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**THE CAMPBELL COLLAPSE:
HOW THE FAILURE OF THE EARNED MEDIA STRATEGY
TRIGGERED THE ELECTORAL DOWNFALL OF CANADA'S
OLDEST POLITICAL PARTY**

by

WILLIAM J. FOX

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April 14, 1994

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OLDEST POLITICAL PARTY**

submitted by William J. Fox

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Journalism

Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Journalism and Communication

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ABSTRACT

Political scientists agree election campaigns in western industrialized democracies are largely media events.

As a consequence, the impact of media coverage on voter intentions has been the subject of academic analysis for more than 50 years. Paul Lazarsfeld's self-selective school of the late 1940s with its two-step flow of communication theory was the dominant paradigm for media studies through the early decades.

In recent years, however, a third stream of thought has emerged between the selective attention and magic bullet schools. Inspired by the writings of Walter Lippman in the 1920s and sociologist Todd Gitlin, Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder make the argument that television news is news that matters; not because it tells people what to think, but more precisely because it tells people what to think about; that media has an impact on public opinion through its "agenda-setting," "priming" capabilities.

Building on a study of the 1988 election that concluded campaigns matter, this paper examines the "earned" media component of the Progressive Conservative Party's 1993 campaign to determine if media coverage of campaign events impacts on voter intentions.

INTRODUCTION

On October 25, 1993, Canadians filed into church basements and school auditoriums from Newfoundland to the Yukon to exercise that most fundamental democratic right -- the right to vote.

When national totals were posted in the early hours of October 26, all but two of the 295 candidates of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada had gone down to a rather inglorious defeat.

A once-proud political formation with a history that pre-dates Confederation, the Conservatives had gone from a majority government to a backbench rump in the House of Commons in less than seven weeks.

Party leader Kim Campbell -- Canada's 19th and first female prime minister -- was unable to hold her own seat in Vancouver Centre.

With unseemly haste, party functionaries and luminaries alike were moved to provide journalists writing post-debacle analysis with self-serving interpretations of what contributed to the most crushing

defeat in Canadian electoral history. The October 27 editions of the Globe and Mail are a particular case in point.

Certain political observers argue that the Campbell-led Conservatives never had a chance in the general election because of the unprecedented unpopularity of her predecessor, the Rt. Hon. M. Brian Mulroney.

The former prime minister herself would seem to be partial to that particular view, having expressed regret in a number of media interviews that she did not have sufficient time to put her personal stamp on the federal government before calling the election.

Proponents of the Campbell view can recite a near exhaustive list of specific policies or political initiatives to support their contention that the Conservative campaign was lost before it began. The litany includes the controversial Goods and Services Tax, the failures of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional initiatives, a public perception of patronage abuses and cronyism, the violent confrontation between Canada's first citizens and the Canadian Armed Forces at Kanesatake, cuts to the CBC, even Mulroney's decidedly 1980s corporate-imperial style.

However, public opinion research conducted during the

Conservative party leadership in June and through the summer charts a marked improvement in the party's fortunes. And by the time the writs were issued September 8, 1993, public opinion research by such reputable pollsters as Angus Reid, published in Southam Group newspapers, suggested the Progressive Conservatives were most definitely in a competitive position with their electoral rivals.

Reid polls published over the Labour Day weekend put support for the Liberals and Conservatives at virtually a dead heat; further, opinion research on various leadership attributes suggested Campbell enjoyed a significant lead in virtually every leadership category over her main rival, Liberal leader Jean Chrétien.

Experienced political reporters, such as CBC Radio's National Affairs Correspondent Jason Moscovitz and Toronto Star Editor-in-Chief John Honderich, believe Campbell entered the campaign in a competitive position. University of British Columbia political scientist Richard Johnston, who has studied public opinion shifts in the 1988 and 1993 federal campaigns, also believes the Conservatives had succeeded in getting themselves back into the game.¹

How then could Campbell and the Conservatives have fallen so far in public favour in such a short time?

¹ Jason Moscovitz, John Honderich, Richard Johnston, personal interviews.

The answer, of course, lies at least in part in the Tory campaign. In an analysis piece published in the November 14 Toronto Sun, defeated cabinet minister Perrin Beatty summed up his views of the Conservative election effort in a single word -- terrible.

This paper, however, considers a more focussed hypothesis -- that the Conservative campaign collapse was triggered by the abject failure of Campbell's "earned" media strategy.

Building on Johnston's 1988 election study that concluded campaigns matter, this thesis advances the proposition that media coverage of campaign events is a factor in the electoral decision-making process. The study argues that the media are influential not because they tell people what to think, but rather because the media tell people what to think about partly through the process of "framing." The paper makes the case that the media, particularly television, have an impact on public opinion through "priming" and "agenda-setting." The paper also considers whether lower levels of partisanship in the general population and the consequential increase in "loose" votes are factors in the media coverage equation. And finally, the paper assesses whether the Conservatives or the Liberals won the media battle of the frame.

For purposes of this paper, “earned media” refers to news coverage and commentary in the mass media generated by campaign activity itself.

The paper will posit Campbell's “new” approach to politics, the “politics of inclusion,” never actually included a cohesive, comprehensive plan to deal effectively with either the journalistic entourage that accompanied her, or the wider journalistic community. There was no strategy for communicating an action plan for the future to Canadian voters.

Further, this paper will argue the very structure of the Tory leader's tour -- the Campbell campaign's primary communication vehicle in the early weeks -- ignored the structures and routines of newsgathering. Finally, the paper posits Campbell's strategists, almost certainly inadvertently, crafted a leader's tour designed for a thematic media “frame” with a causal construct that did not lend itself to the dominant episodic frame of television news in particular with its treatment construct. As defined by Shanto Iyengar, thematic frames seek to address political issues in a general, societal context; episodic frames focus on particular events or particular cases. A causal responsibility construct looks to the origin of a problem, a treatment responsibility construct focuses on who or what has the power to alleviate or forestall alleviation of the problem.

The paper also suggests that the shortcomings and failures of other elements of the Conservative campaign, such as the paid advertising in general and the Chrétien "attack" ad in particular, exaggerated the loss of momentum that resulted from the inadequate earned media campaign.

The consideration of this thesis will begin, in Chapter One, with a literature review on the impact of media coverage on voter intentions. The chapter will begin with a brief review of the "magic bullet" theory post-World War One, then to the minimalist view of the late 1940s and evolves through a more recent third stream between the selective attention school and the magic bullet school, a stream that argued items that receive prominent attention on television newscasts tend to be the issues that people think are important; this literature says television news helps set the terms by which political judgements are reached and political choices are made.

The media are a primary site of political discourse; journalism provides the vernacular for political discourse in any liberal democracy. That discourse is conducted however, within a set of rules and structures that dictate the organization and production of news. Chapter Two considers the impact of rules and structures on

newsgathering.

The idea that the journalist's narrative choice is not a free choice, but a choice guided by institutions, routines and conventions that shape perceptions, will be considered as it applies to a federal election campaign.

In a federal election campaign, there are two prime sites for political reporters seeking campaign news: national campaign headquarters and the leader's tour.

The paper examines the media relations operations at Conservative national campaign headquarters. But the paper's principal focus will be the leader's tour as the primary communication vehicle of any general election campaign; that tour is viewed as a "pseudo-event" staged to create an "image" for a political leader to influence public opinion.

The paper traces the evolution of leaders' tours in both Canada and the United States, with a particular focus on developments in the 1992 U.S. presidential campaign because techniques developed on one side of the border have usually been adopted by campaigners on the other.

Leaders' tours began to stray onto less familiar terrain -- dubbed the "Arsenio" strategy after presidential candidate Bill Clinton donned his shades, picked up a saxophone and delivered a bluesy interpretation of Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" on Arsenio Hall's nationally-syndicated late night "chat" show.

This paper examines Campbell's efforts to follow Clinton's lead and will assess the Tory leader's "Arsenio" strategy.

The relationship between party leaders and the reporters assigned to cover their electoral odyssey is also examined.

Underlying this discussion is a campaign correlative advanced by Graham Fraser: if a political formation cannot run an efficient campaign, then it probably cannot run an efficient government.

Chapter Two also considers how the Canadian media have covered political campaigns in the recent past and certain approaches introduced for the 1993 campaign, including the emergence of such "vox populi" features as televised town hall meetings.

Chapter Three includes a look back at recent Canadian political history and a review of the politics and policies of the Mulroney

government with a view to addressing a pivotal question -- was the 1993 campaign ever winnable for the Tories?

We briefly examine key legislative initiatives such as the free trade agreements and the Goods and Services Tax, the concentrated assault on the federal deficit, and the consequences of that assault on specific campaign promises, such as the Tory promise on child care. The intent is not to debate the merits of any one initiative; rather it is to consider the cumulative effect of these various initiatives on public attitudes towards parliamentarians in general, and Conservative MPs in particular.

A review of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional initiatives may provide the best insight into emerging Canadian attitudes between the governed and their governors. Even as the electorate expressed its exasperation with the elected for their perceived preoccupation with constitutional reform at the expense of more pressing economic issues, voters gave voice to their true feelings about the process of government and their growing sense of alienation.

Chapter Three will consider Campbell's successful campaign to win the Tory party leadership and examine her summer barbecue tour in the context of whether her early success put her in a competitive

position going into the fall federal election campaign.

Chapter Three concludes with an assessment of Campbell's September 2 announcement on the controversial proposed purchase of 50 EH-101 helicopters by the Department of National Defence. While the announcement was made before the election was called, the helicopter purchase rollback is considered a defining moment in the campaign.

Chapter Four focuses on the first three weeks of the campaign and the media coverage itself.

Based on an analysis of network and print media coverage, key events during that three week period -- Campbell's statement on jobs on the lawn at Rideau Hall; the release of the Liberal Party's Red Book; her comments at St. Bruno, Quebec on the appropriateness of discussing social reforms during a campaign; the Surrey, B.C. deficit reduction speech; and the editorial board meeting with the Globe and Mail -- are assessed in some detail in the context of Iyengar and Kinder's theories on framing.² In particular we focus on the battle between reporters and journalists over the frame.

² Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, News that Matters: Television and American Opinion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987)

Chapter Four also considers the impact of media coverage on voter intentions through the first phase of the campaign before the paid ad campaign began and the televised leaders' debates were held; campaign strategists have long assumed that voter intentions are not much influenced until these two events occurs.

Chapter Five continues the analysis of coverage of specific campaign events -- including the televised leaders' debates, the Pearson airport controversy, the Chrétien "attack" ad and the October 15 interview with La Presse -- with a particular focus on the bandwagon effect of horse-race style coverage on voter intentions. Chapter Five also considers how the horse-race coverage affected the type of stories emanating from the Campbell campaign

As was the case in Chapter Four, because Campbell's earned media strategy is the focus of the study, references to the media activities of other party leaders are not considered in a comprehensive manner and are cited only when they help elucidate Conservative action.

Chapter Six advances the premise that former prime minister Campbell's failure to take the business of media relations seriously

triggered a chain reaction that resulted in the near annihilation of the political formation she led.

The Conservative campaign's cavalier disregard for the routines and structures of newsgathering resulted in a format for a leader's tour that made it an ineffective vehicle for political communications. The ineffectiveness of Campbell's tour strategy precluded the possibility of effectively using pseudo-events to create a positive public image.

The paper concludes that Tory campaign strategists and the party leader alike succumbed to the curse of the gifted amateur -- presuming the exercise of media relations could be mastered without much effort or expenditure of intellectual energy.

The paper offers the view that Campbell's collapse occurred within the first 15 days of the campaign, and that it was the failure of the campaign's earned media strategy which acted as the trigger mechanism for the electoral debacle that befell the party of Sir John A. Macdonald.

This writer acknowledges the fact that the thesis offered is not that of a clinically detached observer; rather it represents the thoughts of an individual who has been, to use Crouse's term, one of the "Boys on the Bus" as well as a party apparatchik riding in the "wide seats" up

front.

As a former Southam News correspondent and a one-time Ottawa and Washington bureau chief for the Toronto Star, this student covered the 1974, 1979 and 1980 Canadian federal election campaigns, the 1980 Quebec referendum campaign, a half-dozen provincial general election campaigns, and the first primaries for the 1984 U.S. presidential campaign.

In the 1984 election, as press secretary to then opposition leader Brian Mulroney, this student was directly responsible for media relations on Mulroney's campaign plane, was spokesperson for the party leader, and served on the PC Party's national campaign committee and campaign strategy committee.

Following a stint in the Prime Minister's office as press secretary, director of communications and special advisor from September 1984 to May, 1987, the writer was a member of the PC Party's national campaign committee in 1988 and served as a designated spokesperson for the campaign, representing the Conservatives on weekly radio and television pundit panels in English and French.

The writer's involvement in this campaign was reduced significantly because of a strongly-held personal belief that the renewal

of a political party should not begin and end with a change of leader, but should also include the leader's entourage. As someone closely associated with Campbell's predecessor, this writer's preference was to stand aside for the next generation. I served as a volunteer advance person for Campbell's foray to the United Nations on September 29 and as a member of a small working group asked to provide advice on the format for the televised leaders' debates.

The writer has been a comrade, competitor, business partner and confidante of many of the principals of this election story. These extensive contacts over more than 20 years will undoubtedly shape certain perceptions or attitudes expressed.

But each contact with an interview subject was initiated as a student researching a master's thesis. Certain interviewees, such as CTV's Leslie Jones and Sheila Ryder, expressed some bemusement at what they saw as a role reversal. All interview subjects approached were prepared, and even anxious, to share their thoughts about the Campbell campaign's media component and invariably expressed a desire to read the finished product. However, there were occasions when it became apparent the writer's partisan association had not been forgotten. For example, when CBC Radio's Jason Moscovitz talked of poll results as a campaign turning point, he said: "For me, the turning point of the election was when the published polls

suggested you were going to lose; that's when people decided to put the boots to you."³ The use of the second person pronoun is revealing.

As is the case with any analysis, the perspective offered in this paper will be shaped by both professional experience and personal relationship. There is an acknowledged risk readers may question the writer's ability to remain suitably detached and analytical. In the end, the reader will make the final assessment of the validity of the arguments advanced.

The paper, and its central thesis, is offered for consideration against this professional and personal backdrop.

³ Jason Moscovitz, personal interviews, January 27, February 7, 1994.

CHAPTER 1

MEDIA "FRAMES" AND CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

I. INTRODUCTION

Political leaders in western industrialized democracies rely on the mass media to mobilize electoral support and voter participation in general election campaigns.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the impact of the media's campaign coverage on voter intentions has been the subject of idle speculation, study and academic analysis for decades. The broad conclusions drawn from such research have changed over the years.

This chapter will begin with a review of literature outlining the various theories of media effects, beginning with the magic bullet theory that emerged after World War One. The Lazarsfeld model of minimal effects and its particular focus on selective perception and the two-step flow theory of communication will be reviewed as the dominant paradigm of media studies from the 1950s through the 1970s. Our literature review will then focus on the emergence of a third stream of research, situated conceptually between the magic

bullet and minimalist schools, that examined the “agenda-setting” properties of media coverage. The review will deal in some detail with the media “frame” theories advanced by Todd Gitlin, Robert Entman, Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder.

The second section of this chapter sets out Richard Joslyn's view of election campaigns as the product or result of interactions between the candidates, journalists, and the electorate; there is a particular focus on the voters' increased reliance on the media for campaign information. The importance of media coverage in a time of lessened partisanship or “flexible partisanship,” to use Harold Clarke's term¹, here in Canada will also be considered.

Finally, this chapter will consider the specific relevance of Iyengar and Kinder's “framing” theories to the 1993 Canadian federal election, and to Conservative Party Leader Kim Campbell's earned media strategy in particular. This final section will seek to relate the media “frame” theory to election coverage and voter intentions, and will consider the extent to which the Campbell and Chrétien campaigns appear to have understood “frame” theory as it applied to their earned media strategies.

¹ Harold Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon H. Pammett, Political Choice in Canada (Toronto: McGraw Hill, Ryerson, 1979): 303.

II. THEORIES OF MEDIA EFFECTS

In the years immediately following World War One, early media research focussed on the effects that propaganda, diffused through the mass media, might have on a population. Analysts developed the “magic bullet” theory based on a stimulus-response study model. University of Calgary professor Barry Cooper states the magic bullet theory assumed that social behaviour (the response) might be the direct effect of media content (the stimulus).² The theory held that media messages were like “magic bullets” scoring direct hits on a large segment of the population and affecting each individual in a more-or-less uniform manner. In more recent times, this theory acquired other, equally colourful descriptions such as the “hypodermic needle theory” and the “transmission belt theory.” The evolution of psychological and sociological research and theory impacted on those attempting to understand mass communication, as Melvin De Fleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach note. “The magic bullet theory had been built upon assumptions that were no longer regarded as tenable by general theorists, and consequently the theory had to be

² Barry Cooper, Sins of Omission: Shaping the News at CBC TV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994): 3.

rather reluctantly abandoned by students of the mass media.”³

By the end of World War II, the magic bullet theory had been dethroned by a second perspective articulated by Paul Lazarsfeld and his school,⁴ a perspective identified by Todd Gitlin as the dominant paradigm of media studies of this second genre.⁵ Indeed, the “two-step flow” theory of communications articulated by Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld⁶ is identified by Gitlin as the most important theory of the period .

The two-step flow idea advanced by Katz and Lazarsfeld was that media messages do not in fact reach most people directly, but are relayed by relatively well-informed individuals with media consumption habits who impart information that has already passed through their personal information filters. “Ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active

³ Melvin L. De Fleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication, 4th Edition (New York: Longman Inc., 1982): 163.

⁴ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

⁵ Todd Gitlin, “Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm” Theory and Society 6.2, (1978): 207.

⁶ Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications (New York: Free Press, 1955)

sections of the population.”⁷

Lazarsfeld and his associates focussed on the “variables” that intervene between message-producers and message-receivers. Mass media, in their view, are but one of several “variables” that influence attitudes or voting intentions and not a particularly important one in the formation of public opinion.

While conceding that individuals did learn about campaign issues from the media, Lazarsfeld and his associates concluded that the impact of the coverage on public attitudes and voting intentions was minimal. “Despite the flood of propaganda and counterpropaganda available to the prospective voter, he is reached by very little of it. And, when we examine what exactly does reach him, we find that he elects to expose himself to the propaganda with which he already agrees, and to seal himself off from the propaganda with which he might disagree.”⁸

Lazarsfeld concluded that because of this self-selective process of information exchange, media coverage can, at most, act only to

⁷ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944) 151.

⁸ Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry E. Brady, and Jean Crête, Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1992): Prologue 9.

reinforce opinion or predispositions. As a result, Lazarsfeld and his associates concluded the media were not endowed with nearly the manipulative powers that had been supposed.

"This early work showed that the messages transmitted by the mass media did not change people's minds and had no measurable effect on voter turnout or voter preference," University of Calgary political scientist Barry Cooper observed. "Televised messages were considered as simply another source of information citizens could attend or not."⁹

Gitlin notes Lazarsfeld's own claims for his studies were relatively modest. And in a footnote in the Personal Influence study, Lazarsfeld himself states the study was completed before the general introduction of television.

But, as recently as 1976, Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure¹⁰, concluded that television news coverage had little impact on voter intentions. As Richard Joslyn summarizes: "Primarily because network campaign news contains so little meaningful information, it fails to have any meaningful effect on viewers' feelings about the

⁹ Cooper 23.

¹⁰ Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure, The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Elections (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976)

candidates and knowledge of the issues.”¹¹

The 1979 study, Political Choice in Canada, by Harold Clarke *et al.* concluded: “Evidence of direct effects of media attention and party contact in changing people’s voting preference may be lacking, but the data suggest the presence of reinforcing effects . . .”¹² Frederick J. Fletcher and Robert Everett concluded: “To date, Canadian voting behaviour specialists have conceded the possibility of media influence while remaining sceptical regarding direct influence.”¹³

However, more recent media impact analysis has been inclined to question the Lazarsfeld school’s minimalist view, suggesting it may have seriously underestimated the impact of news coverage on public opinion.

Since the late 1970s, a third stream of research inspired by the work of Walter Lippmann emerged, staking out what David Taras calls “a middle position between the magic bullet theory and the selective

¹¹ Richard Joslyn, Mass Media and Elections (New York: Random House, 1984): 158.

¹² Clarke *et al.*, Political Choice in Canada 296.

¹³ Frederick Fletcher and Robert Everett, “Mass Media and Elections in Canada, Media, Elections and Democracy Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher. Research Studies, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Vol. 19. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) 184.

attention schools"¹⁴ associated with Lazarsfeld and others. These theorists rejected the separation between media and society found in Lazarsfeld's theory. They also questioned the focus on short-term changes in attitudes and behaviour within clearly defined time frames, such as election campaigns, because it tended to obscure long-term effects.

The central proposition of this third stream of research is that issues that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems viewers regard as most important, Taras states.

Taras labels Todd Gitlin's book, The Whole World is Watching, as a modern classic for students of politics and communication. Television news, according to Gitlin, is structured according to precise frames. Taras quotes Gitlin to the effect that "frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters. The frame is 'clamped over the event' being reported so that only stories or elements of stories that fit the frame are likely to be selected."¹⁵

These "frames" help reporters organize news stories in a manner

¹⁴ David Taras, "Television and Public Policy: The CBC's Coverage of the Meech Lake Accord," Canadian Public Policy 15:3 (1989): 323.

¹⁵ Taras 325.

that allows news consumers to consider media messages in some context. The “Cold War” frame the media have applied to coverage of U.S. foreign policy post-World War II is a case in point.

Framing, according to Northwestern University’s Robert M. Entman, essentially involves selection and salience. Frames can define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and even suggest remedies.

The fact television news may meet a journalistic definition of political objectivity doesn’t necessarily mean it is politically neutral, according to research conducted by Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder.

Frames, states Entman, have important implications for political communication. “Politicians seeking support are thus compelled to compete with each other and with journalists over news frames. . . . Journalists may follow the rules for ‘objective’ reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of the situation.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” Journal of Communications 43.4 (1993): 55, 56.

As a result, Iyengar and Kinder further posit that the “frame” of news coverage is the key to analyzing television coverage of campaigns.¹⁷

The ideas of Gitlin, Entman, Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder are central to the thesis of this paper, which states that election campaign coverage involves the competition over news frames and that the party's leader's tour is the proverbial front line in that battle for control. These ideas will be considered in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

Iyengar notes that television takes up more of a typical American's waking hours than interpersonal interaction.¹⁸ He and Kinder believe television is an educator without peer and that as a consequence television news is news that matters. Picking up on a concept first set out by Bernard C. Cohen in The Press and Foreign Policy,¹⁹ Iyengar argues media coverage of political campaigns is important and has an impact not because the media tell voters what to think, but more precisely because the media tell voters what to think about.

¹⁷ Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, News that Matters: Television and American Opinion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987)

¹⁸ Shanto Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991): 1.

¹⁹ Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963)

Iyengar and Kinder believe television news does, in fact, exert a powerful influence on the electoral process. As the single most important source of information about political affairs, television powerfully shapes the views of society through the stories that appear on the evening news. "In commanding attention and shaping opinion, television is now an authority virtually without peer."²⁰

States Iyengar: "As the dominant form of mass communication, television is said to have contributed to a variety of maladies including reduced voter turnout, discounting of substantive issues in political campaigns, decline of the political parties, automatic reelection of incumbents, increased use of rhetorical and symbolic rather than problem-solving strategies of leadership and governance, and other fundamental changes in the political system."²¹

Referring to a 1985 study by Robert Bower, Iyengar and Kinder make the point that some 50 million Americans watch network news. "By a wide margin, they believe that television -- not magazines, not radio, not newspapers -- provides the most intelligent, complete and impartial coverage of public affairs and goes furthest in clarifying the

²⁰ Iyengar and Kinder 133.

²¹ Iyengar 1.

candidacies and issues at stake in national elections."²²

In a study prepared for the Caplan-Sauvageau Royal Commission on broadcasting, Peter Desbarats, dean of the University of Western Ontario's School of Journalism, reports the same pattern has been established in Canada; over the past 35 years, television has become the most important and influential news medium for Canadians.

