audiences with stories of his royal encounters, the most famous of which involved him singing O Canada alone in front of a royal audience during a five-day royal visit to northern Canada in 1968.

"They've told me it's part of the royal folklore today," the prime minister recalled Thursday.

"When I had to sing O Canada in French and nobody came along. How many of us have been the soloist to the Royal Family? There was 5,000 people watching. My wife said I've never been so shy. I was sweating, but anyway ... it's the call of duty."

Orchard, Tories head to court

TORONTO (CP) — The Progressive Conservative party needs the unanimous consent of its members to merge with the Canadian Alliance, lawyers argued Thursday as the legal battle between David Orchard and Canada's oldest political party got underway in earnest.

Neither the Canada Elections Act nor the party's constitution allows a merger without the membership's 100 per cent support, said Sean Dewart, who represents Orchard and 22 other disgruntled Tory members.

"Untrammelled majority rule is not the same as democracy," Dewart said at the outset of a full day of arguments from both sides in a lawsuit over the proposed union of the two parties.

"People are being dragged to a place where they don't want to go."

The suit doesn't seek to block the merger; rather, it's designed to ensure the party's name and assets would survive a merger with the Canadian Alliance, regardless of whether party members support the plan.

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