



**Canadian
Study
of Parliament
Group**

The Election and Parliament:
*What voters sought,
what voters got*

**Ottawa
October 27-28, 1994**

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The Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG) was created with the object of bringing together all those with an interest in parliamentary institutions and the legislative process, to promote understanding and to contribute to their reform and improvement.

The constitution of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group makes provision for various activities, including the organization of seminars in Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada, the preparation of articles and various publications, the establishment of workshops, the promotion and organization of public discussions on parliamentary affairs, participation in public affairs programs on radio and television, and the sponsorship of other educational activities.

Membership is open to all those interested in Canadian legislative institutions.

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On Thursday evening, October 27 and Friday, October 28, 1994, the Canadian Study of Parliament Group held a conference in Ottawa on the theme *The Election and Parliament: What voters sought, what voters got*.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed so much to the success of the conference. A special thanks to the two keynote speakers: Professor Richard Johnston of the University of British Columbia and Principal Investigator in the 1993 Canada Election Study; and the Honourable Gilbert Parent, Speaker of the House of Commons. Thank you also to the Chairs and panellists: John Chenier, Publisher of the *Lobby Monitor*; Jane Stewart, M.P. (Brant); Michael Atkinson, McMaster University; Alvin Cader, CBC National Radio News; François Houle, University of Ottawa; Don Boudria, M.P. and Chief Government Whip; Gilles Duceppe, M.P. and Official Opposition Whip; and Jim Silye, M.P. and Caucus Co-ordinator for the Reform Party. Thank you also to the Chairs and participants in the three workshops: Michael Cassidy, CSPG Counsellor; Robert Vaive, CSPG Vice-President and Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia; Ruth Bell, CSPG Counsellor; Robert Marleau, Clerk of the House of Commons; and Audrey O'Brien, Principal Clerk, House of Commons.

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Donald Eldon
Conference Chair and
Counsellor, Canadian Study of
Parliament Group

Note - This publication represents a departure from past practice for CSPG in the format of the published proceedings which in the past have included verbatim transcripts and summary/précis reports. This is an edited transcript. It is based on the verbatim record, but edited to be as informative and enjoyable an account as possible in the least possible space.



The Election and Parliament:
What voters sought, what voters got

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Keynote Address *What voters sought?*

Richard Johnston Principal Investigator 1993 Canadian Election Study

Richard Johnston: Let me begin with a few words about the notion of trying to answer a question such as what voters sought. It is an incoherent question once you start to think about it — and nowhere more so than in the 1993 election.

Even as a general proposition, it's extremely difficult to answer, because any given voter seeks lots of things, some of which are impossible and many of which are conflicting. Most of us want things that are in conflict with each other; we can't have them all in our own lives, much less in the public life of a community or a nation.

I'm also going to make a confession. I do not subscribe to the view that one can readily establish public opinion simply by conducting a sample survey. As a citizen and a scholar, I'm disturbed by the seriousness with which responses to single-question surveys are ascribed a kind of moral standing as representing Canadians' opinions on a question, or what Canadians think or what they want. That is rarely likely to be true of almost any survey question you can imagine. It's least likely to be true of questions asked directly without supplying some further cue as to what the voter wants and then leaving it to the voter to make up an answer.

I'd invite each of you to go through the exercise. Ask yourself what you meant by your vote in 1993. I suspect that many of you wouldn't know what to say, or would find whatever comes to your mind first quickly displaced by a bit of prodding.

The general proposition I start from is that we live in a country that — like most industrialized countries, but perhaps more so than many — is simply incoherent. That's life in a big, complicated, industrial state, especially in a state that, by some measures at least, is binational.

To say it's incoherent means it's very difficult to find anything resembling a true natural majority on any question — a majority that would be freestanding and would resist almost any variation in the way the question was put.

We know from a comparison of opinion polls that the distribution of responses to questions varies with the way the questions are put. We can be cynical about this, but I don't think we have to be. We should realize that when we ask questions about policy issues or constitutional issues, we are engaging in the same activity that parties and politicians do in attempting to frame the question on which an election turns.

We don't necessarily have the strategic intent — winning an election — that a party strategist might have, but we do know that one of the critical elements in setting the stage and playing out a campaign is the struggle by the competitors to get the voters, when they cast their ballots, to ask the right question.

There's very little active persuasion in any campaign. There's relatively little movement in opinion on most questions — at least, if the question is asked the same way — over an extended period of time. Much of what the political struggle is about is the different parties trying to get voters to ask the question that is most strategically favourable to them. Much of it is a competition between different definitions of the question.

That same logic applies to the conduct of polls. How you ask a question makes an important difference to the kinds of answers you get. That simple fact undercuts any notion of a natural majority. If you are skeptical about the existence of natural majorities, you should be sceptical about whether the question of what voters want is susceptible to single answers most of the time.

That's true even in elections like 1988, which in some ways was a very simple election. There was no question about the issue on which the electorate divided, although one could imagine another 1988 election on another issue — the Meech Lake Accord perhaps. But we didn't see that election; we saw an election that pretty much everybody agreed was on free trade between Canada and the United States.

Even though 85 to 90 per cent of respondents in survey after survey had a position on the agreement, in our own study of the 1988 election, 90 per cent of those who had a position on the agreement voted for the “correct” party, in the sense of the party whose position was consistent with their own view. It was an astonishingly close connection between opinion and action. I don't think we'll ever again see an election in which the connection is as close as that.

Even so, it's not at all straightforward what voters wanted in 1988. There was no natural majority on either side of the question. In the end, the mandate that came out of the 1988 election was really an old-fashioned one. Playing by the rules of the game, the Tories received the right to continue governing and thus to pursue their basic policies. But that there was either a clear majority against or a clear majority for free trade is not something we can say about that election.

In the 1988 election there was an unusually simple and close connection between opinion and action. When we come to 1993, we encounter an election that is extraordinarily difficult to interpret. I suggest that the way of interpreting it is a bit like a Chinese box puzzle: you open one box and there's another one inside. It was an incredibly layered event. To the extent that you can interpret it, you have to come up with different interpretations for different layers.

Maybe we should start with the most obvious thing. One of the dramatic features of the 1993 election was the virtual erasure of the Progressive Conservative party from the electoral map. Why did the Conservatives get erased from the map? You wouldn't have found out by asking people on election day what they felt about different questions and then relating that to the vote.

When a party is as close to the floor as the Conservatives were by election day in 1993, there's no variance left to explain. You can't get at the collapse of the Tories by looking at voters after the collapse has occurred. You have to watch it as it occurs to get a sense of why it occurred, and that is a difficult task.

Let me elaborate on how we did this, because it will help you understand some of my later points. The group that now does the election studies goes into the field as close as possible to the beginning of the writ period. To prepare, we do pre-testing and other work in the run-up period before the writs are issued. We do a bit more pre-testing in the day or so after the writs are issued, then we get into the field. In the case of 1993, we were in the field on Friday, September 10, two days after the official beginning of the campaign.

Our target was 3,600 interviews; we actually completed 3,775. Based on the target number of interviews, we take the random digits necessary to achieve that target and break the total number of telephone numbers into 45 groups more or less, depending on the length of the writ period. In 1993 we happened to have 45 days of interviewing

available to us. We break the sample up into 45 mini-samples and release the results day by day as the campaign goes on.

You can't actually use the day of sample release as your unit of analysis, but after three or four days of field work, you reach a point where the distribution of interviews on a given day is roughly stable. About half the respondents coming out of the telephone numbers — the households — are released into the sample that day. About a quarter of the interviews come out of telephone numbers released the day immediately before and about an eighth out of the numbers released two days before. The remaining eighth will be distributed over a number of days released before that.

After three or four days of interviews, you're in a position where the day of interview is like a random event. Each daily sub-sample is indistinguishable, within sampling error, from other daily sub-samples by nothing more than the passage of time. Any differences will be the product of either autonomic forces in the campaign or external events. There will be no story related to the way a sample is released or cleared. We can treat our data, for certain purposes, as a tracking poll.

We don't have the mammoth numbers of daily interviews that a well-oiled political party has in its tracking polls. What we have instead is a much larger and richer set of questions about our respondents. We also go back to our respondents after the election, and if an issue arises during the campaign that we didn't anticipate, we can get at it after the event.

The 1993 campaign was quintessentially one in which only through tracking could you make sense of some of the motivations behind voters' intentions about which party they were going to vote for.

Two parts of the 1993 story didn't require tracking. (In some ways they were the hardest parts to analyze, because they were in place before our field work began.) Obviously one part of the 1993 story was, why was the NDP so weak? I'm not going to give you a definitive answer — but I'll debunk most of the standard answers.

At least three policy-based “answers” come to mind. The deficit may be part of the story; in a context of high deficit, a party committed to large-scale expenditure programs is simply not plausible.

Continentalism and globalization are another part of the story. If the reality of the '90s is increasing globalization, you don't have to like it, but you have to accept its inevitability. A party that

seems to turn its back on that trend is irrelevant, so the argument goes.

A third argument is that the NDP is fatally tied to an unpopular social movement, the union movement, and therein lies its decline.

As far as I can see, none of those arguments holds water. Voter defection from the NDP between 1988 and 1993 occurred in the sectors of the electorate that were still most committed to positions the NDP champions — people who were least troubled by the deficit and did not see the deficit as a barrier to spending; people who were most resistant to further continentalism, most antipathetic to NAFTA, and so on; and people who were still prepared to cut the union movement some slack.

It's hard to find respondents who like the union movement, but nonetheless it was among those who could live with it, not those who were most opposed to its aims, that defections from the NDP occurred. NDP defections came from the NDP core and from people who, as far as we can tell, had not overtly abandoned the traditional positions of the party.

Another possibility is that the NDP was a victim of recession. There is some plausibility to this. In Canada, unlike most other parliamentary democracies, parties of the left are treated as a luxury, to be indulged in good times. In most other countries, parties of the left do well in bad times; they are perceived as the parties most concerned about fighting unemployment and so on. Canada seems to be the one place where the NDP is the party of good times — and the early '90s were not good times. That may be part of the story.

Another explanation heard often is that Audrey McLaughlin was a weak leader and her weakness doomed the party. If you look at standardized ratings of leader popularity — those odd instruments called feeling thermometers, where you imagine a scale from 0 to 100 and rate your feelings about a leader — Audrey McLaughlin was not as popular as Ed Broadbent was in 1988. Superficially that would seem to be a starting point.

The problem is that Ed Broadbent in 1988 was actually the NDP anomaly. Most of the time NDP leaders have not been that highly rated, not even Ed Broadbent himself in earlier years. Beyond this, however, over the course of the 1988 campaign, popular though he remained, Ed Broadbent became progressively less relevant to voters' choices as the NDP fell out of the race.

If Ed Broadbent is irrelevant to the NDP's chances when the NDP is falling back to 20 per cent,

it's unfair to Audrey McLaughlin to suggest that she should be more relevant to the choice as the NDP falls from 20 per cent to below the teens.

It's also the case that though she may have been less well regarded than her immediate predecessor, that did not prevent the NDP from being quite popular in the aftermath of its victories in three provinces.

That brings us to the next explanation — the fallout from political difficulties in Ontario, Saskatchewan and B.C., especially Ontario and B.C. Here we're getting closer to really plausible turf. It is true — and this is pretty obvious — that the reverses experienced by the NDP in 1993 were greatest in the three provinces where they formed provincial governments. That would seem to be a good indicator that a big part of the story was punishment of the federal party for difficulties in the provinces.

There are precedents for this. In 1974 the NDP's drop in B.C. was much greater than anywhere else in the country, and it's probably fair to attribute some of that to the unpopularity of the Barrett government at the time.

So we have an outline of a story here, but we want to be careful about pushing the line too hard, because the other characteristic of provinces with NDP governments is that they are provinces in which the NDP has been strong historically. The other province where the NDP is historically strong is Manitoba, and the NDP drop in Manitoba was not trivial, either.

Part of the problem relates to my first point — defections came from the core of the NDP coalition, and that core happens to be in three of the four provinces with an NDP provincial government. The explanation starts to get rather circular and murky after a while.

My sense is that although some of the story had to do with Messrs. Harcourt and Rae, another story was going on as well, one that didn't have much to do with the NDP. Part of what happened was a desire to punish Brian Mulroney and the Conservatives. This desire was sufficiently strong to drive voters on the general left of the spectrum to consolidate their vote around the one party that had a serious chance of beating the Conservatives, and that of course was the Liberal party.

Helping that process along was the fact that the NDP itself, by virtue of being in government, undercut some of its credibility as the only party defending social programs, the union movement or the environment. Because they had to make hard choices, NDP provincial governments undercut some

of the distinctiveness of the NDP claim, and that facilitated consolidation of some of that vote around the Liberals.

The other part of the story that was in place before the campaign began was the Bloc québécois. They held about half the Quebec vote before the campaign began, and there, more or less, they stayed. I suppose the most important thing is they didn't evaporate, contrary to a lot of expectations.

The biggest story about the Bloc is simple. They presented themselves as a reasonably credible sovereigntist alternative and walked into a niche that had been there all along. This is not to suggest that any party calling itself sovereigntist could have done this. The fact that the Bloc was led by Lucien Bouchard, and that it emerged as a parliamentary entity in a context in which the reasons given by the MPs in the party were eminently plausible to the relevant clientele, must be part of the story.

Even so, a good three-fourths of the Bloc story is attributable simply to the fact that they were offering, for the first time in a Canadian federal election, a sovereigntist alternative and thus were filling a sovereigntist niche. That would not have got them to 50 per cent of the vote, however. It would have got them to something like 38 per cent.

The other quarter of the Bloc vote is a compound of small things. Even among Quebecers who do not go all the way to calling themselves sovereigntists, you can identify a kind of proto-sovereigntist sensibility: some like Quebec more than Canada; some agree with the proposition that Quebec is systematically ill-treated in federal-provincial relations. If you are a federalist who believes these kinds of things, then the Bloc is, at least for tactical reasons, a plausible place to go. The Bloc did pick up some protest votes, as far as we can see. It was a beneficiary of personal economic distress in a way that the Liberal party in Quebec was not.

Finally, the Bloc was a beneficiary of its leader. Lucien Bouchard is a very credible individual for the relevant clientele and for the province — at least for the francophone part of the province. By the standards of our measurement devices, Quebec voters rate him much more highly than any of the alternatives — in particular, he was rated more highly than Jean Chrétien at the time of the election.

These observations about the NDP and the Bloc are not campaign stories — they're about setting the stage for the campaign. Once the campaign unfolded, they lurked in the background. The dynamics of the campaign is a story about Conservatives, Liberals and Reform.

Until a certain point, the Conservatives and the Liberals were level. That should be consistent with your recollection of published polls. Maybe Kim Campbell paid a price for her musings about how slowly the unemployment rate would come down. But, then again, maybe not.

The two major parties were fluctuating in the high 30s. Over the span of a few days, the Conservatives dissipated, by about 10 points. The published polls missed this. As it happens, some polling companies were actually in the field when it occurred, notably Environics for the CBC. The CBC had a story on the 26th of September, reporting their poll. At that point they had the Liberals at 37 per cent and the Tories at 31 per cent. Well, they weren't in it. Their field work exactly spanned the period in which the Tories were crashing.

As far as the Tories are concerned, there was an initial rapid reverse and a bottoming out (possibly an effect from the debate, though if that's real, they recovered), then a final crash and bottoming out. If that has a substantive interpretation, it was the anti-Chrétien advertisement, which was not really an advertisement but a news story.

The response of the rest of the numbers to this development is not straightforward. The parties don't move in ways exactly complementary to each other. When more than one party is a relevant alternative, the responses can be quite incommensurate.

The initial and immediate beneficiaries of the Conservative collapse appeared to be the Liberals. I would not be inclined to interpret that fluctuation; when you have percentages near 50 per cent in a given sample, there's going to be more fluctuation than when you have percentages near the floor. Compare the NDP with the Liberals. I interpret this as saying that there was an initial surge to the Liberals that took them, outside Quebec, to somewhere into the mid-40s. They fell back over the next few weeks.

The other part of the story is that the collapse of the Conservatives kicked off a gradual and cumulative Reform gain. By our reckoning Reform peaked in the second-last week of the campaign. Then they fell back — we can only speculate about why.

Again, there were many fewer polls in 1993 than in 1988, and the commercial firms, as far as I can tell, missed the whole thing. They simply couldn't afford to be in the field in this period. It is an interesting question why they couldn't be.

Though the Conservatives were level-pegging with the Liberals at a certain point, this was level-pegging in a wholly new way, because even though they had vote shares quite similar to those of the Liberals at this point, the map had changed in fundamental ways — not that the constituencies had been redrawn, but rather that the coalitions had changed, as distributed across the map. Whereas in the old days, 35 per cent for the Tories and 35 per cent for the Liberals would almost certainly give the Conservatives a majority government, nowadays the result would be the Liberals with something like 120 seats and the Tories with something like 80 seats. So the Tories were already disadvantaged. But they were at least in the game.

The speed with which they fell out of it suggests that although they were in the game, they had a peculiar strategic vulnerability, the likes of which we hadn't seen before. We asked a set of questions, hoping to get at the fundamental axes of debate and division in Canadian politics and society. One of the questions was, "How much do you think should be done for French Canada (or Quebec, in the case of half those sampled) — a lot more, somewhat more, about the same as now, somewhat less, a lot less?"

That was the positioning question. Then the next question was, "How much do you think the Conservatives want to do for Quebec — a lot more, somewhat more..." and so on. What about the Liberals? What about the NDP? What about Reform? And so on. It is a very crude indicator, to be sure. But using this question you can come up with average locations for various groups in the electorate.

We did something similar on Canada/U.S. relations. We made much of this in our account of the 1988 election. Part of our argument in 1988 was that, if you are interested in building a binational coalition — which you must do under our electoral system — and in a world of a small number of small parties, you have to get yourself into a compromise position on this question. If you're not prepared to do this, you're not going to form a government. If you're prepared to concede Quebec to a single party — as other parties, especially the Tories and the NDP, were prepared to do to the Liberals for many decades — you are conceding to that party a massive head start. If you're serious about forming a national government, you have to come up with some form of brokerage on this question.

What you have is a story of profound incoherence. That's the price of brokerage. That's

life in Canada. But it is a story of incoherence that was greatest in 1988 and continued to be greatest on the eve of 1993, for the Tories.

A crude way of thinking about the coalition Brian Mulroney assembled was that it was a coalition of francophones and francophobes — that's an exaggeration, but it shows why it was difficult to hold it together. His success at holding it together at the parliamentary level was one of the outstanding feats in Canadian politics of our time.

Then the mass base was bubbling away — that was about the constitutional preoccupation and all that. My belief, for which I don't have much hard empirical substantiation, is that this was the most critical part of the story. And when you add to that recession, a widely reviled GST, NAFTA, which was not popular, and a reaction to Brian Mulroney's person, you have a party that is obviously vulnerable.

At this point you might ask why anybody would bother to vote for him. Why not go straight to Reform, or somewhere else, but especially to Reform?

I think there are three answers. One is a question of leadership. At the outset, the Conservatives had succeeded in coming up with the most popular leader. Maybe Jean Charest would have been more popular still, but at the beginning of the campaign Kim Campbell was the most highly rated of the four leaders for the rest of Canada.

Published polls in this period tended to make her seem far more dominant over the others. If you want to get to this sort of consideration quickly, you ask, "Who would make the best prime minister?" But if the cost of the poll is a factor, as it seems to be more in the private sector than in the university sector, you don't go on to ask, "How much better than the next-best is the best?"

We asked respondents to rate the leaders on a scale of 0 to 100. Campbell's ratings were more or less of a piece with the ratings enjoyed by Brian Mulroney and Ed Broadbent in 1988 — okay, acceptable, not astonishingly great, and not as high as the ratings Lucien Bouchard enjoyed inside Quebec. Campbell was the most highly rated individual, but Jean Chrétien was not far behind. He was certainly closer behind than John Turner was in a couple of the periods in 1988.

So leadership helped, at least in the short run. The "boomlet" coming out of the convention and the fact that the summer was an occasion for Ms. Campbell to be the exclusive focus of the news gave her an edge at the beginning of the campaign.

But she crashed, and very quickly. The drop in her ratings precedes the drop in the Tory share by about a day or so.

What happened? You may be thinking about the "47 days" remark — 47 days is too short a period to discuss social programs. I don't think so.

She made that remark on the 23rd. It had happened by then. The Tories were already 10 points down by the time she made that remark.

But I believe that the controversy that led up to that remark is the key to the story. If I'm right, it's a challenge to all serious analysts of elections, because if it is true, then we're saying that an apparently very small stimulus to the electorate arguably caused the unravelling of a century and a half of Canadian history.