Television news about political issues invariably takes one of two frames, Iyengar argues. The first, the episodic frame, deals in specific events or particular cases. The second, the thematic frame, considers political issues in a general context. An episodic treatment of unemployment, for example, might focus on layoffs at a particular manufacturing plant; a thematic treatment would consider unemployment as a consequence of a world-wide recession. Most television news reports actually have both frames, but one is always dominant.

By presenting news in one or the other format, television news attributes responsibility for existence or treatment of the problem differently. "Episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather

²² Iyengar and Kinder 1.

than societal attributions of responsibility.”²³

Despite the fact that virtually all political events are beyond the range of personal experience for most news consumers, opinionation nonetheless occurs. Iyengar writes, “The primary factor that determines opinions concerning political issues is the assignment of responsibility for the issue in question. . . .”²⁴ Iyengar’s point is that individuals tend to simplify political issues by reducing them to a question of responsibility. Opinions about political actions then flow from the answers to these questions of responsibility.

Responsibility, in this context, is framed in one of two ways. Causal responsibility focuses on the origin of a problem or political issue. Treatment responsibility focuses on the question of who or what has the necessary power to either alleviate or forestall alleviation of the problem.

Iyengar cites unemployment as a case in point. Unemployment, as an issue, is usually unaffected by the network frame because people understand it primarily in terms of the state of the economy. However, the issue can turn against a political leader depending on

²³ Iyengar 15, 16.

²⁴ Iyengar 8.

whether news coverage deals with unemployment or alternatively job creation in a causal or treatment responsibility construct. "If the problem of unemployment is assessed in terms of causal responsibility, the relevant questions concern the processes by which individuals lose or fail to obtain jobs. Treatment responsibility, on the other hand, seeks to establish who has the power (and interest) to alleviate or perpetuate unemployment."²⁵

The Canadian media's "frame" of Campbell, Chrétien and their respective policies on job creation was a defining feature of the 1993 campaign and will be considered in more detail in a later chapter.

Referring to the infamous "Willie Horton" ad used by George Bush's Republican campaign against Democratic challenger Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential election, Iyengar argues the ad effectively made the case that Dukakis was a cause of crime because of his state government's furlough program, rather than being an agent of treatment or control.²⁶

People tend to think about responsibility for political issues instinctively, according to Iyengar: conservatives have a tendency to

²⁵ Iyengar 8.

²⁶ Iyengar 9.

assign some responsibility to the victim, while liberals assign responsibility to society or the leading political actors.²⁷

Television news is predisposed towards episodic framing. Election coverage, as a consequence, is more attuned to the sound bite of the day, the size of the crowds, the party's standing in the polls, and the horse race, at the expense of coverage of ideological stances or policy platforms. Further, this episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility. Responsibility, therefore, is usually assigned to individual victims or perpetrators rather than to broad societal forces. Iyengar says that, as a result, the ultimate political impact of framing is pro-establishment. Yet individual candidates for public office can find themselves identified as the perpetrators of a particular problem.²⁸ Again, this observation will be considered in the context of Campbell and her campaign later in this paper.

Iyengar states network news framing influences the attributions of responsibility which, in turn, influence public opinion. Network framing, therefore, has important consequences for public opinion. "Citizens reward and punish presidents depending upon the manner

²⁷ Iyengar 10.

²⁸ Iyengar 15, 16.

in which they attribute responsibility for political issues.”²⁹

Television’s attributions of causal and treatment responsibility powerfully influence viewers’ policy preferences, their assessment of presidential performances and evaluations of public institutions, according to Iyengar. These attributions, and the political opinions they generate, permit citizens to exercise political control, the author argues, despite a low level of factual knowledge on the specifics of an issue on the part of the public. “By reducing the complexity of political issues to the twin concepts of causation and treatment, [these media] attributions enable citizens to structure the otherwise dazzling array of events, policies, institutions, groups, and personalities that make up the day-to-day substance of national politics.”³⁰

Iyengar concludes that individual attributions of responsibility for political issues show significant short-term flux depending on the episodic and thematic frames used in the daily flow of information generated by television news coverage.³¹

Accessibility is also an issue. Information that individuals can more

²⁹ Iyengar 114.

³⁰ Iyengar 128.

³¹ Iyengar 130.

easily retrieve from their memory bank tends to dominate judgement. Because people rely heavily on the media for political information, the author states, patterns of news coverage are critical determinants of accessibility. "Typically, what comes to mind when the citizen thinks about public affairs are the images and information that flash across the television screen."³²

Iyengar and Donald Kinder, in News that Matters: Television and American Opinion, identify three major manifestations of the accessibility bias in public opinion, specifically:

- agenda-setting effects;
- priming effects;
- bandwagon effects in political campaigns.

The authors describe agenda-setting as the tendency of people to cite issues in the news when asked to identify significant political problems. Richard Joslyn describes agenda-setting as "the ability of news coverage to affect the composition of the political agenda-- that is, to influence those issues, events, themes, or persons that the public considers important enough to think about and talk about."³³

³² Iyengar 132.

³³ Joslyn 164.

The term "agenda-setting" was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their 1972 study which stated: "The mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues. In short, the data suggest a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media [reflecting to a considerable degree the emphasis by candidates] and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics."³⁴ McCombs and Shaw concluded voters tend to share the media's composite definition of what is important.³⁵

Denis McQuail³⁶ notes certain scholars categorize agenda-setting as a plausible but unproven idea. However, Iyengar and Kinder are categoric in their conclusions.

Walter Lippmann, in the 1920s, was the first to consider the agenda-setting power of the media. But, Lippmann's original warning that news organizations possess the power to determine what the public takes to be important seemed to have little impact on the

³⁴ Maxwell McCombs, and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking Eds. David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., Inc., 1991): 21,22.

³⁵ McCombs and Shaw 25.

³⁶ Denis McQuail, Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction. Second Edition (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1987): 276.

research at the time and subsequently, with the Lazarsfeld school. In 1920, Lippmann wrote: "The quack, the charlatan, the jingo, and the terrorist can flourish only where the audience is deprived of independent access to information."³⁷

Lippmann's observation that "pictures in peoples' heads" determine their political choices led Iyengar to conclude: "The exercise of enlightened citizenship demands that the complexity of public affairs be somehow overcome, and these 'pictures' are certainly a convenient basis for doing so."³⁸

Iyengar and Kinder build on Lippmann's hypothesis to assert that those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems viewers regard as the nation's most pressing and serious. Agenda-setting is a continuous process: as television news coverage shifts its priorities, so too does the audience re-order its list of important issues. A series of studies tested this hypothesis by re-ordering, and then dropping, issues on authentic-looking, but experimenter-created newscasts; the tests used issues such as energy cost and conservation, unemployment, and international events. The authors conclude the effects of agenda-setting are neither momentary

³⁷ Quoted in Iyengar and Kinder 3.

³⁸ Iyengar 135.

nor permanent, which suggests public attitudes are a work in progress because of the audience vulnerability to the news of the day.

The studies further revealed the placing of a news story in a newscast had a direct impact on viewer attitudes. Viewers recognize the ordering of items on a national newscast involves an editorial judgement on the part of a news organization. Further, viewers tend to endorse that judgement. Stories that appear first (on a newscast) tend to matter more "because viewers, taking their cues from the networks, confer special significance upon them."³⁹ Part of the reason may be that lead items appear on screen before the viewer's attention begins to wander.

The authors recognized that national problems such as crime in the streets can have a very personal connection; one may be a victim of a mugging or a break-in, for instance. But they discovered that the connection between personal experience and political judgement appeared surprisingly weak. "Personal predicaments are consequential and preoccupying -- but they remain, for the most part, personal. They contribute rather little to beliefs about society or the nation."⁴⁰ However, when problems flare up and capture the attention

³⁹ Iyengar and Kinder 46.

⁴⁰ Iyengar and Kinder 48.

of the media, agenda-setting effects show up almost immediately among those directly affected by the problem. Only when an issue holds the media agenda for a period of time does it register as deeply with those who aren't directly affected.

Television's agenda-setting properties tend to have more influence on those who are more independent of view than on those with strong partisan leanings. Agenda-setting influence is also greater on those with less formal education as well as those who are politically lethargic. Given Canada's high rate of "flexible partisanship" relative to other western democracies (Clarke *et al*), this agenda-setting effect of news coverage may have a particular relevance.

Political scientists have, in recent years, suggested we now live in an era of "flexible partisanship." The first election studies in the early 1960s found levels of partisan instability were higher in Canada than elsewhere in advanced industrial countries. The National Election Studies (NES), funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, identify two-thirds of Canadians as "flexible partisans" and as such are likely to switch votes.⁴¹ These relatively high patterns of partisan change have held up through the

⁴¹ Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon H. Pammett, Absent Mandate: Interpreting Change in Canadian Elections (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Co., 1991): 48.

1960s, 1970s and 1980s.⁴²

The second major effect of television news, according to Iyengar and Kinder, is the “priming” effect. Priming refers to the ability of news and current affairs programming to affect the criteria by which individuals judge their political leaders. The authors say, “By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged.”⁴³

The authors note that when considering leaders, people ordinarily prefer intuitive shortcuts and simple rules of thumb over exhaustive analysis. And a person’s judgement depends in part on what thoughts come to the top of mind.⁴⁴

When television viewers are asked to assess the American president’s overall performance, Iyengar and Kinder assert that they give more weight to their assessment of his performance on those problems most heavily covered by television.

⁴² Clarke et al. Absent Mandate 65.

⁴³ Iyengar and Kinder 63.

⁴⁴ Iyengar and Kinder 64.

The authors suggest the more television coverage interprets events as though they were the direct result of a president's action or inaction, the more influence such coverage has in priming the public's perception of a leader's performance. "When television coverage discounts the president's role, so, too, do viewers; when coverage augments the president's role, viewers do so as well."⁴⁵ The priming effect is stronger for an issue that is relatively new to the media agenda, when the public's understanding of and attitudes on it are still very much in formation.

Of particular significance is Iyengar and Kinder's finding that television news primes the politically involved as effectively as it does the politically disengaged.

"Priming is greatest when the news frames a particular problem as if it were the president's business, when viewers are prepared to regard the problem as important, and when they see the problem as entangled in the duties and obligations of the presidency."⁴⁶

Iyengar and Kinder state much of the activity of a party leader in a campaign, particularly the leader's tour, is mounted in an attempt to

⁴⁵ Iyengar and Kinder 86.

⁴⁶ Iyengar and Kinder 97.

"prime" voters to the leader's advantage.

The authors believe "priming operates on the choices voters make. The priorities that are uppermost in voters' minds as they go to the polls to select a president or a U.S. Representative appear to be powerfully shaped by the last-minute preoccupations of television news."⁴⁷ Iyengar and Kinder state priming can be set off by achievements as well as failure. As we shall see, Chrétien's policy Red Book could be a case in point.

Print media and radio can play a role in priming and agenda-setting as well for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the influence each can have on network news editors. Newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail* and radio news programs such as the CBC's World at Eight can dominate the news cycle on any given day.

Acknowledging Lazarsfeld's view that the media strengthen predispositions already in place prior to the campaign, Iyengar and Kinder concede political persuasion is difficult to achieve, but they argue agenda-setting and priming are pervasive. While there are clear limits to television's power, the authors conclude television news does affect the political process by:

- determining which problems a political leader must take up and

⁴⁷ Iyengar and Kinder 110.

which he or she can safely ignore;

- facilitating or undermining an incumbent head of state or government's capacity to govern;
- intruding, sometimes dramatically and decisively, upon campaigns and elections.

Media coverage of political campaigns can also intrude in a general election campaign through a phenomenon known as the bandwagon effect, according to recent media impact research.

Television news can be quite superficial, portraying election campaigns as little more than sporting events. Television news pays little attention to policy and a lot of attention to the contest itself: who's winning, who's losing, what is the campaign strategy, how much time is left in the game.

This horse-race coverage can create a bandwagon effect among news consumers to the demonstrable benefit of the perceived winner.

The 1988 National Election Study by Johnston et al. concludes voters' expectations about election results are important to voter behaviour on election days in our "first past the post" electoral system.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Johnston et al 197.

Reports on public opinion polls register with electors and can lead to a bandwagon effect. This bandwagon effect was demonstrably a factor in the final two weeks of the 1993 campaign, it will be argued in Chapter 5 and is the basis for a further study by Johnston et al.

Iyengar and Kinder have also studied the bandwagon effect. "As would be expected from our results on priming, when campaign coverage is preoccupied with winning and losing, so, too, are the voters," the authors state.⁴⁹ If the only story in the coverage is the "horse-race" story, then virtually all voters, regardless of how involved they may be in other matters, will know who is ahead and who is behind. "Such relentless promotion of a single view of the campaign reduces the electorate's capacity to choose wisely," the authors add.⁵⁰

In short, "horse-race" style reporting causes the electorate to think of candidates in terms of their electoral viability. The candidate the media deem to have the brightest prospects is typically the beneficiary of horse-race reporting.

While Iyengar and Kinder's research was conducted in the United

⁴⁹ Iyengar and Kinder 129.

⁵⁰ Iyengar and Kinder 129

States, Barry Cooper concludes: "There is no reason to think that different results would be obtained from Canadian subjects."⁵¹

III. THE MEDIA, CAMPAIGNS AND VOTERS

Political scientists now agree general election campaigns are primarily media events. In their 1972 study of voter attitudes in Chapel Hill, N.C., Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw note: "In our day, more than ever before, candidates go before the people through the mass media rather than in person. The information in the mass media becomes the only contact many have with politics."⁵²

The McCombs/Shaw conclusion is supported by a series of Canadian election campaign studies.

As Richard Johnston and his colleagues put it: "The images in the media, especially on the small screen, are as close as most citizens get to a real campaign. Indeed, such reality as the campaign possesses is largely manufactured for media consumption and re-transmission."⁵³

⁵¹ Cooper 25.

⁵² McCombs and Shaw 17.

⁵³ Johnston et al 112.

The campaign itself, according to York University political scientist Frederick Fletcher, has become a contest waged by parties and their leaders to determine which issues the campaign will revolve around. "The object of the contest . . . is to manage events so that the news coverage will come out as close to their preferred version of events as possible."⁵⁴

In The Canadian General Election of 1988, Alan Frizzell, Jon H. Pammett and Anthony Westell state every national election campaign is now in essence a media campaign. The media present candidates with the opportunity to communicate with millions of voters several times every day. Journalists, in turn, interpret the message, shape the image and can be highly critical of the candidate. "In the circumstances, it is vital for a political party to have an effective media strategy."⁵⁵ Strategists with the Campbell campaign interviewed for this paper scoffed when asked if the prime minister had a thought-out media strategy. To a person, they insist a separate media strategy was never crafted, or at least never tabled with senior strategists for discussion or deliberation.

Frizzell and his associates suggest the influence of media coverage

⁵⁴ Richard Johnston et al 112.

⁵⁵ Alan Frizzell, Jon H. Pammett and Anthony Westell The Canadian General Election of 1988 (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989) 75.

in the political process may be over-estimated; they note the televised leaders' debates, which afford leaders the opportunity to speak directly to the people, may have the potential to have a profound effect on public opinion. Clarke and his colleagues agree with Frizzell et al. on the issue of media coverage, but are somewhat more ambivalent on the second point.

This paper will suggest that Frizzell's use of the term "potential" as applied to televised leaders' debates applies equally to media coverage. And in the case of the Campbell campaign, the paper will argue media coverage demonstrably was a factor in the electoral decision-making process.

Campaign communication through the mass media takes on four forms: paid advertising messages, public opinion research, televised leaders' debates, and "earned" media coverage of campaign activity.

This paper focuses on the "earned" media component of the 1993 Canadian general election, and in particular, the Progressive Conservative Party's earned media strategy.

The media provide citizens with a "mediated" version of an election campaign, according to Richard Joslyn.

Earned media is a riskier proposition for campaigning politicians. Unlike their paid commercials, politicians must cede control of the earned media message to professional interlocutors -- journalists, in other words. On the plus side of the ledger, earned media coverage is more credible with electors and it is free, a not-insignificant factor in this era of campaign spending limits at both the national and the constituency level. As a result, says Joslyn, "candidates will always be ambivalent about such free communication There is always a tension between the risk and the attractiveness of these forms of communication."⁵⁶

This ambivalence on the part of candidates is shared by their campaign strategists. Some campaign advisors believe the early campaign period, before the paid advertising kicks in and the televised leaders' debates occur, is the political equivalent of the Phony War of 1939-40. As was the case with the Phony War, casualties can occur in this early campaign period, but certain strategists tend to see it as being less important, in terms of the final campaign outcome, to the paid advertising campaign and the televised leaders' debates. Senator Norman Atkins, chair of the successful Tory campaigns in 1984 and 1988, believed strongly that paid party messages were the most effective campaign communication tool.

⁵⁶ Joslyn 80.

Tory strategist John Laschinger reflects the ambivalence of campaign gurus towards this free media period: "Unable to purchase their own time to deliver their own message the way they want to say it -- unfiltered by reporters, commentators, editors and headline writers -- the parties have to settle for second best: television news coverage of their leaders participating in contrived events, manipulated to resemble real happenings."⁵⁷

Veteran Tory strategist Hugh Segal expressed similar sentiments in a CBC Prime Time News interview on September 16. Asked to comment on the Liberal decision to release its campaign policy Red Book early and in total, Segal said: "I think the Liberals faced an important strategic and tactical choice: put out your policy step by step and be questioned in great detail in that process or put it all out in one document early in the campaign when very few people are watching and hoping like heck that it just goes away."⁵⁸

Richard Joslyn states the onus is on candidates to say or do something to attract media attention. On one level, Joslyn says, a candidate must time campaign appearances to accommodate media production schedules, provide media representatives with the tools to

⁵⁷ John Laschinger, and Geoffrey Stevens, Leaders and Lesser Mortals: Backroom Politics in Canada (Toronto: Key Porter Books Ltd., 1992) 136.

⁵⁸ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News, September 16, 1993.

do their jobs -- such as telephone lines, typewriters and press releases (Joslyn was writing before the advent of the laptop computer and the cellular phone) -- and must arrange for the transportation and accommodation of travelling journalists.

Joslyn quotes one political consultant's check list for effective earned media coverage: "be brief . . . be prompt . . . be early . . . and be visual."⁵⁹ But on another level, Joslyn says candidates must provide stories "that can be simplified and condensed, that contain conflict or drama, that present something novel or unexpected, and that lend themselves to stories about the likely outcome of the campaign."⁶⁰

Here in Canada, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, chaired by Pierre Lortie, commissioned a series of studies to determine what, if any, patterns exist in media coverage of campaigns.

William O. Gilsdorf and Robert Bernier agree that since the 1960s, "media use and control are essential to effective campaigning."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Joslyn 77.

⁶⁰ Joslyn 77.

⁶¹ William O. Gilsdorf and Robert Bernier, "Journalistic Practice in Covering Federal Election Campaigns in Canada." Reporting the Campaign: Election coverage in Canada Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher. Research Studies, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Vol. 22. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) 1.

Increasingly, they suggest, the voter has become a passive observer and consumer of news reports and pre-packaged messages.

The Royal Commission studies reaffirm the view that, in news coverage, a particular importance is attached to national issues, leaders' tours, and polls. And, consistent with the findings of Lyengar and Kinder, the studies state the definition of what constitutes an important campaign issue is closely related to the agenda that is set through the media. Consequently, the power to set election agendas is largely the prerogative of politicians and the media, according to Gilsdorf and Bernier.

By 1979, television had become the dominant source of Canadian campaign information. Asked to list their preferred source of campaign news in a 1979 study by the Carleton University School of Journalism, a clear majority (52 per cent) said television; 30 per cent of the respondents said newspapers and 11 per cent picked radio. Conrad Winn, president of Compas Inc., a polling firm, says television is growing in importance as an information source simply because people are less literate. "They don't read as many newspapers or books as they once did. People are spending less time reading largely due to the fact they are spending more time working."⁶²

⁶² Bob Fife, "Tuning In to the Power of Television," Ottawa Sun, September 5, 1993: 32.

As a result, campaigns have become contests of television performance, say Frederick Fletcher and Robert Everett in their Royal Commission study. "Influenced by television, the national campaigns tend to focus on party leaders, downplaying not only local candidates and potential cabinet ministers, but also policies and issues."⁶³ Fletcher and Everett say floating voters tend to respond to image politics, for which television is particularly suited. As a consequence, they conclude: "Campaigns are run for television by the national parties, primarily because party strategists believe it is the best medium for reaching uncommitted voters."⁶⁴ CBC Radio's National Affairs Correspondent, Jason Moscovitz, believes campaign strategists are "fixated to a fault"⁶⁵ with television coverage. These strategists tend to ignore the agenda-setting abilities of other media. They also ignore the advantages print and radio can have in imparting different kinds of information.

Frederick Fletcher's studies identified certain trends or patterns to media campaign coverage, including more direct attention to leaders' performances, more coverage of party strategies and strategists, and

⁶³ Fletcher and Everett, Media, Elections and Democracy Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher 198.

⁶⁴ Fletcher and Everett, Media, Elections and Democracy Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher 198.

⁶⁵ Jason Moscovitz, personal interview, January 27, 1994.

more coverage of public opinion polls with a particular focus on voter intention questions.

Because the media in general are predisposed to bad news, being in the news in a campaign context is not necessarily a positive or constructive development. The 1988 Carleton University study by Alan Frizzell and Tony Westell concluded all three major party leaders received more unfavourable than favourable coverage.⁶⁶ Certainly editorial endorsements in major metropolitan dailies appear to have little or no influence in federal elections; witness Pierre Trudeau's majority government victory in the 1980 federal election in the face of widescale editorial support for the Conservatives.

These observations beg the question: does media coverage of a campaign matter? Indeed, prior to the 1988 campaign, election research focussed on a more fundamental question: do campaigns themselves matter?

In their study Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election, Richard Johnston and his colleagues assert the 1988 general election campaign "poses fundamental challenges to electoral studies." The study continues: "It seems to be widely held in the discipline that campaigns do not matter. The 1988 campaign did.

⁶⁶ Frizzell et al 89.

The way in which 1988 mattered suggests that, at some level, all campaigns matter, even when they do not exhibit the spectacular ups and downs of 1988.”⁶⁷

Johnston and his colleagues suggest that U.S. election studies from 1940 on be re-examined with a view to answering the question: “to what extent is the discipline’s slighting of campaign effects mainly the result of failure to look for them?”⁶⁸

Johnston concedes some campaigns are, and will be, tepid or dull, where little happens of any interest or impact. “But other times they will meet campaigns filled with strategic and rhetorical moves that reverse the balance of forces and determine the election,” the study continues. “One or two studies may even run into a campaign that alters permanently the basic alignment of political forces.”⁶⁹ Johnston’s findings, coupled with the fluid nature of partisan leanings among Canadian electors, suggest some voters may be more susceptible than others to media messages, as discussed earlier.

In Absent Mandate: Interpreting Change in Canadian Elections.

⁶⁷ Richard Johnston et al 245.

⁶⁸ Richard Johnston et al 252.

⁶⁹ Richard Johnston et al 253.

Harold D. Clarke and others consider the phenomenon of flexible partisanship in the context of recent Canadian elections.

Canadian political parties have evolved as “brokers” rather than ideologically-driven political formations. The business of politics has become the process of coalition creation. The challenge for political formations, according to Clarke *et al.*, is that these brokerage parties are forced to recreate coalitions at each election. Brokerage parties constantly compete for the same voters, and by and large, the same policy space. And they tend to appeal for electoral support in election campaigns by promising voters quick-fix solutions for their declared grievances; those grievances tend to evolve around the expression of voter impatience with the political failure to improve economic conditions.

The authors state: “The parties’ failure to give voters coherent competing programs thus turns the electoral process into a spectator sport for those who enjoy political ‘horseraces’ rather than an exercise in informed citizen participation.”⁷⁰ Because many Canadians do not believe they can have any real impact on the course of political events at either the federal or provincial level, they tend to be passive followers of campaign coverage in the mainstream media and restrict their activity to voting.

⁷⁰ Clarke et al *Absent Mandate* 37.

Canadian political parties organize around their leader rather than around political principles or ideas, the authors note. The parties are able to generate interest and participation in elections with this problem-centred, leader-focussed approach. But they fall short of generating interest in the political process in general.⁷¹

There is a significant risk to governing parties and leaders who present themselves as problem solvers, however. They bear the brunt of the public's displeasure when things go wrong. In addition, Canadians are more likely to connect parties with transitory factors associated with a specific campaign rather than ideological perceptions. These factors would include leadership, a specific issue, or a government's performance in a particular area.

Campaign issues, according to the Clarke study, had little staying power through the 1970s and the pattern seems to hold to this day. While economic issues may dominate issue lists in successive campaigns, it isn't always the same economic issue that surges to the fore. In the 1974 federal election, for example, the voters were preoccupied with inflation; ten years later, the issue was jobs. The electorate therefore appears prone to accepting a new definition of the problem in each campaign and abandoning those issues deemed

⁷¹ Clarke et al. Absent Mandate 37.

important in previous campaigns. "The result," state the authors, "is that issues are presented and discarded with remarkable rapidity. What sells, and not what's needed, remains the guiding principle."⁷²

Clarke and his colleagues agree political leaders are the superstars of Canadian politics. Their every campaign utterance is treated as a major news item, particularly during an election campaign.

The leader is always portrayed as having the "Right Stuff," according to the authors. Pierre Trudeau's pledge to "wrestle inflation to the ground" and Brian Mulroney's 1984 mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs" are identified in their analysis as leader-oriented strategies offered to the electorate instead of thought-out policies to deal with high prices and unemployment.⁷³

The parties place the emphasis in campaigns on cultivating positive images for their leaders that, if successful, eventually get telescoped into horse-race election coverage. These same parties therefore compete for electoral support by attempting to manipulate mass media to get the most favourable coverage possible. These image-making

⁷² Clarke et al Absent Mandate 86.

⁷³ Clarke et al Absent Mandate 89.

efforts are supported by slick paid advertising campaigns.⁷⁴

Clarke and his colleagues make the point that the vast majority of Canadians have never seen a party leader in person; yet these leaders are familiar figures to them.⁷⁵

Televised leaders' debates are important in shaping a leader's image -- perhaps more important than is generally believed, according to the authors. Conversely, these televised debates may be less important than we think in terms of a direct effect on voting intentions.⁷⁶ Turner, for instance, emerged the big winner in the 1988 leaders' debate but still lost the election.

Party leaders can influence voting choice, according to Clarke and his colleagues, but the effect on voting and election outcomes can vary markedly from one campaign situation to another. This observation will be pursued in the context of the 1993 federal election in more detail in a later chapter.

⁷⁴ While acknowledging the priority that campaigns assign to election advertising, both in terms of budgets and creative energy, the focus of this paper is "earned media": that is, electronic and print news coverage generated by campaigns. Advertising will be considered, but only as a subject of media coverage. Similarly, the leaders' debates will be considered in the context of the news coverage the events generated.

⁷⁵ Clarke et al Absent Mandate 101.

⁷⁶ Clarke et al Absent Mandate 102.

In systems where people have strong, durable party attachments, based either on ideology or group loyalties, leaders and/or issues may be factors in election outcomes. But in Canada, where partisan attachments are weak and interchangeable, large numbers of voters may be predisposed to react to the changing images of leaders and issues as reflected in the mass media's campaign coverage.

Frederick Fletcher, in a 1987 study⁷⁷ building on the observations of Harold Clarke and his colleagues, concludes that campaigns themselves are increasingly significant because of increased voter volatility. In recent campaigns, up to 60 per cent of voters were deemed to be willing to change their voting preference. NES research suggests 43 per cent of respondents to surveys from 1974 through 1988 say they made up their minds on how they would vote during the campaign itself; half of those voters waited until the final week, or even the final day, of the campaign.⁷⁸

Performance on the hustings, according to Clarke and his colleagues, can account for some differences. Turner's poor performance in the 1984 campaign, for instance, eroded his credibility. Presumably, because most voters get their information on

⁷⁷ Frederick Fletcher. "The Media and Parliamentary Elections in Canada," Legislative Studies Quarterly 12(3): 341-372.

⁷⁸ Clarke et al. Absent Mandate 110.

leaders' performances from the media, media coverage is a factor.

The effect of leaders and their image, and issues on voting patterns can easily become intertwined, according to Clarke and his colleagues.⁷⁹ In campaigns, pronouncements by party leaders on relevant issues receive extensive media coverage. Public attitudes towards party leaders can be shaped by how the public perceives the party leaders will deal with salient issues.

Altered perceptions about party leaders and their abilities to deal with key issues enhance the likelihood of vote-switching, or abstention. "A brokerage party system produces a highly volatile issue agenda and highly changeable party leader images," Clarke and his colleagues observed.⁸⁰

Precisely because of the way parties approach and conduct campaigns, it is extremely difficult for a government to obtain a true policy mandate according to the authors. (Hence the title, Absent Mandate.) Yet that doesn't stop governing parties from claiming such a mandate. The reason, of course, is that campaigns are fought out over issue generalities, often articulated in political phraseology best

⁷⁹ Clarke et al. Absent Mandate 114.

⁸⁰ Clarke et al. Absent Mandate 124.

suited to a bumper sticker.

Political parties usually settle on one of two strategies for a general election campaign. The first is to portray societal problems in very general terms and then portray their particular group as the party best able to confront the problem. Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien's 1993 campaign is a case in point; it was organized around the theme of Jobs, with his famous Red Book as the instrument to convince the electorate he had the plan to confront the unemployment problem.

The second strategy is to try to distinguish one's party from the others by advancing a very specific policy option. The NDP's pledge to tear up the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is one example. Joe Clark's 1980 budget campaign, with its proposed 18-cent a gallon tax on gasoline, is another. These campaigns try to position the party as the only formation prepared to deal with the issues, while the opponents peddle platitudes.

In the end, Clarke and his colleagues conclude campaigns in Canada come down to a measure of the party leader and the perception of how that leader will deal with salient issues. "The prominent role accorded the leaders during election campaigns ensures that any policy discussion occurs around the public utterances and personal skills of these few people. As a result, their character traits and the

public's confidence in their abilities to carry out policy become inextricably woven into the electoral issues themselves."⁸¹

This observation has particular salience to the 1993 campaign.

The authors, prophetically in Kim Campbell's case, conclude: "Individual party leaders have become both the anchors of the brokerage system and its major casualties."⁸²

Newscasts, current affairs programming, and print coverage provide much of the information that becomes part of the voters' decision-making process.

In a study for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, R.H. MacDermid writes: "For most people, politics means the short 'sound bite' spoken by a party leader and featured in a 45-second story on the national or local television news."⁸³ For that reason, MacDermid says, it is surprising how little we know about how media usage affects voting intentions, patterns or turnout.

⁸¹ Clarke et al Absent Mandate 154.

⁸² Clarke et al Absent Mandate 154.

⁸³ R.H. MacDermid, ed. "Media Usage and Political Behavior," Media and Voters in Canadian Election Campaigns Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher. Research Studies, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Vol. 18. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) 45.

The 1988 National Election Study asked Canadians how often they had read a daily newspaper or watched a newscast in the past week. MacDermid reports 45 per cent of respondents watched a TV newscast every day and 62 per cent reported watching a newscast at least four times a week; 40 per cent reported they had read a newspaper every day and 52 per cent had read a newspaper on at least four days of the past week. It is not known, however, whether the television news watchers viewed the entire broadcast. Nor is there any way of knowing from the National Election Study exactly what the newspaper respondents were reading. Radio emerged as the least important source of information during a campaign. MacDermid, therefore, concludes that the attention of Canadians to media coverage of campaigns is far from concentrated and universal.⁸⁴

Expanding on the earlier observation of Lazarsfeld and his school, MacDermid states media attentiveness is related to social background variables such as gender, income and education. He says the conjunction of characteristics describes not only those who pay most attention to politics but those who are most active in politics as well. Middle-aged, better educated males with above average incomes are most attuned, says MacDermid, perhaps because this group has more

⁸⁴ R.H. MacDermid, ed. "Media Usage and Political Behavior," Media and Voters in Canadian Election Campaigns Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher. Vol. 18. 48.

to gain or lose in material terms through political decisions. MacDermid's study further revealed that those who are most attentive to political messages are also likely to be the most partisan. Conversely, more casual voters present something of a paradox. On the one hand, these uninvolved voters tend to float and show a high susceptibility to short-term change if new political information actually reaches them. But if there is no marked information intake, these same casual voters are the least likely to show any change in the patterns of behaviour.⁸⁵

MacDermid, however, says the effect of attention to media on political knowledge, beliefs, and opinions, is by far the most difficult question to address. "Clearly, our knowledge of the effect of the media's message on the political beliefs of citizens is woefully inadequate. Part of this gap is because research designs that can address the content and effect of the messages transmitted through the media are very complex, time-consuming and costly."⁸⁶ MacDermid states attention to television news is a weak predictor of political knowledge, a situation that is reversed for newspaper readership.

⁸⁵ R.H. MacDermid, ed. "Media Usage and Political Behavior," Media and Voters in Canadian Election Campaigns Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher. Vol. 18. 86, 87.

⁸⁶ R.H. MacDermid Media and Voters in Canadian Election Campaigns Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher, Vol. 18. 87.

While television news is the most common source of political information, Ian Mitroff and Warren Bennis in their 1989 study, The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What Is It Doing to our Lives, argue that whatever "knowledge" viewers get from television, it "is quite different from the knowledge we would expect of an informed citizen of a democracy: television knowledge is essentially visual, incoherent, frenetic, lacking context, without a larger framework to ground the images that are thrown at the viewer, and contradictory."⁸⁷

IV. MEDIA, FRAMES AND THE 1993 ELECTION

If voters rely on the media for campaign information, and if the media's impact on voter intentions is rooted in agenda-setting, priming and the bandwagon effect brought about by news "frames," how do these "frames" -- which Globe and Mail reporter Murray Campbell describes as "the way reporters and editors set up hypotheses and organize reality so they can understand it"⁸⁸ -- get established? And what role did these "frames" play in the Conservative campaign collapse in the 1993 federal election?

⁸⁷ Quoted in Media and Voters in Canadian Election Campaigns Ed. Frederick J. Fletcher, Vol. 18 88.

⁸⁸ Murray Campbell, "Why News Gatherers 'Framed' Campbell," Globe and Mail October 7, 1993: A6.

This thesis posits the view that media coverage of the Campbell campaign did, in fact, constitute a dramatic and decisive intrusion in the 1993 federal election campaign.

The Canadian media, and network television in particular, established a dominant "frame" for the Campbell campaign relatively early on; moreover, that frame proved problematic for the Campbell campaign. Harold Clarke and his colleagues refer to the tendency of leader coverage to become intertwined with a dominant issue. In 1993, that dominant issue was jobs.

Following models set out in Iyengar and Kinder's research, this paper suggests the Canadian media used a dominant episodic frame for its 1993 coverage, with a treatment responsibility, rather than a causal construct.

Job creation emerged as the dominant issue. Campbell's explanation that Canada's unemployment levels were directly attributable to a world-wide economic downturn might have sufficed, had the media opted for a causal responsibility construct to the coverage. Once the media opted for a treatment responsibility, however -- that is measuring the Tory leader against expectations of what she was going to do personally to try to alleviate the unemployment problem -- her candidacy was doomed.

Entman's observations on framing -- that is journalists may follow rules for "objective" reporting, yet convey a dominant frame that prevents most news consumers from making a balanced assessment of the situation -- applies directly to Campbell's case.

Campbell's candidacy and the Progressive Conservative Party's campaign suffered seriously as a consequence. But the failure lies with the Campbell campaign, and not the journalists who covered it.

This paper, first, posits that the Tory leader's tour was structured in a manner that lent itself to a dominant "thematic" rather than a dominant "episodic" frame; this structure, however, is at odds with the traditional media approach to campaign coverage. Second, Campbell's campaign failed to establish her issue -- deficit reduction -- as the dominant campaign issue. Third, Campbell's lack of policy in general, and a specific federal job creation scheme in particular, left her vulnerable once the media settled on a treatment responsibility construct rather than a causal construct, particularly because jobs emerged as the dominant issue.

The Tory campaign's failure to develop an earned media strategy contributed immeasurably to the failure of the earned media component of the campaign.

The Liberal campaign, by contrast, was designed for a dominant “episodic” treatment. The party, correctly, identified jobs as the dominant issue. And the Liberal Red Book and \$6-billion federal-provincial infrastructure program afforded the Liberals an effective message for the media’s treatment-responsibility construct.

The Liberal strategy was geared for the coverage patterns of campaign reporting. The Conservative campaign was not.

To understand why this contrast in strategies emerged is so important, and why the media assign dominance to episodic and treatment over thematic and causal, it is important to understand something of the routines and practices that guide journalistic behaviour as it relates to newsgathering on a day-to-day basis.

CHAPTER 2

CAMPAIGN COVERAGE: THE STRUCTURES AND ROUTINES OF NEWSGATHERING

I. INTRODUCTION

The media are a primary site of political discourse. As Thomas C. Leonard observed, journalism provides the vernacular for political discourse in any liberal democracy. But that discourse is conducted within a set of rules and structures that dictate the organization and production of news.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of these rules and structures in the context of political reporting in general and campaign reporting in particular. While some journalists may still argue that news is simply a mirror placed before reality, a review of selected commentaries and essays on the media leads inescapably to the conclusion news is anything but.

The chapter will also consider Daniel Boorstin's theories on "pseudo-events" and "image" and the particular application of these theories to the party leader's tour -- the primary communication

vehicle in any political campaign. The paper will examine how the leader's tour and campaign headquarters satisfy the routines and structural requirements of newsgathering.

Finally the paper will consider emerging trends in political coverage both in Canada and the United States in the 1990s, with a particular focus on election coverage plans for the 1993 federal election adopted by major national news organizations.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF NEWSGATHERING

In Between Fact and Fiction: The Problem of Journalism, Edward Jay Epstein asserts that "despite the more heroic public claims of the news media, daily journalism is largely concerned with finding and retaining profitable sources of pre-packaged stories."¹ Journalists, according to Epstein, are rarely if ever in a position to establish the truth about an issue for themselves.² Walter Lippmann was careful to distinguish between news and truth, suggesting the two could only coincide in a few limited journalistic forms, such as box scores for baseball.³ Epstein believes the limits of journalism described by

¹ Edward Jay Epstein, Between Fact and Fiction: The Problem of Journalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 9.

² Epstein 3.

³ Epstein 4.

Lippmann still persist in basically the same form, contends the gathering of news is a very different enterprise from establishing the truth,⁴ and suggests journalists would be better off if they gave up the pretence of being the establishers of the truth.⁵

A series of essays, published under the title Reading the News, also challenge the assertion that reporters simply and successfully mirror a "real" world with a sequential consideration of the fabled five W's of journalism -- who, what, where, when, and why. The five W's lead is the first and greatest commandment of journalistic style, state the book's editors, Robert K. Manoff and Michael Schudson, yet these simple commandments of journalism presuppose a platform for inquiry.

"The essays in this book hold that these platforms, frameworks, and rules organize the kind of news we read . . . and trace them to political and economic structures, occupational routines of daily journalism, and literary forms that journalists work with."⁶

One of the most important routines is reliance on news sources for

⁴ Epstein 9.

⁵ Epstein 17.

⁶ Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds. Reading the News: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 5.

the provision of much of the content that appears each day.

Leon Sigal observes that news is not what journalists think but, more precisely, what someone says has happened or will happen.⁷ Schudson says newsgathering is often a matter of the representatives of one bureaucracy, such as a newspaper or television network, picking up pre-fabricated news items from the representatives of another bureaucracy, such as business, or government or a political party.⁸

Because of the limitations of newsgathering resources, both human and financial, journalism is routinized more often than not around the beat system, the dominant mode of news coverage for North American dailies and, to a lesser extent, radio and television. Beats are a remarkably efficient method for deploying personnel and gathering information. As James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser observe, "If reporters cannot know what will be news each day, they can at least know where and when to find it."⁹

⁷ Leon V. Sigal, "Who? Sources Make the News," Reading the News: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture Eds. Manoff and Schudson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) : 15.

⁸ Michael Schudson, "When? Deadlines, Datelines and History," Reading the News: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture Eds. Manoff and Schudson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 81.

⁹ James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, On the Epistemology of Investigative Journalism (U.S.A.: Gordon and Breach, Science Publishers Inc., 1985) 187.

The Parliamentary Press Gallery is home for the "beat" reporters of federal politics. During general election campaigns, many of the reporters assigned to cover the major political parties and their leaders are experienced Press Gallery hands.

Time constraints in the daily press leave very little time for verification; therefore, daily reporters tend to strive for accuracy and not veracity. Reporters endeavour to report propositions fairly and accurately, but will steadfastly refuse to vouch for the veracity of the assertions they have so carefully recorded. Campaign reporters will file news copy quoting a politician's campaign promise that ends up flared across the front page, only to scoff at the merits of the promise later over a beer in the bar.

Straight or "objective" reporting is dependent on information that is bureaucratically organized, produced, and disseminated. Within their bureaucratic field of knowledge, according to Ettema and Glasser, bureaucrats are seen by daily reporters as "self-evidently competent knowers." The authors quote Gaye Tuchman to the effect that the very organization and structure of newswork define bureaucracies -- especially established public bureaucracies -- as "the appropriate site at which information should be gathered."¹⁰ The beat

¹⁰ Ettema and Glasser 189.

system, therefore, is efficient and convenient because it offers the daily reporter prejustified accounts of what, with no requirement for independent analysis or evaluation, passes as knowledge.

In an election campaign, party strategists and campaign organizers for the various political formations serve the bureaucrats' role as "self-evidently competent knowers."

Ettema and Glasser write: "The efficiency of the beat system rests on its capacity to circumscribe how reporters will know what they know, an achievement inextricably wedded to what journalists will know."¹¹ Sigal expands on the point, suggesting what a journalist knows depends on whom he or she knows, which in turn depends on where they are.

By convention, reporters choose authoritative sources over other potential sources; the more senior the official, the more authoritative that source is presumed to be and the better his or her prospects are for making news. In the United States, the President has no peer as an authoritative source. In Canada, that role falls to the Prime Minister at the federal level, and the premiers provincially. During election campaigns, the role extends to other candidates for the highest elected office.

¹¹ Ettema and Glasser 187.

In fact, party leaders so thoroughly dominate election news that senior cabinet ministers virtually disappear from the airwaves and news pages. In 1993, for example, Conservative party efforts to position then deputy prime minister Jean Charest as a key spokesperson, particularly in Quebec, failed. News organizations weren't much interested in Charest simply because he was not a party leader.

If, as Sigal says, "news is not reality, but a sampling of sources' portrayals of reality, mediated by news organizations,"¹² that "sampling of sources' portrayals" can often be at odds with reality, because of two important factors. First, tacit alliances form between reporters and officials on the beat as each uses the other to advantage within their respective organizations. Second, individuals who are routine sources for the press are far more likely to be favourably portrayed by the media.

Sigal, whose working premise is that sources make news, observes ordinary people rarely make news unless they are caught up in official proceedings.¹³ In choosing the "who" for news stories, journalists

¹² Sigal 27 and 28.

¹³ Sigal 12.

prefer the known to the unknown. And if there is no "known" on an issue, reporters will, by necessity, create one. In the debate around the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, the media made former Trudeau advisor Maude Barlow a known. Similarly, during the 1992 referendum campaign on the Charlottetown constitutional initiative, Deborah Coyne was anointed as one counter-voice to the political elites arrayed on the "Yes" side.

However, in the post-Charlottetown environment, most Canadian news organizations tried to find editorial vehicles to give voice to ordinary Canadians. As will be elaborated upon later in the chapter, various news organizations experimented with "town hall" formats and other techniques for expanding attention paid to public opinion.

New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan was among the first in America to argue that the press is part of an adversarial culture.¹⁴ And there is no denying that journalists will often feature conflict within institutional and bureaucratic organizations and, in doing so, provide a forum for dissent.

However, because of the routinization of news, the reliance of daily news reporters on bureaucratic sources, and the tendency of the media to portray non-traditional political movements as less than

¹⁴ Sigal 29.

respectable, one is hard-pressed to view the media as a monolithic, adversarial culture. The media may highlight voices of dissent. That dissent, however, is most often expressed in terms of shades or variations on the capitalist, liberal democratic societies now dominant in the industrialized world. News sources advocating a more dramatic restructuring of society, from the Green Party to the Marxist-Leninists, consistently claim their option is marginalized by the mainstream media; witness their primarily "feature" treatment in election campaigns. There is also a "market" imperative at play here, as it must be acknowledged that movements such as the Marxist-Leninists are of less interest to the majority of readers and viewers of the mass media than more traditional, mainstream political formations.

Epstein states journalists cannot compel a source to furnish them with an account of an event.¹⁵ Indeed, a source need only tell reporters what that source deems to be in his or her own self-interest. Because of the voluntary nature of the source-reporter relationship, then, the supply of information continues only if the source is satisfied with the way the journalist uses information. Journalists must also protect their sources to some extent if the relationship is to develop.

In Canada, the parliamentary system of responsible government and

¹⁵ Epstein 6.

the politics that flow from it are, or at least have been, largely adversarial in nature. Political reporters in Canada need look no further than the Opposition benches for competing "sources" on a public policy issue. Offering up the claims and counter-claims of the government and opposition parties constitutes "objective" reporting for many journalists. During election campaigns this process is further simplified. Statements or comments by one party leader are immediately bounced off the others for further elaboration, comment or condemnation.

Sigal, like many others who have studied the question, believes that too much is made of the press's role in elections. But he does acknowledge: "Who makes the news affects who governs and who opposes . . . The press, in amplifying some voices and muting others, in distorting some messages and letting others come through loud and clear, affects the nature of opposition and hence of governance."¹⁶

Washington Post media critic Howard Kurtz says the media's one real bias is a bad news bias: "We love conflict, emotion, charges and countercharges."¹⁷ Republican strategist Roger Ailes believes that the press is mostly interested in "conflict, scandal, polls, process and

¹⁶ Manoff and Schudson 36 and 37.

¹⁷ Howard Kurtz, Media Circus: The Trouble with America's Newspapers (New York: Times Books, 1993) 139.

gaffes.”¹⁸

Epstein argues that, at least in television news, this problem of bias is structural in nature, rather than a reflection of the personal biases of correspondents or producers, therefore, it is more serious and less correctable. Network news, he says, “operates much more like a search light, which seeks out pre-selected targets in the dark, highlighting certain aspects of them and neglecting others.”¹⁹ The dependence on audiences and ratings for commercial success forces television into a dominant episodic frame/treatment responsibility construct of issues, with all that framing implies for a campaigning leader.

The “rules” of television tilt news coverage towards certain types of stories and modes of presentation and away from others. Tabloid journalism is the essence of growing amounts of television news, with an intense focus on melodramatic or confrontational situations. The emergence of programming such as Hard Copy and A Current Affair, electronic equivalents of the National Enquirer, has increased the pressure on national network newscasts to respond with more breathless, sensational news items. Network news tends to present

¹⁸ Tom Rosenstiel, Strange Bedfellows: How Television and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992 (New York: Hyperion, 1993) 117.

¹⁹ Epstein 226.

problems in a point/counterpoint debate. The Prime Minister, or a premier, sets out a policy option. An opposition party leader or interest group leader is expected to denounce it. The more aggressive the denunciation, the more compelling it is for network news. The result is that network news tends to highlight society's divisions at the expense of those instances where issues are being resolved constructively. And in a campaign setting, leaders are expected to be full participants in this point/counterpoint coverage.