This suggests just how vulnerable the Conservatives were — but even so, I'm still taken aback by how small this stimulus was. The controversy that ended up with the 47-day remark was about deficit versus social programs. The claim was made that there was a secret plan to cut social programs. Ms. Campbell denied it. The denial was not treated as credible.

Some of the ground lost by the Tories may well have been among people who were concerned about the integrity of social programs. My sense, however, is that most of the ground was lost among those on the other side.

The one other substantive reason that comes to mind for staying with the Conservatives at this point is that they remained more credible than the viable alternative on the deficit. The Conservatives had allowed the deficit to remain large and had allowed the debt to accumulate, but they were still more credible than the Liberals. In the early going, in fact, they were about as credible as Reform, mainly because Reform wasn't really visible at that point.

In our polling we asked, "If the Conservative party forms a government, what do you think will happen to the deficit — will it get much larger, somewhat larger...?" and so on. Again, this allows you to locate groups in the electorate on the general question of credibility. You ask this about each party.

It should come as no surprise that the Conservatives were not hugely credible among people who cared about the deficit. This was the one-third of the electorate that cared most about cutting the deficit, but they were the ones who counted for this part of the story. Among those who

cared about it, the Tories and Reform both had a little credibility. The Liberals had none.

By this point, then, the leader is still hanging in as the most highly rated, leading a party that voters had to stay with if they cared about the deficit. At this point Reform doesn't seem any more credible than the Conservatives.

This brings me to the third point. Reform is not viable. History tells us there are two big parties in Canada, and one of them is not called Reform — unless you're thinking of the Liberal Party, whose origins lie in reform of Upper Canada. The ironies abound in this realm.

My hunch is that when she was confronted with the accusation that there was a secret plan to cut social programs, Kim Campbell would have been better off to say, it's not secret, here is the plan — to say that she was prepared to put programs on the line because that's how committed she was to cutting the deficit. But she wasn't prepared to say that. She revealed herself as lacking commitment on that question. My sense is that she was so concerned about protecting one flank from the Liberals that she forgot about Reform on the other flank. In a matter of days, the party's reported share of the vote dissipated such credibility as the party had remaining.

In addition, Reform now started to become visible. As Reform grew and started to get attention, Mr. Manning's appearances began to get serious coverage, Reform became progressively more credible on the deficit, and so on.

The remainder of the story is in two parts: the decline in Conservative credibility, which within days puts the Conservatives as far away from Reform as from the Liberals, and Reform pulling away on the deficit question. Reform is not going to get voters who don't care about the deficit, but it's more and more clearly the party for people who do care about the deficit.

In sync with this, as a kind of circular and mutually reinforcing process, Reform is also becoming a more viable party. In the run-up to the election, all the strategic considerations that are embedded in a plurality electoral system like ours were working in the Conservatives' favour. But in the span of a few days, those considerations were turned on their heads, particularly to the extent that Reform was geographically quite consolidated. As Reform grew, the Conservative vote became geographically more dispersed relative to its total. The logic of the electoral system was turned on its head and favoured the new emerging party.

I believe that the stimulus was the deficit question, but that's not all that follows from this. People whose primary concern was the deficit were not the only ones flocking to Reform — indeed, the flocking took a little while. Once the unravelling of the Conservative coalition was allowed to begin, all sorts of things came out. In fact, I would argue that the fastest shifts were not deficit-driven ones at all. They were group relations issues, French/English relations and others.

We devised a daily index to display responses in terms of respondents' attitudes to certain groups, from relatively favourable to relatively unfavourable. We took the percentage for Reform among the most unfavourable minus the percentage for Reform among the most favourable — the contrasting thirds — and then did the same calculation for the Conservatives. So here, for example, the least favourable third of the electorate was 10 points more likely to vote Tory than the most favourable third of the electorate, and similarly for Reform in this period.

As the Conservative party unravelled, much of the initial unravelling was people who weren't necessarily preoccupied with the deficit but who were preoccupied with ethnic kinds of questions, constitutional questions, immigration, racial minorities, and so on. Before the events of late September, even if you were a Conservative who was deeply unhappy with your own party's position on those questions, you felt trapped in the party, because the alternative whose positions you might prefer wasn't viable. With the viability issue solved, there was no reason not to go over to Reform. So for a time at least, the goal of Messrs. Stanfield, Clark, and Mulroney — a Conservative party purged of ethnic differentiation — was achieved. Unfortunately, the party was also collapsing in a heap.

With about a week to go in the campaign, the only people left in the Conservative coalition were people who, on these questions, were quite like Liberals. Everybody else had flooded off to Reform. At the very end, the voters who were quite like Liberals realized, I would argue, that voting Conservative would be pure self-indulgence — and they couldn't indulge themselves any more. If they cared about these questions, they had to go to the Liberals. So part of the Liberals' late surge — the surge that put them over the top to a majority government — was because of Conservatives preoccupied with national unity.

Was Reform a protest party? I'm reluctant to talk about it in those terms. A protest party, as

classically conceived, is one in which the connection between policy and the vote is rather weak. That's not the texture of the Reform vote. First, Reform did not get the vote of people who were experiencing personal economic distress or who were particularly concerned about the economic difficulties of the country. Once Reform displaced the Conservatives, Reform picked up people who would otherwise have voted Conservative — people less likely to report personal economic distress and less likely to think of the economy as being in trouble. In that respect the protest parties were the Bloc in Quebec and the Liberal party in the rest of the country.

A vote for Reform was quintessentially a policy vote. If it was a protest, it was a protest against three-party collusion on questions that were mainly constitutional in character, collusion dictated by the logic of trying to form a country-wide, single-party, majority government. At the same time, Reform was an ideal means for voters to convey to the political order just how concerned they were about the deficit — so concerned that they were prepared to vote for a party that would sacrifice social programs to fight the deficit. My conclusion is that a vote for Reform was a policy vote, not a protest vote.

The Reform vote was mainly a hollowing out of the Conservative party's core. True, there were former Liberals and New Democrats in the Reform vote, but the exchange with Reform from those old parties was no greater in 1993 than was typical in earlier elections. Canada is not a simple left/right party system — it's more complicated and multidimensional. There's always a turnover that seems to transcend the extremes, Conservative to NDP, NDP to Conservative. The flow from Liberals and New Democrats to Reform in 1993 was entirely typical of the flow in earlier elections. The difference was that no one was going in the other direction — how could they when there weren't that many Reform voters in the 1988 election.

On the Liberal vote, to the extent we can make sense of it from our data, my view is probably how the government itself sees it — as an endorsement of the status quo, of the delicate patchwork of programs and accommodations. We're not talking about people who want to do more. There was an unmistakable pattern of exhaustion with those kinds of things in our sample and in the electorate. Nonetheless, there is a vast body of opinion in Canada that is prepared to keep the show going along roughly the same lines as in the recent past, and the Liberals consolidated that vote,

including former Tories. So the high end of the group relations scale — concerns about programs, accommodation, and so on — was defined in terms of defence, not extension, of these phenomena.

Curiously, in another respect, the Liberals were quite like Reform, as opposed to what was left of the NDP and the Conservatives. In this election, on moral questions — which in terms of the structure of opinion are quite separate from questions of ethnic relations or economics — the Liberal vote was modestly traditionalist, as was the Reform vote.

In sum, I don't have a simple, straightforward answer to the question of what voters were seeking. In trying to sort through the entrails of the election, we discerned different meanings at different times. The considerations that drove the vote at particular instances and that were clearly pivotal in explaining the outcome, at least in 1993, had the power of unlocking other considerations. So the deficit got things going, but other questions, like the constitution, burst out once the deficit dyke broke.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Question no. 1

Much has been made of Reform's populism. How much did that influence voters during the campaign, and how did it affect Reform's eventual share of the vote?

Answer

Richard Johnston: We struggled with how to represent populism. It's one of these terms like protest; it has as many different meanings as you might want to ascribe to it. One has to do with alienation from the political class; we might get at this by measuring willingness to assent to the proposition that politicians are our moral inferiors. I don't like the particular question we framed on that issue, but we did have one. It was a modest part of the story, but I can't dismiss the possibility that we came up with relatively modest estimations of its effect because we had bad measures.

If you want to relate it back to the populist episode of 1992, part of what we picked up was the split of the Conservative coalition along [Charlottetown] referendum lines. Of those natural

1988 Conservative voters who voted no, very few voted for the Conservative party. Virtually all who stayed with the Conservative party had seen their way to a yes in 1992.

That's a sign of willingness to trust a political leadership. To the extent that what we detected was the same impulse that led at least some voters to a no vote in 1992, we were picking up populism again. The difficulty is that a lot of this overlaps with opinion on substantive issues, especially French/English relations.

Question no. 2

This election seems to have been about credibility. You began your polling at the dropping of the writs. How much of what transpired and what you tracked was in the cards already? For example, the Tory strength you saw in the first few days was really very soft and there was very little commitment there. How do you react to the suggestion that the stage was set for this well before the writs were dropped — in the election we saw something played out that had actually been decided, six, eight, twelve months, two years beforehand, in the Mulroney government and its unravelling?

Answer

Richard Johnston: I don't think you can dismiss that explanation out of hand. It might be that 1993 was analogous to 1984, where we saw a Liberal boomlet just after a leadership convention that also dissipated very quickly. We don't know precisely how quickly, but it might well have been at roughly this speed and scale.

The Conservative party's share of the vote on election day was roughly its average share in polls the previous January and February, before Mr. Mulroney announced his intention to step down. There is certainly no question that the coalition they had re-established was fragile. The crux of the matter might be whether they could have held onto the bulk of the coalition Campbell had pasted back together — at least enough to be the official opposition — by adopting the strategy they did not adopt, by staking out the deficit turf more clearly.

Or is it that the manoeuvring room was so narrow and the precipice so steep on either side that she was going to fall about as far as she did regardless of the choice she made?

We're talking about a random process. Some issue is going to come along to reveal vulnerability. This happened to be it, but another one would perhaps have come along and had the same effect.

I don't think we can dismiss your suggestion out of hand. We're still groping for a way to test whether it was inevitable — just a matter of waiting for an accident to happen — or whether it was, at least in some measure, avoidable. This is the presumption behind my argument that, strategically, Campbell should have gone after the deficit more aggressively.

Both interpretations are plausible. Certainly the evidence of polls before February — particularly if you compare it to the historical situation, say, before the 1984 election — makes a fairly strong case for the argument that events were foreshadowed.

Question no. 3

Considering that in the lead-in to the election the Conservatives spent a considerable amount of effort trying to get the population to believe that the deficit was a major problem, it's ironic that they were hoist on their own petard.

What was the effect of the electorate's perception of the major issue in the election? How important was the definition of the issues in the electorate's mind? There were at least two major issues — employment and fighting the deficit. It seems the Tories got confused about where they stood on both issues.

One comment from Kim Campbell that stands out in my mind — and I would be interested if you could remind me when she said it — was that it would be the next century before everyone got back to work. Was that early in the campaign?

Answer

Richard Johnston: Those were the two questions. More voters in our survey and in other surveys tended to say “jobs” rather than “the deficit”. We framed several questions on the deficit to get some sense of how it would work as an issue, rhetorically. For example, if you ask people whether

they are concerned about the deficit, they say they are. If you then ask, which is more important, fighting the deficit or maintaining social programs, in that context the majority will say fighting the deficit. The only way to trump the deficit is by asking, is it more important to fight the deficit or to create jobs? At that point a majority — but not everybody, a modest majority — would say it's more important to find jobs.

My sense is that Kim Campbell believed, or at least was pushed in the direction of thinking that she could battle the Liberals for ownership of jobs, optimism, that kind of thing. But it wasn't plausible for her to do it, coming out of the previous three years of a government of which she was a member.

If you're going to make a case for a made-in-Canada recession that your government has contributed to, you have to show that you believe in the fiscal and monetary stance behind that. Indeed, it might help if you showed you believed it even more than Brian Mulroney did. That might not have won the election, but at least it would have kept you in the game.

There wasn't a point where 1993 could have been like this, but in other elections, championing a minority position — but one held by a large minority — can win you the game. In a sense, that is what the Tories did in 1988.

There was certainly a large enough body of opinion that worried more about the deficit than about any of the things deficit reduction might put at risk. At that point Campbell was still more plausible — far more plausible — than Chrétien and the Liberals, and still certainly rivalled the plausibility of Reform.

Campbell made the statement virtually at the beginning of the campaign — it was Friday the 10th or thereabouts when she said this. Our tracking suggested maybe she did take a bit of a hit for it, but it didn't last.

I don't know whether strategists would counsel a party leader in a campaign to be content with being leader of the opposition, but it seems to me that's what she should have been. She should have been content to stay in the game. She had a crack at staying in the game by trying to retain her party's credibility, such as it was, on the deficit side.

Morning Panel Discussion

What voters got: The response in Parliament

Chair:

John Chenier
Publisher, *Lobby Monitor*

Panellists:

Jane Stewart, M.P. (Brant)

Michael Atkinson
McMaster University

Alvin Cader
CBC National Radio News

John Chenier: Last night, Richard Johnston showed us the very steep, swift and irreversible drop in voter confidence regarding Kim Campbell as prime minister. Subsequent to this drop, there was a drop in voter preference for the PC party. This took place very early in the campaign and coincided with the controversy about whether the Conservatives had a secret agenda for social policy reform. Mr. Johnston's conclusion was not that social policy was the issue on which the election turned, but that Kim Campbell was seen by her core supporters to be soft on attacking the deficit, and these core voters, who were firmly in the Conservative camp until then, left for Reform.

Three things happened then. The roughly 35 per cent of the electorate who were interested in or concerned about the deficit and who had been the Conservative camp started drifting off to Reform. As Reform became a viable alternative to the PCs, the drift away from the PCs to Reform accelerated.

This brought on the third event: the remaining part of the PC party — the “liberal” part, the part that was concerned about more traditional Tory values other than deficit reduction — was concerned about Reform's surging strength, and they deserted the Tories and went to the Liberals. Mr. Johnston argued that had Kim Campbell opted for a strategy of being tough on the deficit — even though this meant settling for being the official opposition — they would have fared much better in the election.

As for this morning's panel, Alvin Cader is going to start off with his views of what the

electorate seemed to be saying as he toured the country with the leaders during the campaign. Michael Atkinson will then talk about the importance or unimportance of responding to what the voters seem to have said during the election, and Jane Stewart will talk about the quandaries of doing so.

Alvin Cader: For me the reference point for this discussion has to be the election campaign, which began on September 8, a campaign in which I was assigned to report on the comings and goings and pronouncements of Jean Chrétien for 47 days.

In answering the question of what the voters sought and what the voters got, I could be out of here in 30 seconds. This is the answer perhaps — a *Globe and Mail* cartoon showing a very playful, contented Jean Chrétien with a sheaf of papers under his arm entitled “polls” and an attaché case labelled “Not Brian Mulroney”.

I'll try to go beyond the cartoon. My sense from day one was that what voters were looking for, hungering for, was a change from what the Mulroney government had come to represent. All kinds of descriptions come to mind — arrogant, patronizing, corrupt, dishonest, and mean. One only has to remember the nasty ads ten days before election day that played on Chrétien's facial deformity.

What the electorate was seeking was a return to honesty, trust, accountability, and respect. They felt their politicians and political institutions had stopped respecting them and had taken them for granted.

Just two days into the campaign, there was one of the many defining moments of the campaign. It was September 10th, and we were in a union hall in the north end of Toronto. Hundreds of unemployed construction workers were there. Chrétien had come to announce his much vaunted infrastructure program, and he was selling the message of hope to these unemployed workers, many of whom had given up hope.

Part way through his speech, Chrétien was interrupted by one of those workers, John Tomcoe, who was 39 years old, unemployed, from Hamilton, and a former evangelist preacher. With evangelical fervour and fire in his voice, he interrupted Chrétien and said, I'm getting tired and very frustrated because I have not seen a politician I can trust. Mr. Chrétien, can I challenge you to be the politician I can put my trust in? The crowd erupted.

Chrétien said, yes, yes, yes. The event was billed as a strategic policy launch of the infrastructure

program — perhaps the centrepiece of the Liberals' economic agenda — yet I felt like I was at a revival meeting.

For me and for many of my colleagues, John Tomco came to embody the mood of millions and millions of Canadians who had grown very cynical and very suspicious of their politicians and their political institutions.

The parties responded in various ways to this disenchantment, this disaffection, with the political system. Reform went into the campaign vowing to shake the system to its foundation, to purge it, and the Bloc québécois said it was going to Ottawa to get out of the system, to dismantle the system. Chrétien and the Liberals, I think, fell back on tradition and to a certain extent on nostalgia.

On the first day of the campaign as we got ready to board the Chrétien bus, Mr. Chrétien gave his send-off speech, and he harkened back to the good old days. He said, we want to go back to the good old days, when politicians were not held in disrepute and when people had jobs.

Throughout the campaign, Chrétien, rather than agreeing with the cynics, confronted them. Wherever he went, he said that politics was a noble calling, that he was proud to have given 30 years of his life to public life, and that he — voters should be assured — would restore honesty and integrity to public life.

The other day I was talking to a Liberal strategist about this conference, and he said that honesty and integrity were really the underpinnings of their entire election strategy. That message had to be hammered home. It had to resonate. By week two we owned the honesty issue, he said, and by extension we owned the election.

What has happened since then? The critics say that apart from the helicopter deal, the Pearson Airport contract, and the decision to lower tobacco taxes, the government really hasn't done a hell of a lot. It has been a do-nothing government according to the critics.

But the Liberals have continued to invest in the honesty and integrity issue that they began investing in during the campaign. The argument you hear from Liberals is that they want to get the plumbing right, they want to get the fundamentals right. That has meant more than 20 public consultations on things such as foreign policy, defence, social security, sales tax reform — which Jane Stewart is immersed in — immigration, you name it.

Again, this goes back to the lessons of Charlottetown and Meech Lake, which the Liberals seem to have learned: you have to listen to the people, and that's the fundamental building block on which you rebuild public confidence and faith in politicians and institutions.

As Paul Martin was getting ready to launch his pre-budget consultations last winter, he said, yes, the Tories held consultations, but we're going to be different. We're going to tell people why we're not doing certain things. We're not just going to do them and not explain why. We're going to tell them why they can't have this or why we will not do that.

Did it work? After the budget, Martin and the prime minister hit the road to sell the budget. I covered both of them. Wherever I went, I did not see the lynch mobs that greeted Michael Wilson and Don Mazankowski. There was barely a whimper after the budget, even though it had sweeping — some would say brutal — spending cuts on UI and transfer payments to the provinces.

All week long we've heard a lot of talk about the honeymoon. It has become a cliché. How long can the Liberals go without the bubble bursting? Did you ever expect it to last this long?

Jane Stewart: Yes.

Alvin Cader: A lot of your colleagues didn't. The explanation that has been advanced most frequently is the realignment in Parliament, the new composition of the House. We have an opposition that's fractured mainly along regional lines, the Reform party with its base primarily in the west and the Bloc Québécois with its focus almost exclusively on Quebec.

Last week, on the first anniversary of the election, the prime minister was asked whether he thought it would be this easy, whether he thought the honeymoon would last this long. He said yes, I found the job easier than I expected. I don't have a national opposition. There is no obvious government-in-waiting with a national constituency on the opposition benches.

Realignment has also resulted in a significant mood change in the House, which has worked to the government's advantage. There has also been a change in style. Jean Chrétien brings a homespun, earthy, simple, modest, "don't worry, be happy" attitude to the job. He talks about how the Cadillacs are in the garage, but "I drive a Chevy — no airbus for me."

Does he have a plan to keep the country united? Does he have a plan B? I don't need a plan B, he says. He wants to avoid creating the impression that there's a crisis. There are problems, and they'll work themselves through, but we don't have a crisis.

Brian Mulroney's departure has also meant less rancour in the House, although all you have to do is look at the Commons and you will see a House more divided than perhaps at any time in the country's history. Yet you don't hear opposition MPs accuse the government of Nazi-like, fascist tactics, like we used to hear from some of Jane's colleagues when they were sitting in opposition. Brian Mulroney's personality and style contributed to this atmosphere.