In Canada, of course, the CBC exists as a public broadcaster, at least in part, to free network journalism from certain of these market-driven constraints. CBC's Prime Time News is expected to provide more in-depth coverage than the CTV National News, for example. Yet in the past year PTN has suffered a significant loss of viewers. While the move from a 10 p.m. to a 9 p.m. time slot is cited as the reason for the ratings decline, PTN staff insist the time slot isn't their only problem. The debate over the editorial direction of PTN is, at this stage, far from resolved.²⁰

In their preface to Reading the News, Manoff and Schudson state that there is a structure to the reporting and writing of news and that this structure determines the kind of news we read, hear or watch. Journalism, they argue, operates "out of its own conventions and

²⁰ Personal interviews. PTN staff.

understandings and within its own set of sociological, ideological and literary constraints.”²¹ Manoff asserts that the narrative choice of the journalist is not a free choice, but a choice guided by institutions and routines, by conventions that shape perceptions and provide the formal repertory for presenting those perceptions to the news consumer.²²

“Hard” or “straight” news is the dominant genre of political campaign reporting. What constitutes news is usually measured against five traditional news values: timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence and human interest. The election story fits the bill perfectly; it has a cadence, a rhythm to it. The election story is easier to read and absorb because the reader can tap out the beat, the reader knows when the story begins and when it ends. The election story lends itself to horse-race style coverage. Writes Schudson: “This is what the press handles best: stories that are timely, that have anticipatable end points, and that have end points that figure in simple, binary possibilities. . ..”²³

Groups, be they public office holders, would-be office holders, or

²¹ Manoff and Schudson 6.

²² Manoff and Schudson 229.

²³ Michael Schudson 99.

special interests, differ in their ability to make their voices heard. Schudson believes the fact news must happen at specified times in the journalist's news day is a critical factor in that determination. He writes: "The more the media emphasize the immediacy of news, the more subject journalists are to manipulation by public officials who know how to prey on people with stopwatch mentalities."²⁴

The essays of Schudson et al. seem to suggest that this institutional matrix is controlled exclusively by the bureaucracies rather than by journalists. However, the desire of bureaucracies to communicate to a wider, extended audience leads to a significant reliance on the media. That reliance affords journalists real power. The relationship, therefore, might be somewhat more balanced than Manoff, Schudson et al. seem to suggest. Certainly, during an election campaign, the institutional matrix takes a particular form. As mentioned earlier, political parties in general, and the leaders of those parties in particular, become the bureaucracy of news coverage. Public servants, as "self-evidently competent knowers," are replaced by party apparatchiks. In national election campaigns, two institutions are dominant generators of news -- the leader's tour and national campaign headquarters.

²⁴ Manoff and Schudson 81.

III. COVERING THE LEADER'S TOUR

Journalists and political figures have long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. According to Clive Cocking, politicians and reporters began working under the same roof in a formal way in 1835 when the British House of Commons agreed to provide space and services to the scribes.²⁵

In Canada, newspaper reporting of provincial legislatures predates Confederation. Records of the federal Parliament reveal space and services were provided for the press at the time of Confederation. And, by 1880, parliamentary reports had formed the self-governing Press Gallery Association.²⁶ There is no evidence, however, of a structured leader's tour during the early years of Confederation. The political leader's tour, as we know it, coincided with the coming-of-age of transcontinental trains.

For the better part of 50 years, the routine on either side of the 49th parallel hardly changed. At each "whistle stop" (a term campaigners gave to the idiom), a gaggle of fedora'd reporters would pile out of a train, stand on the tracks, record the "bon mots" of the

²⁵ Clive Cocking, Following the Leaders: A Media Watcher's Diary of Campaign '79. (Toronto: Doubleday, 1980): 16.

²⁶ Cocking 16.

candidate, count the crowd, clamber back on the train, and write a piece which was then handed over to a telegraph operator to file. The reporters were interchangeable drones, for the most part. Said Edward T. Folliard, once the Washington Post's chief campaign reporter: "It was all very friendly and romantic . . . the men wrote what they heard and saw and damn little what they thought."²⁷

During the 1953 federal election campaign in Canada, as then prime minister Louis St. Laurent toured the country by train, a Canadian Press dispatch reported Uncle Louis "had refined the whistle stop act to the point where he could give lessons to Harry S. Truman, the old master."²⁸

Democratic presidential aspirant Adlai Stevenson's decision to take to the air in 1956 signalled a transition of the leader's tour into the jet age. But it was John F. Kennedy's successful 1960 campaign that signalled a sea-change in campaign strategies in general and the leader's tour in particular. Jerry Bruno, in his book The Advance Man, sets out the Kennedy campaign's pre-occupation with the detail and the premium attached to finding the right visual backdrop. And Theodore H. White's seminal work The Making of the President, 1960

²⁷ Crouse 29.

²⁸ Robert Mason Lee, One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1989) 31.

radically altered the function of the campaign press by drawing back the curtain to the first-class compartment for a glimpse of a presidential campaign that was not being provided by reporters flying steerage class at the back of the campaign plane.

Joe McGinniss' Selling of the President 1968 set out, in television-script style, Richard M. Nixon's discovery he could build on his innovative 1952 "Checkers" speech and use television to go over the heads of political reporters and establish a direct link with the electorate. Nixon staffers concluded the candidate could isolate the media without any direct consequences for campaigners and campaign reporters alike. It was not as if Nixon's handlers had discovered the communications equivalent to the wheel. Rather, they had simply incorporated communications techniques that had been used for decades in television advertising.

McGinniss asserts: "Politics, in a sense, has always been a con game . . . Advertising, in many ways, is a con game, too . . . It is not surprising then, that politicians and advertising men should have discovered one another."²⁹ Says Crouse: "The success of Joe McGinniss' Selling of the President embarrassed them (journalists)

²⁹ Joe McGinniss, The Selling of the President, 1968 (New York: Trident Press, 1969) 26, 27.

into examining the candidates' use of the media."³⁰ By 1972, New York Times Managing Editor Abe Rosenthal was telling his campaign reporters: "We aren't going to wait until a year after the election to read in Teddy White's book what we should have reported ourselves."³¹

As a result, the 1972 presidential campaign in the United States ushered in a new era of the leader's tour; that era marked by a press corps that openly chaffed at the media manipulation tactics of the party leaders, tactics that had their genesis in the mid-19th century and were built around a communication form known as the "pseudo-event." Smarting from the revelations of McGinniss and others, reporters were determined to expose the manipulation tactics of campaigns for what they were. And in doing so, they may have been playing right into the candidates' hands.

The term "pseudo-event" was coined by Daniel Boorstin in his work, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America. Boorstin argues that in American public life today pseudo-events (which are events planned primarily for the purpose of being reported) tend "to drive all other kinds of events out of our consciousness, or at least to

³⁰ Crouse 303.

³¹ Crouse 34.

overshadow them.”³² Moreover, he writes, by their very nature, pseudo-events are more compelling than natural events. “The American citizen thus lives in a world where fantasy is more real than reality, where the image has more dignity than its original.”³³

Reporters themselves can be principal players in the production of this synthetic commodity known as the pseudo-event. An interview is a pseudo-event. A news conference is one, as is a news release. A news “leak,” another form of pseudo-event, also proves the axiom that pseudo-events produce more pseudo-events in geometric progression. By way of example, a candidate’s statement in an election campaign will trigger reaction stories from other candidates and then follow up stories of third party denials, disavowals or confirmations.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt is credited by Boorstin as the first modern political master of the pseudo-event and he argues that the rise in the power of the presidency coincides with the use of such pseudo-events as a televised White House news conference or presidential plant tour. Similarly, the increased focus in Canada on party leaders in general and the prime minister in particular, can be linked to the increased focus on pseudo-events.

³² Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America (New York: Atheneum, 1978) 37.

³³ Boorstin 37.

Pseudo-events place a premium on participants' performance rather than the substance of their remarks. White argues John Kennedy's success in the 1960 presidential debate was due to the fact Kennedy did not bother to debate Nixon, but rather used the format to address the television audience directly.³⁴

A celebrity is the human pseudo-event, "a person who is known for his well-knownness."³⁵ In contrast to the heroes of antiquity who were distinguished by achievement, the celebrity is distinguished by image or trademark. Boorstin holds that today's celebrity is destroyed as he or she was made -- by publicity.

Political leaders must be celebrities as well as being achievers, and they therefore devote considerable effort and energy to the fashioning of an image. Boorstin says an image has to be believable if it is to have any value, and a favoured path to believability is understatement.³⁶

The machinery, by which an image is fabricated and projected fascinates us, Boorstin says. Like spectators at a magic show, we want

³⁴ Boorstin 42.

³⁵ Boorstin 57.

³⁶ Boorstin 188.

to know how the rabbit disappeared. The more we know about what went into the image building, the more satisfied we are. "Even after we have been taken behind the scenes, we can still enjoy the pleasures of deception."³⁷

This insight explains the media's increasing fascination with campaign strategies and strategists as subjects of media coverage. Senator Keith Davey's old adage that campaign strategy is something you do and not something you talk about has been overtaken by recent coverage trends. The campaign strategist who isn't prepared to share certain insights with campaign reporters will inevitably pay a price.

Leaders' tours are the ultimate political pseudo-event. They are a primary vehicle for image creation in politics. Graham Fraser, in his book Playing for Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, points to one of the most critical images established by these tours in his "campaign correlative": if a political formation cannot run an efficient campaign, then it probably cannot run an efficient government. "In this analogy, the campaign tour becomes a metaphor for government."³⁸

³⁷ Boorstin 194.

³⁸ Graham Fraser, Playing for Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1989) 16

Former Liberal strategist Hershell Ezrin believes the leader's tour is the most focussed upon part of a general election campaign -- and the least understood. "The leader's tour has become more and more the creation of, and a requirement for, the kind of media age we live in," Ezrin told authors John Laschinger and Geoffrey Stevens. "It's having the appropriate hamburger [press statement] for the day to be doled out at the right time of day with the right photo opportunity at the right event. And, it is probably one of the most difficult and toughest things to do. You have to make sure that it all looks like a seamless effort with the right crowds out, the right signage around, things happening appropriately, and a proper venue in which to deliver your message. Because, if you don't, it's the most obvious place for the media to say, 'the leader had a terrible day today.' 'Nobody showed up.' 'They got the wrong message out.' 'The speech was late.' And, God forbid, the worst of all things, 'They did not meet the timing that we, the media, needed to file [our stories].'"³⁹

As we shall see in later chapters, the Campbell campaign would have been well advised to heed Ezrin's admonition.

Political reporters chafe at what they see as the manipulative methods of political leaders. The irritation of journalists is heightened

³⁹ John Laschinger and Geoffrey Stevens, Leaders and Lesser Mortals: Backroom Politics in Canada (Toronto: Key Porter Books Ltd., 1992) 111.

by the smug declarations of political operatives who publicly dismiss the editorial content in political discourse at every opportunity. And that irritation quickly escalates into anger when organizers further assert that political communication is all about pictures, that editorial content is irrelevant.

A journalist may set out to expose these efforts at image creation. But, as noted earlier in this chapter, Boorstin argues the exposé itself lends credence to the manufactured image and actually enhances the public's acceptance of that image.

The emergence of television as a primary source of information for the electorate created an opportunity for political candidates, through the leader's tour, to establish multi-faceted communications systems directly with the voters. As McGinniss observed: "Television seems particularly useful to the politician who can be charming but lacks ideas."⁴⁰

Through the 1970s and early 1980s, political organizers and political reporters in Canada and the United States skirmished on campaign planes crossing the continent at 37,000 feet.

Crouse described life on a campaign plane as "a totally abnormal

⁴⁰ McGinniss 29.

world that combined the incestuousness of a New England hamlet with the giddiness of a mid-ocean gala and the physical rigors of the long March."⁴¹ Here in Canada, Ottawa Citizen Editor-in-Chief James Travers once described the arrival of the media corps as "a semi-civilized visit from the Hell's Angels."⁴²

Reporters, wrote Crouse, are "assigned to follow a single candidate for weeks or months at a time, like a pack of hounds sicked on a fox."⁴³

Some news organizations in Canada try to reduce the risk of the journalistic equivalent of the Stockholm Syndrome by switching reporters from one leader's tour to another during the campaign. But reporters can still succumb to "black-line fever," a condition in which journalists get infected with the manufactured excitement of a particular campaign because they want their stories to get good play. And in journalism, news accounts of winning campaigns are played above the fold; copy from the also-ran's tour bus ends up wrapped around a Canadian Tire ad.

⁴¹ Crouse 348.

⁴² Clive Cocking 126.

⁴³ Crouse 7.

Because leaders' tours are pseudo-events used to create an image to help shape public opinion, the expression of that public opinion is an important element of a political campaign. Campaign coverage, therefore, can slip into the most facile genre of sports reporting -- who is winning, who is losing, and how much time is left in the game. "The polls became the political equivalent of the Racing Form,"⁴⁴ writes Boorstin. Says ABC correspondent Britt Hume: "The press has a greater responsibility than to do a bunch of goddam handicapping stories."⁴⁵

Newspaper and radio reporters in both countries complain they have been reduced to the role of drama critic, penning reviews of events that have been staged for television. Television reporters, somewhat defensively, agree they would be just as happy if political tour organizers left them to their own journalistic devices and resisted the temptation to act like so many Cecil B. de Milles.

But Tony Westell, former Ottawa Bureau Chief of the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail and former director of Carleton's School of Journalism, argues the real myth of the leader's tour is the myth the media do not like being manipulated. "We do, we live on it," says

⁴⁴ Boorstin 236.

⁴⁵ Crouse 304.

2

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010A
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

Westell. "We need a story a day, we need colour, we need drama, we need accusations."⁴⁶ Peter Johansen, the present director of Carleton's School of Journalism and Communication, agrees. "As much as journalists hate to admit it, they do in fact like to get their daily Gainsburger," Johansen told the Globe and Mail. "If the Tories or anyone else for that matter are not providing this daily ration, the dogs in the pack are going to go elsewhere to find their food. And what they are going to do is write about what they have access to, which is how Campbell is doing vis-à-vis everyone else."⁴⁷ As we shall argue, the Campbell campaign, in a bid to rewrite the rules of campaigning, deliberately eschewed this daily Gainsburger approach. As a consequence, reporters covering the tour couldn't find a news hook in the traditional sense. Campbell paid accordingly.

Post-Watergate political campaigning in the U.S. in the 1970s gave rise to a healthy scepticism on the part of the media that, on occasion, was nudged over the line into cynicism.

In Canada, political reporters assigned to the Trudeau tour in the 1974 federal election spent much of their time writing variations on the former prime minister's "zap, you're frozen" denunciation of a

⁴⁶ Cocking 27.

⁴⁷ Murray Campbell, "Why News Gatherers 'Framed' Campbell," Globe and Mail, October 7, 1993: A6.

Conservative call for wage and price controls. A year or so later, many of these same reporters could only shrug Trudeau-style when the former prime minister commandeered national television time to announce the imposition of the very controls he had denounced so vigorously in his successful re-election campaign.

Through the 1970s, the media focus on leaders became even more pronounced, consistent with the pattern first identified by Boorstin.

In their 1979 work Political Choice in Canada, political scientists Harold Clarke and colleagues state analysis of data for the 1968 and 1974 federal elections strongly indicated a tendency for voters to view and evaluate party leaders in personal and/or stylistic terms, rather than on the issues.

The ability of electoral campaigns to influence election results was a contentious issue then, as now. So too was the question of the impact of a leader's tour on the electorate. But these political scientists concluded, "it is clear that the leaders' tours and the speeches that are made during them are the primary source of news that is reported to the public during the campaign . . . Those who argue that Canadian politics is dominated by the party leaders have evidence in their

favour."⁴⁸

The focus on leaders implicitly results in a focus on leaders' tours, both in terms of news coverage and in terms of the effort and organizational energy of the political parties. The on-going struggle of political reporters to break free of the manipulative tactics of the leader's political operatives resulted in a significant shift in the style of political reporting throughout the 1980s.

Daniel C. Hallin argues political reporting over the past 20 years has evolved to the point where news consumers hear very little of what candidates for office actually have to say. Between the 1968 and 1988 presidential campaigns, the length of the average sound bite shrank from more than 40 seconds to less than 10. Hallin asserts that for the television journalist of the 1980s, the words of candidates or other newsmakers are but raw material "to be taken apart, combined with other sounds and images, and reintegrated into a new narrative."⁴⁹ The result, writes Hallin, is that the journalist has become the primary communicator, and not the candidate. For that reason, the "frame" of news coverage is critically important.

⁴⁸ Harold Clarke, Jane Jensen, Lawrence LeDuc and Jan H. Pammett, Political Choice in Canada (Toronto: McGraw Hill, Ryerson, 1979) 279.

⁴⁹ Daniel C. Hallin, "Whose Campaign Is It Anyway? The Candidates and the Reporters" Columbia Journalism Review January/February (1991): 43.

Hallin is disturbed that the public rarely has a chance to hear a candidate or any other newsmaker speak for more than a few seconds. Journalists are quickly bored to tears with a political candidate's stump speech, yet only the tiniest fraction of the electorate ever gets to hear any part of it. Journalists decry the culture of the campaign consultants and the emphasis on technique over substance, yet eagerly incorporate that very culture into their news and current affairs programs. "There are moments indeed when it is hard to distinguish the journalists from the political technicians they are interviewing,"⁵⁰ Hallin states. Citing sociologist Todd Gitlin's observation of a post-modern cynicism that debunks image-makers but in the end accepts them as the only reality this society has left, Hallin concludes: "It must be said that in 1968 one did have a feeling that the campaign, as it appeared on television was important, that it was essentially a debate about the future direction of the nation. As sophisticated as it has become, television news has not succeeded in maintaining that sense of seriousness."⁵¹

If, as Boorstin holds, celebrities have replaced heroes, if pseudo-events have replaced real events, if image has replaced substance, and if we are all supportive of and indeed part of the legendary showman

⁵⁰ Hallin 46.

⁵¹ Hallin 46.

P.T. Barnum's new order, how do election campaigns misfire? How do leaders' tours, based on the most modern opinion-shaping technologies known to man, fail?

The 1988 presidential and federal election campaigns provide certain insights. Democratic Party hopeful Michael Dukakis' image makers, for instance, ignored certain of Boorstin's identified characteristics of what is necessary for an image. Boorstin held an image must be believable. The corny photo of an uncomfortable Dukakis perched in the turret of a tank looking like Snoopy as World-War-One-flying-ace, was hardly believable.

In Mulroney's case, the 1988 campaign was carefully scripted; voters were being offered a softer, blander Mulroney. The problem, however, was that this pabulum campaign provided no focus for the media, no events of the type described by Westell and Johansen that are the life-blood of campaign coverage. For want of anything else to write, reporters began to file pieces about Mulroney's "Boy in the Bubble" campaign style, highlighting Mulroney's perceived lack of accessibility.

There is a very fine line between media management and media manipulation. A political leader cannot allow the boys and girls on the bus to control the agenda. A leader's message on evening newscasts is

lost if he or she is constantly reacting to developments in other campaigns or indeed in the world. But a leader cannot be seen to be ducking the press and, for that reason, a "cocoon" strategy that is revealed as such can be problematic. Instead of compensating for a perceived weakness, it simply magnifies the weakness by communicating the fact at the connotative level that the leader's advisors do not trust him or her. The implications, in political terms, are devastating and can be reduced to a single question: if the people who know the leader best do not trust him or her, why should you?

Pierre Trudeau did run a victorious "peek-a-boo" campaign in the 1980 federal election. But the victory may have had more to do with the fact Trudeau's Liberals went into the campaign with a 20-point lead than with the merits of a peek-a-boo strategy.

Trudeau's former press secretary Patrick Gossage, in his book Close to the Charisma, explains how he handled questions from CBC correspondent David Halton about the media's right to access to the candidate in the 1980 campaign. "I defended our right to control access to the leader and to direct the flow of information in 'wartime' as it were (during a campaign) as distinct from 'peacetime' (during a period of government or opposition)!" Gossage stated. "I can hear myself telling Halton with a straight face that the media had no right to set the agenda for a campaign by asking Trudeau questions when

they pleased and thereby sidetracking our strategy. We had every right to set our own agenda and get our message out as clearly as possible. The media were to be neutral vehicles, imposing no judgment on what they heard or saw!"⁵²

Tory post-mortems in 1988 conceded that the early "Boy in the Bubble" campaign strategy was fatally flawed, and that it was only after Mulroney emerged from the carefully constructed communications cocoon that his campaign reversed a significant slide in public support following a less-than-impressive performance against Liberal Leader John Turner in the televised leaders' debate.

The determination of party media strategists to create Boorstin's image through the pseudo-event of the leader's tour and the prescribed structures and routines of newsgathering identified by Manoff, Schudson *et al.* come together in an essential, if uneasy alliance of strategists and journalists during a general election campaign. And while campaign coverage has evolved over the past forty years, certain defined patterns have emerged.

⁵² Patrick Gossage, Close to the Charisma: My Years Between the Press and Pierre Elliott Trudeau (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) 191.

IV. GATHERING NEWS AT CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS

The leader's tour is the dominant communication vehicle in any political campaign. Campaign studies such as Clarke *et al.* in 1979 and 1988 and Frizzell *et al.* in 1984 and 1988, agree the leader's tour is the primary focus of media coverage. Gilsdorf and Bernier believe the first-line struggle for control of the political agenda is now between journalists and the candidates' advisors, and the leaders' tours are the primary site of that struggle.

However, party headquarters can be an important, if secondary, source of campaign news.

Typically, party headquarters would handle media queries posed to senior campaign strategists; provide background information on local candidates; release party policy manuals; and respond to questions on the paid advertising campaigns, campaign budgets, negotiations for the televised leaders' debates, and issues related to free-time broadcasts.

The Campbell campaign divided media relations into four operational components. Senior campaign strategists, such as Campaign Chair John Tory, National Director Tom Trbovich, and Senior Advisor Harry J. Near (a business partner of this student) were

encouraged to work their own media sources. And in an unusual move, Tory was also designated senior spokesperson for the campaign, in contrast to 1988 when Senator Norman Atkins designated other spokespersons, including this student, to represent the party on panels or for interview purposes.

The second unit was on the campaign plane itself. Press Secretary Paul Frazer, a career diplomat, was lead spokesperson; he was supported by Tom Van Dusen Jr., and Marie Josee Lapointe.

The third unit was the "War Room" run by David Small and party Communications Director Randall Pearce. The intent here was to maximize research on opposition parties by putting relevant information directly into the hands of journalists either travelling with party leaders or covering the campaign in Ottawa. "Just Asking," a feature lifted directly from the Clinton campaign, asked pointed questions of other parties and its reports were sent by fax to specific reporters on the Liberal, NDP, Bloc and Reform campaign buses. For example, on September 21, as Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien began his first campaign foray into New Brunswick, Tory headquarters tried to prime reporters covering Chrétien to ask questions designed to drive a wedge between the federal leader and Premier Frank McKenna. A "Just Asking..." fax suggested reporters probe Chrétien's position on such contentious issues as workfare and user fees in health care. The

fax, sent to Winnipeg Free Press reporter John Douglas, CP reporter Rob Russo and Sun chain columnist Peter Stockland, claimed McKenna was in favour of workfare and user fees and asked: "Is Jean Chrétien planning to flipflop on his party's longstanding opposition to this type of reform to Canada's traditional health care system?"⁵³ "We took a little heat for this but not much," says Pearce.⁵⁴ The war room also had a satellite dish at its disposal, as the Tories were under the mistaken impression they could match Jeff Eller's efforts in Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign.

The fourth component, headed by former ministerial press secretary Sylvie Cloutier, handled straight-forward media queries for itineraries or formal interviews with campaign strategists.

These efforts were supported by an intricate fax network.

Messages and themes were developed against a matrix developed by Democratic consultant Phil Noble. A grid of statements, announcements or policies was developed as follows: Tories on Tories, Tories on Liberals, Liberals on Tories, Liberals on Liberals. A similar grid, which was put up on the wall in the war room, was developed for

⁵³ PC campaign document, "Just Asking," September 21, 1993.

⁵⁴ Randall Pearce, personal interview, February 23, 1994.

each of the political parties.

The media grid for September 15, for example, shows Tory spokesperson Tom Hockin trumpeting free trade as a creator of jobs while attacking the Liberals for being evasive and indecisive on the free trade issue. The grid shows Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien claiming his party's policy Red Book, to be released later that day, will prove his party to be fiscally responsible. Chrétien also attacked the Conservatives for their erroneous claims about the cost of Liberal campaign promises. The Liberal leader also admonished the Tories to spend more time developing their own platform. The New Democrats attacked both the Liberals and the Conservatives, claiming both were prepared to slash health care. The Bloc Québécois, seizing on Robert Bourassa's announced retirement, claimed the resignations of Bourassa and Mulroney shows federalism cannot be renewed.