In terms of who is doing well in the opposition, clearly the Bloc Québécois has been the more effective of the two main opposition parties in the 12 months since the election. Last spring I was invited, along with two other journalists, to sit in on their daily tactics session. They start at 7 a.m. to prepare their daily strategy. They are remarkably well researched. They have focus, they have depth, and they have experience from Ottawa and from the National Assembly in Quebec City. They are very, very professional. Because of their status as official opposition, they have often set the agenda. They are aggressive. They keep the government back on its haunches, and on several issues they have forced the government to reverse itself, such as tobacco taxes, the Collège militaire St-Jean, and referendum spending. So the Bloc Québécois can argue with some legitimacy that they are fulfilling their mission. They have come to Ottawa. They are defending Quebec's interests, and they are standing up for Quebec.

The Reform party is a different story. Generally, they are perceived to have been a major disappointment in the year since the election. They are too docile, poorly organized, badly briefed, short on experience, lack a focus, miss opportunities, and sometimes look downright disconnected from daily events. Reform blew into Ottawa on a mission to do politics differently. They thought this was what Canadians wanted. So they were big on symbolic gestures. Preston Manning takes a seat in the second row. Preston Manning gives up the car — although we later learned that he has a fairly flush personal expense account.

Instead of having MPs assigned as critics, we saw this cluster model. It was critics by committee. They wouldn't stoop to heckling. Manning waited

two weeks before he reacted to Paul Martin's budget. There was a total aversion to tradition and almost a horror at doing anything that could be construed as having been co-opted by Ottawa. More often than not, their performance in the House had reporters scratching their heads and asking, what planet are these guys on?

That is changing. Reform seems to be transforming itself. In the last few weeks, certainly since the beginning of the fall session, Reform has been a very different presence in the House of Commons. They privately acknowledge that they misread things for the first six to eight months. They say, yes, we want to shake up the system but first we have to understand it. First, we have to position ourselves so that we can get to the controls.

Their performance has improved immeasurably. They're more combative, they have more focus, and they are more aggressive. An example happened yesterday during the question period debate about Michel Dupuy. Six months ago, the things Reform MPs were doing and saying yesterday would have been unthinkable. Six months ago, Reform would have been very polite and wouldn't have demanded resignations. Yesterday, they smelled blood and went for the jugular. They moved in for the kill. They realized they had a minister and a government on the ropes, and they went for it.

One party official told me the other day, it has taken a year, but slowly we are losing our virginity. That is not necessarily a bad thing. Ottawa has forced us to lose our virginity.

Because of numbers, the NDP is hardly relevant. It has almost no time in question period. It is limited to Members making a few statements and the odd news conference. The NDP's weakening has created a gaping void to the left of centre on the political spectrum. At times the Bloc Québécois has tried to fill that void, offering itself up as a champion of social programs. The problem is, though, that to Canadians outside Quebec, the Bloc Québécois is not their opposition party. So the Bloc lacks credibility on that score.

The Tories are virtually irrelevant in the House. Their only leverage is in the Senate. Jean Charest's best hope is the coming Quebec referendum, which he hopes to use as a springboard to rebuild the party.

At this time next year we'll know a lot more. We will have gone through Paul Martin's next budget. We will be either in the midst of a referendum campaign or approaching it.

Finally, I have an update on John Tomcoe, that unemployed pastor turned construction worker. He's still getting by on unemployment insurance. He got only 25 weeks of work last year. He's still disillusioned. Jean Chrétien has not restored his faith in politicians. He was told by a Chrétien aide that Chrétien would like to get in touch with him at some point to find out how he's doing. He gave him his number. John Tomcoe is still waiting for the call. John Tomcoe ended up voting Reform.

John Chenier: Thank you, Alvin. Michael, will you pick it up from there.

Michael Atkinson: Almost 40 years ago, a deservedly famous political scientist, Anthony Downs, observed that political parties don't get elected in order to fashion policies. They fashion policies in order to get elected.

He saw the political process in economic terms and interpreted elections as exchanges in a political marketplace. The policy positions that parties adopt during election campaigns are like alternative baskets of political goods offered to voters in exchange for their support. These baskets are opened, displayed, and even rearranged, but they are nothing more than instruments in the competition for political power in the Downsian world.

In this model of the electoral process, the parties are like firms, each searching for a product that consumers — voters — will buy. The search doesn't imply commitment to the product. It merely implies commitment to the sale.

If you select your policy positions in order to get elected, then election obviously is the goal. Once election has been achieved, policy positions would appear to be dispensable. Downs thought this wouldn't happen. Downs believed that it was in their interests for parties to be reliable — that is, to act on their policies once they achieved office. His reasoning was that a reputation for unreliability would keep parties out of office. It was in their interests, therefore, to connect the rhetoric of the campaign trail to a record of responsible parliamentary performance.

Downs went on to be one of the founders of the rational choice study of politics, an enormously influential movement in academic circles. He has been celebrated for years as a model builder in this tradition.

However, it's not clear that his expectations regarding the behaviour of parties in the post-election period have been borne out, at least not in this

country. Anyone who has observed politics in Canada for the last 20 years is well acquainted with the propensity of political parties to make vague electoral appeals that are forgotten, modified, or even reversed once office is achieved. Everybody remembers the Liberals' opposition to wage and price controls in 1974. They adopted them a year later. The Tories called social programs a sacred trust in 1984 and then moved to de-index them in 1985. In addition, major policy initiatives have been introduced with little or no discussion of them during election campaigns. The introduction of the national energy program was not presaged by the 1980 election. The GST was not the key issue in 1988. Finally, policy pronouncements during election campaigns are often abandoned once a party is in power. You'll recall the Clark government's promise to move the Canadian embassy to Jerusalem. It seems likely that the Chrétien government will find a way to back away from its promise to jettison the GST.

Under these circumstances, it's a mystery to me why analysts persist in using the word "mandate" to describe election results, yet they do. If by "mandate" we mean that a party proposes a policy direction and a program to achieve it, the electorate votes for the party on the basis of that policy direction, and the party subsequently enacts its program, then there are virtually no mandates whatsoever in Canadian politics. The idea that the Conservative government of Joe Clark had a mandate to introduce mortgage deductibility or even that the Mulroney government had a mandate to introduce free trade is a serious distortion of what transpired during those election campaigns.

For one thing, specific proposals like those are rare, because they typically split the electorate. What parties prefer are vague packages that emphasize goals that everybody wants. When specific proposals are floated, it's the reaction of the electorate that determines whether there's anything resembling a mandate. In 1988 — arguably the election that most closely resembled a referendum — only a small minority of voters supported either the Conservatives or their adversaries solely because of free trade. Only about 15 per cent of Conservative voters, for example, were drawn to the party because of the free trade issue. The idea that the Canadian electorate was instructing the government to pursue free trade is simply a distortion.

Does this mean, then, that we should expect no connection whatsoever between electoral agendas and parliamentary ones — in other words, go to the

opposite extreme of the Downsian position? I don't think that would be reasonable either. But it does mean that connections occur because the governing party chooses to make them. Traditionally in this country there have been very few constraints on those choices, mostly because of the nature of our political parties and the kind of party system we have.

In Canada the government comes to office as a coalition of interests, often a very loose coalition, as Richard Johnston explained to us last night. They are attached to one another by belief in the leader, belief in a set of symbols, and the natural desire to reap the rewards of office. The election will have been a source of some strategic lessons but virtually no policy direction. The only mandate the government would have is what Harold Clark and his colleagues have called a performance mandate — the mandate to govern as it sees fit and to produce results.

Now, perhaps you think that whatever truth there may be in this analysis of Canadian electoral politics, the Chrétien government broke the mould in 1993. They proposed a package of specific proposals, published it, and spoke to it during the campaign. Do the red book proposals establish a connection between electoral and parliamentary agendas and hence restore the kind of integrity that Downs felt rational voters would naturally want?

The red book does represent a change in the style, if not the substance, of brokerage politics in Canada. It does not make the Liberals a party of principle in the sense that their proposals will remain consistent over time, nor will it allow the government to argue that it has a mandate, because very few people were aware of the specific contents of the red book. I would be astonished if that content influenced more than a tiny proportion of the electorate in October 1993.

But the red book does give the government and its critics a visible standard against which to measure progress, a kind of reliability test — just the sort of thing Downs expected. In that sense the government has bound itself to an agenda that will become less and less relevant and may become more and more uncomfortable as time goes on.

However, let's not presume that the Chrétien Liberals are seriously hampered by this agenda. In the first place, the government is free to decide where to put the emphasis on elements in the program. For example, the red book did not anticipate that the minister of finance would emphasize deficit cutting

as the route to job creation. The infrastructure program was supposed to have equal billing, but the infrastructure program has a limited shelf life. It will soon be over and forgotten. I doubt that it will interfere with Mr. Martin's new priorities.

Second, the red book did not stipulate a timetable for the government's agenda. So while the overhaul of social programs was supposed to take place — if you check the book — in close consultation with the provinces, it's hard to object when the government decides it is going to devise its own strategy first and open up the consultation process and then maybe get to the provinces later on.

Third, for all its specificity — and in some places the red book is really quite remarkably specific — it is still not legislation. When it's translated into legislation, some of the specifics and some of the contents of the red book will end up being changed. For example, according to the red book, the promised ethics counsellor is supposed to report to Parliament. But Bill C-43, the bill intended to impose greater burdens on lobbyists, indicates that the ethics counsellor will report to Parliament only on some matters, namely those relating to lobbyists. When it comes to ministers and senior officials, the prime minister will remain in charge, as we have been discovering yesterday and today.

Finally, the red book is of necessity an incomplete document. It doesn't pretend to anticipate everything that will happen during the government's life in office, and in some areas, specifically the constitution, it is strategically silent. Here the party has decided to steer discussion away from sensitive issues, even though the leadership was well aware these questions would arise before their term was over.

Incidentally, I don't criticize the government for any of these changes. I'm merely pointing out that whatever the red book did — and I think the red book has established a benchmark — it does not bind the government terribly tightly to a program and allows considerable freedom of action, which the government is quite reasonably — indeed rationally in Downsian terms — taking.

Not only does the red book pose few impediments; it actually assists the party leadership. Having the semblance of a legislative agenda at the outset helped discourage those who may have wanted to return to the distributive politics of the Trudeau period, to reinvent DREE and so on. The red book makes it clear that the government has other pressing priorities. In terms of the party leadership, I think the red book could really be an advantage, a lever.

Most important, by choosing strategically from among the red book proposals, the government can capitalize politically on the integrity deficit bequeathed by Mr. Mulroney. By integrity deficit, I don't mean the ethical problems Mr. Mulroney and his government encountered but rather the perception that Mr. Mulroney and his predecessors often made promises and failed to deliver.

Rational voters, Downs insisted, want to trust their government because it is so expensive, in Downsian terms, to have to monitor your government closely, watching everything they do and criticizing. It's far better to work on the basis of trust. Trust is the most efficient way to ensure reliability and the translation of promises into action. The new Chrétien government has every reason to want to nurture that sense of trust. In Downsian terms, this isn't a matter of behaving ethically on the part of the Liberals, it's a matter of behaving prudently.

John Chenier: Thank you very much. Now it's up to Jane Stewart to tell us how it really is.

Jane Stewart: I want to talk about what we MPs see as what the electorate told us they wanted over the course of the campaign. By and large, I agree with both Michael Atkinson and Alvin Cader on their assessment of what voters wanted. I didn't have the benefit of listening to Richard Johnston, but I did have the benefit of knocking on thousands of doors during the election campaign.

I thought the voters were telling me three things. They were definitely concerned about issues of policy. We talked about jobs, fiscal issues, the GST, deficit and debt management, and crime and justice.

Second, there was an all-encompassing sense that the electorate wanted government to do things differently. People felt divorced from government, that decisions were being made in a vacuum. Things were happening and they were saying, hold it, that's not what we want to happen. How do I get control of this again and let people know I count? It was the idea of wanting to participate and have a connection with governance.

Third, the issue of integrity. People were frustrated with government. They didn't trust us. I got more spitballs than I did handshakes. Here comes another politician. We can't stand your type. We don't want to talk to you. It was ugly out there — scary in fact.

Those were the three areas I felt I had to

deal with during the campaign and now feel responsible to do something about as a Member of Parliament.

So what am I doing about them?

I don't want to spend too much time on policy. But the vehemence with which the electorate expressed its views had much to do with the other two aspects — the process by which government was managing itself and the frustration it was causing the electorate. So they really were angry about certain policies.

However, when we think about the notion of participation — Canadians wanting to be more involved in their governance — it's not so strange, because in many other spheres in society we're seeing the same kind of need. As a human resources consultant I spent a lot of time in the last few years helping management change its strategy from a top-down approach to a more participatory approach, using human resources fully and extensively and building broader partnerships in the private sector.

There's a lot of information out there. We're all smart. We all want to take part. It was that issue of feeling divorced from the process of government that encouraged me to get involved, because I could see different methods and different ways for government and Parliament to respond to individual needs.

So what am I doing? During the election I held public meetings and encouraged people to come together, identify issues, and talk about strategies and concerns. They weren't particularly well attended, except by members of the Liberal party. People were still thinking the meetings were political, and they weren't comfortable participating.

On being elected, it was very clear to me that I had to develop very clear and consistent lines of communication with my electorate. I used the typical householders that are mailed to constituents, but there was a sense that the electorate was saying, we don't want you spending money on us. Keep us involved, but don't spend money.

So I looked at the communities and asked, how do I make these connections? There are lots of ways, and they're free. Every week I write an article in our local paper that gets delivered to every household. I don't write political articles. I write information articles about what's happening on the Hill, what the issues are, what my sense is, and where I stand on the issues, and I ask people for their advice and comments. I get a lot of feedback from those articles. Cable TV is another important and cheap

way of reaching the electorate. Many of us are using those strategies. The resources are clearly available to us, and they're helpful.

Then there are public forums or town halls. Just before the last budget I had my first post-election town hall. It was not particularly well attended — about 30 people. The press didn't play it up too much — there may have been something in the local paper. People were still a bit shy about attending, not believing it was for the whole constituency, thinking it was a Liberal-type meeting. It worked out very well, and it gave me really good data with which to prepare and present my speeches to the House of Commons.

I recently held a town hall meeting on social security reform. More than 100 people come out to talk about social security reform. It was an incredible event. We broke into groups, people got into it, we focused on detailed aspects, and we had a very enlightening and encouraging debate.

At the constituency level, MPs are trying to connect and to keep the public connected with what's happening. In answer to Alvin's question — are you surprised the honeymoon is still going on — I have to say that I'm not, because my job is to make sure it continues and to recognize that what people really want is to participate in a way that is appropriate. I don't think they want to have to be vigilant. I do think they want to be able to trust the government, but they still want to know they have their hands on it.

As far as what we're doing on Parliament Hill to connect with our electorate, we are having things such as take-note debates. For the pre-budget debate, I made my speech based on what my electorate was telling me. The take-note debate on Bosnia and on cruise missiles — these kinds of things help us participate more effectively as Members and representatives.

Also, the committee process is changing; for example, some bills — and in the future I hope it will be more bills — go to committee before second reading, before Parliament has accepted the bill in principle. The committee can then get an understanding of what the bill is intended to accomplish, get input from the electorate, change the content of the bill, then bring it back to the House at that point. These structural things are changing Parliament in a way that we hope will keep us connected in a more sensible way to the Canadian people.

Integrity was the third aspect I sensed was

of real concern to Canadians. As MPs in the constituency we now think about things a little differently. In the old days, the big thing was how much money you could get for your constituents — how you could make big announcements about finding \$100,000 or \$50,000. My sense is that people don't want to hear that any more. The last thing I want to do is go into the riding and say, I'm bringing you a sugarplum, here's the money. They don't want to hear that. What they want to hear about is the results of that dough.

So the work is about making sure the resources get into the communities, but the announcements have to come after, in the context of what the successes were. If there was extra money to hire young people through the summer, they want to know how many, what they did, and what the value added was. It's a shift in the kind of communication.

Referring to Michael's discussion about the red book. Again, it's not so much the content but the process. For me, the red book really epitomized a change in process — that yes, we're willing to outline for Canadians a strategy, a certain level of commitment, that is something they can count on and use as a checklist. Maybe the electorate wasn't that familiar with what was inside, but they sure knew we had a red book and that we were making a commitment to follow it. In the context of our caucus and the direction the prime minister gives his ministers, that's the agenda. The message is, make sure you meet our red book commitments in your ministry. That's really how they're being measured by the prime minister. So it's happening.

For a Member of Parliament, it's a marvellous tool to refer back to. In conversation we say, that was in the red book, that wasn't in the red book, this is how I'm interpreting it. It is a document that is being used. You'll see that as we build with Lloyd [Axworthy]'s proposals and Paul [Martin]'s proposals that this strategy is one of the disciplines we're imposing on ourselves. To date, it has been quite good at keeping us together — and keeping 177 Members and 40 senators together in a caucus is going to be a heck of a challenge. This is a tool we need.

As a rookie MP who came in on the wave of change, these are the things we're doing that I see as different from the past. Those of you who have been on the Hill much longer than I have may say, it's not too new to us. I'd be interested in your comments. But I think the Canadian people were saying, we've had enough of the last nine years — and even before

that. We want something that looks different. That's what got me here, and that's what is required of me as a good representative of the people who elected me.

John Chenier: Thank you, Jane. As you can see, there are rookies and there are rookies. Jane, of course, is the daughter of Robert Nixon, so you can see that she's inherited some of the political genes in the family.

We'll take questions from the floor. I'm going to use the chair's usual prerogative to put a question to all the panelists. Everyone has stressed how important integrity was to the election of Jean Chrétien. What do you think of the government's position on the GST as it now stands, the Dupuy affair, as it unfolded yesterday and continues to unfold, and more subtly perhaps, the perception people have of the government's motives in the social policy review?

I draw your attention to a poll in *The Financial Post* last weekend that showed that 65 per cent of Canadians are perfectly prepared to see social policies reformed to make them more effective. However, when you ask them what they think the government's reasons are for reforming social policy, 65 per cent believe the government is doing it to save money. If the government is saying that it's not to save money but to make it more effective, yet 65 per cent of the electorate are saying, we don't believe you, is this not going to have an impact on the way people perceive the integrity of this government, and could it not come crashing down if a viable opposition were to emerge?

Jane Stewart: When we look at social policy reform, maybe we should talk about timing. Should Paul have gone first with his budget measures, or should Lloyd have gone first with his social policy proposals? Clearly, the two are intertwined. We ran on a two-track policy — we're going to have jobs and growth and we're going to manage the deficit, and we're going to do it in a balanced and effective way.

If you look at the documentation, the three goals the government set for itself in Axworthy's social security review were, one, to make sure that we focus on employment and on getting people back to work; two, that we focus and take aim at child poverty; and three, that we do it in an affordable way. So the two contexts are right there in the documentation.

Certainly from the point of view of an MP, I make darn sure that both those messages are out

there. I think it's a matter of how you interpret it. I don't feel compelled to focus on one side or the other. I think both pieces are there, and I believe that's how it's being presented.

John Chenier: On the other issues?

Jane Stewart: The GST issue is going to be an interesting one. The committee has heard from a lot of Canadians on this. The messages we got were, boy, we hate this thing, but by and large we accept the fact that you need the \$15 billion in revenues, and there are opportunities to change the tax and make it better. I thought the committee came up with a reasonable suggestion. We'll see how it works out. Unfortunately the provinces are still suggesting options — they know they're on the hook for this one too.

Alvin Cader: I haven't followed the GST issue, but on the Michel Dupuy affair, clearly, this has scratched the squeaky clean veneer of the government. It is a serious bit of damage, primarily because the prime minister and his candidates emphasized the issue during the campaign. Two days ago in Vancouver, the prime minister was crowing about a scandal-free year in office, then two days later he was saddled with his first bona fide scandal. When you set the bar of probity so high, you have to meet it.

In terms of the social security review, there are many who agree that Paul Martin should have gone first — to set the tone — and that the Axworthy initiative should have followed, then Manley's initiative, followed by Massé's program review.

The launch of the social security review — the green paper — was a disaster from a strategic perspective. Just before the launch the CBC interviewed the deputy prime minister, Sheila Copps, for television and radio, who said on five different occasions in five different ways, this exercise has nothing to do with the deficit, it has nothing to do with cutting costs. The morning of the launch, on the front page of the *Toronto Star* — that good Liberal paper — was a story based on a leak of an internal government document talking about \$7.5 billion in additional cuts that Paul Martin and Lloyd Axworthy have secretly cooked up.

The problem is that it revived memories of the Tories and their hidden agenda. Many people argue that the government should have said, yes, we do want to save money, but yes, we also want to improve the social security system. But the pretence

of saying they just wanted to improve the system, that they didn't want to hurt anyone, seemed to call the government's honesty into question.

Michael Atkinson: I've seen a lot of scandals, and what has impressed me is that how the scandal is managed once it breaks is critically important in determining how much it damages the government. The fact that a minister made a mistake — Mr. Dupuy said he had made a mistake — is not particularly important in and of itself. What is important is knowing you have all the information. A lot of prime ministers in the past and people in other jurisdictions have been bushwhacked by their own supporters who have not told them everything. So it's critically important to know as much as possible.

Of course the prime minister, unlike the rest of us, has to make a decision at the front end of this process. The rest of us get a chance to listen to the discussion and debate what this really means. The prime minister doesn't have that benefit. He has to quickly make a decision.

When I used the term integrity, at least in the last part of my discussion, I wasn't referring so much to these incidents, which will happen. The real question is whether the government comes clean. It is far better to come clean. I don't know what the truth is, but if it is true that some kind of arrangement was made between Axworthy and Martin on the subject of the deficit — and I think that in the minds of voters it would seem rather unreasonable not to pull these two major policy thrusts together — it's far, far better to say so.

I take a lesson from Richard Johnston's discussion last night. It's far better for the government — and in the case last night, for Ms. Campbell — to say, yes, we are deficit cutters. People understand that and even reluctantly accept it. If you try to play both sides...

If we're talking about new politics and what people expect now, my sense is that they expect you to come clean. If that means putting damaging stuff on the table, stuff that may hurt in the short run, let it happen. It's almost always less damaging than to have it dribble out, so that eventually you contradict yourself, and reduce the level of trust people have.

John Chenier: Jane, you mentioned that you run town hall meetings and that people told you during the campaign that they want to be listened to. They don't want to supervise government, but they want a level of trust and they want to be listened to.

This government appears to be very anxious to consult with the people, but is there an adequate model for this? Are the people ready for this? Are there ways for them to participate? Do they feel it's meaningful?

In the next five weeks the committee on social policy review is going to tour Canada and stop in 41 different cities. Compare that to Senator Croll, who took 18 months to cross the country and talk about poverty.

Do you not think that could start breeding cynicism among the electorate, who will say, they're not really listening, they're just passing through, but the decisions have already been made. Might this not backfire if it's not managed well?

Jane Stewart: That's an excellent point. It's interesting to look at the difference between our response and the Reform party's interpretation of what people were saying when they said they wanted to participate. Reform is saying, people want direct democracy. We're going to have a button in everybody's house. They can just push it, and we won't need parliamentarians any more. I don't think that is really what people want.

On our pre-budget consultations, we need to be clear with Canadians about what we are in search of, so that we're not just listening to everybody say, yes, we have to cut, but don't cut us. We have to have a very clear agenda and a clear line of questioning so that we do come back with some practical answers.

We are learning how to do this as we go. We are just developing these strategies, and the dynamics are only now becoming apparent. We have to manage the process effectively if we're going to be able to use this strategy as a good model and a good tool. The implications of this kind of approach are just starting to be revealed.

A lot of Members of Parliament are holding public meetings on the social security review, and they need models of how to get the information out and what to do with it. This isn't something that has typically been included in Members' budgets.

Alvin Cader: The Liberals have embarked on more than 20 public consultations on a wide variety of subjects. It reminds me of Brian Mulroney's comment when he first came into office — give the Tories six months and Canadians won't recognize this country. If the Liberals ever get to implement their full agenda, they will make Canada

much more unrecognizable than the Tories ever would have.

To lay the groundwork for that, they have to massage the public. They have to prepare the public. In some cases the public is probably out in front of the government; in other areas, they'll need to be dragged along. From the government's viewpoint, consultations are very crucial.

However, it's Pandora's box. You open up the process, and people start telling you what they don't want. They start drawing lines in the sand, and when those lines are crossed, they get angry. Cynicism wells up, and we hear the old complaint, the politicians don't listen to us. They hear us, but they don't listen to us.

Another danger is that politicians, the leadership, start hearing voices that don't exist. Paul Martin is sometimes prone to this. At the first session of pre-budget consultations in Halifax last January, he addressed the opening session, then he attended each and every workshop with a gaggle of reporters in tow. At the end of the day, in a scrum, Paul Martin said, I heard a very powerful consensus today for sweeping cuts to social programs and UI and a very strong voice for closing off tax exemptions and sealing loopholes.

But in the reporters' view the consensus was far more general, far less specific. The reporters had attended the same sessions as Paul Martin and hadn't heard those voices. The danger is that, again, it feeds a suspicion that politicians have their minds made up, that they know generally where they want to go.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Question no. 1

We've been hearing the view that the Liberals are doing politics differently, but there has been no reference at all to the two major opposition parties that are now in the House.

Alvin began by talking about a House fractured on regional and ideological lines and about the problems of irrelevance facing the Reform party when they found that their new kind of politics just didn't work.

How will this strange new Parliament develop over the next couple of years? My own sense is that there may be more convergence as the

Bloc finds that Ottawa isn't such a bad idea and as some of them who have spent little of their professional or political lives outside Quebec begin to realize there is something out there in the rest of the country.

I'm looking for forecasts and predictions particularly in terms of the evolution of Parliament from the rather strange beginnings of a year ago.

Answer

Michael Atkinson: In all likelihood an institution like this will, in fact, drive people who come with separate agendas and separate experiences into a common kind of experience. I think you are absolutely right in anticipating that there will be a convergence.

In fact, the theme of policy convergence, if I may reach outside Parliament, is one you see a lot in the academic literature — the observation that not just in the jurisdictions in Canada but around the world, policy makers are gravitating to similar kinds of solutions. A lot more attention is being paid by people in Ottawa to what is happening on the European continent and elsewhere and to bringing those lessons home. Of course, with communications being the way they are, it's not possible any more to have private experiments. Very quickly the whole world learns about them.

My guess is that in the context of Parliament you are right. There will be learning. The parties will come to resemble one another more. They'll also come to resemble parties of the past more, such as the kind of behaviour we came to dislike in question period. We will see more of that, although I suspect it will be tempered to the point where Canadians will find it more digestible than they found it earlier on.

In the end, however, we know what the job of the Reform party is. The Reform party has to split the country, or at least be complicit in the division of the country, or Mr. Manning has no prospects of forming a government.

The Bloc Québécois, no matter how friendly its MPs become toward the rest of the country, cannot, for credibility's sake if nothing else, tone down its basic separatist appeal. In that sense, at the end of the Parliament the parties will be as recognizable as they were at the beginning.

Toward the end of the Parliament, though, there may be some thoughtful attempts to build coalitions, especially on the part of the Reform party. That is the party that will make the most changes in

the way it reaches out to Canadians. It has to do that, or it won't survive. It will be submerged by a resurgent Conservative party.

I'm less comfortable predicting what will happen to the Bloc, especially because we're going to have a referendum in Quebec. After that, it's hard to tell. There will no doubt be convergence along some dimensions. In the end, though, the parties will still be recognizable.

John Chenier: From my perspective there is a tension in this Parliament — perhaps more so than in any other — about the role of the individual MP versus the party. This tension is being played out certainly, as Jane mentioned, in the Liberal caucus, where there are divisions within the party.

Jane Stewart: I didn't say that.

John Chenier: Sorry, it was someone else. Another MP leaked it.

Obviously, the Reform MPs have a very different idea of what an MP should be or do — they are in a state of transition, as the initial concept doesn't seem to have worked out very well. It's still a long way from what we think a traditional backbencher does. When I spoke to a lot of the rookie Liberal MPs, they had a very different view of life as a backbencher than the MPs in the last Parliament.

The tension comes from trying to play a meaningful role — going out and consulting with the people — but at the same time facing the realities and the pressures of the government trying to get its agenda — which is not necessarily the MPs' agenda — through the House. This tension is still being played out, and it will go on for the next five to eight months, perhaps longer. Eventually, it will resolve itself. If things continue as they are, we'll wind up with a Parliament like we've always had. The institution is very resilient. It can impose a role on MPs. Parties can impose a role on MPs.

Question no. 2

I'd like to return to the question of consultation. We always seem to proceed from the assumption that consultation is good, that it's going to be useful, that it means horrible, evil politicians will go out and listen to what the public has to say. This

troubles me a great deal because consultation is about more than that. Consultation is also about education in the other direction.

I'm still disturbed about a poll by *Maclean's* and *Decima* in the midst of the Charlottetown debacle that said that 80 per cent of the public wanted to vote on whether we accepted the Charlottetown accord but only 20 per cent of them had ever read it. This is a serious problem, and politicians and academics are falling into a deep, dangerous pit by assuming that salvation lies in involving more people in the decision-making process.

As a veteran of a few public hearings, I have found that the people who make the most useful contributions are those who are most intimately involved in the issue. However, now there is a tendency to dismiss them as special interests. It's getting to the point where nobody who knows anything is listened to or has any credibility. The only people who apparently are entitled to wear the divine mantle of "We, the people" are people who have never read it, never studied it, and are not involved in it. How do we address that?

Answer

Jane Stewart: That's an excellent point. My practical response entails a couple of things. First of all, I do consider the work I do educational. Whether they use it or not, I do have a responsibility to provide the information. I also see a challenge role — people say, we don't want this, and I say, if you don't want that, you understand that the impact will be this.

Consultation isn't the only tool — it is a tool to deal with certain parts of the electorate. I don't just use the town hall meeting as my data base. I go to the experts, such as my local Canada Employment Centre, where people have been dealing with unemployment insurance for years, and say, what's working? What's not working? How do you see this affecting our community? I go to the social services folks and say, do we have the right programs for single moms?

We have a consultative approach in caucus as well — we all make our points of view known. We all have to recognize that consultation doesn't necessarily mean that what you want is going to happen. You get your opportunity to make your case. Sometimes you win, but sometimes you lose.

Michael Atkinson: The limitation of that perspective is that a lot of people expect that what the majority wants is what ought to happen. They take offence when a majority of the people express themselves in a particular way but the minority opinion prevails, because that's the opinion held by political elites.

The reason we have so much interest in matters of direct democracy — which I believe is antithetical to the kind of participation you're talking about: it represents a totally different model and understanding of participation — is the failure of the model you have suggested — not its intellectual failure, because the model of mutual education and understanding goes back to Plato, but its failure lies in the execution. It's the sense that governments were not engaging in that kind of mutual education, understanding, and exchange over a long period of time. That's what they find so appealing about direct democracy — people register their preferences and something happens in Ottawa. It's not something I find particularly attractive, but you can understand why people might be attracted to it if they feel discouraged about the other model and its operation.

Question no. 3

Reference has been made to the fact that one of the things voters got out of this election was a very different opposition. What do panelists see as the main reason the Reform party has not been as effective as they would have liked to be? I think one of the major reasons is that to get any attention from the media you have to be confrontational. Do the media determine how effective you can be?

Answer

Alvin Cader: Many Reformers feel they haven't had a fair shake from the media for much of the last year. I'm not going to try to defend my profession and say that we're entirely blameless. I go back to the attitude the Reformers brought to this town. Ottawa is fat city. The media are part and parcel of the Ottawa institutional structure. We are part of that central Canadian elite that the Reformers and their constituencies have come to mistrust.

At the parliamentary press gallery dinner this year, the prime minister was there, the governor general was there, Lucien Bouchard was there, Jean Charest was there. Two of the 52 Reform MPs showed up. The rest of them boycotted it. This is the one time of year when inhibitions tend to fade for reporters, politicians, and bureaucrats. The walls come down. It's an opportunity for people in my profession to get to know people in their profession at a one-to-one human level and vice versa. But Reform MPs had an absolute horror of getting sucked into the Ottawa vortex.

John Chenier: And they paid a price for that.

Alvin Cader: Yes. I don't think that members of the media said, we're going to get even with the Reformers, or we're going to ignore them. But Reformers did tend to ignore one of the institutions for which they had a fairly healthy mistrust when they came to Ottawa.

John Chenier: Thank you, Alvin. It only remains for me to offer sincere thanks to our panellists and to give them a complimentary copy of my own *Inside Ottawa* directory. Thank you very much.

Keynote Address

What voters got:

The impact on Parliament

The Hon. Gilbert Parent Speaker of the House of Commons

Gilbert Parent: This is a time when the Canadian public's opinion of politicians in general and, indeed, of the whole institution of Parliament is probably at one of its lowest points in history. The 1993 election results were one reflection of this. Witness the fact that of 295 Members of the House, 205 are brand spanking new. Of the three traditional parties in the House, the Liberal party formed a majority government. The New Democratic party was reduced to a number of seats that has not allowed it to claim party status, and the Progressive Conservative party, the governing party from 1984 to 1993, was reduced to only two seats. Two parties with only nominal representation in the House before the election gained enough seats to assume the roles of official opposition and the second party in opposition. In fact, the official opposition now holds only one seat more than the third party.

With a new Parliament Canadians expected many things — a more civil demeanour, a more serious focus on issues and less theatrics, a more responsive and responsible House of Commons and more chance for both the public and individual parliamentarians to participate in the decision-making process.

The Speaker is the servant of the House, and one of the goals I've set for myself is to work with my fellow parliamentarians to renew the public's faith in this our most important national institution.

I believe that the tone of the House has become more civil, notwithstanding the last two days, though the election of so many new Members has made this Parliament a very challenging one. Not only have these new Members had to learn to meet the demands of their new positions, but they have had to do so while the very institution in which they operate is changing around them even as they serve today. In fact, their presence has increased the pressure to change the way Parliament works. They have new ideas and their parties have different philosophies about how Parliament should work, and this environment presents the House and its Speaker

with new challenges, which I see falling into two areas — administrative and procedural.

Fiscal restraint has become a fact of life for government at all levels. As servicing the public debt absorbs an ever-increasing portion of tax revenues, those holding the purse strings have to reduce expenditures while maintaining the quality of services. The House of Commons is no exception. As Members of Parliament, it is up to us to show leadership and set an example. Members and their constituents want Parliament to be administered efficiently and transparently, and they want accountable management of its finances. At the same time, the work Members are called upon to perform requires the most efficient and modern equipment and services. The House must therefore meet this double requirement of financial rigor and quality services.

We have already gone a considerable way toward meeting this challenge successfully. In the interests of transparency, decisions of the Board of Internal Economy are tabled regularly throughout the year. In the past, they were made public only at the beginning of each session.

We have also modified some significant aspects of House administration. We have cut costs considerably and have begun an effort to rationalize operations. We have combined certain services and eliminated others. As you may know, we just offered more than 700 employees an early retirement incentive. We are proud of this initiative, because it is fair and responsible, and it meets the needs of employees who have served this institution well. This was part of our rationalization efforts and will allow us to reduce our staff complement without layoffs.

This is proving to be a fascinating Parliament from a procedural standpoint. Three forces are making us rethink how we function as a legislative body. First, there's a strong demand for Parliament to play a more important role in the development of policy and legislation. Second, there is a demand for increased public participation and influence in the work of Parliament. Finally, and especially important given the composition of this new House, there is a demand for a greater influence by individual Members.

These forces have already led to significant changes to our Standing Orders. Several changes in the structure of committees were adopted on January 25, 1994. Among other things they made committees more effective and reflective of changes in the structure of government. In addition, two special

committees, one to review foreign policy and one to review defence policy, were established.

On February 7 of this year further amendments to the Standing Orders were adopted by the House. Committees were empowered to consider the expenditure plans and priorities of departments and agencies and the finance committee was charged with undertaking pre-budgetary consultations starting in the fall, preceding the presentation of the budget.

Mr. Martin's appearance before the finance committee last week was the first time in my 20 years, and the first time I know of, that a finance minister has appeared before the committee as part of this process.

New options were introduced into the legislative process, including procedures to send bills to committee before second reading and to allow committees to prepare and bring in bills on their own. To date, under these rules, two bills have been sent to a committee before second reading — Bill C-38, An Act to provide for the security of maritime transportation, and Bill C-45, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* amendment.

In addition, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will put forth a bill to amend the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* and will report before Christmas.

Other minor amendments were made to the rules last spring, while another major set of amendments, which corrected technical anomalies and inconsistencies in the rules, was adopted in June.

The Procedure and House Affairs Committee continues to study issues such as forms of direct citizen participation, electronic voting, special debates, and a special question and answer period, to name but a few. The special question and answer period would consist of an extra half-hour or 45 minutes at the end of our question period where one minister would be questioned in detail on a department's budget or plans for the future.

In a break from the recent past, the new government has also been an active participant in bringing debate on major policy issues back to the floor of the House. This is a major innovation that is long overdue; parliamentarians should have their say not in response to something that happened but in helping to plan the way the government is going to act on certain issues. Since the beginning of this Parliament, the House has debated such important matters as social security, defence policy, budgetary planning, and Canada's role in international peacekeeping. All of these things touch us as Canadian citizens.

All of these developments seek to increase the real influence of individual Members in the legislative process and to make them more accountable to their constituents. The reforms to Private Members' Business in the last two Parliaments continue to bear fruit. For example, already in this Parliament, Bill C-207, *An Act to amend the Auditor General Act*, was sponsored by the honourable Member for Ottawa-Vanier. Mr. Gauthier's bill has since received royal assent. In my 20 years here, the only Private Members' bill that I can remember being passed was Sean O'Sullivan's bill to make the beaver the national symbol. Now other Private Members' initiatives have been adopted, and still others are before committee.

Canada's 35th Parliament is a very different one. The two major opposition parties have strong regional foundations. The official opposition is made up of Members solely from one province, Quebec, and is dedicated to that province's independence. Meanwhile, the Reform party's representation is based in the west, and its political views are a reflection of that support.

This underscores the fact that we have a strong parliamentary tradition in this country that respects the right of all Members to defend their political views whatever they may be. When I speak around the country, I am often asked, "What are you going to do with those separatists who want to break up the country? What are you going to do with these people who do not have Canada's best interests at heart? What are you going to do with these rednecks from the west who try to impose their right-wing views? And what do you do with these Liberals who are nothing more than trained seals in the hands of the Prime Minister?"

I tell them that I have a great advantage in being the Speaker of the House of Commons. The 295 Members of Parliament were elected fairly and squarely, and they have a rightful place as parliamentarians, no matter what province they come from, no matter what political views they hold. This is the strength of Parliament and the *raison d'être* of Parliament: to bring these views into the national arena.

This is where all the words have to be spoken — not only from the head, but from the heart. We represent the people of Canada. We are their voices. Should we not have very deep feelings? Should we not believe very strongly in the issues that brought us into public life in the first place? Would anyone dare to silence a Member of Parliament when he or she is speaking about issues that are important

not only to them but to the people who sent them here? My role as the Speaker is to ensure that all Members, regardless of ideology, are given a fair opportunity to express their views, and I will do that.

Regionalism has always been an important part of Canadian politics, and our system has evolved accordingly. This is simply more evidence of the strength and flexibility of the Westminster model and of its ability to accommodate diversity.

One year after the 1993 election, I believe we have shown Canadians a different face of Parliament. Make no mistake, the road ahead is not going to be a smooth one. The next 12 to 18 months will be among the most decisive and divisive months we have faced as a nation. But if I can paraphrase Winston Churchill when he spoke in our House on December 30, 1941, we have not come across the centuries, we have not come across the oceans, we have not come across the prairies, we have not come across the mountains because we were made of sugar candy. And we Canadians, are not made of sugar candy. We've been through wars, adversity, depressions. We've been through the glories of victories along the way, and we've build a compassionate, reasonable society, one that says, "Yes, I am my brother's keeper. Yes, we will devise programs that will cover Canadians." We do not flinch. We have not flinched in the face of adversity, and we will not flinch now. Mr. Churchill spoke for the British people, but today in this room I claim the same words and I speak for the parliamentarians and the people of Canada.

The pressures on us will increase and we'll all be called upon to adapt to changes, many of which are still unforeseen. We are making concrete, positive changes to counter the negative impressions some people have. We are doing our utmost to restore the confidence of Canadians in our democratic institutions, most specifically their Parliament.

Since 1867, the only people who came onto the floor of the House of Commons were our parliamentarians and the people they individually asked to come onto the floor. Last spring I decided, in consultation with my colleague Roméo LeBlanc, the Speaker of the Senate, that we were going to open up the floor of Parliament. This summer we had 500,000 visitors come onto the floors of the House of Commons and the Senate.

It is time Canadians claimed their Parliament. It is time for them to come into their own House, their own home, and see what it's like so that they can understand how we, the parliamentarians, face one another every day in confrontation.

We are not afraid of ideas. We are not afraid of the expression of ideas. This Parliament, although more civil, in my view, is still bringing forth the types of ideas that cause us to reflect and to make choices about what we want to be as a nation.

It is my hope that you will come to appreciate that although it is early yet in the life of the 35th Parliament we have made some progress. God willing, with good spirits, we'll continue to do so in the four years left in this mandate.