Like the Democrats, the Conservatives scanned overnight news accounts and developed a summary for a 7 a.m. meeting. The summary and media line of the day were developed and taken to the senior strategists' meeting at 7.30 a.m. for approval. In theory, the media line was to be written and distributed by 10 a.m., then sent for translation, transmitted to Montreal, and distributed to provincial campaign headquarters and riding offices on electronic mail.

On the Liberal campaign, Ottawa lawyer Warren Kinsella headed up the Liberal Quick Response Team that included a half-dozen people. Liberal Communications Director Peter Donolo fended off media requests for detail on the Quick Response structure, saying, "We don't think it's important to talk about our internal plumbing . . . We're just making sure people aren't allowed to misrepresent our policies or our message."⁵⁵ However, Senior Advisor Eddie Goldenberg says there wasn't any "spook" technology being used by the Liberals. "Cell phones was about as high tech as it got. But what we did have was direct, and constant communication between the Quick Response Team and the leader's tour."⁵⁶

Media queries to the Liberal campaign were fielded by Donolo, rather than by the campaign co-chairs, Senator Joyce Fairbairn and André Ouellet. However, the simplicity of the Liberal campaign communications structure in no way reduced its efficacy. Journalists interviewed for this paper, such as the CBC's Christopher Waddell, gave the Liberals high marks for their responsiveness.

The Conservative campaign headquarters, for all the pre-planning that went into the structure, never succeeded in mounting an effective

⁵⁵ William Walker, "Hidden High-Tech 'Toys' Help Big Parties Battle for Voters," Toronto Star September 21, 1993: A11.

⁵⁶ Eddie Goldenberg, personal interview, February 26, 1994.

media operation.

Post-campaign interviews conducted by Global's Peter Kent for his special, "A Shock to the System," reveal a complete breakdown in communications between the leader's tour and campaign headquarters. Strategists interviewed for this paper, such as then chief of staff Jodi White and Campaign Chair John Tory, confirm the disconnection. Specific illustrations will be cited in detail in later chapters. But, for example, White says she had but a single telephone conversation with Campbell in the first three weeks of the campaign. "We were dysfunctional between campaign headquarters and the plane or the bus, whichever they were on," White told Kent. "I mean, there was just an astounding lack of communication."⁵⁷

V. PLANNING FOR CHANGE IN 1993

National campaigns of political parties are oriented primarily to the national media, which Frederick Fletcher and Robert Everett define as the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, Le Devoir, La Presse, the Canadian Press, Southam News, the Montreal Gazette, Maclean's and television networks CTV, CBC, SRC, and TVA.

⁵⁷ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

Fletcher and Everett state these major organizations generally avoid overt partisanship in their news coverage, as the last vestiges of a partisan press disappeared in Canada in the early 1960s.⁵⁸

Editorial endorsements in major dailies, according to Fletcher and Everett, appear to have little influence in federal elections. "On a day-to-day basis, the key style setters are the senior members of the parliamentary press gallery, based normally in Ottawa . . . some two dozen high-profile reporters and commentators continue to have substantial influence over the focus and tone of political coverage, especially during election campaigns."⁵⁹ This predominance of gallery reporters can result in knowledgeable coverage; but it can also mean a preponderance of common opinions or conventional wisdom.

Planners for the major news media also planned for the 1993 election campaign determined to reflect a new political environment. Reacting to the Charlottetown referendum experience and cognizant of the successful media strategies used by the Clinton campaign, media managers were determined to broaden the scope of their coverage beyond the leaders' tours.

⁵⁸ Frederick J. Fletcher, ed., Media, Elections and Democracy Canada, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, Research Studies, Vol. 19, 192.

⁵⁹ Frederick J. Fletcher, ed., Media, Elections and Democracy Canada, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, Research Studies, Vol. 19, 193.

As CBC correspondent Wendy Mesley reported, media outlets and the political parties alike had flirted with the notion of abandoning the leader's tour in 1993. "But in the end, neither could resist; the politicians, for all the opportunities to mold the message, and the media for fear of missing a big story."⁶⁰

The 1993 campaign included a series of "firsts"; specifically:

- it was the first CBC Newsworld campaign;
- it was the first cell phone campaign;
- it was the first campaign that required national news organizations to cover five major parties and party leaders.

As campaign strategists and media executives began the planning process for the 1993 federal general election, both sides were determined to break out of the media coverage patterns catalogued by scholars and journalists alike. As for the voters, their very clear signal seemed to be that they simply wouldn't settle for any less.

The voters themselves were determined to have more of a role in the process, to snap out of the passive news consumer role described by Gilsdorf and Bernier. In the United States, a campaigning Bill Clinton said: "New Hampshire was the place, but '92 was the year in

⁶⁰ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. Mesley item, September 20, 1993.

which people really wanted to believe that they could be brought into the system [again]."⁶¹

In the U.S., Texas billionaire and self-declared populist Ross Perot gave voice to those middle-class voices of discontent. Denouncing the "gotcha" journalism so prevalent inside the Beltway, Perot outflanked the Washington press corps by appearing on open line programs such as CNN's Larry King Live. In Canada, Reform Party leader Preston Manning countered the media's tendency to marginalize his movement by distributing audio tape cassettes for a whole new definition of easy listening.

Bill Clinton, determined not to be totally eclipsed by Perot, opted for the "Arsenio" strategy -- a reference to his appearance on Arsenio Hall's syndicated late night show where the presidential aspirant, in shades, played tenor sax with the house band, the Posse.

Suddenly, electronic town hall meetings were the order of the day; open line radio guaranteed a role for the disconnected voter. Nominees literally went back to the bus -- not for an afternoon or two, but for days on end -- a take-off on the old "whistle stop" campaigns. Lest anyone think this "new" approach was any less contrived than

⁶¹ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992 (New York: Warner Books, 1993) 172.

Reagan's approach, it is worth noting the Clinton-Gore bus tour was produced and directed by Mort Engelberg, who produced the Smoky and the Bandit movies which starred Burt Reynolds.

George Stephanopoulos, Clinton's communications director, said Clinton's campaign style is the key to understanding the Clinton presidency; it embodies the change in media cultures, the change in political culture, the refined campaign techniques.

The established press, in the early days, had a tendency to dismiss the talk radio shows as silly and pointless. The Washington Post, writes Rosenstiel, referred to them as "slow pitch softball." Rosenstiel states: "That was a dangerous and irresponsible mistake. The call-in programs were revealing something important, if the press wasn't too threatened to see it. Too often, the questions journalists asked did betray how isolated the press had become from voters' concerns and how cynical reporters were about what was important about politics."⁶²

In the U.S. presidential campaign in 1992, it became fashionable to talk about how the "new media" such as The Arsenio Hall Show had eclipsed old media such as This Week with David Brinkley. The old media fronted for a tired, out-of-touch establishment; the new hip hop

⁶² Rosenstiel 184.

media were in tune with the people.

But Kurtz reminds us none of the populist media forays of 1992 were particularly novel or new. Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave fireside chats when radio was new and hot. Bobby Kennedy was a guest on The Tonight Show before Johnny Carson was the host. Richard Nixon asked the Laugh-In crowd to "sock it to me". And Gary Hart did Saturday Night Live.⁶³

This less structured, more accessible campaign style dictated a further change in the campaign structure and style of elections. Candidates required the information equivalent of a light rapid deployment, information force. Stephanopoulos, with media advisers James Carville and Paul Begala, set up a "War Room" for the Clinton campaign. A Nightwatch team set about reading every newspaper and wire service story they could lay their hands on, while gathering all the intelligence on the Bush campaign they could muster. Every state office in the Clinton campaign compiled a report on the nightly TV and newspaper coverage in their state. Rosenstiel says that Jeff Eller, a Clinton campaign strategist, would literally troll outer space on the satellite hoping to intercept either network feeds or Republican feeds in an effort to get a sense of what might be on the news later.

⁶³ Kurtz 284.

At 7 a.m., Carville and Stephanopoulos began a strategy session reading a summary of the news. The campaign's "media hit" of the day (the message that the candidate, his running mate, their wives and spokespersons would take) was finalized. Stephanopoulos and Carville would then focus on Bush's day, reminding staff what Bush was doing and what they hoped to get him to respond to. Midday adjustments were made and sent to the field. At 7 p.m., the "day news flow" team began an evening staff meeting with an account of the network evening newscast. According to Rosenstiel: "A key objective of all this was to try whenever possible to get inside the opponent's story every day with your own positive story. Hence, if Bush talked about foreign policy and levelled a charge, Clinton's team hoped the press would include Clinton's answer inside that story -- separate from the Clinton story of the day."⁶⁴

These elaborate media relations tactics were well advised, according to Rosenstiel, who believes: "News coverage drives presidential politics, not advertising. The sheer volume of news -- and that means mostly television -- overwhelms every other source. Ads are accents, visual metaphors of the key campaign themes."⁶⁵ Rosenstiel is also convinced "In politics, the messenger is the

⁶⁴ Rosenstiel 259.

⁶⁵ Rosenstiel 274.

message -- and always has been."⁶⁶

American presidential campaign innovations, both for the campaign committees and the media, had an influence on campaign preparations here.

Certainly the Conservative and Liberal campaign strategists considered carefully the campaign wrinkles implemented by the Clinton campaign. And Reform Party advisors have occupied front row seats at "Campaigns and Elections" seminars for years.

All news organizations faced a challenge in terms of financial and human resources. The media had to cover more with less. In the case of Canadian Press, for instance, the campaign budget was set at the same dollar figure as in 1988.

CBC Newsworld effectively brought Marshall McLuhan's global village to play in a federal election campaign, allowing the various campaigns to respond to one another instantly.

And finally, the fact reporters on all campaign tours were equipped with cell phones changed the dynamic as well. The media "cocoon" strategies that certain party operatives had used effectively in the late

⁶⁶ Rosenstiel 295.

1970s and through the 1980s were instantly obsolete. As was the case in the 1992 presidential campaign in the U.S., reporters travelling with one leader could contact spokespersons for another campaign instantly to get comment before filing a story. Reform party strategist Rick Anderson, on several occasions, passed the phone directly to Preston Manning to counter an attack from another party leader.⁶⁷

News organizations were also determined to ensure a role for their readers/listeners/viewers in their campaign coverage.

Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe, for example, says the Southam organization was determined to benefit from the experience of the last two federal campaigns. To address the resources issue, Southam News decided to involve its member papers to an unprecedented extent through the 2 1/2-year-old Southam Star Network. Southam News writers were joined by seasoned political reporters from the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Edmonton Journal, the Vancouver Sun and the Calgary Herald. Their writers were assembled in Ottawa under the Southam News banner, and rotated on the various leaders' tours. Southam affected a changing of the guard every seven to 10 days; reporters who weren't on tour were assigned issue-oriented features. These writers were supported by Southam's regional correspondents as well as reporters at member

⁶⁷ Rick Anderson, personal interview, March 10, 1994.

papers. A nightly main lead was written out of the Ottawa bureau and updated for later western time zones.

Southam News also used its satellite capabilities to involve member papers in various "vox populi" stories. On three separate occasions, national "streeters" were set up on major issues; these news items provided timely snapshots of public opinion. The satellite was also used by Southam papers to trade editorial and op-ed pages. Special letters-to-the-editor features were also moved on satellite, having been culled from the pages of Southam papers.

For Toronto Star readers, campaign coverage plans were no mystery. In a front page article published September 9, Star Editor John Honderich set out his newspaper's battle plan in a column that carried the headline "The Star's Election Plans". Honderich declared the economy the issue of the campaign. The piece then went on to list specific elements of the Star's organizational plans. A Starphone would record readers' views of which were the dominant issues. An extra letters page would be added to each Sunday paper. A regular "Voices of the Voters" feature, reflecting views from across the country, was planned. The Star committed itself to full coverage of each party leader, as well as news analysis, in-depth features on the issues, riding profiles on all 33 ridings in the Metro Toronto region and a new "Spin Watch" column. Other sections of the paper

promised to contribute to the coverage, including "the off-beat, the humorous and the absurd".

However, the biggest single change in the Star's 1993 campaign coverage, according to Star Managing Editor Lou Clancy, was the decision to downplay coverage of public opinion polls. "It wasn't because of the money," Clancy said in an interview. "It was because we had come to question the validity of some of these polls." Clancy said Ottawa Bureau Chief Rosemary Speirs had written a major takeout on the phenomenon of respondents hanging up on the pollsters and refusing to respond, raising questions about the validity of the traditional random sample. However, Clancy's primary concern was that poll coverage takes away from substance and issues and can result in some lazy journalism. "If the polls are right, you're telling people what they already know, so where's the news value in that?" Clancy added.⁶⁸

Election planning for the Canadian Press, Canada's newsgathering co-operative, was co-ordinated out of the Ottawa bureau by Bureau Chief Kirk Lapointe. As was the case with other news organizations, CP instituted a "truth cop" element to its coverage, assigning two reporters full-time to verifying the statements, claims and promises of the various parties. Another reporter was assigned to developing

⁶⁸ Lou Clancy, personal interview, February 17, 1994.

stories on where each of the parties, as well as major interest groups, stood on each of the issues. Lapointe says these innovations worked well.⁶⁹

In terms of the leaders' tours, CP was prepared for a range of different options. "Early on, about 1992, there were rumblings around that there were going to be very unconventional candidacies. That we were going to see campaigns that would be more of a hub-and-spoke kind of thing, landing in one place and working for three or four days in a region," Lapointe said. "So we were prepared for the possibility there wouldn't be an actual leader's plane, that we would be left to our own devices."⁷⁰ As a result, working with other CP bureaus, a number of contingencies were built in.

For all the rhetoric about new and different, Lapointe says once the writs were issued, the leaders' tours were pretty well the old style, with a campaign plane of some sort. "In the case of Kim Campbell, we were prepared too for doing politics differently. We'd watched quite carefully what had gone on with the Clinton campaign and how it appeared as if she and Preston Manning were prepared to import the town hall setting and use it in a different way than it had been used in

⁶⁹ Kirk Lapointe, personal interview, February 28, 1994.

⁷⁰ Lapointe, personal interview.

previous Canadian campaigns,” Lapointe said.⁷¹

CP staffed all leaders’ tours, although *La Presse Canadienne* assumed lead responsibility for coverage of Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard for the first three weeks. A total of nine reporters were assigned to the leaders’ tours, with the more senior political reporters assigned to the Chrétien and Campbell campaigns. There was a rotation system to give CP reporters a look at more than one campaign, and “down time” in Ottawa to file analytical pieces. CP reporters were given clear instructions that readers weren’t particularly interested in their working conditions, and so reporters were advised to keep their professional travails out of their copy.

The Globe and Mail, Canada’s national newspaper, began its campaign coverage planning facing two home truths. “We had a money problem and we had a space problem because it was a five headed monster,” Deputy Managing Editor Colin MacKenzie said in an interview.⁷²

The first substantive difference in the Globe’s coverage was the decision to go with a CP-style, single main lead, with reporters from

⁷¹ Lapointe, personal interview.

⁷² Colin MacKenzie, telephone interview, February 24, 1994.

each leader's tour filing into that story. Ottawa bureau reporters, accustomed to filing stand-alone stories from each leader's tour, did not welcome the change, MacKenzie said. "It took about three weeks for their backs to come down."⁷³

MacKenzie says the Globe and Mail introduced a reality check column as well as a series of "vox populi" type features that he described as "the view from the living room." A panel of undecided voters was assembled, specific stories on media coverage were commissioned. There was a determination to get away from the day-to-day "bang, bang" type coverage to get at the "real story," MacKenzie said. Interestingly enough, MacKenzie is not convinced these initiatives were of significant editorial value. "It looks useful, but I don't think it adds value at all to the reader," he said.⁷⁴

These "Vox Populi" features -- whether in the form of town hall meetings, panels of undecided voters, or person-in-the-street interviews -- occupied newspaper column inches and airtime that might normally have been allotted to other types of coverage. And, because the features were, in the main, forums of discontent, they may have been more problematic for the governing Conservatives than for

⁷³ MacKenzie, telephone interview.

⁷⁴ MacKenzie, telephone interview.

the opposition parties.

The Globe and Mail abandoned the ambitious polling program it conducted in 1988 for the 1993 campaign, primarily for budgetary reasons. And by focussing on issues and thematic stories, The Globe tried to avoid a preponderance of horse-race stories in their coverage. Too much so, in MacKenzie's view. "We said going in, as everyone says, that we won't be mesmerized by the horse-race story, but in fact we should have been a little more mesmerized with it than we were." MacKenzie argues that, with the emergence of five parties as substantive political players, it was important for the media to know how the parties were doing in the electoral marketplace. "When the Tories come out of this with just two seats, it shouldn't just be the janitor who wins the office pool," MacKenzie argues.⁷⁵

MacKenzie cites Ottawa Bureau Chief Edward Greenspon's series on the suburbs as a prime example of the kind of coverage the Globe and Mail should provide its readers. Greenspon had been struck by U.S. campaign reporting on the way constituencies are marshalled into electoral coalitions. "Canadian political reporting didn't seem to deal with that very much," he said. The Globe bureau chief asked a Conservative strategist if he could identify the Tory coalition. "The most salient thing he could come up with was home ownership,"

⁷⁵ MacKenzie, telephone interview.

Greenspon said. Delving into Statistics Canada census reports from 1986 and 1991, Greenspon decided a "distinct political entity" was growing in Canada's suburbs with a "profile that was strikingly different" from voters in the downtown core.⁷⁶ Greenspon literally walked the streets of suburban communities such as Ajax and Pickering to report on this emerging electoral group. While it may be old fashioned, MacKenzie attaches a real premium to getting out to talk directly to people and planned the Globe's coverage accordingly.

Globe and Mail political reporter Hugh Winsor and his colleagues drew certain conclusions from the 1992 referendum campaign. "We felt we didn't reflect frustration that was out there enough in the referendum," Winsor told the Queen's Forum, a yearly series of discussions under the aegis of CBC Newsworld and the university that brings together party strategists and reporters, editors and producers "After it happened, we noted it." Winsor said the Globe deliberately moved away from a straight, hard news approach in its reporting. "We decided we would in effect concede the news to the electronic media and try to sell interpretation. While we had some news, we sort of abandoned, if you like, the who, what, when and where of the newspaper of record and tried to be first in letting you know what we

⁷⁶ Edward Greenspon, telephone interview, April 12, 1994.

thought it meant.”⁷⁷

All CBC Television News coverage was controlled entirely out of Toronto and was directed by former national editor and current Ottawa Bureau Chief Christopher Waddell. The 1993 campaign had a number of elements of particular relevance to the CBC that distinguished it from earlier campaigns, Waddell said. For starters, there were more parties to cover, and therefore more bodies required, even as the CBC was being squeezed for more money. In addition, CBC's all news channel, Newsworld, was in place for the first time in a federal general election. In the past, the CBC had basically guaranteed coverage of the leaders' tours of the three traditional parties. “That simply wasn't going to happen this time,” Waddell said. “We weren't going to get five party leaders on the air every day.”⁷⁸

CBC-TV decided to cover the leaders of the three traditional parties for all seven weeks, to cover Reform Party Leader Preston Manning for five of the seven weeks, and BQ Leader Lucien Bouchard for three of the seven weeks, with the understanding that SRC would be covering Bouchard all seven weeks and could therefore be counted on for news footage.

⁷⁷ “Forum on Politics and the Media,” Media CBC Newsworld/Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

⁷⁸ Christopher Waddell, personal interview, February 28, 1994.

In addition to the leaders' tours, a designated group of CBC correspondents were given specific assignments. Wendy Mesley, for example, was assigned to the media. Joe Schlesinger was to provide analysis and context pieces. Julie Van Dusen, Susan Harada and Sasa Petricic were left in the Ottawa bureau to provide "meltdowns" -- the electronic equivalent of a daily roundup story -- throughout the day, beginning with CBC's Midday, updated for each of the five regions, and including a final wrap-up piece intended to lead Newsworld's morning show out of Halifax.

Each CBC reporter on each leader's tour cut a news piece every day, whether the item was picked up by Prime Time News or not. The stories were made available to affiliates through the Corporation's National Syndication Service. The supper-hour news shows on local affiliates had the option of taking either the meltdown piece, or a piece from each leader's tour.

Separate features included issues pieces, coverage of media and the "Reality Watch," featuring Brian Stewart. "We wanted to try to do something that gave people a little more understanding and explanation of what was going on than you can get on the plane or on the leader's tour, or in a feature," Waddell said in an interview. "And we thought that the best way was to do it with one person who had a

fair amount of credibility. The truth is, on these you were walking the line between analysis and editorial in some cases, and so it's best to leave that with one person and let that person walk the line," he added.⁷⁹

Stewart said the concept behind "Reality Watch" had been used in the 1992 American election. Each item ran between 3 1/2 and four minutes. In his unassuming way, Stewart described the items as "modest little essays." Stewart analyzed the respective party positions in respect to deficit reduction. He also examined the wisdom of promising to cut defence procurement programs such as the EH-101 helicopter purchase in the absence of a comprehensive defence policy. But the pieces were well received by viewers and provided a valuable insight into such issues as defence policy and the deficit. "Context was what we were striving for," Stewart said in an interview. "We set out to provide simplified briefing papers for viewers."⁸⁰ Extensive use of graphics allowed Stewart to get away from relying on campaign pictures. "Reality Watch" was so successful the CBC intends to continue the feature between elections to shed light on such contentious issues as immigration policy or crime.

⁷⁹ Waddell, personal interview.

⁸⁰ Brian Stewart, telephone interview, February 24, 1994.

Rosenstiel offers the view, however, that initiatives such as Reality Watch fundamentally alter the role of the media in campaigns. "By labeling a candidate's statement as distorted or false, the press went from being a colour commentator up in the booth to being a referee down on the field," Rosenstiel wrote. "Implicitly, this role acknowledged that the press not only reflected political events, it shaped them."⁸¹

CBC Prime Time's coverage included a series of town hall meetings, first introduced in February, 1992. They included "real time" measurement technology to test attitudes of the participatory audience.

CBC Prime Time News anchor Peter Mansbridge first suggested a town hall-style special in 1989, before the Meech Lake round of constitutional negotiations reached a fever pitch. The idea, says Mansbridge, was to have a joint CBC/SRC production that would get people in Quebec talking directly to people in the rest of Canada.⁸² Budget considerations were the first problem. And by the spring of 1990, the Stanley Cup playoffs intervened.

⁸¹ Rosenstiel 273.

⁸² Peter Mansbridge, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

The public broadcaster's coverage of the June, 1990 constitutional negotiations was subjected to some pointed criticism from commentators such as Rick Salutin. Mansbridge says the initial reaction of him and his colleagues was: "Screw you, we didn't do anything wrong." But on further reflection, CBC journalists agreed their constitutional coverage gave too much air time to interest group spokespersons such as Tom d'Aquino, head of the Business Council on National Issues, and Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians, and not enough time to ordinary Canadians. "The question then was what vehicle gives them [the public] the opportunity to participate but one that doesn't prevent us from doing journalism," Mansbridge said in an interview. "Out of that was born the town hall on the economy in February of 1992, the Sunday night before the federal budget."⁸³

The special, entitled "Hard Times, Hard Choices," brought together a cross-section of Canadians, all of whom had been affected by the recession in one form or another. The group included laid-off workers as well as entrepreneurs who had developed innovative approaches to doing business in the new economy. Participants in the live broadcast were assembled in CBC studios across the country and were able to put questions directly to cabinet ministers such as Michael Wilson. "There were some technical problems, but the

⁸³ Mansbridge, personal interview.

special was judged a huge success,” Mansbridge said.⁸⁴ The special averaged more than one million viewers for each minute of the 90 minutes.