Afternoon Panel Discussion

Lessons from the first year of the 35th Parliament

Chair:

François Houle
University of Ottawa

Panellists:

Don Boudria, M.P.
Chief Government Whip

Gilles Duceppe, M.P.
Official Opposition Whip

Jim Silye, M.P.
Caucus Co-ordinator, Reform Party

François Houle: **Don Boudria** is the Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and was first elected to the Ontario legislative assembly in 1981 and to Parliament in 1984. He has been the Chief Government Whip since last September. The second panellist, **Gilles Duceppe**, Member of Parliament for Laurier-Sainte-Marie, was elected for the first time in 1990 in a by-election. He has been the Opposition Whip since October 1993. Finally, **Jim Silye** is the Whip for the Reform Party and represents the riding of Calgary Centre. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 1993 and has been the Whip since September 1994.

Don Boudria: I and 176 other Members of Parliament were elected a year ago on the government side of the House of Commons. Until that point I had the rather dubious distinction of always being in opposition. Between 1981 and 1984 I was a member of the provincial legislature at Queen's Park in opposition. I left in 1984 at the height of the popularity of Prime Minister John Turner to become one of his candidates. With a prime minister who was so popular, how could I possibly go wrong by running in that election? As you know, things turned out quite differently and I ended up in opposition. I sat in opposition between 1984 and 1988 and then again between 1988 and 1993. Today, it has been one year of being in government after many, many years on the opposition side of the House.

The work of a government member is quite different from that of an opposition member — this is one of the lessons of the past year. Another lesson is, being in government is more complicated than being in opposition — that's the first lesson for me. This isn't necessarily a great revelation. But I often look across the floor of the House and remember that I once had a very different perspective on the business before us.

The past year has also seen a different kind of Parliament than in the past. By definition, the official opposition is a regional party, a party that wants to represent a specific part of the country — it's not a criticism, it's a fact. Traditionally, the official opposition wants to replace the government and govern itself. In the present context, it's a bit different.

Nevertheless, despite what is apparent of the House on television, that there is considerable cooperation among the parties to make the chamber work well, to make the rules work, to accommodate the greatest possible number of Members.

As far as the government's successes go, I'm sure you'd like me to talk about that a bit, and my perspective may be somewhat biased. We have certainly delivered on a good portion of the commitments we made during the election campaign. I just happen to have a copy of the red book with me today. Mr. Duceppe said, "Do you have a copy of the red book?" I said, "Does Betty Crocker wear her hair in a bun? Of course I have a copy of the red book."

It's definitely not a cook book. Or a cooked book. We have delivered on many of the commitments we made, and of course; the commitments were for a full term of office. The commitments range from taxation to trade deficit targets, literacy initiatives and social security reform, the airport issue, the cancellation of the helicopter contract, which we couldn't afford, regardless of who was in power. We tackled a number of these in the first year, and we have gone some distance. The government has contributed through the infrastructure program and in other ways. We have restored confidence in the economy. We enjoy a high level of confidence. The number of jobs created is in excess of 325,000 since the election, and a number of things have turned around in that area. Obviously, there's still much to be done. There is still too much unemployment. But, I think the economy, at least at that level, is on the right track.

So we're on our way to delivering on the commitments we made to Canadians during the election, and I hope we'll be able to continue to do that for the rest of our mandate. One year later, I am satisfied not only with the government's program, but also with how the House has been functioning in general. All parties have made an effort to ensure things function well. There is reciprocal respect among the Members — I believe this has improved over the recent past and that Canadians are seeing it as well.

Gilles Duceppe: To pick up on one of Mr. Boudria's points, the Bloc Québécois considers itself a national party in the sense that the Québécois constitute a nation, and this party is a product of the nation of Quebec. This is not the first time Quebec has voted as a block (no pun intended). We have seen this phenomenon numerous times since Confederation, but particularly in the past 30 years, since the 1960s — a massive vote for the Liberals, followed by a massive vote for the Conservatives. So block voting was not new; in fact it illustrates the problem of the national issue between Quebec and Canada.

If we're looking at the various political streams represented in Parliament, it's important to note that the policies advocated by the Bloc are more progressive than Liberal policies of the past or Conservative policies of any era.

As far as the rest of Canada is concerned, Parliament is being seen in a new light following the birth of the Reform party and the virtual disappearance of a party that has been on the scene since the beginning, the Conservatives, and of a more progressive voice on the left, in the form of the NDP. We have been accustomed to a greater NDP presence in Parliament. Without passing judgement on either the Liberals or Reform, I would simply ask whether the full political spectrum is represented in Parliament. In my view, the progressive element in the Canadian electorate is much stronger than the number of NDP seats would suggest.

At the same time, this is a Parliament that is dealing for the first time with the central question that has animated Canadian politics since the beginning — the place of Quebec in Canada or, from the opposite perspective, relations between Quebec and Canada. Are there two founding peoples? Are there two nations? These questions have been asked since Confederation, but they've taken on much greater significance in the past 30 years. This is the

central political question of the day — regardless of the other economic and social issues. You may have different solutions for the issue, but you can't deny that this is the central question.

And now the issue is being tackled in a different way, by nationalists in Ottawa. In the past, Quebec has been represented in Ottawa by federalists, whether Liberals or Conservatives, who said, see, Quebec sovereignty isn't an issue — the fact that we're here proves it. But that wasn't a true reflection of reality.

This was not healthy for democracy in the rest of Canada, because Canadians were being exposed to only one side of the debate. They had only federalists in Parliament telling them what the reality was in Quebec. Now, they can see both sides of the debate — and I've been told that audiences for the proceedings of the House of Commons have tripled in the past year. If audiences are up, surely it's because it is more interesting, and it is more interesting because it is a real debate now, and this is healthy for democracy.

Another element in this Parliament is the fact that a sovereigntist party forms the official opposition. Again, this illustrates the contradiction at the heart of Canadian politics. We often hear questions about whether it's acceptable for the opposition to be made up only of MPs from Quebec. But we've often seen this situation — not only an opposition with just one MP from Quebec but also a government with only one or two Quebec Members. No one ever questioned their legitimacy, no one said it didn't make sense. They said, that's the way the democratic cookie crumbles.

Today, the rules haven't changed, but the reaction has. If previous governments and oppositions from which a significant part of Canada was missing were legitimate, then so is the present opposition. You can't change the rules just because you don't like the result.

In my view, Parliament is more disciplined today than in the past. There's less of a sense of a private club, with in jokes and backslapping and collegiality between the government and opposition Members. Perhaps this is attributable in part to the 205 new Members and the presence of the two new parties, which were not part of the private club formed by the Liberals and Conservatives and didn't have the same traditions and customs.

This has also been a Parliament of a great many consultations and little concrete action. Consultation is valuable, but a government also has

to show leadership and propose a program. It would be more useful to have consultation on specific proposals — should we tax RRSPPs or not? Should we do this or that? We shouldn't be trooping across the country to consult just for its own sake.

Jim Silye: Listening to my two colleagues, I feel all we have to do is get the Liberals to reread the red book, especially the chapters on patronage, integrity, the deficit and the debt. That would be a step forward. If we can convince the Bloc québécois to accept the principle of an economic union of 10 equal provinces, each with the same rights over language and culture, we should be able to welcome them to stay in Canada. Then we would be a true opposition and could work to keep the country together. Our job would be done and I could get out of this business in three more years.

However, that's probably a little bit easier said than done, so I will confine the rest of my comments to an assessment of the Reform party's progress after our first year in the House. Specifically, I would like to address where we were effective, where we were ineffective, and what we learned from our first year.

Let me spend a minute on my initial observations as a rookie. I am a businessman from Calgary dealing in the oil and gas industry. A lot of the business of oil patch involves integrity and giving your word and handshakes, and I brought that same attitude to Parliament. So far, with my colleagues, I have been treated with the utmost respect. Their word has always been kept and I have no problems.

There is a steep learning curve when you come to Ottawa if you've never been in politics. I enjoy it. It's a challenge, it continues to drive my efforts and it encourages me to come to work every day.

I've developed a new motto in this business. It's expect the unexpected. I came here with a plan and ideas. I was going to change the world in three great speeches in the House of Commons. I was going to fix everything that was wrong. I was wrong. It takes a little longer than that. Every day you plan for the next day and then, of course, the next day never unfolds the way you plan for it.

I would like to touch on four areas where we were effective. The Reform party and a lot of our Members brought a strength of conviction and reasoned arguments on fiscal policy, social policy and parliamentary reforms to the House of Commons.

A second area where we've been effective is pressuring the government to recognize the problem of the deficit and the cost of servicing the debt, which is the single biggest problem facing Canada today. This is what is threatening our social programs. This is what is threatening all our programs, and we have to solve the problem.

The link between deficit and debt and job creation is something the finance minister laughed at a year ago, whereas now he is accepting that there is a connection between reducing the deficit and creating more jobs. It's seven times better than an infrastructure program. The more we keep this pressure on, the more the government will start to do things that will be to the advantage of all Canadians.

The Liberals are trying to do a good job, but there are a lot of them and it's hard to get them coordinated, and they are starting to have some problems in caucus and differences of opinion on issues. I know it's difficult; we are only 52 and we have differences of opinion in our caucus.

Right now, what I see is a lot of the ministers talking the talk, but not walking the walk. The Minister of Immigration talks tough on immigration, but there's no action. The Finance Minister talks tough on deficit and debt and budgets, but the last budget was a do-nothing budget — no cuts whatsoever, other than cuts to programs they said they were not going to spend on. The mathematics I learned is that you look at what you spent last year and decide how much less you are going to spend this year. That's a cut.

Another area is justice, where the Justice Minister brought in legislation and Reform tried to make it a little bit tougher. Let's go after the criminals. Let's penalize criminals with tougher sentencing and protect victims' rights. We got legislation that does move in the right direction, but we feel it didn't go far enough.

We've been teasing the prime minister — referring to him as Dr. Feel Good and Do Nothing. What concerns us is that talk is cheap. There is a cost to inaction and discussion papers and consultations. The Liberals are going to add \$40 billion to the debt. They recognize that the deficit and the debt are a problem, but they haven't cut their spending.

The third area is downsizing the cost of government operations. I feel we've been effective. I think our member on the Board of Internal Economy, Stephen Harper, has done a good job with Mr. Duceppe and, prior to Mr. Boudria, Alphonso Gagliano. They have concentrated on reducing the

House of Commons budget. They are looking at the rules on MP travel, the food and beverage area, the size of the civil service, offering an early departure incentive program. It's important work, and I think they're doing an excellent job. The quarter billion dollar budget of the House of Commons is symbolic of all government expenditures. So if that department can show some leadership and can set an example, then all the other departments might follow.

The fourth area where we were effective is social policy and parliamentary reform. In debate we pointed out the problems with our social policy, and we offered some solutions. We led this debate three, four, five months ago, and we are glad to see a lot of those arguments and points included in Mr. Axworthy's discussion paper.

Regarding parliamentary reform, throughout the year we've held electronic town halls. We've advocated recall of Members of Parliament. We are debating that today, as a matter of fact, in the House.

We pushed for free votes. What we mean by free votes is that every vote could be free, and if it is a question of confidence in the government, follow it up with a vote of non-confidence.

Our objective in parliamentary reform is to have interaction with the constituents we represent and to make ourselves available and accountable to those constituents more often than just during the election.

This business of consulting Canadians through committee trips and hearings doesn't work. That is not listening to rank-and-file Canadians. I travelled with the finance committee on the GST study, and the same special interest groups showed up here in Ottawa as showed up in Quebec City and Edmonton. These are the people that lobby the government. They know how to do it. Ministers can then just have selective hearing and say, I heard Canadians. This is what they told us in Edmonton. This is what they told us in Quebec City. But these are not really our constituents.

Regarding where we were ineffective, I also see four areas. We came to Ottawa and announced proudly that we were going to do things differently. Then we got bogged down. We concentrated too much on the process rather than on the issues that got us elected. When we first came, we thought we could conduct ourselves in a certain way. We appointed a caucus co-ordinator. Now, a year later, we need a whip. So I think we're getting better.

Another area was our ideas on seating and where Preston should sit in question period. We didn't recognize how much the media feed on it.

We couldn't believe that the masses would fall for this stupidity and this theatre, but that's where it's at. So we had to learn to get our message across in a better way by using the tools at our disposal to get our message out to the Canadian public.

There's no recognition for the sacrifices we made. Not too many people recognized that after we got here, we did take a 10 per cent pay cut as a sign of leadership. If as a Member of Parliament I am going to ask Canadians to sacrifice, to do with less, to take more responsibility, I should set the example and be willing to take a cut myself.

The reason we did that was to put pressure on the government, the prime minister, and the cabinet to lead by example. Then when the prime minister and the finance minister talked tough to Canadians, they would listen more and be willing to comply. However, that fell on deaf ears, and it was our fault. We just didn't get the message out there enough.

Regarding MP pensions, our view on pensions is construed as a view on salary, and the prime minister just doesn't get that point. We are not making the point effectively. We are ineffective in getting our point across, and we have to get better at it.

On committee work, looking back, we didn't realize at first how effectively you can use committees. For committees that stay put, we can invite witnesses. We can ask committees to do certain studies on any particular issues. These tools are available to us. You have to appreciate that as 51 rookies out of 52, it took us a while to get a handle on it. Now we will be asking standing committees to review departmental spending, to get more information, to call certain witnesses.

The last area where I feel we were ineffective is in getting our message out about how ineffective the status quo is. We know it is ineffective. That's why the Reform party got elected mainly out west. They wanted to send a strong message to Ottawa. That's why the Bloc québécois won in Quebec. So we know that status quo federalism has a problem. If we still do politics the same old way, it's not going to make any difference. But we haven't done a very effective job of presenting our alternative to the status quo as represented by the Liberals. They believe they can make a difference by changing the people, providing good government, and I respect that. Let's hope they can move forward on it. The Bloc québécois feels that separation is the answer. We are in the middle. We believe we can make a lot of changes in our

system that don't require constitutional change, that can make a new and better Canada, and that we can work together in economic and social terms.

We need to look at decentralization, maybe some privatization, maybe some program elimination. We have to reduce government spending so that we can lower taxes and leave the money in the hands of the people who make it. That's what will turn the economy on. I am not an economist, but I believe the economy works despite government interference, rather than because of it.

As to what we have learned in the past year, there are three areas I'd like to touch on. As the Reform party we should go back to the basics, those things that got us elected — our fiscal policy, our zero-in-three program, our stance on criminal justice and the need to look after the rights of victims, and an agenda for democratic reform.

If all we do is change the faces but not the system, we haven't changed a thing. If Jean Chrétien doesn't do government differently from Brian Mulroney, we haven't changed a thing. To date those areas have not changed — we are still spending the way we were spending, we are still making appointments through patronage, we are still doing things that don't really keep us in touch with the Canadian public after we've been elected. I wish the Liberals would do a bit more of that.

Central Canada has a perception of us as extremists. Whether it is justified or not, we have to recognize that. There is a misconception out there, and we have to set the record straight. We are not anti-Quebec, we are not anti-immigrant, we are not anti-anything that moves. We are pro all these things. We just have different views on them, and we have to do a better job of getting that message out.

We have to offer Canadians an alternative. We have to become as effective as we can in offering that third option of a new and better Canada. We have to present it better than we have in the first year, to stick to our message, and to point out the urgency of the interest costs to service that debt.

These are the things we've learned. These are our goals and objectives. We have a lot of work to do, and we're trying to do the best we can. As rookies, after one year, a lot of Reformers are realizing that the work is going to be a lot harder than we thought. We have to dig a little deeper and raise our game one level higher.

François Houle: I will use the chair's privilege to ask the three whips to talk about something they haven't mentioned — party

discipline. What are the lessons of the first year of the 35th Parliament concerning that question? Has it changed or is it going to change? Or is it going to be as it was in the past — strong party discipline?

Don Boudria: The parliamentary system depends in part on party discipline — it's characteristic of our system of government, modelled on Westminster, that the government depends on the confidence of the House. This doesn't mean that every vote is a vote of confidence, but the fact remains that the government stays in power only as long as it has the confidence of a majority in the House.

Confidence votes, by definition and tradition, relate to the speech from the throne, the government's program, the budget, the financial measures needed to implement the government's program, and of course any specific motion of confidence or non-confidence.

I don't believe that party discipline is any stronger here than at Westminster. We used to hear figures quoted about the number of British MPs that voted against the party, but that was mainly in the '70s. Here the government has initiated some changes, such as referral of bills to committee after first reading, to relax party discipline and give Members a bit more leeway.

But should party discipline disappear entirely? My answer is no. I am one of those who believe that the influence of lobbyists is inversely proportional to the strength of party discipline. The example of the United States shows what can happen in terms of lobbyists and interest groups when there is no force for cohesion among the parties. I would welcome your comments on that theory.

Gilles Duceppe: People elected for a party are elected in the context of the party's program, which has been presented to voters during the campaign. We have to look at the parliamentary agenda in terms of that program. Members are going to adhere to the party line to the extent that they respect the platform on which they were elected and to the extent that they want to continue to be effective within the party. If they don't they're free to leave.

This happened at the beginning with the Bloc Québécois. Lucien Bouchard and others left. It is the responsible thing to do if you don't agree with the party. But if you do, you should stick to the party line. There may be issues on which discipline isn't so strict, but that too should be spelled out in the

platform. The Bloc did this with respect to abortion in the last campaign. We specified that it would be a free vote, and we made this clear to voters.

You can't separate the issue of party discipline from the fact that we're all elected as members of a party that supports a specific platform. We should also respect the electorate's decision — they knew what our platform was when they elected us, and we should respect that.

Jim Silye: The position of the Reform party on party discipline is that we favour a greater use of referenda and free votes in the House of Commons.

Three forms of representation are important for voters. One is the mandate theory, where you have a mandate to go to Ottawa to fulfil your red book, your blue book, your platform — and you stick to it because that's what you ran your campaign on.

There's also the delegate theory. I represent all of Calgary Centre, even those people who didn't vote for me, so it's my responsibility to keep in touch with them and then vote on their behalf as much as I can reflecting the majority point of view there. They also voted for me and the representation I offer on the basis of my personal abilities and strengths, but obviously that was a small factor in getting elected. I think voters want all three and sometimes it gets confusing.

On moral issues we believe that referenda are important because abortion, capital punishment, maybe even sexual orientation, if these issues are presented to the Canadian public, if it's a clear question, you have a true reflection of what society wants, not just what an MP wants, not just what the cabinet wants, not just what the government wants. I think it's important to remember that.

With respect to free votes, we're not saying a free vote on every bill because a government's elected on a platform. The Liberals have been elected. It's clear what their platform was. Therefore, any bills that they present in the House, they should have party discipline and caucus solidarity on those. That's why they got elected, and that's what the Canadian public wanted. They're the government.

But other issues that are not in the red book should be put to free votes in the House of Commons. Let MPs find out the wishes of their constituencies the best way they can. We have to work on that. It's in evolution. It's not perfect. Polls, phone-in shows, surveys — all these mechanisms are important to consider. If we did that I think governments would be a true reflection of the people that voted for it.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Question no. 1

Earlier this morning we heard that the government's honeymoon is over. Why did it last so long? If it is over, will civility we see in the House give way to a more belligerent atmosphere in the next two years or so?

Answer

Don Boudria: I'm not a proponent of the honeymoon theory — we're elected to do a job and we're doing it. People assess that individually, collectively, in polls, and at the next election — that's the real test.

I don't believe in representation by survey. When the difficult issues come up — capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia — I'm sure I've voted contrary to the majority opinion in my riding. But I was re-elected with 80 per cent of the popular vote. So I don't believe in honeymoons.

Will the government be more popular or less popular next month? We'll see. In any event, civility in the House — or the lack of it — isn't linked to the government's popularity — other factors are at work. In the last Parliament, for example, the House was actually more agitated when Mr. Mulroney was very popular. But other factors are at work — the way the Speaker handles the House, the way the public reacts to a raucous chamber, MPs' own discipline — and the factors and their interaction are constantly changing. Sometimes the public expects more decorum and sometimes it expects less. But my sense is that this Parliament, perhaps to the end of the mandate, will be much calmer and more civil than the past Parliament and certainly than the 1984-88 one, which was among the most raucous in memory.

Gilles Duceppe: The general approval rating that we're seeing across Canada doesn't apply in Quebec. The Liberals haven't been at the top of the approval ratings in Quebec since the election. In Quebec, the Liberals are being criticized as they aren't being elsewhere in Canada. But this hasn't kept the House from being more disciplined than it has been in recent years.

Our approach has been to present ourselves as responsible, disciplined Members who are working to advance the parliamentary debate, to

clarify ideas, not to provide an entertaining spectacle, which people don't want to see. In Quebec people are saying to us, first, that we're doing a good job and, second, that we're acquitting ourselves well in the House — we're hearing this even from those who don't share our position on the issues. So we have no intention of changing our approach. We can be very aggressive in a civil way. We can raise very profound issues while staying well within the rules.

Jim Silye: I agree that the honeymoon is over. The prime minister himself has said that the reason he is popular is that he's compared to the former prime minister and that makes him look good. I disagree with the prime minister on policies and on his government's lack of action. As soon as the walk catches up with the talk the honeymoon is over, because the Liberals have big problems in their own party.

The problems will start when they start introducing bills. Gun control has become an issue, and caucus is split. Budget cuts — caucus is split. Just wait until the justice minister introduces a bill to include sexual orientation in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* or the Charter. Watch the split in caucus.

As the whip in the caucus co-ordinator's office part of my job is to establish decorum. Whereas we sat there quietly before, we are a little more vocal now. Sometimes we go too far. But we will continue to ask the questions. We will continue to debate. We will continue to make our points and hope that the government listens. I don't see why we have to get into name-calling and personal grudges, because all 295 MPs are all here for the same reason — to do the best we can for the region we represent. The only thing we disagree on is how to get there.

Question no. 2

I would like to bring to Don Boudria's attention comments made in our workshop this morning. Participants observed that the Liberal caucus has quite possibly the best group of MPs ever elected to the House of Commons, in terms of education, experience, and personal qualities. The problem is that there isn't that much for these MPs to do — a chronic problem when there is a large majority. Scepticism was expressed about whether referral to committees after first reading and studies by committees would be enough to absorb the energy and the talents of these people.

Answer

Don Boudria: Yes, we do have a pretty good crop of people and a lot of talent in a lot of areas. The prime minister himself has referred to the A Team and the B Team. He was referring to the fact that the parliamentary secretaries are of very high calibre.

In terms of not having much to do, may I suggest that you chat with any committee clerk in this room about whether there isn't much to do. There are days when we just can't keep up.

I'm not very concerned, at least not in the immediate future, that MPs will be bored because there isn't enough to do. There's lots of legislation before committees. We have caucus committees in various policy areas, and we have done a lot of work scrutinizing legislation from our own party perspective. It's not an effort to keep them busy — there is work to be done. We don't have to concoct schemes or find something for them to do.

Although we do have a comfortable majority, it's not as lopsided as 1984, when there were very few opportunities for Conservative MPs to participate, particularly in committees with 11 Conservatives, 1 Liberal and 1 New Democrat. Now the ratio on committees is such that most Liberal MPs participate in most committees on most days.

Will the legislative agenda become so light in the future that it will create a problem? I doubt it. Usually as a Parliament progresses the workload tends to increase rather than decrease.

Jim Silye: Our party is concerned about parliamentary reform and the use of committees and effective government. If you're not a cabinet minister, if you're not a parliamentary secretary, the third best thing you can be is a committee chair. But it's disappointing that MPs sit on committees on behalf of the government. Opposition Members have a little more weight — they can question, they can query, they can use committees more effectively. But it's a place to keep the government MPs off the minister's back.

Whether a bill is introduced after first or second reading, it's still the end of a process for all intents and purposes. It's not the beginning of a process. You can make some minor adjustments or amendments, but the thrust of the bill is not going to change because it's a government bill.

There is a more effective role for committees. The finance minister has said that he is

going to give MPs a bigger role in pre-budget consultations. What better process could you have than to look at the estimates from last year — have department officials come to standing committees to review what was spent last year, decide whether they should spend more, decide whether they should spend less, have an exchange of ideas with department officials and give that information to the minister of finance.

The number of bills you can pass and what you can do for a country is a function of the amount of money you have to spend. So that would be a worthwhile exercise, and the finance minister could do something to make MPs' roles and MPs' lives in government and in opposition more effective and more meaningful rather than just spinning paper.

Mr. Houle: Thank you very much.

Mr. Eldon: At lunch time, our Speaker — I believe he belongs to all of us citizens — said that the parliamentary institution is strong, that it can accommodate citizens' opinions, however strongly expressed and strongly felt. I think we've seen something of the parliamentary institution and its strength here this afternoon and throughout our conference.

Workshop no. 1

What voters got: Members of Parliament

Chair:

Michael Cassidy
Counsellor
Canadian Study of Parliament Group

Participants:

Robert Marleau
Clerk of the House of Commons

John Chenier
Publisher, *Lobby Monitor*

Michael Cassidy: The focus of this workshop is to get a sense of what people expected in the election, the very different composition of this House, and how that appears to be affecting the role of Members of Parliament and its evolution. Jane Stewart talked about setting up new forms of consultation. This afternoon, when we will have a Reform MP on the panel, we may hear about their efforts at direct communication, using 1-900 numbers, and so on.

During the panel discussion this morning, there was also a sense that in this Parliament the role of MPs is being perceived quite differently from the traditional role of backbenchers in the past.

I perceive a change in the quality of MPs as well, perhaps reflecting improvements in education in the population. We seem to have a range of skills and experience such as Parliament has not seen in the past.

I want to invite Robert Marleau, the Clerk of the House of Commons, to say a few words.

Robert Marleau: Thank you, Michael. I came as an observer, but perhaps I can offer a couple of comments from an institutional perspective. The House is experiencing the impact of the demographics of the nation. This is the baby boom House, and they are having the same impact as the baby boom generation has had on our society since the postwar period — from the development of disposal diapers to demanding laptop computers in the House. This is having a quiet but definite impact on this Parliament.

Baby boomers don't take advice easily. We have an excellent relationship in terms of the role of the Table in providing advice, but they judge it far more severely than their predecessors might have done. My father never went for a second opinion if his lawyer gave him advice. When baby boomers get advice from their lawyers, they usually seek out another lawyer as well — not necessarily because it wasn't the advice they wanted to hear, but because they're more inquisitive and they're more judgmental when you give them advice. They also won't necessarily formulate a position according to party diktat, and that's having an impact in caucuses. They seem to reflect more before they take a position.

The other thing that has affected the House, and one that I'm quite concerned about from the perspective of the institution, is the loss of mentors. There used to be more hierarchical relationships within party caucuses and Members who trained the novice MPs. In opposition right now there are no mentors because there is no one with enough experience. In the Reform party, Ray Speaker has the most parliamentary experience, from his years in Alberta, but Deborah Grey is the only one with Ottawa experience, and it is relatively short. From her perspective, mentoring is a demanding task. The expectations of her are probably very high.

The loss of mentors in all three parties — the Liberals have a few more, but most of them are quite busy in cabinet — has left a lot of the new MPs to formulate their own principles for carrying out their parliamentary duties. Some might argue that this is good; it breaks old habits and challenges the institution with new ways of doing things. But I believe the loss of mentors is going to have a long-term impact on the House as an institution. In the next four years there will be an election and more retirement among the senior people. Then you will potentially have every Member of the House with not much more than four years of experience in a parliamentary institution. I don't think we can underestimate the effect of that.

The composition of the House this time is unique. All governments, whatever their principles or ideologies, at one time or another need to form coalitions — for nation building, to see through hard issues that are unpopular. The Liberal government has its work cut out for it in trying to find coalition ground, in view of the ideologies across the way. That is a high-risk situation for them.

Many of the new MPs are still seeking their way, before they choose what to specialize in. As new MPs, everything is of interest to them in the first year. It takes a while for them to narrow their focus and develop their expertise and sense of personal priorities.

Question: What kind of impact will the loss of mentors have?

Robert Marleau: Any institution that loses that number of mentors suffers a loss of knowledge and must then ascend a longer learning curve to build back that pool of knowledge over time. Any institution that suffers an exodus of experience is going to bear the consequences.

Question: Since there are so many new MPs, has there been a movement away from following House procedures? Have they become familiar with them, or are they saying, let's do things a bit differently?

Robert Marleau: There was an early change in the rules, following some of the commitments the Liberal government made in the election campaign. The House Management Committee is looking at changing the question period format — special debates, a supplementary question period focusing on one department. Those kinds of things are being debated.

So I wouldn't say there is a falling away from the rules. There is a renewed interest, as there was in 1984, when the Conservatives came in. There is always an interest in looking at how the House does its business and trying to improve it. But there isn't a challenge of the rules, if that was implied in your question. It is more a question of refining and finding alternatives that might be more current, more modern.

Michael Cassidy: I'm going to pass it over to John Chenier now, with thanks to Bob Marleau.

John Chenier: My first exposure to the new MPs was that we sat down at *Inside Ottawa* and tried to speculate about who was going to be in the cabinet. We looked at the list of people elected, and we were impressed. There are at least two or three cabinets in this government, if not more. There is an awful lot of talent on the back benches. This obviously augurs well for the calibre of cabinet ministers. But we also saw it posing some problems

in the Liberal caucus, because what do you do with all this talent? The House has not been a good user of talent unless it is in the front benches. And it's not only the Liberals who have good-quality candidates.

As Mr. Marleau pointed out, there was a wholesale change in Parliament, and a lot of mentors disappeared. But I'm not sure that's a bad thing — in fact, I think it's quite a good thing. What Mr. Marleau didn't say, and what I think is quite important, is that this institution is in trouble. Not only the role of Parliament but the role of Members of Parliament was questioned by voters and continues to be questioned. This question is eating at the Reform party as well. What is the role of MPs? How does it relate to constituents? Jane Stewart also mentioned the issue — it's obviously high in her mind as well — of how to relate to her constituents and how to make the role of an MP more meaningful.

The red book addressed that issue by promising change in the role of the MP and in the way legislation moves through the institution — to committee after first reading rather than second reading, a greater role for committees in consulting people, and so on. That has begun, but I think the strategists in the Liberal party have forgotten why they wanted to do it. They're going through the motions because they started it, but they're forgetting the principles they were trying to pursue when they proposed these reforms, when they put them in the red book, and when they started addressing these issues, just six or seven months ago.

This brings me to the power of institutions and how they operate on individual MPs. When they arrive here, they're their own persons, they have skills, they're connected to their communities. As rookies they confront the realities of Parliament, Parliament's rules, and Parliament's ways of doing things. Even without mentors, there are still all sorts of things that are going to try to put them into a mould.

Look at how parties, for example, are affecting the MPs. I made as many phone calls as I could last week to try to find out how people perceived the role of MPs changing, how comfortable they are, and how they are doing. The verdict I got, after speaking to House staff, researchers, and media people, was almost unanimous. They broke down in this way. As Alvin Cader said this morning, Reform is still lost. They're at sea in committee and in the House. As one person put it, their role is that of an anti-politician politician. How can you be an anti-politician politician? Where is it written down what one does? How does an anti-politician politician

operate in the House of Commons and in committees?

The person who coined this phrase, who must remain anonymous, suggested that there are all sorts of opportunities in committee for Reform to play a role, to suggest amendments. However, because they're not sure whether they want to play that game — or whether that's the game they want to play in — they don't. The work of the committee just goes on, and it's other Members — the Bloc, even Liberal backbenchers — who are doing their work for them while they sit there being ineffective or irrelevant.

It's the party, not the individuals. They're all very capable individuals, but the party philosophy is hamstringing them. That came out in some interviews we did with Reform MPs after the convention, with Bob Ringma saying, we have to have a better way for MPs to feed back into the party what they think should happen. Others were saying, we have to have more freedom for MPs to play a role as they see fit.

On the Liberal side, we have a case of too many people for too small a job. I spoke to a lot of Liberal backbenchers when they first came in to get an idea of what they wanted to do. I spoke to a good number, probably 60 or 65. Of course, I couldn't speak to them all at the beginning, so it was about two months after the election before I got to the last one. By that time they had started to make decisions about where the important things were in Ottawa. Four or five said that the House was where they thought they would make their best mark. If you speak to them now, many of them will say, boy, was I surprised when I found out that you go if you have House duty, but if you're not on House duty, you're somewhere else — there are many better places to spend your time.

But for the Liberals it's not clear where the better places are. I followed one committee pretty closely last spring. There were 15 Members, nine of them Liberals. The way committees are dividing up their time is 10 minutes for the official opposition — the Bloc; 10 minutes for the vice-chair or parliamentary secretary; and 10 minutes for Reform; then 5-minute questions for each of them, then another 5-minute round, and so on. So by the end of most meetings, only three or four Liberals at most are going to have been able to ask questions. The other five are sitting there like bumps on a log.

You could see their frustration growing; they wanted to participate, they wanted to contribute, but they couldn't. The structure wouldn't let them.

That dissatisfaction was being voiced in caucus and in steering committees, but as far as I can see, there is still no mechanism for the Liberals to deal with their large numbers. You see this particularly in the committees studying legislation, where the government has stated its position. The Liberals are there mainly to provide moral support, and it's the opposition that must carry the can.

I've never seen so much shifting and moving about on bills. Even on C-43, which is arguably the centrepiece of the Liberal's integrity package, there has been a constant shuffling of Liberal MPs in and out, because even though it's first reading and even though there's supposed to be flexibility for Members to contribute, the government has in effect put the whips on and said, this is what we've agreed to do, this is where we're going. When Manley made his appearance, he even referred to the amendments they would accept. If this is the centrepiece legislation, if this is the way they're going to treat first reading, then where is the new role for MPs, particularly Liberal MPs?

So the verdict on the Liberals was that things are brewing in caucus, but they're quickly getting to the point where they feel there's no effective role for them as backbenchers.

The verdict on the Bloc was, again, nearly unanimous. This is a party that has no problem with the role of MPs. All that is subordinate to the general cause of Quebec independence. The party works well. In committees, Bloc Members are like graduate students who haven't prepared for a seminar. The caucus researcher has done the work, but the Member has been too busy to do the reading. So often the first meeting of a committee is a shambles, because the Bloc is not prepared, the Liberals aren't doing anything, and the Reform can't do anything. It can be quite disheartening if you like to see Parliament working well. However, when Bloc Members do pick up their brief, you can see they are indeed very, very good at their role as Members.

Overall, there's tremendous pressure — mentors or no mentors — within parliamentary institutions, within the party process, to put backbenchers, particularly government backbenchers, in a spot where they are fodder for the executive. They don't really have a role.

The Liberals have been very active in caucus, as one way of trying to keep their MPs occupied. We're constantly finding out there's a committee on this or that. For example, on Pearson airport, Carolyn Parrish had a caucus committee of Toronto MPs looking at what the government should

do. A caucus committee is studying what should be done with the disposition of Downsview Airport, and it's the subject of considerable lobbying pressure right now by people who want to turn it into a film studio. An Ontario caucus committee on small business and banking went around the province and talked to small business people, bankers. There's one on gun control. So there have been attempts to give the Liberal Members a role. Since they can't play it in committees, because there's not enough time, there is an attempt to give them more of a role in caucus. Perhaps that is where Liberal MPs will make their mark.

The difficulty is that this activity is invisible. If we want voters to see MPs having an impact, then the last thing our institutions need is another policy-making mechanism that takes place behind closed doors. Already far too much of our policy making takes place behind closed doors: in cabinet, in the bureaucracy, and now in caucus.

Michael Cassidy: I hear a note of pessimism in what John said, in the sense that perhaps old patterns are re-establishing themselves. He mentioned that the MP is being relegated to cannon-fodder in what is almost a one-party House. Let me open the floor for comments.

A workshop participant: I'm a retired public servant. This is rather depressing. I'm old enough to remember when the Trudeau government was elected. The Trudeau government, the Clark government, and the Mulroney government each talked about enhancing the role of backbench MPs and strengthening committees, which we thought would deliberate and submit meaningful amendments to government legislation. One might have hoped this would be happening.

During my formative years in the public service — I joined in 1950, in the days when the only governments were Liberal ones — we expected that legislation prepared by public servants would be approved by Parliament. A few rough edges might be knocked off, but essentially legislation was the product of the bureaucratic process.

Is it possible to reform our system to achieve more meaningful participation? The other extreme is the American system, where legislation can even be drafted in Congress, or if it comes from the administration, all bets are off in terms of amending it, and it can emerge completely changed. We've seen the chaotic side of that, particularly under

the Clinton administration — the inability to get very important legislation through Congress.

Is there really an answer? As a reformed bureaucrat, I don't like to think of the government simply being run by the bureaucratic process. Is there any middle ground between that and the pretty chaotic situation we see in Washington?

Michael Cassidy: I came here in 1967, as a press gallery journalist. If the MPs of that era had had the same facilities, resources, and opportunities to play a part in the system as they have today, they would have thought they'd died and gone to heaven.

Every five or six years, though, they keep raising the goal posts in terms of what people expect. The baby boom generation wants laptops. They're used to accomplishing things, they're used to having influence. So they've raised expectations once again, and that's true of the public as well.

John Chenier: But aren't these just trappings, Michael? You can have three or four more staff, bigger offices, a constituency office, a laptop — but if you are not making a sizeable impact on the legislation going through this institution, has your role really changed?

Michael Cassidy: In today's fiscal climate, we're going to see less legislation, so how do you use a talented group of 240 people who are not in the ministry, when these people are leaders in society. They're educated, they're talented, they're skilled, and they've had full professional careers before coming here. If there's less to do because there's less legislation, then maybe that's going to make it more difficult.

A workshop participant: I agree with John. The physical accoutrements have been infinitely enhanced. In the early days, on a couple of occasions I came to see backbench MPs and there were two of them in an office. When I came to see an MP on an issue involving the department, he asked his colleague and the secretary to leave so we could discuss it in private.

That has changed beyond recognition, but I'm still concerned that they might not have a visible influence on policy, and if the minister specifies in advance the few limited amendments that he might be prepared to entertain, then surely they are in a pretty emasculated position.

A workshop participant: I want to add to John's comment about keeping the Liberal backbench busy with caucus committees. This reminds me of what happened in 1984. Faced with large numbers, the Conservatives were very concerned that they didn't have enough for people to do, so they had all kinds of caucus committees for the first year. Twelve months later it all disappeared. They came up with too many innovative ideas and made life difficult for the ministers. After a year you didn't hear much more about caucus committees.

John Chenier: I think ministers and departments see caucus committees as they see standing committees. Take the Standing Committee on Transport. There are all sorts of interesting things some Members would like to examine, but they have been told, hands off — you can look at A or B, but we don't want you looking at X, Y and Z. You can see the Members' frustration.

With a caucus committee, without the opposition present, ministers and departments might be more open. But I don't sense that openness. Of course, it's difficult for the bureaucracy to relate to a caucus committee in that it's political. It's not Parliament. It's a part of the political party.

In this town policy making is still seen very much as a zero-sum game. You either have the power or you haven't. To give it to someone else, or to let someone else come in and play in your playground, means you have less room to manoeuvre yourself. That's the way it has been, and if you're going to change it, you'll have to change all the institutions. You can't just change Parliament. You have to change the ministers. You have to change the way they instruct their officials. We need a very different vision, articulated from the top and going through all the systems. We can't just change the role of backbenchers and expect that they're going to be able to move the entire policy-making iceberg.

Michael Cassidy: It sounds like a new way of doing politics.

A workshop participant: What are they going to do with the results of these caucus committees? There was a caucus committee on small business at the same time as the industry committee was holding hearings on small business. That's very confusing, especially for the public.

John Chenier: One of the things about consultation is that there's a lot of it. The caucus

committee talked to the banks, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and some small business owners in various communities. Then the House committee turned around and talked to those same groups. Some of the committee membership was the same and some was different. The public starts to wonder what the government means by consultation and which committee they should consult with. The caucus committee? The standing committee? The officials who come calling shortly after or shortly before?

A workshop participant: When the new MPs came last fall, everybody had high expectations about how much independence they would have and that Parliament would be different. The reference to the Reform party as anti-politician politicians could almost be applied to the Liberals as well, with their stand on the red book and integrity in government.

When they first came in, some MPs had a reputation for independent-mindedness or honesty. You would think that's a good thing, but that's not necessarily how people get ahead in the system. There are clearly some good people who will never get higher than the chairmanship of a committee. So I don't know that the system has really changed that much.

John Chenier: In the press gallery there is a big poster with all the MPs' names and phone numbers. Some MPs' names are in bold print. Which ones? All the cabinet ministers. Where are the committee chairs if committees are so important? They aren't even identified, let alone in bold. There are just so many things that reinforce the point that the only Members who are important are cabinet ministers.

A workshop participant: One of the things we heard at the Ontario legislature, where of course there was another substantial change in membership in 1990, was that certain aspects of the operation of the House suffered from that. It's clear to many observers that the atmosphere in the House, the relationship of Members to one another, especially across party lines, has changed dramatically, partly because of the way that the election turned out and because of the new Members.