Initially, CBC planned to organize similar specials every three months on issues as varied as the economy and immigration policy. “But when all the bills came in, we knew we wouldn’t be doing one every three months,” Mansbridge said with a chuckle.⁸⁵

A slightly different format was introduced for the next iteration, during the 1992 referendum campaign. This time people were invited to a studio to put questions to a group of experts and political leaders assembled at a long table. “The CBC editorial people all liked that approach, but external critics felt it was an abandonment of the principle of providing a forum for people, that once again we had gone to an elite front bench,” Mansbridge said.⁸⁶

For the 1993 campaign, the CBC decided it would take yet another stab at finding the right format. This time, they were determined to put the public in direct touch with the politicians again. And, to

⁸⁴ Mansbridge, personal interview.

⁸⁵ Mansbridge, personal interview.

⁸⁶ Mansbridge, personal interview.

reduce costs, it was decided to set up in a single location, rather than in locations across the country. Mansbridge hosted the first special and says: "I was stunned at the level of animosity. It was most obviously targeted at the party in power because they had the most to answer for, but nobody [from the other parties] got applauded." The politicians, says Mansbridge, didn't know how to deal with this anger from the audience. Some believed they had been set up, that the CBC had manipulated the selection process to ensure only malcontents with a particular axe to grind were handed a microphone. But as Mansbridge concludes: "Given the results October 25, you might say it was representative of what was going on out there."⁸⁷

The most controversial issue in the format was the decision to have the audience, and not the politicians, providing the concluding remarks. "I thought it was brilliant then and I still defend it now,"⁸⁸ Mansbridge says, while acknowledging the format did encourage participants to try to out-better each other in the tone of their concluding remarks.

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"The post-Meech Lake world has turned us [the CBC] and everybody else into more of a carrier of what the people are saying," Mansbridge

⁸⁷ Mansbridge, personal interview.

⁸⁸ Mansbridge, personal interview.

added.⁸⁹ The danger, he says, is that these expressions of vox populi can squeeze out journalism by allowing people to make statements that are unchallenged and unchecked factually. Mansbridge says the CBC still hasn't found the right mix for town hall programs, although his personal opinion is that the first format, for the special on the economy in February, 1991, is the closest to being right.

As part of covering the media, correspondent Wendy Mesley was assigned to explore the planning that political parties put into a media event, as well as the media's efforts to ensure that neither they nor their viewers are manipulated.

Mesley focussed on a Campbell campaign appearance at Pineridge Secondary School in Pickering, Ontario. The purpose, said Mesley, was to show the prime minister's concern for education; the highlight of the event was a question and answer session. But as teacher Dave Lomax admitted on camera, the teachers coached the students and a school official picked the questioners to ensure the school presented the right image. "What we got here was -- it almost seemed like we were asking kids to fall hook, line and sinker, like we were co-operating with the media machine to create a constructive reality, a

⁸⁹ Mansbridge, personal interview.

kind of Pineridge, a kind of dream Pineridge.”⁹⁰ Lomax was being introduced to the world of Boorstin’s pseudo-events. Mesley, in turn, was providing a textbook example of Boorstin’s arguments about how we all want to know how the rabbit disappears in the hat.

In terms of the general thrust of CBC-TV coverage, Waddell said: “Our editorial philosophy was to try and get more substance in our coverage and more focus on the issues.”

Campbell’s much-ballyhooed new style of politics did not result in any major structural changes to the CBC’s coverage; the emergence of five major political formations did. Said Waddell: “Reporters and the media are still oriented towards certain sorts of coverage, whether that’s coverage of the traditional Gainsburger or whether it’s coverage of confrontation or whether it’s coverage of challenges. Journalists get ample opportunities throughout the year to cover conferences or consultative sessions; but they usually don’t, mostly because there isn’t any news being made as the media define it. We covered this campaign differently because of the different parties but we still went into it with the same mental orientation as to what is a campaign and what is news and what should happen in the course of a campaign.”

⁹⁰ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. Wendy Mesley item, September 20, 1993.

Waddell said. "When it doesn't happen, you get a little perplexed."⁹¹

Prime Time News Executive Producer Tony Burman told the Queen's Forum on the 1993 election that 80 per cent of CBC's coverage was issue-oriented. "The whole flow was markedly different,"⁹² Burman said, while acknowledging CBC coverage was similar to coverage of the 1992 referendum campaign. Burman, however, was including the "vox populi" features as part of the CBC "issue" coverage.

Craig Oliver, CTV's Ottawa Bureau Chief, says his network's coverage was "fairly traditional." Canada AM, the morning public affairs program, featured a panel of undecided voters and a weekly phone-in segment with party leaders. Dr. Darrell Bricker, a pollster with the Angus Reid Group, provided analysis of the network's polls. CTV had its own "Reality Check," but the feature was dropped after about three weeks.⁹³

Oliver assigned one reporter to each leader for the duration of the campaign. There was no planned rotation to other campaigns.

⁹¹ Waddell, personal interview.

⁹² "Forum on Politics and the Media." Media CBC Newsworld/Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

⁹³ Craig Oliver, personal interview, February 4, 1994.

although Oliver, as bureau chief, moved from one leader's tour to another; in addition, he served as host of CTV's Question Period. As was the case with the CBC, CTV did not run a story from every leader's tour every day, a break from the practice in the days when campaigns were dominated by three traditional parties.

CTV carried an election "feature" on each nightly newscast of CTV News. Topics ranged from the plight of the jobless to health care. And in recognition of the emergence of talk radio as a channel of political discourse, the network featured weekly segments from radio talk show callers, taking its cameras into the studios at Vancouver's CKNW for the Rafe Mair show, or CKTB in St. Catharines with John Mitchell.

News anchor Lloyd Robertson left his anchor desk to take to the streets for three newscasts to, in his words, "test the mood of the voters at the grassroots of Canada."⁹⁴ The locations selected were Steveston Harbour, a suburb of Richmond, B.C.; Kitchener, Ontario; and Quebec City.

Both CTV and CBC featured one-on-one interviews with the five major party leaders and the news anchors as part of their election

⁹⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, Lloyd Robertson, September 27, 1993.

coverage.

CTV producer Tobias Fisher told the Queen's Forum the network was determined to give ordinary Canadians a place in CTV's coverage. "The referendum taught us there was a lot of public disaffection and we tried to tap into that."⁹⁵

CBC's Newsworld pursued its coverage "the old fashioned way," said Senior Parliamentary Editor Don Newman, who co-hosted a nightly one-hour special from Ottawa with Nancy Wilson in Calgary. "We were event-of-the-day driven. We wanted a piece every night from every leader. We were report driven and we were issue driven."⁹⁶

At Société Radio-Canada, the emergence of Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard as a political force altered coverage plans significantly.

The normal five-person crew (reporter, producer, cameraperson, soundperson, editor) was cut back to four, for budget reasons. SRC also decided Campbell, Chrétien and McLaughlin would be covered extensively, as would Bouchard. However, Preston Manning's tour

⁹⁵ "Forum on Politics and the Media." Media CBC Newsworld/Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

⁹⁶ "Forum on Politics and the Media." Media CBC Newsworld/Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

would be covered for the first and last two weeks of the campaign. SRC also planned to scale back its involvement in the leaders' tours, covering the tours for only five of the seven weeks on a full-time basis, while relying on day trips on days when leaders were in major centres for the remaining two weeks.

SRC also resisted the trend to "town hall" style coverage, preferring to stay with panels of experts and political pundits on issue specific pieces not dissimilar to the discussions featured on cable's TV5 network from France.

In the aftermath of Meech Lake and Charlottetown, and inspired in part by changes in American media coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign, news organizations seemed determined to curb predispositions towards personality-driven, poll-fixated, horse race coverage. The Canadian media declared their determination to be more substantive and issue-oriented, and to let the people in.

Yet in retrospect, several campaign coverage planners concede most of the structural changes in their coverage were the direct result of the arrival on the federal political scene of two new political formations -- the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party. While Reform had fielded candidates in 1988, it was barely above the definition of fringe populist party and certainly did not require the same allocation

of resources as was the case in 1993. News organizations can point to substantive features on issues. The Edmonton Journal, for instance, set out thumbnail descriptions of party positions on a series of issues. The Toronto Star's Starphone initiative, which triggered almost 13,000 calls, allowed readers to identify their issue priority list, which then guided the newspaper as it set out party positions on each of these issues in a series of articles. But in the opinion of at least one senior editor, the Globe's Colin MacKenzie, his paper was so determined to move away from the "horse-race" style story that it was slow to pick up on the strength of Reform and was equally slow to understand the extent of the Tory collapse.

The final word from the Washington Post's Howard Kurtz: "After each election, journalists swear off the bottle. No more silly scandals or mindless horse-race stories. No more photo ops and thirty-second smears. Never again will we allow ourselves to be manipulated by campaign consultants. This time we will stick to substantive issues, whether the candidates want to talk about them or not. And then, like struggling alcoholics, we take one drink and fall off the wagon."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Kurtz 266.

CHAPTER 3

CAMPBELL'S CANDIDACY: WAS IT EVER WINNABLE?

As Canadians settled in front of television sets October 25, 1993, to appraise the results of their electoral handiwork, Kim Campbell's tour team was offering silent thanks to the inventor of room dividers.

On Sunday, the day before the national vote, Conservative Party oracles finally informed Campbell of the magnitude of the defeat that was about to unfold.

Pressed for a seat projection, the party's pollsters consulted week-old, dog-eared computer print-outs of nightly tracking surveys from 25 "swing ridings" and concluded that while it was conceivable the party could cling to 12 seats and retain official party status in the House of Commons, it wasn't a likely outcome.

Even before the first official results were posted that Monday, Jodi White, Campbell's chief of staff, was on the telephone to Liberal Party strategists to discuss an appropriate date for the transition of government.

As Monday evening wore on, deputy chief of staff Ray Castelli told the Globe and Mail's Ross Howard that Campbell had been aware for several days of the possibility of a rout. Castelli said Campbell "has been and is being very brave." But as Howard himself observed: "The magnitude of defeat stunned Ms. Campbell's coterie although its members had long ago resigned themselves to failure."¹

At dissolution, the Progressive Conservative Party held 157 seats, including Campbell's riding of Vancouver Centre. On this night, the party would be reduced to parliamentary rubble.

Campbell aides reported she was calm, even stoical in face of the defeat. Early in the evening, Campbell placed calls to defeated MPs offering consolation. When the list of defeated MPs became unmanageable, Campbell focussed on former cabinet colleagues.

Results in Atlantic Canada presaged the extent of the debacle. Fisheries Minister Ross Reid, co-chair of Campbell's successful leadership campaign and a personable and popular individual, could not hold St. John's East. Employment Minister Bernard Valcourt, the "enfant terrible" of the Mulroney cabinet who was equally attracted to

¹ Ross Howard, "Election 93: The Vote - The Quick Unravelling of a Campaign," Globe and Mail October 26, 1993: A2.

fast motorcycles and the works of Robert Reich, was defeated in the Acadian riding of Madawaska-Victoria.

Meanwhile, Campbell's logisticians were busily shrinking the size of the main ballroom at the Hotel Vancouver. The ballroom had been filled to overflowing March 22, 1993, when Campbell officially launched her leadership campaign. It was in this very ballroom that Canadians first heard about "the politics of inclusion." The launch was magic, Campbell's finest hour in politics, carried live on CBC Newsworld. The makeshift stage groaned under the collective weight of the cabinet "heavies" who had crashed the party to ensure everyone knew they were with Kim. On October 25, the room was cavernous, the atmosphere funereal. Room dividers could take care of the first problem; the atmosphere, however, could not be improved upon given the result. Once the contest in Vancouver Centre had been decided, Campbell moved to the ballroom to concede.

Campbell's concession speech was a signature speech -- a demonstration of the traits of wit, insight, intelligence and self-deprecating humour that had attracted so many to her leadership cause. The assembled scribes understood the emotion of her reference to "a good snurf into a kleenex" even if they couldn't find the correct spelling for "snurf" in their Funk and Wagnalls.

Her equanimity in stating: "Canadian democracy has spoken loudly and clearly and I accept the judgment of the Canadian people with disappointment but without reservation"² was as forthright and honest as it was gracious. And her closing comment: "consider yourself hugged" is seared on the consciousness of every Conservative volunteer who knocked on a door, staffed a polling station, raised a dollar, or put up a lawn sign for a cause that in 1993 was hardly fashionable.

As Campbell headed back to her suite, the enormity of what had happened to the party of Sir John A. began to register. As a member of CTV's political panel that night, perched uncomfortably on a studio swivel chair designed for an individual several stone lighter, I was asked: what happened? And more to the point -- was this campaign ever winnable for the Tories?

The issue of winnability must be the central question of any consideration of the impact of media coverage on Campbell's campaign bid.

The answer is neither simple nor straightforward, and begins with another election night almost five years before, when Martin Brian

² Murray Campbell and Jeff Sallot, "Election 93: The Vote - A Liberal Landslide. All But Two Tories Lose. Bloc Could Become the Official Opposition," Globe and Mail October 26, 1993: A1.

Mulroney, Baie Comeau's favourite son, had led the Conservative Party to its first back-to-back federal majorities since Macdonald a century before. The 1988 general election had, as its primary media focus, the Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

But in the drafty arena in Baie Comeau the night of November 22, 1988, Mulroney was telling Canadians that what the campaign had really been about was unity. Mulroney's message that night was that the Free Trade Agreement and the Meech Lake constitutional accord were component parts of his government's strategy to forge a stronger economic and social unit. "The Free Trade Agreement and the Meech Lake Accord are the chief instruments of our prosperity and unity," Mulroney said. "They constitute a brilliant affirmation of the new spirit of national reconciliation and economic renewal that benefits us all."³

The problem for Mulroney, and for the Conservative Party, was that the nation-saving attributes of the FTA and Meech Lake were not immediately obvious to all. Indeed, in a relatively short period of time, both initiatives were seen as threatening, rather than reassuring by a majority of Canadians.

³ Robert Mason Lee, One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter and Ross, 1989): 266.

The Canada-U.S. relationship has been a political hot button since the time of the United Empire Loyalists. The FTA was sold by the Tories as an opportunity, and attacked by the opposition as a threat to our way of life. While the federal government waited for the statistical evidence of the FTA's benefit to pile up, its opponents used anecdotal accounts of individual loss to lend credence to the notion Canadian jobs were being lost to low-wage states in the American sun-belt.

Declining support for Mulroney's free trade policy was fed by a growing unease about the state of the economy. Canada, as was the case with most of the western industrialized nations, experienced a significant economic downturn in the early 1990s. But the world-wide downturn was compounded by domestic monetary policy. Ottawa's decision in early 1989 to cool out an overheated Ontario economy with a high interest rate policy tipped the industrial heartland into a full blown recession, perhaps the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The recession a decade earlier exacted a high price -- double digit inflation, double digit unemployment, and home mortgage rates in excess of 20 per cent. Yet the recession of the 1990s, by contrast, was somehow more insidious. It was all couched in corporate newspeak -- rationalizing, downsizing, competitiveness, restructuring. But the net effect was that few Canadians felt economically secure.

even those who were gainfully employed. Media accounts of the unemployed began to compete for space with news of the underemployed. Parents wrestled with the realization that their children might not enjoy the same standard of living as they had grown up with.

In terms of political fall-out, the voter disenchantment was exacerbated by the decision to tackle Canada's growing deficit problem. The Mulroney cabinet looked to cut costs and improve its revenue stream. The specifics involved budget cuts to such important institutions as Via Rail and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Mulroney and his cabinet colleagues sought to debate these issues on specific terms. If Canadians feel so strongly about passenger rail service why don't they ever take the train? was a common query put by members of the Conservative caucus. If we are asking the whole country to do more with less, why should the CBC be exempt? was another.

The public debate, however, unfolded on a totally different plane. At a time when they sensed their identity and distinctiveness were being threatened by increased American influence through the FTA, Canadians questioned the motives of a government that seemed determined to dismantle the very institutions that helped us define

ourselves.

Further aggravating the electorate was the federal government's decision to improve its long-term revenue position with the introduction of the controversial Goods and Services Tax.

The government's decision to ensure the GST was recorded separately on the myriad number of commercial transactions against which it was applied ensured individuals would be reminded several times every day that they were paying significant federal taxes on everything from donuts to driving lessons. The political price the Mulroney government paid for insisting that the GST be visible cannot be overstated.

A CTV-Insight Canada Research poll released in September, 1989, indicated 79 per cent of respondents opposed the tax; of even more concern to federal lawmakers was the fact that 75 per cent of respondents saw the tax as unfair.

So vehement and vociferous were objections to the proposed GST that the opposition Liberals -- who enjoyed a majority in the Senate at the time -- felt secure enough to ignore constitutional convention and threaten to defeat a money bill that had already been adopted in the House of Commons.

Mulroney responded to the Liberal threat by invoking a seldom-used clause in the constitution that allowed him to name eight extra senators to ensure a Conservative majority and the ultimate passage of the bill.

Mulroney's decision to "pack" the Senate was defensible in the context of Canada's system of responsible government. The kazoo-playing appointees of previous Liberal governments simply could not be allowed to frustrate the will of the duly-elected House of Commons. However the "GST Senators" play compounded Mulroney's problems with an electorate that was already evolving from scepticism to cynicism on the issue of patronage.

Mulroney, who had exploited the patronage issue to great effect in the 1984 general election, found himself on the defensive with his Senate gambit. The initiative was characterized as an orgy, an excess of reward at taxpayers' expense for party services rendered. The appointments fed a growing public perception that Mulroney's confidantes were benefitting from their government contacts. Whether the specific references were the burgeoning lobbying industry, or the awarding of contracts to firms such as Decima Research or the Earnscliffe Strategy Group's subsidiary, Anderson Strategic Research, the cumulative effect was a sense too many Tories

were getting by with a little help from their friend.

Regional tensions were also on the rise in this period. In Atlantic Canada, blame for the collapse of the east coast fishery, particularly the tragic depletion of the northern cod stock, was laid directly at Ottawa's doors due to a belief Ottawa was responsible for the mismanagement and had compounded the crime by standing, impotent, in the face of over-fishing by foreign trawlers.

The resurgence of western alienation had a somewhat different rationale. The roots lie in irritants of long-standing -- official bilingualism and federal procurement practices that were seen as favouring Central Canada, and particularly Quebec. Western Canadians expected Pierre Trudeau's Liberals to protect their Quebec base. But with the election of Mulroney's Conservatives in 1984 they expected change. Mulroney and his cabinet colleagues believed they were sensitive to, and responsive to, the needs of Western Canada, citing the repeal of the National Energy Program and the power of ministers such as former deputy prime minister Don Mazankowski and former constitutional affairs minister Joe Clark to buttress their case.

However, caucus and cabinet solidarity on issues such as the GST and the Meech Lake constitutional accord created an ever-growing rift between Western Canadian Conservative MPs and their constituents.

Alberta Premier Don Getty's non-binding, but innovative Senate "election" in 1989 served as an early warning system for voter discontent. As Reform Party Leader Preston Manning, who supported Stan Waters' successful candidacy, explained after the fact: "To those who criticized us for making the Alberta Senate election a referendum on Meech Lake and the GST as well as on Senate reform, we explained that the elected people who were supposed to be representing Albertans' views on these issues were not doing so."⁴

Uneasy over its future economic prospects and angry over a new tax it considered unfair, the electorate grew exasperated with what it saw as a preoccupation of its political leadership with constitutional issues, specifically the Meech Lake constitutional initiative.

The Meech Lake agreement was hammered out at a series of closed door sessions at a federal government retreat in the Gatineau Hills just outside the Nation's Capital the last week of April, 1987. The rare consensus was widely acclaimed by media opinion leaders and all federal opposition parties. Within a few weeks, however, a discordant note was struck by former prime minister Pierre Trudeau. In twinned op-ed pieces that appeared in the Montreal daily La Presse and the Toronto Star, Trudeau argued the Meech Lake accord, with its distinct society clause, effectively created a federal system that conferred

⁴ Preston Manning, The New Canada (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1992): 210.

rights on one province and its citizens that were not conferred others. Mulroney argued Trudeau's interpretation of the Meech Lake accord was disingenuous; that asymmetry had been a feature of Canadian federalism, from the British North America Act of 1867 to its patriated version, the Canada Act, 1982. But Trudeau's characterization of Quebec's special status as "value-added" caused great consternation in English Canada.

Interest groups, including the leadership of Canada's aboriginal peoples and the women's movement, became convinced the special status afforded Quebec in the Meech Lake accord undermined rights entrenched in the Canada Act, 1982. Because the amending formula allowed up to three years for ratification by the federal Parliament and provincial legislatures, the cast of characters began to change. Supportive Conservative premiers such as New Brunswick's Richard Hatfield and Newfoundland's Brian Peckford retired or were defeated, and were replaced by Liberal premiers Frank McKenna and Clyde Wells who echoed Trudeau's concerns.

Over time, the notion that the Meech Lake accord embodied a "value-added" citizenship for Quebecers who would enjoy rights not available elsewhere took hold in English Canada. English Canadians tended to see constitutional discussions as a squabble among elites, a power play removed from their day-to-day concerns. They were

unhappy the constitutional file dominated the political agenda, in their view, at the expense of the economy. Ironically, for Quebeckers, the constitutional file was mostly about the economy.

While English Canadians seemed to be operating on the premise Quebec's constitutional concerns were largely cultural, the debate in Quebec focussed more on economic issues such as which level of government should control manpower retraining. The rest of Canada chafed as well under hectoring from political leaders who tended in their public declarations to equate support for the Meech Lake initiative with the continued participation of Québec in Confederation. Québécois federalist critics of the accord such as Trudeau and future prime minister Jean Chrétien were a rallying point to those English Canadians who wanted to reject the notion of special status but did not want to be perceived as rejecting French-speaking Quebeckers.

By mid-1990, Bank of Canada Governor John Crow's high interest rate policy had tipped the Ontario economy into a full-blown recession. The farm and fishing economies of the Prairies and Atlantic Canada had also collapsed.

The Meech Lake accord was dead; acrimony was the mood-of-the-day in the nation's capital cities as the first ministers, aboriginal leaders, and spokespersons for various interests scrambled to ascribe

blame.

Mohawk warriors, in armed defiance, had seized control of the Kanesatake reserve outside Montreal. For the first time since the October crisis of 1970, the Canadian Armed Forces were called out to regain control of the streets.

Mulroney's public appearances invariably attracted angry protesters and infrequent, ugly confrontations. Mulroney had been stung personally by the defection of a senior Quebec cabinet minister over the constitutional impasse. Environment Minister Lucien Bouchard, who later established the Bloc Québécois, had been a close friend and confidante of Mulroney for years. Like a pied piper, Bouchard led six other Tory MPs to the Opposition benches. Support for the governing Conservatives, as measured in monthly public opinion sounding, plummeted to single digits.

As a sour mood seized the country in the fall of 1990, Mulroney asked former Ottawa Citizen editor Keith Spicer to head up the "Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future." Commissioners were asked to listen to Canadians to find out what kind of country they wanted for themselves and their children. Spicer decided early on that instead of inviting Canadians to come to the Forum, the Forum would go to them. Logistical snafus plagued early efforts and triggered a negative early

press. As the Commissioners reported: "In the early weeks, devising as we were implementing, we faced hostile, uncomprehending media unaccustomed to the unorthodox, sometimes experimental nature of the Forum."⁵

Spicer and company persevered, and their perseverance paid handsome dividends in terms of taking the nation's political pulse. By the time the final report was compiled, some 400,000 Canadians and an additional 300,000 students had responded to the Forum in 7,681 group discussions, with position papers and letters, in calls to hot-lines, and through electronic town halls. The report provides a revealing look into the nation's soul.

The Forum discovered that participants had a strong sense of a distinctive Canadian identity, but that the BNA Act parameters of "peace, order and good government" no longer reflected Canadians' aspirations for, or expectations of, government. The concept of Canada as a nation of two founding peoples came under sustained attack. Equality and fairness were cited as guiding principles for tomorrow's Canada. A premium was attached to consultation, to dialogue. There was an expressed desire for consensual settlements on major issues. Minority rights should be heard, but the view of the

⁵ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991): 25.

majority should prevail. Special status was a non-starter. The Forum report quotes one group which, in the opinion of the Commissioners, seemed to capture the view of the vast majority of participants on the issue: "We will not stand for any province demanding any more than equal treatment."⁶ Participants were dubious about free trade with the United States and noted there was no free trade within Canada because of interprovincial trade barriers and provincial variations in professional codes and standards.

Forum participants were sharply critical of federal government policies that, in their view, undermined unifying forces in the country. They cited funding cutbacks to Via Rail and the CBC, the partial privatization of Canada Post, and the decision to allow changes to the uniforms of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. As a Toronto participant stated: "My country is being taken away from me. I see cutbacks in the communications that this country needs to talk to itself. CBC is dying, Via Rail is dying, and we're talking about putting cultural industries on the bargaining table with Mexico."⁷

While participants offered specific suggestions for constitutional reform, the overriding message from English Canada was that

⁶ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 36.

⁷ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 45.

tinkering with constitutional clauses came a poor second to the economy on their governmental "things to do" list.

The long-standing cleavage between French and English Canada took on a sharper focus during the Forum discussions. Quebecers tended to see the rejection of the Meech Lake package as a rejection of minimal demands. Quebec participants argued that if English Canada was not prepared to accept the "defensive" provisions of Meech, then there was little likelihood of a constructive dialogue on the more substantive economic issues related to the division of powers. The Quebec reaction was expressed in nationalistic rhetoric. "It is clear that the rest of Canada doesn't want us: it is therefore the time for us to affirm ourselves,"(tr.) said one participant.⁸ "Canadian federalism is a failure," added another. "Among the different alternatives now available to Quebec, moving to sovereignty seems to us to be the most welcome."(tr.)⁹

In the rest of Canada, there was no talk of agreement at any price. On the contrary, participants clearly preferred that Quebec remain part of Canada, but not if the price of that continued presence damaged or destroyed those values they held dearest. There was a

⁸ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 52.

⁹ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 54.

constituency for the idea that it would be better for all concerned to live beside a friendly foreign Quebec than to continue to seek common ground with a disgruntled reluctant province. Quebec's controversial language law clearly had crystallized public opinion in English Canada on the issue of Quebec and the rest of Canada in a most profound manner. Bill 178 was regarded by many Forum participants as a contemptuous rejection of efforts by English-speaking Canadians to embrace the idea of a bilingual, bicultural nation. The report cites a conclusion from the 1979 Ppin-Robarts Task Force on Canadian Unity to the effect that "even crises can become tedious and difficult to believe in if they go on too long and if nothing seems to happen."¹⁰ Spicer *et al.* seemed to believe Canadians are moving inexorably to a defining moment; that a bottom line has emerged on the issue of Canada/Quebec. English Canadians in particular seem to agree that the time has come for Quebecers to make a choice once and for all. This bottom line dynamic would be reflected in the discourse, and the results, of the 1993 federal election.

However, if there were growing divisions in English and French Canada post-Meech on appropriate constitutional arrangements for the future, there was a strong consensus on the issue of political leadership. Participants stated emphatically that they had lost faith in

¹⁰ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 51.

both the political process and political leadership. They did not believe governments, particularly at the federal level, reflect the will of the people. Whatever the specifics of the policy issue -- bilingualism, multiculturalism, the economy, aboriginal rights or constitutional reform -- participants said they did not sense they were being governed according to their fundamental values and wishes. The media were held at least partially responsible for the current state of dissatisfaction; they were criticized by Forum participants as "a major source of misinformation and confusion"¹¹ predisposed to emphasizing differences for purposes of sensationalism. But governments in general, and the federal government in particular, were the real focus of wrath. The Forum report states: "There is no ambiguity, and practically no regional variation, to be found in the disillusionment of our population with its current leadership, nor can their call for honour, responsiveness, and governance in accordance with their fundamental values be misinterpreted."¹² Participants were dissatisfied with the conduct of the elected, who seem to forget the fact they are accountable to the people on assuming office.

Of particular concern to partisan Conservatives was the fact much of the anger and hostility expressed at the Forum was directed at then

¹¹ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 98.

¹² Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 101.

prime minister Brian Mulroney. While acknowledging that criticism comes with the territory and that, in this age of television, politics is increasingly leader-focussed, Spicer nonetheless concludes: "At least for now, there is a fury in the land against the prime minister."¹³ There were innumerable calls for the prime minister's resignation based on a widely-held belief he had stopped listening to the people. As one participant put it: "Most people are against Free Trade, G.S.T., cutbacks (just to name a few) but he still rams it down our throats whether we like it or not."¹⁴

Canadians, the Forum report states, dislike secrecy. Yet as a direct consequence of executive federalism, there is a consensus that much of what goes on in government occurs behind closed doors under the rule of elite accommodation. Parliament was criticized as too partisan; too adversarial; too focussed on Question Period and television bites; and, because of the iron rule of caucus discipline, too rigid and unresponsive to the views of constituents.

Throughout the Forum process, there was much talk of the need for certain reforms more consistent with the American system of government, such as term limits and direct citizen participation via

¹³ Canada. Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 6 and 7

¹⁴ Canada. Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 100.

referendum campaigns, impeachment or recall measures. Edmund Burke's view of a parliamentarian was, at least for the moment, decidedly out of fashion, perhaps because present parliamentarians seem to have forgotten the first part of Burke's message in his speech to the electors of Bristol on November 3, 1774 in which he sets out a parliamentarian's responsibility to be in constant correspondence and communication with his or her constituents respecting their opinions, preferring their interest to his own. Support for each of these reform measures as a line item varied. But the overriding message from the Forum process was that Canada was in a crisis: "a crisis of identity, a crisis of understanding, a crisis of leadership." While Forum participants did not use the word "crisis" specifically, commissioners concluded: "What they told us adds up, mercilessly, to this conclusion."¹⁵

Globe and Mail Ottawa reporter Susan Delacourt, a veteran of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional wars, captured ordinary Canadians' anger and exasperation with political leaders in her work United We Fall: the Crisis of Democracy in Canada. Delacourt's story is the story of a citizens' uprising against political, business, academic, journalistic and labour establishments.

¹⁵ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future: A Report to the People and Government of Canada 113.

Delacourt argues the 1992 referendum campaign marked the end of traditional politics in Canada. The "mood of popular discontent" that had been "seething and fermenting" had finally bubbled up to the surface, Delacourt wrote.¹⁶ "All of that constitutional wrangling was really the death throes of traditional politics in Canada, which revolved around compromises by the leaders and the blind observance by the led. In its place, has come a new, vaguely worded recognition of the need for 'new politics' in the country."¹⁷

The referendum campaign, according to Delacourt, demonstrated the public's desire for ideas over personalities in their politics. The electorate seemed to be determined to make an informed choice. And on open line radio shows such as CKNW's Rafe Mair or CFRB's Andy Barrie, the voters were demanding to be heard.

Delacourt concluded the 1992 referendum campaign exposed a serious rift between the politicians and the public and that rift constituted the real threat to national unity. "The country is split between the electors and the elected, the represented and the representers. The next national-unity mission will have to heal this

¹⁶ Susan Delacourt, United We Fall: The Crisis of Democracy in Canada (Toronto: The Penguin Group, 1993) 4.

¹⁷ Delacourt 421.

breach.”¹⁸

For the governing Conservatives, however, there was a more immediate deadline than the next national-unity mission: the constitution stipulated the government was going to have to go to the people in 1993.

This voter disenchantment found voice in the United States as well. In an important work entitled Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy, William Greider argued this alienation was actually running both ways. “Politicians are held in contempt by the public. That is well known and not exactly new in American history,” Greider stated. “What is less well understood [and rarely talked about for the obvious reasons] is the deep contempt politicians have for the general public.”¹⁹

Greider held core institutions -- political parties, the press and the mass-media culture -- as being responsible for the state of affairs. “The rich and complicated diversity of the nation,” wrote Greider, “is reduced to a lumpish commodity called ‘public opinion’ that is easily

¹⁸ Delacourt 441.

¹⁹ William Greider, Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy (New York: Touchstone, 1993) Introduction, 17.

manipulated by the slogans and imagery of mass communications."²⁰ Today's "new politics," according to Greider, is the expensive politics of facts and information; a politics that he dubs "democracy for hire"-- a world of media strategists, direct mail, opinion-polling firms and advertising agents. The cost of assembling that information effectively precludes the involvement of ordinary Americans, Greider stated. The result, he says, is artificial public opinion invented by the manipulative techniques of the modern day oracles and soothsayers.

Greider identifies the press and television as the principal gatekeepers for the dialogues of political debate. Echoing the findings of Iyengar and Kinder, Greider states what matters to the press must matter to politicians. Conversely, what the press ignores the politician can safely ignore as well. The media, he says, sets the agenda, a fact both the politicians and the public resent to a certain extent. "Everyone in politics turns to the press, if only to manipulate or deflect it," Greider writes. "In this milieu, even second-string reporters and editors cannot escape feeling powerful because they are constantly approached, beseeched, inundated with appeals for their attention."²¹

²⁰ Greider 18.

²¹ Greider 299.

Talk radio, says Greider, has become the new channel for democratic dialogue, a place where unorganized citizens can speak directly to those in power. New communications technologies, such as the 500-channel universe, may be the salvation of democracy, he concludes. These expressions of U.S. voter disenchantment surfaced during the 1992 presidential campaign, just as the referendum campaign here exposed the true extent of our national discontent.

The 1992 U.S. presidential campaign that saw baby boomer Bill Clinton oust incumbent Republican president George Bush is now described as a watershed in American politics. It was an election year when the old rules seemed not to apply, a year when the counter-intuitive decision seemed to come more often than not. It was the year of the people, a year when voters seemed to be taking their cue from Howard Beale, the anchor character in Paddy Chayefsky's award-winning film Network. Like Beale, the voters of America had a clear message for their would-be legislators. "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore."²²

On the dedication page of their study of the 1992 presidential campaign Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992, Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover quote Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to

²² Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992 (New York: Warner Books Inc., 1993): 16.

James Madison stating: "I hold it, that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."²³

American voters, in 1992, were rebelling to some extent against a campaign process that had been reduced through the late 1970s and early 1980s to bumper sticker rhetoric articulated in eight-second sound bites against a visual backdrop pre-selected to help illustrate the story of the text. The voters, this time, were hungry for straight answers from the candidates. Germond and Witcover, veterans of the presidential campaign process, observed that in the strange politics of 1992, politicians accustomed to setting their own agenda were confronted by voters who took it upon themselves to determine what the campaign topics would be.²⁴

Here in Canada, voter disenchantment with their national government and their determination to get straight answers from would-be leaders was no less pronounced.

Remarkably, despite the party's lamentable standing in public opinion through most of his government's second term, Mulroney's

²³ Germond and Witcover, Dedication Page.

²⁴ Germond and Witcover 16.

leadership of the Conservative party was virtually unchallenged from within. British Columbia backbencher Dr. Stan Wilbee was one of the few caucus members prepared to articulate before the television cameras a view of Mulroney as an electoral albatross. Even the corporal's guard of disgruntled Quebec MPs who bolted to the Bloc following the collapse of Meech Lake tended to absolve Mulroney of any blame for the lack of constitutional progress.

Mulroney had intended to step down as party leader in the fall of 1990. However, in the wake of the Meech Lake collapse senior cabinet colleagues such as Senator Lowell Murray and Don Mazankowski offered the blunt assessment they were not certain caucus and cabinet solidarity could be maintained if Mulroney took his leave. Ironically, even as Canadians were trooping out to Citizens' Forum events to express their profound displeasure with Mulroney's stewardship, world leaders such as former U.S. president George Bush and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher were pressing Mulroney to let his name stand as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Canadian media commentators treated Mulroney's candidacy with a mixture of incredulity and scorn and sought out mid-level diplomats at UN headquarters for the prerequisite quotations minimizing Mulroney's chances. Mulroney, who knew he had the support of Mikhail Gorbachev, Bush, Thatcher, and French President François Mitterrand (once France had protected its commercial

interests by supporting an African candidate on early ballots), knew he had a serious chance of securing the secretary general's post. However, at the urging of senior cabinet colleagues, Mulroney decided not to pursue the UN post.

Mulroney's next tentative departure date was set for the fall of 1992, but once again, the constitutional agenda intervened. Under the aegis of Joe Clark, ministers responsible for constitutional affairs (including Ontario Premier Bob Rae) worked out a package with aboriginal leaders they were certain they could sell to Quebec. Mulroney, in Europe for an Economic Summit meeting, was uneasy with the July 8 agreement. But a First Ministers' meeting at the end of August, with Quebec premier Robert Bourassa as a full participant, produced an amended version that became known as the Charlottetown accord.

Haunted by the memories of the Meech Lake collapse, first ministers decided the new constitutional agreement should be put directly to the people in a national referendum -- only the third in Canada's history.

The political leaders' efforts were subsequently endorsed by the majority of business, labour and interest group leadership. Yet the ensuing campaign provided further proof of fundamental

disconnection between the leaders and the led.

The first ministers, and aboriginal leaders, made certain decisions that adversely affected their referendum campaign. The first was in assuming their collective imprimatur would be sufficient to ensure broad acceptance of the Charlottetown package. If part of the problem with Meech Lake was a perception that it was a deal worked out behind closed doors by 11 white males in suits, the problem wasn't going to be resolved with a second agreement, worked out behind closed doors by 17 mostly white, mostly male persons dressed mostly in suits. Secondly, first ministers miscalculated in settling on a simple, yes/no style referendum question. A report on initiative campaigns in the United States and Europe prepared for the Privy Council Office by Anderson Strategic Research, a division of the Earnscliffe Strategy Group Research, co-authored by this student, concluded the referendum question is an essential element in framing the subsequent debate. The error on the ballot question was compounded by a lack of publicly available information on the Charlottetown accord's specifics. To add to the injury, citizens recoiled when the political leadership insisted they should vote on the package in the absence of final legal text.

It is not the intention here to re-fight the referendum campaign which saw the voters reject roundly the constitutional proposal, or to

analyze the merits of the Charlottetown agreement in constitutional terms. But the referendum campaign, as the Citizens' Forum before it, revealed the depth and extent of the anger many Canadians felt about political leaders, our political institutions, and the process itself.

Significantly, two new political formations intervened on the "No" side of the referendum campaign -- Lucien Bouchard's sovereigntist Bloc Québécois and Preston Manning's Reform Party. Both would apply the lessons of the referendum to their 1993 federal campaigns. What remained to be seen was whether the governing Conservatives had learned a thing.

As a defeated George Bush prepared to move out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and the Mulroney government headed into the fifth year of its mandate, the overriding question for the Progressive Conservative Party was whether its leader could overcome this latest setback to his political agenda and ever re-connect with the voters. Mulroney, for his part, calmly accepted the result of the referendum campaign. He was content that Canadians had been given an opportunity to pronounce themselves on the Charlottetown agreement and had done so in a clear and unequivocal fashion that had transcended regional and linguistic lines. The prime minister felt none of the anger and even bitterness that had marked his mood following the Meech Lake collapse in 1990 because in that instance he

believed the initiative had been hijacked by political gamesmanship by one premier in particular -- Clyde Wells. Mulroney also never doubted his ability to out-campaign Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien in a general election.

Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery dismissed Mulroney's musings about his electoral prospects as boastfulness. While they had no trouble containing their enthusiasm for Chrétien, the gallery consensus was that Mulroney's political career was over whether he knew it or not.

In the weeks before Christmas, 1992, the underground activities of leadership aspirant Kim Campbell began to break through the surface of the mainstream press. Spooked to some extent by the manoeuvring of Campbell supporters, other potential candidates such as Perrin Beatty and Michael Wilson began to sound out the party faithful to test their own chances as well. Mulroney, for his part, began planning a cabinet shuffle geared to a leadership campaign.

The ensuing cabinet shuffle saw Campbell shift from Justice to the Defence portfolio, a move designed to give the former student of strategic affairs some exposure on the international stage. The shuffle triggered media speculation that Mulroney had anointed the west coast lawyer as his chosen successor. Campbell's quip when

confronted with the query ("Who needs a leadership race. I'll just stage a coup. Don't mess with me, I have tanks."²⁵) struck the party as reflective of the type of engaging, quick, personable individual that just might be able to effect a comeback.

On February 24, 1993, Mulroney finally put an end to the speculation and announced his intention to step down as party leader 10 years to the day from his 1983 victory. As Peter C. Newman, a journalist who enjoyed Mulroney's confidence, reported in the March 15, 1993, edition of Maclean's: "He left office in such good humour, because, even if he has become the most controversial prime minister of this century, he knows it was because he so seldom backed off from choosing the politically risky options."²⁶

Mulroney waved off arguments that he had left his departure so late, that there was no reasonable chance of his successor winning a new mandate from the Canadian people. William Thorsell, editor-in-chief of the Globe and Mail, set out Mulroney's rationale in a post-election analysis carried in the October 27 editions. Thorsell reports Mulroney had a seven-part strategy that suggested there was nothing inevitable about defeat. First, Mulroney believed the leadership

²⁵ E. Kaye Fulton, "The Rising Star," Maclean's January 18, 1993: 12.

²⁶ Peter C. Newman, "How Brian Mulroney Planned His Exit," Maclean's March 15, 1993: 37.

campaign would generate better media coverage for the party.

Second, new, strong leadership candidates would offer the public a full display of Tory talent. A detailed plan to restructure and downsize the federal bureaucracy prepared by former treasury board president Robert de Cotret was sitting in the prime minister's in-basket, ready to be announced and implemented. The July summit of G-7 leaders would afford a new prime minister an opportunity to shine on the world stage. A vigorous policy platform that included reforms to social programs was ready to be articulated in a Speech from the Throne. And finally, the party's electoral war chest was full (\$5.9 million) and an experienced campaign team was in place. While Thorsell did not report the detail of Mulroney's strategy until after the election, the former prime minister had discussed this rationale in some detail with advisors at the time of his resignation.²⁷

However, Mulroney's comeback strategy began to unravel within days of his decision to resign. For starters, the leadership campaign was virtually over before it began. By the time Campbell formally disclosed her intentions in the same Hotel Vancouver ballroom that would serve as the stage for the final act, the strength of her candidacy had frightened off several putative opponents.

²⁷ William Thorsell, "How Mulroney's Strategy Failed," Globe and Mail, October 27, 1993.

Campbell had effectively created a media consensus of her own. The Tory leader followed a model set out by Bill Clinton. Rosenstiel, in his book Strange Bedfellows, argued Clinton's ascendancy as a candidate said as much about the American media as it did about the candidate. "Clinton had become the front-runner by having already won the invisible primary, a critical event conducted by a closed circle of journalists and Washington insiders that decides which candidates could raise money, build an organization, and win party support. The press drove the invisible primary by insisting on writing about who was ahead or behind before most voters knew who was running."²⁸ Campbell, in effect, won the media equivalent of a primary campaign; she convinced journalists that her candidacy was the best financed, that she was supported by the party's best and brightest, and that any challenge would simply be counter-productive.

Campbell's handlers led a new generation of reporters to the conclusion Canadian politics were about to undergo a sea change and that Campbell was the 1990s equivalent of Pierre Trudeau and his flower power pitch.

The March 22, 1993, edition of Maclean's featured a smiling Campbell on the cover under the headline: "Why is This Woman

²⁸ Rosenstiel 47.

Smiling?" A Maclean's/Compas Inc. survey of delegates to the June leadership convention reported a huge lead for Campbell over other declared, or still-reflecting rivals.

The Compas poll probed delegates to determine what the Tories were looking for in a new leader. The findings suggested delegates were in the market for an effective debater and polished television performer. Asked to rank leadership attributes in order of importance, fully 90 per cent of respondents listed the ability to beat Chrétien in a debate; 86 per cent listed a command of television, while 85 per cent listed being in favour of less government and lower spending. The least important attribute, at 31 per cent, was loyalty to the Mulroney legacy.

Campbell certainly seemed to personify the stated desire for change, so pronounced even among Tories. A woman, a baby boomer, from the west coast, with an interesting educational background and a facility in both official languages, Campbell's candidacy certainly seemed compelling, at least on paper. While Campbell had cabinet experience, she was not personally associated with such unpopular policies as the GST. And her grad student lifestyle was a decided contrast with the corporate-imperial style ascribed to the Mulroneys.

Said social author and columnist Peter C. Newman: "what people

wanted was somebody they could look at and say, 'yeah, they'll be different.'" Later in the same Global TV special, Newman said: "what we didn't want was another guy in a suit. She wasn't a guy and she held her suits in front of her and so we said, 'hey, this is different, we really love this.'"²⁹

The campaign launch, carried live on CBC Newsworld, was magic in the eyes of her more loyal supporters, though they readily acknowledge they are hard pressed to explain why. Certainly the statement that struck reporters as the most significant was Campbell's assertion: "I'd like to change the way people think about politics in this country by changing the way politics is done."³⁰

Conservative campaign strategist Nancy Jamieson, who had served Tory leaders Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney as a senior policy advisor, says Campbell brought a different perspective to public policy problems. "She was bright," Jamieson says. "I was intrigued by the way she came at problems: she didn't bring a whole set of preconceptions to the discussion. Occasionally, she would say something that was completely wacky. But in two of 10 occasions she

²⁹ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

³⁰ E. Kaye Fulton, "A Separate Identity," Maclean's April 5, 1993: 15.

would be original, innovative, and insightful.”³¹

Jamieson liked Campbell personally, and was particularly attracted by Campbell's openness and warmth. Jamieson also believed there was real value in having a strong woman candidate in the race. “It was our turn,” Jamieson says. “I thought it was important to the party to have a strong woman candidate. Politically, for the party, it could even have been quite canny. But I thought it was even more important to society.”³²

Pollster Allan Gregg was also an enthusiastic convert to Campbell's candidacy, stating he had never in his career worked with a candidate with more potential. “I thought her gender was really going to work for us. I thought her generation clearly was. She had a wonderful, wicked sense of humour, an ability to be self-deprecating and a real common touch in terms of understanding and smart as all get out,” he said in a Global Television interview.³³

Campbell had succeeded in establishing a media frame for her leadership campaign coverage, and that frame was “New Age.”

³¹ Nancy Jamieson, personal interview, January 24, 1994.

³² Jamieson, personal interview.

³³ “A Shock to the System” Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

Campbell's coronation did have its anxious moments, however. Early missteps had would-be contenders such as Beatty and Wilson second-guessing themselves. For party veterans who remembered the John Turner Liberal leadership of 1984, there were haunting similarities. Jamieson says it was clear to her supporters during the leadership that Campbell was not a skilled communicator "largely because she did not take it very seriously."³⁴

Campbell had been something of a media sensation from the moment the wire services moved the Barbara Woodley portrait of the bare-shouldered justice minister holding up her lawyer's robes. The British tabloids proclaimed her the "Madonna" of politics. Campbell laughed off the Madonna media reference with the quip: "The comparison between me and Madonna is the comparison between a strapless evening gown and gownless evening strap."³⁵ "Campbell made good copy," says Jamieson. "She was interesting, she said outrageous things. But she had never been subjected to the same kind of scrutiny people in politics normally are."³⁶ Campbell's media exposure in Ottawa had tended to be restricted to Justice beat

³⁴ Jamieson, personal interview.

³⁵ Robert Fife, Kim Campbell: The Making of a Politician (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishing Ltd., 1993): 157.

³⁶ Jamieson, personal interview.

reporters. She would, on occasion, sit down with three or four individual reporters over coffee and discuss policy; however, Campbell's exposure to the more adversarial political reporters was limited.

Through the early weeks of the leadership campaign, there were expressed concerns, in the party and in the press, that Campbell was something of a media creation; that a new generation of journalists were looking for the 1990 equivalent of Trudeaumania and flower power. Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe had to field more than one call from a Southam editor to that effect.

Peter Desbarats, dean of the University of Western Ontario's School of Journalism, said Canadian reporters may have been overly influenced by Bill Clinton's candidacy.

"She is a new face, bright, ambitious and quite exciting, at a time when Canadians, who are influenced by what is going on in the United States, are looking for younger leaders," Desbarats told the Vancouver Sun. "But that doesn't absolve journalists of their responsibility of reporting comprehensively and accurately and reasonably objectively."³⁷

³⁷ File 179.