What with a similar sort of change here, and especially with polarization in the House, I'm curious whether we can see the same thing emerging here. It used to be that Members of Parliament could associate with one another across party lines.

Committees could work well. When Members were travelling together on committees or delegations, they maintained links that worked positively toward the general public good. Many observers in Ontario are saying that this no longer happens. Is this kind of polarization happening in the House of Commons, and will it have a bearing on the way Parliament operates?

A workshop participant: A committee is looking at procedures, but they're not really looking at committees and how to improve them — they're working on the assumption that committees are working well. But if the focus is to be on the work done in committees, you have to look at the role of MPs in committee.

In the Ontario legislature, when an MPP sits on a committee, it's not that individual who is sitting — it's a Liberal or an NDP member. They're bringing a lot of roles to the committee; this is not allowing them to sit as individuals and has a great effect on the work that is done.

The second thing is membership and attendance. People who don't attend are replaced by other people who have no knowledge about what the committee is dealing with. The whip sends them to represent the party, because somebody from the party has to be there.

A workshop participant: What citizens do is the real question. In my experience — and I have experience at the municipal level as well — you tell citizens what's going on, ask them if this is what they want the government to do, and everyone yawns. You lay out the information and the implications clearly and still their eyes glaze over. I'm stumped at that stage — I don't know what to do next.

A workshop participant: I was interested in Jane Stewart's remarks about the role of a government MP in trying to explain legislation and the government's intentions to constituents so as to get a somewhat more informed public in relation to complex issues of public policy. I'm not hopeful that this will start a tidal wave of communication, but it is at least a promising role for an MP. Unfortunately, it's applicable only to a government MP, because it's not likely that Reform or Bloc Members are going to explain to their constituents what the Liberal government has in mind.

The abysmal ignorance of so many voters — and even the lack of interest in what is intended in a piece of legislation — is one of the black spots on

our participatory democracy. Populism has some good points in terms of participation, but it has limitations as well — as we saw at the Reform party convention a few weeks ago. The grassroots of the party made it clear that they don't want to be told what the Ottawa view is — they want to tell Ottawa what their view is, no matter how ill-informed.

A workshop participant: The Canadian Study of Parliament Group had a conference a few years ago on parliamentary reform, and we were reminded at that time that all the reform initiatives of the past decade have been predicated on the assumption that meaningful change in the role of the private member depends on major attitudinal change — you can improve the trappings as much as you want, but without the attitudinal change, success will be limited.

This brings me back to caucus committees, which may be born out of frustration on the part of Members, or may be a top-down effort to find things for idle Members to do. When I first came to the Hill, I worked for a Member who was active in this area, and it seemed to be a bona fide outlet for Members who were interested in providing input outside the committee structure. Obviously it is a political grouping, but it still has the potential to be a meaningful exercise. It doesn't have to take place in secret. If it is a committee of concerned individuals working toward a common goal — not a band of dissidents — why would they fear making their deliberations public?

Michael Cassidy: Is this attitudinal change occurring?

A workshop participant: Yes, but I don't know whether it will last.

A workshop participant: With so many Canadians being represented by Liberal backbenchers and by Reform anti-politician politicians, I wonder how they are reacting to the quality of their representation and how this will affect what they do in the next election.

A workshop participant: A constant thread running through reform efforts in Parliament over the past 20 or 30 years seems to have been the tension between public servants — the professional full-time politicians — and the legislators — the amateur part-time politicians. As an indicator of where the balance lies today, where are the lobbyists? Are they

on the Hill or are they in the corridors of the bureaucracy?

John Chenier: That's a good question. I think they're covering their bases and they're in both places. Certainly when House committees are looking at major topics, they're ensuring that their clients appear before these committees and get their points on the record.

An example was the House committee studying small business. The lobbyists for the banks were appearing before the committee, but they were also working extremely hard behind the scenes in the industry department, which was getting the government's response ready.

Comparing the United States and Canada from a lobbying perspective, in the United States, if one hole closes, you just try to open another. If you can't get one legislator to sponsor something, there's always someone else. You just keep going and going. In Canada our decision-making system is made up of very restricted channels. If you can't get the minister responsible to agree, nothing is going to happen. That's the only person who can sign the memo, the only person who can bring it to cabinet and order action. So from a lobbyist's perspective, if you can't get the department of the environment or industry or whatever onside, that's it. There's no sense going anywhere else — it isn't going to fly.

Commenting on people's observations about committees and relations between MPs of different parties, some committees looking at particular issues have tried to become more effective, less partisan. Members take the attitude that they're all in it together, so why not approach the issue with open minds.

It looked as if they were succeeding, but two things intervened. One, the House doesn't work that way, so how can you expect committees to do so. Two, as legislation left the House and came to committees, the very same committees that were supposed to be non-partisan in the study of issues had to become partisan again in the study of legislation. They couldn't just check their party hats at the door; they had to figure out whether to bring it in with them, depending on what the committee was dealing with that day.

There's still some degree of camaraderie within the committees. I'm thinking of two reports where there were minority reports but the Members — the Bloc and the Liberals — tried to smooth over their differences. At the same time, they recognized

that parties exist, and they exist in the committee system, as much as they might not want it to be so.

Michael Cassidy: We've had few examples of committees that really worked effectively, even if out of the limelight. I think of the Fisheries Committee and the Transport Committee, where generally there is a great deal of expertise and knowledge on the subjects they look at. The Blenkarn Finance Committee from 1984 to 1988 acquired a deserved reputation.

One of the problems with caucus committees is how to distinguish between a committee of concerned individuals and a group of dissidents. Of course they see themselves as concerned individuals, but a minister finding these people messing in his backyard will see them as dissidents. Finding a balance within the party system is extremely difficult, for a committee chair and the committee itself.

The Blenkarn Committee had a very competent chair who had ruled out becoming a cabinet minister and was therefore able to put his name in bold print in the directory, so to speak, by his own efforts and by working on a collaborative basis with the other parties.

Don Blenkarn fenced off some space for the committee, partly because of his own ability to command attention from the press. The committee was almost unique in bringing in researchers at times from the different parties. The idea was to try, at the staff level, to have different views represented and to bring them together with more time to concentrate on the issues than the Members might have.

A workshop participant: I remember the first day the Members came back to the House — not for the opening of Parliament but for an orientation day. It was the first time new Members came to the House to learn how it works. The first thing we saw was that Members sat by party on their side, and even the Bloc Québécois and the Reform party sat on their side. That was a good illustration of camaraderie among Members. They were talking together, but they sat in their separate places. They knew where they had to sit.

Michael Cassidy: It may be that the jet plane, the fax machine and the cellular telephone have interfered with some of that camaraderie. Back in the 1960s, and certainly in the 1950s, there was a good deal of camaraderie. But that was in the days

when MPs would come to Ottawa for two or three weeks at a time, and they weren't funded to go back to their ridings.

These days the pressure on Members, as on other people in our society, is incessant — to perform, to be on the telephone, to be on television, to be back for meetings in the riding, and so on. It interferes with camaraderie even within their own groups, let alone across party lines.

Michael Cassidy: As with other questions we were discussing this morning, we are not going to come to conclusions.

John Chenier: If you send a nine-person committee out on the road, it will develop. They're out on their own, they're meeting constituents, they hear the same stories, and they do develop some degree of camaraderie and empathy for each other's position and views.

It doesn't happen as much as it ought to. It will happen even less with television beaming people from one place to another without ever meeting face to face. With a large committee it becomes self-defeating, because they then stay within their own caucuses when they go out on the road.

Workshop no. 2

What voters got: Parliamentary Parties

Chair:

Robert Vaive
CSPG Vice-President
and Deputy Clerk, Legislative Assembly
of British Columbia

Participants:

François Houle
University of Ottawa

Alvin Cader
CBC National Radio News

Robert Vaive: This morning we had a good overview of what voters got. Here we'll concentrate on parliamentary parties. Canadian political parties, unlike their European counterparts, historically have been brokers of political interests rather than adherents to specific political doctrines.

The most successful party federally has been the Liberal party, which has consistently positioned itself in the centre of the political spectrum of the day and has shown the ability to manage significant regional cleavages. That is how historically they have always been able to claim a bigger share of power than the other parties.

Over the last decade or so, however, voters have become increasingly sceptical of parliamentary parties. Voters are more demanding and also more suspicious of political parties, both before and after the election. This scepticism has been channelled through a new populism, reflected in the Reform party.

For the first time in Canadian history the regional tensions that have always attended Canadian politics are institutionalized in the chamber. The opposition now is composed of two major regional parties.

Many people voted for the Conservative party — 16 per cent of voters — and about 19 per cent voted for the Reform party, but our system produced only two seats for the Tories, even if they obtained almost as much of the popular vote as the Reform party. The Conservatives doubtless still have a lot of supporters, but they now have very little organization with which to rebuild.

The NDP was similarly punished. The size of their caucus does not accurately reflect their share of the popular vote, which was 7 per cent.

This lack of proportion between popular vote and number of seats is mitigated to a certain extent when we consider the fall-off in popular vote. The PCs fell by 27 per cent from the previous election, and the NDP fell by 13 per cent.

One year after the election the government is still, according to the polls and the way the prime minister has been reacting, on a high-level honeymoon, although of course many difficult issues have yet to be tackled.

The Bloc Québécois has, by most estimations, outperformed the Reform party as the effective opposition. It has done that as a defender of Quebec's interests first and in that sense is certainly living up to its promise, although it has also managed to focus on some national issues.

Reformers — again a brand-new caucus — continue to focus on some national issues, but they have had a lot of growing pains and they have tried to reconcile the demands on them by their constituents on the one hand and parliamentary life on the other.

So the election left voters with a national party but not necessarily a national parliamentary system as in the past. The party in power appears to be a national party, but the opposition is regionalized, though the parties in question claim otherwise. The Reform party says it's a national party despite the concentration of its seats in the west, and the Bloc Québécois calls itself a national party, although its aim is to promote Quebec's interests, because as the official opposition it sees itself performing a national role in Parliament.

This is the context we are dealing with. We have two panelists this morning. I'll ask François Houle to begin.

François Houle: This morning I want to explore some deeper factors in Canadian society that explain the result of the election. The election campaign was important in allowing those factors to emerge, but the campaign itself is not the whole story. Nor were the election results a foregone conclusion; instead, the combination of the underlying factors and the campaign produced the results.

Canada is divided more than ever on a regional basis because of different conceptions about the Canadian identity. That didn't start a year ago or

two years ago. We can go back to the early '70s in Quebec and the '60s in the west, but for the most part it was during the mid-'80s when everyone became very disillusioned with the Conservative government, which they were hoping would be a good government for their region.

I see three underlying factors. First, why did Quebec and the west not believe in a national identity and national unity? The eastern provinces and Ontario do see themselves that way for the most part, and that's one of the reasons they voted Liberal. But Quebec and the west have different perceptions of national identity, and for the first time they had a chance to vote for parties that defended only that view, with no pretence to being national parties. My second point concerns the role of the parties in the House, and my third point is where, with our fractured identity, do we go from here — what will happen to our party system?

Did Canadians get the party situation they wanted from the election? I think so, and it was probably the first time in a very long time that Canadians can see themselves reflected in the party standings that emerged.

I'm going to use the regions as a prism through which to look at the election results. We hear a lot these days about the equality of provinces, but there is a much older reality in Canada — the regional reality — that in my view has a greater impact on the structure of our political parties. Let's begin with a simplified view of four regions — the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario and the west (although British Columbia admittedly constitutes a special case). In the Atlantic region and Ontario, the election results are explained by two major issues — Conservative politics and Liberal policies. It was a vote against Conservative politics and in favour of Liberal policies. At the same time, the Liberal party represented a broad concept of Canadian identity that is shared by these two regions — a united Canada from coast to coast. Quebec and the west, by contrast, voted not only for certain policies, as Richard Johnston demonstrated last night, but also for regional representation.

The three large parties — Conservatives, Liberals and NDP — saw themselves as national parties and, I would argue, tended to suppress the expression of views in Ottawa that departed from this national vision. In the 1960s and '70s, the dissenting voices that emerged in certain regions had no outlet in Ottawa. The interesting thing about the 1993 election was that it allowed alternative views to

emerge. The Conservatives might have been able to limit Reform's success for a while, but sooner or later it would have emerged. This was true, though to a lesser extent, of the Bloc Québécois as well. Before the election, these factors were in place.

In the Trudeau era, the notion of Canadian identity put forward by the government was not embraced by a good portion of voters in the west or by a large minority in Quebec. With the decline of Social Credit in the late '60s and early '70s, Quebec voters had no outlet for nationalist sentiments.

The west had found something of a regional voice in the Conservative party in that period, advancing ideas and policies not unlike those the Reform party is promoting now.

So Mulroney won a large majority in the 1984 election by assembling a coalition of westerners who wanted a voice in Ottawa and nationalists in Quebec who were prepared to throw in their lot with the Conservatives. Ontario and the Atlantic region were far more divided in terms of the way they voted.

Between the 1984 election and the 1993 election, two things happened: Conservative policies and constitutional failure. The failure of Meech Lake and Charlottetown told Quebec nationalists that there was no way to get what they wanted through a national party. Mulroney was their best chance in a long time to get the constitutional change they wanted, but he failed. And along came Lucien Bouchard, offering credible and viable leadership, as well as a certain charisma. So the nationalist identity had a credible voice, and the Bloc Québécois succeeded where the Bloc populaire and the Parti national had failed in the past.

The situation was not so straightforward in the west. The west opposed Conservative policies like the GST and other policies that were seen as national policies — not particularly favourable to the western provinces. Westerners realized once more — as they had already realized about the Liberals — that federal institutions and the federal executive slanted public policy toward central Canada. This reinforced the idea that the west needed representation from a party that made no pretence to being national.

Thus, both Quebec and the west wanted to be represented by parties that wouldn't try to be national parties. This became possible in 1993, which is why I said at the beginning that the 1993 election result reflects a more accurate picture of the way Canadians see themselves than the 1988 result, the 1984 result, or any election result of the Trudeau

years. The difference was that voters not only had alternatives in 1993, but that they were credible alternatives.

When we look at the dynamics in Parliament, however, Canadians didn't necessarily get what they sought. They got the party standings they wanted, but they didn't get the parliamentary dynamic they were looking for.

With respect to the government, history will show that changes in the government party will probably not produce significant change in its central policies. There may be some changes in style, some changes with respect to integrity and openness and so on, but I think the Liberals will stick with their main policies, which would be the same whether the Liberals or the Conservatives formed the government. Some examples: trilateral free trade; cuts in unemployment insurance; downsizing of the public service, the GST, the deficit — all things the Liberals railed against in opposition but that they accept now, and the further into the mandate, the more this will be apparent.

I think Canadians sought a change of policies, but they didn't get it. This creates an enormous problem in Canada and in other democracies — what I would call the democratic deficit. In democratic societies the state used to be seen as the conveyer belt (*courroie de transmission*) for citizens' wishes and desires, but it has become the conveyer belt for the demands of a globalized economy, globalized markets, financial markets. Instead of public policy being a means of expressing the desires of citizens, it is now being driven by globalization. This creates a democratic deficit and poses a risk to democratic institutions.

In our haste to celebrate the victory of democracy, we're ignoring this crisis in liberal democracies around the world. Politicians — particularly finance ministers — are pointing to these global forces driving public policy as a means of avoiding responsibility for decisions — Michael Wilson was the best example. It's very dangerous to democratic institutions and to relations between citizens and the state if members of the government can refuse responsibility for their decisions — if they can say, we didn't have a choice, circumstances were such that we had to do this or that. This is a far more important issue than the issue of confidence in politicians, which can always be restored.

On the opposition side, English-Canada didn't get what it wanted. No amount of effort on the part of the Bloc Québécois will gain it credibility on that score. This will serve to magnify regional

differences — the Bloc is covered much more by the French media and the Reform party is covered much more by the English media, for language and other reasons. So this reinforces the perception Canadians already had that Reform is the party of the west and the Bloc is the party of Quebec. Both parties are trying to get out of this box, but haven't had much success because their message has stayed pretty much within the confines of the House of Commons.

For example, the Bloc Québécois for the past year has emphasized that it is not only promoting Quebec's interests but also criticizing the government on national policies, foreign policy, defence policy, fiscal policy, social programs, and so on. Overall, the Bloc has played the role of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

But what we heard and saw in the media was the Bloc on the military college at St-Jean, the Bloc on cigarette smuggling, the Bloc on referendum spending. So the Bloc has a major problem trying to prove that it is a national opposition — outside the House, no one's listening except in Quebec.

The Reform party made the big mistake of wanting to change the institution. When Canadians see Parliament, they see the controversial debates and question period — in other words, confrontation. It's a system based on forcing the government to justify its policies and giving the opposition an opportunity to present alternatives. It's not about improving government policies. The Reform party wanted to be constructive — but that's not a viable role in the parliamentary system as we know it.

These two factors — the Bloc's inability to speak to anyone but Quebec, and Reform's ineffectiveness — also help to explain the Liberals' long honeymoon. The Liberals helped their own cause by not making mistakes, but the other two parties also helped by failing to show in the parliamentary arena that they were capable of moving beyond their regional origins.

So Canadians didn't get the opposition they wanted, with the exception of Quebec nationalists, who were winners on both fronts.

There has been another fracture in Canada that we don't hear much about. The Reform party has been built in English Canada in part on a concept of Canada that doesn't necessarily include Quebec — not that Quebec is automatically excluded, but that Canadian identity is not based on two peoples. It's an English Canadian identity that we hear about now — the "rest of Canada".

Two elements are central to Reform — first, a definition of Canadian identity that doesn't exactly

reject Quebec but doesn't include it automatically either — they can take it or leave it — and second, the equality of the provinces. This has great appeal in English Canada, but the problem for many English-speaking Canadians is that this position comes along with Reform's ideological side. Reform was born on the right and it wants to stay on the right.

I agree that Reform will be marginalized if it doesn't expand its base, but at present it doesn't appear to want to do that. We've heard that Reform is going to try to expand its base in the next election, but I'm not convinced, because Reform exists in part as a result of the Conservative party expanding its base in the 1970s and '80s. The Conservatives weren't able to expand their base while maintaining their support in the west. Reform doesn't want to make the same mistake of letting its national aspirations distance it from its hard core support in the west. So the Reform party may not necessarily evolve along traditional lines. They'll have to do it if they want to play the political party game and take power, but they may not want to do it.

So a significant number of voters in English Canada like the notion of Canadian identity represented by Reform — equality of the provinces, the possibility of Canada existing with or without Quebec — but within that group there are ideological conservatives and ideological progressives. Ideological progressives are the one group that isn't represented in Parliament at the moment, because Reform is too ideologically conservative for them.

To sum up, then, on the question of identities, the nationalist vision in Quebec — if not independence, then at least asymmetrical federalism — is represented by the Bloc. The centralized, unitary vision of Canadian identity that includes a francophone element is represented by the Liberals and Chrétien — who takes pride in being a man of the past, which for him is also the future. The concept of Canadian identity as the rest of Canada, an assemblage of equal provinces, with or without Quebec, is represented by Reform. The orphans are those who share the Reform vision of Canadian identity but find themselves at the centre or on the left of the ideological spectrum. If the NDP is looking to reposition itself, that may be a niche it can fill, because there's currently a vacuum in parliamentary representation.

Robert Vaive: So Canadians got what they sought as far as a government is concerned, François, but not in terms of the parliamentary dynamic that

resulted. My question is, how can the Reform party behave more like a traditional party at the parliamentary level, so that it can gain some political ground, and still maintain credibility with its voters?

A workshop participant: I want to go back to Mr. Houle's point about the opposition being regionalized — really, it depends on how you look at it, because in fact seven provinces and a territory are represented in the opposition, while the government can claim that it has representation in ten provinces and a territory.

The rules of the House of Commons require that you have 12 MPs before you can be recognized as an official party, and a great deal follows from this in terms of participation in question period and so on. A change in this rule would mean that voters would have a different perception of how regions were being represented. There are actually four opposition parties — the electoral system put them there, but the House rules don't recognize them.

François Houle: My point was the Reform party and the Bloc Québécois have played essentially a regional role in parliamentary institutions since the election and that their position can essentially be termed regional. The problem is the inability of these parties — because of their history, their origins, their electoral success — to articulate a message that will be perceived and listened to as a national message. They've tried, but Canadians aren't listening. This may change in a few years, after the Quebec referendum. Depending on the referendum results, and if the Bloc stays in Ottawa, Canadians may want to re-evaluate the way they see the federal parties.

A workshop participant: The dilemma for the Reform party is how to gain ground in the other provinces without losing support in the west — given that the Atlantic provinces' view of identity is different from that of the western provinces — they're not really reconcilable at the moment. So if Reform wants to become a national party it has to penetrate Ontario and down east — it goes without saying that Quebec is not in question. It's going to be tough sledding, because there seems to be a certain rigidity in Reform policies. I don't know how they're going to make the policy adjustments that would be necessary to gain ground elsewhere.

A workshop participant: The debate about how Reform is to define itself almost obsesses the

party. They're very wary about making the same mistake the Tories did — becoming mainstream, national in scope and alienating their western support.

In 1991, they crossed a major threshold at their assembly in Winnipeg where they adopted a resolution to expand east of Alberta and to run candidates in 9 of the 10 provinces in the next federal campaign. It was the subject of vigorous debate, very intense debate. That debate has now evolved and last month, at their assembly here in Ottawa, the extension of that debate took place, about whether to establish provincial Reform associations. There is a guardedness about going too far too fast, wariness about losing their hard-core support, alienating them, leaving the impression, perhaps, that Reform is losing sight of its roots. This is a question they wrestle with all the time.

Now, of course, they are committed to running candidates in Quebec. They will field a candidate in the by-election in Brome-Missisquoi. I am not putting any money on their chances, but Preston Manning said something I found revealing earlier this week. He said, "By 1997, we want to position ourselves to be the next government." To be the next government, you have to be a national party. You cannot be a regional party. To me, that signalled a very important shift in Reform thinking.

François Houle: That doesn't mean being a party from east to west. For the Reform, being national is getting into Ontario. The Maritimes, with 32 seats, are not that important. In Quebec, they have no chance; in the short term or even medium term I don't see them there. So the only place they can grow is Ontario, and if they succeed in getting half of Ontario, the federal system will have some problems, because the Liberal party will be almost even with the Reform. So Ontario is the only place Reform should be worried about — how to get people in Ontario to vote Reform without losing the west. I think they can do it, because there are people in Ontario who will agree with them that the identity of Canada doesn't necessarily include Quebec. The problem is that they are too far right, and if they can move a bit on that, they can expand in Ontario.

Then we'll have two parties, the Liberals and the Reform, almost equal in strength. And what will happen in Quebec? If they leave, that will help Reform. If they don't, will they turn to the Liberals? Maybe this will help the Liberals stay in power for quite a while or — and this is a strong possibility — maybe they will keep the Bloc québécois as their

main party in Ottawa. If they do, we'll have a three-party system with two equals, the Liberals and the Reform, and the Bloc. Then you'll need a coalition to govern. Which one will govern Canada? I don't know.

A workshop participant: The seats the Reform party won reflect that they're regionalized, but when you look at the popular vote they came in a strong second in many seats in Ontario and the Maritimes. So in terms of popular vote they have a national constituency, but because of our electoral system they don't get the seats. But it's a good base on which they can build and go get those seats.

A workshop participant: I like the emphasis on identity as a way of trying to understand this, but it strikes me that there's more than one dimension to the identities to which Reform appeals.

One is the rest of Canada, potentially even without Quebec, but it's hard to expand and keep emphasizing that identity, because in Ontario there are a lot of people who subscribe to the Liberal concept of identity you talked about.

The other identity Reform appeals to is the ordinary citizen against some kind of elite — and they're trying to get us all to agree on a definition of elite so that we can then agree on what we should be doing for the ordinary citizen. The policy convergence you were mentioning this morning is very compatible with this second identity — if we think of ourselves all as taxpayers, for example, that type of policy convergence leads to deficit reduction and attacks on big government.

Whether they can sell themselves in Quebec, where the other dimension of our political identity is so important, is much more doubtful, but in Ontario there's a lot of potential for growth in this direction. Identity is also going to be important in the upcoming provincial election in Ontario, and the policy congruence around Paul Martin's agenda really speaks to that kind of identity as well. So if Reform can pick up on it more effectively than the Liberals, then the other dimension of identity might not be as big a hurdle as you thought.

François Houle: I think you're right — there is more than one kind of identity. In Ontario there are a lot of people who identify with "the rest of Canada" but don't agree with the right-wing policies — people who believe in multiculturalism, for instance, and are a bit fed up with special status for Quebec. I think Reform's problem in Ontario is

really ideology. Most of the 50 ridings where they came second are in rural areas, but Ontario is more and more an urban province. So if they want to grow, they will have to tap into another identity at some point, but I think there are still some structural problems for them at this point in Ontario.

A workshop participant: We should all go back and read John Porter on how a fixation with national unity destroys and subsumes all other aspects of the debate. If, as Richard Johnston suggested last night, a Reform party vote was a policy vote, then what would explain the precipitous drop in their support since the election? It's very tempting to explain it with factors like their performance in the House, but if Johnston is correct that their support was based originally on policy, then that argument is not very persuasive.

Maybe there are other things in play, perhaps best captured by the fellow from *La Presse* who exchanges views with a columnist in the *Toronto Star*. Recently he argued that the Reform party is more dangerous to Canadian unity than the Bloc, not because of its regionalism but because of the kinds of policies it espouses. He went on to talk about the encroachment of American-style politics and so on. I wonder whether we're seeing a fragmentation of the right, similar to what's occurring in the Republican party in the United States, where you have Conservative icons like Barry Goldwater — who are very fiscally conservative but you never hear a peep out of them on moral issues — then the other side of the coin is Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition and their fixation on moral issues to the exclusion almost of everything else.

I see this happening in the Reform party; many people like what the Reform party has to say about a lot of issues, but when it comes to their fundamentalist approach on moral issues they just go [smacks his forehead]. Now that Reform has a bunch of people in the House of Commons, the loose cannons are starting to roll around on the deck, and people are starting to see the rest of the agenda. So while Reform might have got its votes initially on policy issues, it wasn't the whole story, and now that people are seeing the whole story they're starting to say, wait a minute.

François Houle: I agree with Mr. Johnston that people voted for policy reasons. It was not a protest vote in the sense that it was not against everything; it was for some kind of policies and some kind of representation in Ottawa. Voters thought the Conservative party would deliver, and the Conservative party did not, so they found another vehicle and voted for it.

On fiscal versus moral conservatism, I think you're right. The morally conservative position has never been very popular in Canada. One of the successes of the Conservative Party in Ontario and Quebec was that it was not a conservative party on that dimension. Mulroney was quite a liberal on abortion and similar issues.

That's one problem for Reform. If Reform moves too fast and too strong trying to impose on Canadians not only fiscal restraint but also a moral point of view, I think they will lose some ground. That might explain why Reform has lost some ground during the last year, not only because they haven't been effective in the House, but also because people realize that they do stand for very conservative positions on moral issues.

A workshop participant: Someone mentioned that they'd seen a new rigidity in the Reform party position. Their recent convention demonstrated this — debating a resolution (although they didn't adopt it) to abolish the Charter, and the list went on. The convention was a replay of the Republican convention that began with a diatribe from Pat Buchanan.

Workshop no. 3

What voters got: The Impact on Parliament

Chair:

Ruth Bell
Counsellor
Canadian Study of Parliament Group

Participants:

Michael Atkinson
McMaster University

Audrey O'Brien, Principal Clerk
House of Commons

Audrey O'Brien: As clerks of the table in the chamber and in committees, we have seen some differences as a result of the composition of this new Parliament. Now 205 of the 295 MPs are new. In many cases they have had no experience as Members of Parliament or members of provincial legislatures or even in municipal politics.

As a result, there has been a paradigm shift in terms of how MPs approach their work. New Members also come face to face with a very steep learning curve. If someone has never been a member of a deliberative assembly before, there's an awful lot to learn about the culture of the institution, none of which is written down. Question period, for example, appears entirely adversarial if you watch it on TV, but in fact the culture of it is fairly collegial, and people have had to learn this over time. The adjustments we've seen in the Reform party since the resumption of work this fall reflect movement along the learning curve, a greater realization about how the place actually works, as opposed to how it appears to work when you're looking at it from outside.

The other thing everyone brought back from the election campaign, regardless of party affiliation, was how frustrated the electorate was, how cynical they were about the ability of politicians to represent them, how cynical they were about any kind of integrity on the part of politicians. The Members who were elected were indelibly marked by this and came to the House bound and determined to do better, bound and determined to shift that perception.

To this end — and as part of the red book

commitment to use Parliament and parliamentarians more effectively — a number of things have happened. We have had a number of special debates on peacekeeping, the Bosnian situation, defence policy, foreign policy, the social security review. On some issues, after debate on the floor of the House, the matter has been handed over to a committee — so we have a Special Joint Committee on Foreign Policy and a Special Joint Committee on Defence Policy. The Standing Committee on Human Resources will be taking up the Axworthy green paper and hitting the road for five weeks of consultations, and the Finance Committee is handling pre-budget consultations for the Minister of Finance.

As someone said this morning, an education process is involved in these consultations, which is a very important aspect of them, because in many cases, people just don't understand the question, though they invariably have an answer to it. The effort to communicate is an interesting development, and something we haven't seen much before. For example, the presentation by the Minister of Finance to the Finance Committee, with numerous charts and slides, was part of an elaborate effort to explain the deficit reduction strategy. Whether you agree with the strategy or not, it was an elaborate effort to communicate, and it went on before the television cameras; in the past, pre-budget consultations, when they took place, took place behind closed doors. People were consulted, but in a process that involved officials, and it was all rather murky. Now there's a tremendous effort to have everything upfront and visible.

Parliamentarians in the last Parliament — and this is also the case with new Members — felt a strong desire for the individual MP to have a greater say. Caucus was traditionally the place where MPs had their say and had influence, but now they are insisting on a much greater say in the House, so there is a great deal of participation in debates, and Private Members' Business — business initiated by backbench MPs — is taking on new importance.

On the organization of committees, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, chaired by Peter Milliken, has a continuing mandate to look at the rules of the House. There have been discussions on a wide range of issues and high expectations of that committee. One result was the change to the Standing Orders to allow a bill to be referred to committee before second reading — before the House actually pronounces itself on the principle. This should give Members more scope to

influence the bill and amend it before the principle has been agreed to and the margin of manoeuvre is vastly reduced.

At the same time, there is a learning curve to be traversed in committee as well. The new Members didn't come in with a very clear agenda on where they want to go. So, the changes, while important, did not necessarily tackle the most important issues. Possibly they will come back to those as they gain experience and start to be frustrated with one procedure or another.

One of the hardest things to learn about the rules of the House is that they work as a whole. If you're frustrated with one particular rule, tinkering with it doesn't necessarily fix your problem, because it threads back through a whole bunch of other rules. It's difficult for people who have not worked with the rules to appreciate this.

On the question of free votes, for example, there is a notion that a change in the rules would make this straightforward, so that you would have a much clearer idea of where your Members stood on a particular issue. There's nothing in the rules to prevent anyone from voting exactly as they please. But there's an entire culture of party discipline. It's a much more complicated issue than it first appears.

People look to the United States and say, "In Congress you always know how people have voted and what they stand for." But again, nobody looks at what's behind the individual Member — what interests they represent and why they're pushing a particular agenda. So it's not a straightforward issue, and no change in the rules is going to make it straightforward.

A workshop participant: There's a fundamental difference between representative and responsible government.

Audrey O'Brien: Exactly. People become infatuated with one aspect of another system without realizing that you can't import just one aspect from a different constitutional system and a different type of government. That is not generally well understood.

In any event, expectations of committees are very high. The whole process of consultation necessarily raises expectations, and it's going to be interesting to see their actual performance. Committees' powers to initiate enquiries are very considerable, but the committee has to get its act together. It has to know what it wants to pursue and how to avoid dispersing its efforts in too many

directions at once, so that it ends up having no discernable impact on the issue. Of course, the composition of the House is reflected in committees — and the political agendas of the parties are significantly different from each other — so that doesn't lend itself easily to consensus on what a committee's agenda might be.

A workshop participant: Are there more minority reports?

Audrey O'Brien: There tend to be quite a lot of minority reports, and the rules provide for that as a possibility. Certainly, the Bloc québécois has been using that quite effectively.

The sense I get is that MPs want to make Parliament, the chamber, more relevant, and want people to feel that this is, in fact, the institution where their voice is heard. Whether this will continue as we get further into the life of this government and this Parliament will be interesting to see. I would think, though, that it is something Members would ignore at their peril.

A workshop participant: On the question of party discipline, I agree that it's a question of political tradition, not parliamentary rules. But how has this worked out in practice in the past six or eight months? Have there been more dissenting voices in the parties? Have MPs voted against the party line in the House or in committee? Has it been different in different parties? Is it on the increase?

Audrey O'Brien: In the chamber, we haven't seen any notable rise in dissenting voices. Members are voting with the party for the most part. There were some defections on the government side in the last Parliament — Members who voted against the party. But I wouldn't say that we've seen a marked increase in the independent-mindedness of Members.

A workshop participant: If we are still on the honeymoon, by definition, it has to end at some point. Very few marriages have endless honeymoons. I don't necessarily wish it would end, as there are some good sides to it. But when we look at the record of changes in the process of Parliament, once the honeymoon is over — and barring a very profound cultural change, which we may be seeing on things such as consultation — it may be a government not much different from what we've known before.

Have you seen anything that convinces you that we're really changing how we are being governed? What about the committee hearings on direct democracy? Has that dissipated? What about the Reform Members, who were elected on a platform of direct democracy. Are they still true believers, or have they become more realistic, knowing that the degree of support is not likely to be very large in the present House?

A workshop participant: I can't help but feel that there is an awful lot of pious rhetoric in our description of this process. The people I see most in Ottawa are in the public service. They tend to carry on as the public service did in the early '50s — as if they were running the country.

The red book is wildly rhetorical, but on specific proposals it doesn't mean a thing unless some official can put some form to it. This makes me wonder whether these elaborate consultative processes — introducing bills before second reading, committees rushing around the country, special debates — are not largely academic exercises.

A workshop participant: Let me begin by saying that continuity in Parliament and in the ways of our political parties will be the order of the day across a large number of dimensions if only because the country remains as divided, as heterogeneous, as it always was. The public service, for all the cutbacks, remains as in control and as necessary for the government's agenda as it always did.

I believe that the very existence of the red book — even though it will become less and less important for the government as time goes on — remains important in a way we wouldn't have seen in the St. Laurent period. We have crossed a bridge with respect to public expectations about integrity.

The red book facilitates the bringing together of what you say and what you do. The electorate, for all its deficiencies and lack of clarity, have at least got this sense that the red book will be there later on for them to consult, even though my guess is that less than 1 per cent of the voting public in the 1993 election actually got hold of and read the red book. The electorate nonetheless has the opportunity to consult the red book and in retrospect make a judgement on the party's work.

A workshop participant: One of the serious problems is that even if you get a party program that is relatively specific, there's real difficulty

implementing it after a party gets into power, because of the rapidity of social and economic change. So my question is, do you think the term of Parliament is too long? Shouldn't it be two or three years rather than four or five because of this rapidity of change?

A workshop participant: In Australia, the parliamentary term is two years.

A workshop participant: And they think it's too short.

A workshop participant : They're sure it's too short and they've been trying desperately to change it.

A workshop participant: Wouldn't the cost of having elections every two years be huge?

A workshop participant: Norman Ward wrote a piece a long time ago called *The Costs of Democracy* in which he argued, I think persuasively, that the cost of elections is not that prohibitive in light of the total government budget — mind you, he was writing 30 or 40 years ago. There's something to be said for it, given the up side of elections — the kind of renewal elections promise.

I would be less concerned about the cost than about the learning curve Audrey talked about. Especially if MPs come to Ottawa with a sense that it's them against us, it takes a long time to become comfortable in the setting, to become acquainted with what's on the government and legislative agenda. Two years seems to me rather short, particularly in view of the turnover we've experienced in the last couple of Parliaments.

A workshop participant: What was the turnover this time? Was it 40 per cent?

A workshop participant: No, much more than that.

A workshop participant: It was 205 out of 295.

A workshop participant: The difficulty is implementing the red book. When it gets into power the government finds there are certain constraints, revealed by the bureaucracy, for instance, and they just can't implement the program because circumstances have changed.

A workshop participant: How would a two-year term make that easier?

A workshop participant: We wouldn't change as fast, that's all.

A participant: I've been on the inside after elections in the pre-red book days, trying to interpret what we, as good public servants, were supposed to be recommending. I remember trying to read the tea leaves of speeches and little quotations in articles in the *Calgary Herald* and so on. As someone who always believed that the job of public servants was to help elected people get something done — rather than be like Sir Humphrey — I would actually have appreciated the presence of something like the red book, that brought it all together, that had a kind of legitimacy behind it. It's a very positive development in our politics, and it's going to be difficult for major parties in the future to do anything less than that.

There's always going to be the difficulty of having to cut your cloth differently when circumstances change. The red book language is fuzzy, but what is surprising to me, given the kind of document it is, is that it was not fuzzier.

A workshop participant: I want to return to the national obsession with consultation. Throughout the morning session, I wanted to ask, who's participating among the general public. There are the party faithful and a few other brave souls interested in various issues. But how effective is this mechanism when there is still such a broad sense of cynicism and alienation of the public from the parliamentary process. I recognize that this mechanism is intended to change that, but there are still barriers, and I question the effectiveness of consultative committees and town hall meetings and so on.

A workshop participant: There's a cultural twist to it as well, because it used to be that royal commissions or parliamentary inquiries would be enlightened by the solemn and thoughtful presentations of the army of the good — non-governmental organizations of various sorts promoting good public policy of a more or less neutral sort. These people were, throughout our history, an invaluable political resource. Whenever the country was trying to think through a problem, the great and the good would be wheeled out.

What has happened since Kim Campbell — though I don't think you can blame Campbell for it

— is that these people are thrust aside as special interests. They are seen as a sinister special interest because they represent the poor, the intellectuals, the worthy of some sort or another, so one shouldn't consult them.

A workshop participant: What impact has the election of the Bloc québécois had on the level of bilingualism on the Hill? I heard the hope expressed that it would promote bilingualism on the Hill.

Audrey O'Brien: I'm surprised that anyone would say that bilingualism needed a boost on the Hill.

A workshop participant: So was I.

Audrey O'Brien: Certainly, the presence of the Bloc has meant that we hear more French on the floor of the House than in previous Parliaments, but I think the Bloc Members have been pleasantly surprised by the level and quality of bilingualism among House officials and House staff. In fact, the environment is rigorously bilingual.

A workshop participant: How does Reform react? Is there any kind of feedback from them?

Audrey O'Brien: Such comments as they've made on the floor of the House tend to be concerned with the cost of bilingualism. In terms of dealing with the officials at the House, I don't think it has been an issue for them. This comes back to the question about direct democracy, and do they still remain as committed?

I think they are very committed to the whole notion of direct democracy. But their experience as MPs has been an awakening in many respects and has been reflected in the changes they made before the House resumed this fall — for example, they now have critics on particular issues.

The learning curve is steep if you have people with absolutely no experience — and not just Reform but also many government Members and some of the Bloc Members. If you have no experience in a deliberative assembly, you have no idea of all the below-the-tip-of-the-iceberg stuff that goes on.

A workshop participant: Has the advent of critics in the Reform party made their interventions more conflictual, more strident? If so, what is happening to the search for greater civility on the

floor of the House of Commons? It's not something that can be wished away quickly, and it certainly can't be done through a rule change. But one of the sources of cynicism about Parliament is the false battle — the huffing and puffing and pounding of fists. What is the future for a somewhat more civil kind of politics?

Audrey O'Brien: Civility is a funny kind of issue because what people see as uncivil is the clips of question period on the news. You get a clip on the news if your feigned outrage has been particular vivid, if you've managed to rent your garments with particular vigour. People see it and decide it's the general tone of Parliament, whereas a special debate, where we hear some really quite thoughtful presentations by Members, gets no coverage at all.

A workshop participant: To get back to consultation, on the budget issue, which is really an important one, I wish they would have less consultation and just listen to the specialists we have in this country and then get on with biting the bullet. Consultations cost time and money. Surely we have enough specialists to give good advice.

Michael Atkinson: Rule by experts is probably not the order of the day. The government is caught between satisfying taxpayers, who just want action, and appearing to act in a manner that is responsible and responsive. Hence, the consultation process we've seen up until now.

When the Senate, under Croll, looked at child poverty, it spent 18 months — and now we're going to rush through on social security review relative to that. Yet, what is the government to do but consult on the one hand and act on the other? You have to look at this government over the full four-year period and judge it in terms of its entire term.

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