Jodi White, later to serve as Campbell's chief of staff, had managed Jean Charest's leadership bid. "I really thought that a lot of people who were making a very early decision on Kim Campbell were doing a disservice to her and to the party frankly. It was important for the party to have a race. . ."³⁸

As the Campbell leadership campaign unfolded, the wheels began to wobble on the Campbell bandwagon. She proved to be an indifferent performer in a series of televised policy debates. And her command of French seemed less complete than her supporters had led people to believe. A troika of senior cabinet ministers -- Trade Minister Michael Wilson, Energy Minister Bill McKnight and Employment Minister Bernard Valcourt -- tried to convince Mulroney's Chief of Staff Hugh Segal to enter the race. When Segal decided against running, Wilson and Valcourt finally went over to Campbell, despite their deep reservations. Evoking the analogy of the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare, Environment Minister Jean Charest began to attract significant support. The May 17, 1993, cover of Maclean's profiled "The Real Kim Campbell;" the June 7, 1993, edition declared Charest was closing the gap.

Campbell's campaign rhetoric marked her as an apostle of the new politics. At a Calgary appearance, Campbell told her audience: "You

³⁸ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

hear a lot about strong leadership. But I think there's a difference between strength and bravado. Canadians are tired of being shouted at. They want to be respected and they want to be persuaded. And leadership is the capacity not just to know where you're going, but to know how to get there -- to be able to mobilize people, to rally them to a sense of common purpose."³⁹

During convention week, a Gallup poll suggested a Conservative Party led by Jean Charest would win the next federal election, while a Campbell-led Tory party would be defeated. By then, however, delegates were determined to disregard any sign of weakness on Campbell's part. A Saturday speech that struck many delegates as uninspired had no appreciable impact on delegate voting intentions. On Sunday, June 13, 1993, Campbell was elected leader of the Conservative Party on the second ballot. Conservatives patted themselves on the back, convinced they had finessed the Liberal Party in exactly the same way the Liberals had finessed Robert Stanfield by picking Pierre Trudeau as party leader in April, 1968.

An Angus Reid poll published in the June 21, 1993 edition of Macleans suggested Campbell was seen as the best hope for a new style of government by a wide margin over her leadership rivals and was a solid choice as the leader who would make the best prime

³⁹ Delacourt 423.

minister (37 per cent of respondents, compared to 29 per cent for Chrétien.)

Once she was sworn in as Canada's 19th and first female prime minister, Campbell moved quickly to attempt to put her personal stamp on the government. A major cabinet shuffle that reduced the number of ministers to 25 was crafted to give the government a new look. The de Cotret report, with its recommendations on restructuring the federal bureaucracy, was finally announced. Campbell was positioned as a sharp contrast to her predecessor. She joked about her sex life and constantly talked about doing politics differently.

The mere prospect of a change in the leadership of the PC party seemed to alter attitudes of Canadian journalists involved in political coverage. In February and March, 1993, Anderson Strategic Research, a public opinion research firm in which this student has a significant interest, together with the Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication, conducted the first wave of The Media in the Mirror: A National Probe of Media Attitudes Toward Coverage of Campaign '93.

The sample design was exhaustive but those sampled could choose whether to respond or not. A total of 601 questionnaires were mailed

out. The Carleton University Survey Centre, where responses were anonymously processed and recorded before the data were transmitted to Anderson Strategic Research, reports 112 failed to reach respondents for various reasons, leaving the number of eligible respondents at 489. Of that total, 126 or 26 per cent returned a questionnaire. For that reason, the survey is not considered statistically representative of the entire Canadian journalistic community.

The survey is of interest, however, in that results suggest important changes in opinion were brought about by Mulroney's February 24 announcement of his resignation, particularly in terms of media perceptions regarding party momentum. Respondents were asked to indicate the date on which they completed their survey. The sample, therefore, can be split into pre-resignation and post-resignation populations. In surveys completed before the resignation, only 11 per cent of respondents believed the PC's had the greatest momentum. Following Mulroney's announcement, a majority (59 per cent) ranked the Tories first in terms of momentum.

A similar contrast in opinion was measured between the two populations on the question of which party was likely to win the next election. In the pre-resignation group, fully 71 per cent of respondents believed the Liberals were likely to win the election.

Following Mulroney's announcement, views were almost evenly divided, with 52 per cent predicting a Liberal win and 48 per cent predicting the PC Party would form the next government.

Finally, more than two-thirds of respondents (70 per cent) indicated they believed the next government would have a minority of seats in the House of Commons, regardless of its partisan stripe.

Susan Delacourt believes the end of the Mulroney era was greeted by relief from Canadians who were tired of being told the government knew better; that they were wrong on issues such as the GST and constitutional reform and that the government was right. But the Globe and Mail reporter questioned whether the public's message had really sunk in with Campbell. 'This was the same woman who called proudly apathetic voters 'condescending S.O.Bs.' This was the same politician who said she had little in common with the beer-drinking public who watched TV in their undershirts. This was a politician like many others in the country, whose words betrayed her difficulty in respecting Canadians who refused to show their own respect of elected leaders," Delacourt wrote.⁴⁰

Campbell dedicated the summer to reinforcing her image as a people person. Canada Day -- July 1 -- set the tone. Campbell joined

⁴⁰ Delacourt 424.

newly-minted Fisheries Minister Ross Reid, who had co-chaired her leadership campaign, for a sunrise ceremony on Signal Hill, overlooking the harbour at St. John's. Then, thanks to a government Challenger jet, Campbell skipped across the country for a series of Canada Day celebrations that concluded with a sunset party in her home town of Vancouver.

Pollster Allan Gregg says Campbell's summer surge in popularity was rooted in a desire of the electorate for change, "a desire for a different kind of leadership that initially she personified for the population."⁴¹

Nancy Jamieson says, "What people saw over the summer in an unfiltered way is what she is like when she is at her best: a young, energetic, funny, bright woman."⁴² However, Jamieson says Campbell may have been lulled into a false sense of security over the summer because of the easy pace of the summer tour. Public support, as measured by published polls, in Jamieson's opinion, was a mile wide but less than an inch deep. "We shouldn't have been fooled by that," Jamieson says. "We all talked ourselves into thinking we could do it

⁴¹ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

⁴² Jamieson, personal interview.

again."⁴³

Globe reporter Hugh Winsor covered one of Campbell's summer swings through the interior of British Columbia. People, he says, were genuinely interested in meeting Campbell and shaking her hand. But Winsor believes Campbell came through the leadership campaign as damaged goods. "I don't think there is any doubt about that."⁴⁴

Winsor cites Campbell's performance at the first leadership candidates' debate in Toronto, carried live on CBC Newsworld. Campbell, Winsor says, was overly cautious in her statements and did not appear to be comfortable in her role as front-runner or a candidate in charge. Subsequent appearances raised questions in Winsor's mind about Campbell's grasp of the issues. When the leadership contest was over, the myth had gone, Winsor says. "We (reporters) were not in awe of her by the time we got to the campaign," Winsor said.⁴⁵

University of Toronto historian Desmond Morton told a Global Television interviewer, Campbell had benefitted from the fact her summer tour was covered by the "second string" while more

⁴³ Jamieson, personal interview.

⁴⁴ Hugh Winsor, personal interview, March 7, 1994.

⁴⁵ Hugh Winsor, personal interview.

experienced journalists, in anticipation of a fall campaign, took the summer off.⁴⁶

Randall Pearce, then communications director for the PC party, says the summer barbecue tour simply went on too long. "The media were beginning to feel used. They were beginning to lose their own credibility. Ottawa-based journalists, smarting from internal criticism that they had afforded Campbell love-in treatment during the summer, decided they would restore a sense of balance by applying a more strict scrutiny of her campaign than would be the case for Chrétien," Pearce added.⁴⁷

Reporters interviewed for this paper do not confirm Pearce's claims as such. But several stated that as a prime minister, Campbell was held to a more rigorous standard of precision in her answers than was the case for Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien who, as leader of the opposition, did not have access to the federal public service.

Donolo referred to Campbell's summer campaign as a "quasi-royal tour." As several strategists observed, however, the summer success was somewhat misleading because Campbell virtually had the field to

⁴⁶ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

⁴⁷ Randall Pearce, personal interview, February 23, 1994.

herself.

Former Trudeau press secretary, Patrick Gossage, who accompanied and advised Trudeau through two federal general election campaigns, believes image is important to a political leader and therefore ascribes importance to media coverage in general, and television coverage in particular, to a campaign.

Trudeau was always aware of television's importance as a medium of political communication, says Gossage, and engaged in an extended correspondence with Marshall McLuhan to improve the Liberal leader's understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the medium.

"The old television camera is fairly accurate," says Gossage, "it is a close-up medium." Gossage believes the summer barbecue tour may have revealed more about Campbell than was in her interest. "Her lack of personal skills was quite visible. Everything about her said there is quite a piece of glass between her and everybody else."

Gossage believes Campbell is neither personable nor approachable, considers herself a cut above the average Canadian, and that it shows.

"I believe sincerely that in the end you are left with these images of a leader in your head and they are probably the single most important

influence in your behaviour," Gossage says. "They [the voters] have an image of Chrétien in their mind. They have an image of Campbell in their mind. They know they like him. They know they don't like her. And those perceptions are formed pretty quickly."⁴⁸

Reform party strategist Rick Anderson admits his party approached the summer with some trepidation. Campbell, as a bilingual woman from Western Canada, was a new and attractive political personality with the potential to restore Tory support in the west.

This expression of interest began to surface in public opinion polls. Gossage's post-campaign assessment notwithstanding, Campbell received some of the highest approval ratings ever recorded by Gallup through the summer. Her performance at the Tokyo Economic Summit was deemed a success, particularly when Campbell was "firm and polite"⁴⁹ (Maclean's July 19, 1993, edition) in chiding U.S. president Bill Clinton for his failure to give Canada notice on his July missile strike at Iraq.

Tory advisers were beaming as Campbell worked her magic. As one advisor told Maclean's: "We're not exactly broken-hearted if people

⁴⁸ Patrick Gossage, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

⁴⁹ Maclean's, Robert Lewis editorial, "Kim Campbell's Stand," July 19, 1993: 2.

look at her and say 'Geez, she's not a bit like Brian.'"50

However, former external affairs minister Barbara McDougall said in an interview there was too much barbecue chicken and not enough work during the summer "with the people who were in place."⁵¹ McDougall, presumably, was referring to Cabinet's inability, or refusal, to make decisions on a series of policy issues such as social programs reform.

Allan Gregg says when he arrived in Ottawa over the summer the policy cupboard was bare. He says cabinet was unable to come forward with new ideas "and when they were presented for them, were completely and utterly unwilling to adopt or endorse any new initiative."⁵²

Campbell aides had promoted four speeches scheduled through the summer as major policy pronouncements that would define Campbell's government. The first, which focussed on an ethics in government package, was well received. However, each of the three remaining speeches failed to live up to advance billing. Aides confirm cabinet's

⁵⁰ Anthony Wilson-Smith, "A Low-Key Debut," Maclean's July 19, 1993: 10.

⁵¹ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

⁵² "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

reluctance to take certain decisions resulted in watered-down policy messages.

During August, Campbell and her cabinet faced a critical strategic decision -- whether to recall Parliament for a full Speech from the Throne that could serve as a policy manifesto for a fall campaign, or rather to ask Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn to issue the writs for a general election. Cabinet sessions in late August failed to produce a consensus on such critical elements of the proposed throne speech as reform of social programs. A view began to take hold among certain cabinet ministers that the government should try to ride Campbell's personal popularity to re-election and save the hard decisions for the next mandate.

On one issue, though, a decision was made and on September 2, a Tory rent-a-crowd known as the Confederation Club was assembled at Ottawa's Congress Centre for what had been billed as a major announcement on the controversial purchase of 50 EH-101 helicopters by the Department of National Defence. Financial Post reporter John Geddes, in an article that carried the headline, "Campbell's Flip a Flop," captured the atmosphere in the room. "For a fleeting moment, it sounded as if the lady was not for turning," Geddes wrote. He quoted Campbell as saying: "The temptation to tilt with the winds has been great. But I cannot do that. I will not do

that."⁵³ Benoit Long, Bernard Valcourt's chief of staff, joined the applause, convinced the Conservative party leader had decided to hold the line on the helicopter purchase. But in the very next breath, to the astonishment of the audience, Campbell said: "I am announcing the reduction in the helicopter program [from 50] to 43 . . . this decision will yield savings of close to \$1 billion."⁵⁴

Campbell's announcement raised as many questions as it answered. Tory insiders claimed Campaign Chairman John Tory and pollster and chief strategist Allan Gregg had insisted on the rollback. Campbell's compromise was the last hurdle to be cleared before the issuance of the writs. Over the Labour Day weekend, the Conservative campaign apparatchiks were told to be ready for a Wednesday call.

Her chief of staff, Jodi White, considers the helicopter rollback a major mistake. Campbell herself didn't want to do it and the issue sharply divided the campaign team and the prime minister's office. "I think we blinked and I think the Liberals knew it," White said.⁵⁵ Liberal advisor Eddie Goldenberg says Campbell's rollback gave the helicopter issue a salience the Liberals could never have created on

⁵³ John Geddes, "Campbell's flip a flop," Financial Post September 3, 1993.

⁵⁴ Robert Marshall, "Propeller Flip-Flop," Maclean's September 13, 1993: 25.

⁵⁵ Jodi White, personal interview, February 16, 1994.

their own.⁵⁶

Globe reporter Hugh Winsor agrees the helicopter decision was Campbell's first major post-leadership mistake; that the rollback showed Campbell wasn't her own person and cost her a great deal in terms of her own credibility. The rollback, says Winsor, was a ridiculous effort at weaselling. "Here was Kim Campbell as prime minister saying I don't support Kim Campbell as defence minister. That just gave Chrétien a huge opening."⁵⁷ Winsor, and other reporters, said Campbell's helicopter flip-flop was a clear signal that as a political leader, she might not be all that different after all.

CBC Ottawa Bureau Chief Chris Waddell says the helicopter reversal was equally important because it changed the Liberal perspective of just what they thought their real prospects were.⁵⁸

Chrétien Communications Director Peter Donolo admits he was one of the Liberals concerned about Campbell's summer success. But Donolo says the helicopter rollback was, in media terms, manna from

⁵⁶ Eddie Goldenberg, personal interview, February 26, 1994.

⁵⁷ Winsor, personal interview.

⁵⁸ Chris Waddell, personal interview, February 28, 1994.

heaven.⁵⁹

Campbell, through the leadership campaign and the summer barbecue season, had succeeded in creating an image that led to the media frame of "change." However, her pre-campaign capitulation on the helicopter procurement decision caused reporters to begin to speculate as to whether she wasn't just another politician after all.

By the time Campbell called on the Governor General, reporters were no longer prepared to give her the benefit of the doubt on policy specifics. Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, in their 1987 study News That Matters: Television and American Opinion assert campaign reporters believe there is no more noble cause than to hobble the front-runner out of the gate. The observation most certainly applied to the Ottawa press gallery in 1993, as we will see in later chapters.

Headquarters strategists were satisfied with the helicopter announcement and believed Campbell's summer tour and policy speeches had positioned her well for the general election campaign.

The Canadian public -- before the Spicer Forum, on talk radio, and in the ballot box in the constitutional referendum -- had declared its desire for a different style of leadership. They wanted new and

⁵⁹ Peter Donolo, personal interview, March 16, 1994.

different, and Campbell had succeeded in meeting the job specifications at least to the extent that people were interested in her.

The relative lack of federal political experience was positioned as a plus, and not a minus on the candidate's ledger. Campbell seemed open and accessible, prepared to share her innermost thoughts. Her slogan of "the politics of inclusion" struck a responsive chord.

And if the Conservative policy cupboard was bare, as both Gregg and Tory confirm, then the Campbell political persona would have to carry the day.

Everyone involved in the Campbell campaign, including the candidate, was aware of the weight of the Mulroney government legacy. Certainly journalists assigned to Campbell's campaign were conscious of the fact that prior to the post leadership blip, the party's standing in published opinion polls had been wallowing in the low teens.

Several reporters, including the Globe's Hugh Winsor and Journal de Montreal's Michel Auger cite the fact the chinks in Campbell's electoral armour were beginning to show during the leadership campaign itself.

A resolution test chart featuring various patterns of vertical and horizontal lines. The patterns are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some patterns being larger and more prominent than others. Each pattern is accompanied by a numerical value, likely representing a resolution or frequency. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2, 3.6, and 4.0. The patterns consist of alternating black and white lines, with some patterns having a central black bar and others having a central white bar.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2

Yet virtually without exception, journalists and strategists interviewed for this paper believe Campbell came into the campaign in a competitive position; a view that would seem to be supported by polls published at the time.

Campbell called on the Governor General September 8, 1993. And an Angus Reid poll conducted the first two days of the campaign suggested the Liberals and the Conservatives left the blocks virtually tied. The Reid poll suggested the Liberals began with the support of 37 per cent of decided voters, while the Tories were the choice of 35 per cent.

The western-based Reform party was at 10 per cent in the Reid poll, the Bloc Québécois was at 8 per cent (32 per cent in Québec) and New Democratic Party support was also pegged at 8 per cent.

Campbell also continued to lead the personality contest, with 42 per cent of the 1,414 respondents saying she would make the best prime minister, compared with 23 per cent for Chrétien. Some 63 per cent of respondents said they thought Campbell would do a good job as prime minister, compared to 53 per cent for Chrétien. All other party leaders finished far up the track.

The poll did have its share of warning signs for the Tory campaign.

however. Respondents identified leadership as the least important factor for making up their minds. And unemployment was clearly identified as the most important problem facing Canadians.

Reid's findings were supported in a later sounding of public opinion conducted by Compas Inc. for the Financial Post.

In the aftermath of the election debacle there has been much discussion of whether the Campbell-led forces ever had a chance of winning the fall federal election. Many Conservatives believe the Mulroney legacy was simply too onerous, an electoral albatross that precluded any possibility of a third successive victory.

However, the empirical evidence provided by various opinion polls published in the early days of the campaign suggests the Conservatives -- at a minimum -- began in a competitive position.

Canadians clearly had decided there would be change in federal politics. What would be determined over the 47-day campaign was which leader, group of candidates, and party platform would best respond to that declared desire for change.

Carol Goar believes Campbell had a real opportunity to win the general election, despite the October 25 results. "It would have

required a superb campaign, with better personal skills, a better platform and a better tour, but it was not predetermined that she would be punished because she was Brian Mulroney's successor," the Star columnist said.⁶⁰

Adds CBC correspondent Denise Harrington: "My best judgement was that she had a chance at forming a majority government if she played her cards right."⁶¹

Campbell had every reason to feel confident as she headed to Rideau Hall that Wednesday morning. Certainly Campbell's pollster Allan Gregg, believed his candidate had a realistic shot at forming the next federal government. A campaign post-mortem in the Globe and Mail quoted Gregg as saying: "It was winnable to the extent that people had an open mind."⁶²

⁶⁰ Carol Goar, Personal interviews, February 8, March 9, 1994.

⁶¹ Denise Harrington, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

⁶² Edward Greenspon and Jeff Sallot, "How Campbell Self-Destructed," Globe and Mail October 27, 1993, A1 and A8.

CHAPTER 4

THE NOT-SO-PHONY WAR

Rideau Hall

When a confident Prime Minister Kim Campbell emerged from the Governor General's official residence at Rideau Hall on September 8, 1993, to confirm the worst kept secret in town, her message, according to party strategists, was supposed to be one of hope.

The Tories had decided in the hours leading up to the September 8 call to put all their eggs in Kim Campbell's basket. A strategy memo prepared by Allan Gregg stated explicitly the Tory campaign would be a campaign of style over substance emphasizing a new style of leadership at the expense of new policies. The tour was designed to make Campbell appear to be more in touch with the 1990s than her rivals. The strategy was decidedly high risk. Public opinion research suggested the Conservatives were on the wrong side of the jobless issue, in a campaign in which the economy -- and particularly unemployment -- was the runaway number one issue. And respondents also indicated, by a factor of three to one that issues would be a more important determinant than leadership in the

decision-making process for October 25.

A briefing note crafted by strategist Nancy Jamieson had recommended the Prime Minister emphasize certain themes in her prepared statement: first and foremost among them was the twinned theme of hope and optimism about the future. "The message was built on the premise that we had a plan of action to deliver results to Canadians,"¹ Jamieson said in an interview. The idea was to link an upbeat message about the future to specific measures such as retraining and skills upgrading programs.

The Prime Minister did declare in her prepared text that "Canadians want to see real hope restored, not false hopes raised." But in a scrum minutes later Toronto Star reporter Edison Stewart asked when Canadians might expect the national unemployment rate to dip below 10 per cent. The Mulroney government's last budget in April had predicted the jobless rate would dip below that particular limbo bar within 18 months. To the dismay of campaign strategists, Campbell reverted to her earlier life as a university lecturer in responding to Stewart's question. "Realistically, all the developed industrialized countries are expecting what I would consider to be an unacceptable level of unemployment for the next two or three or four years," Campbell said. "I would like to see, certainly by the turn of the

¹ Nancy Jamieson, personal interview, January 24, 1994.

century, a country where unemployment is way down and we're paying down our national debt and there is a whole new vision for the future opening up for Canadians," the prime minister continued."²

The exchange, carried live on CBC Newsworld, landed at PC Campaign Headquarters like a Scud missile. "When I heard her [Campbell] say it, I thought 'Oh God, she blew it'," said Jamieson. "My response was we have a problem and we have to fix it."³

Jason Moscovitz, national affairs correspondent for CBC Radio, jumped into a taxi to return to the Hill office with a colleague following Campbell's Rideau Hall announcement. At the intersection of Rideau and MacKenzie streets, at the Chateau Laurier, the cab hit a red light. "As we waited for the light to change, I looked over and saw Jodi White (the prime minister's chief of staff) in the next car," Moscovitz said in an interview. "She was chewing her nails ... she knew."⁴

Campbell, however, didn't see her answer as anything other than factual. And as part of her campaign pledge to do politics differently, the Conservative leader made it clear she would not engage in

² Edison Stewart, "It's Official: We're Off to the Polls October 25. PM Calls Our 35th General Election," Toronto Star, September 8, 1994: A1.

³ Jamieson, personal interview.

⁴ Jason Moscovitz, personal interviews, January 27 and February 7, 1994.

expensive campaign promises or what she considered empty campaign rhetoric. "I could say how many jobs I'd like to create, but I'm sorry -- that's old politics," Campbell said. "The point is, let's talk realistically about where jobs come from and how we can maximize those jobs across the country. I'm not going to throw around numbers."⁵ Campbell headed to her campaign bus, insisting she would shun "the glib, gladhanding of the past,"⁶ in favour of a new style of politics, the politics of inclusion.

Campbell's defence, in a post-mortem with campaign advisors, was that she had simply been telling the truth about future growth in employment; and the Conservative leader didn't see how a new-style politician could go wrong telling the truth.

Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien's launch in the shadow of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill, may have looked a lot like old politics but he clearly had bought into Toronto Star columnist Richard Gwyn's slogan: it's about hope, stupid! Flanked by party functionaries and Ottawa-area candidates, Chrétien got off to a less than auspicious debut when he declared: "It will be like the good old days, Canadians will be working again." As Toronto Star columnist, Carol Goar, noted in her

⁵ Edward Greenspon, "Leaders Focus on Economy: Campbell Stresses Deficit, Chrétien Zeros in on Jobs," Globe and Mail September 9, 1993: A1.

⁶ Greenspon A1.

September 12th analysis, evoking memories of the Trudeau government's final term in office wasn't the best message for a party offering a better tomorrow.⁷ Chrétien quickly recovered, however, and went on to say: "The campaign is all about hope -- hope for the future. Canadians want a decent future for their children."⁸

The Liberal campaign's Quick Response Team was onto Campbell's statement immediately. Their motto, according to Ottawa Citizen columnist Jane Taber was, "If you're not part of the story before it's written, then you're not part of the story."⁹ By the time Chrétien's campaign bus rolled into Don Boudria's headquarters in Hawkesbury in mid-afternoon, the Liberal leader was ready with a response that netted Chrétien the lead on several evening newscasts.

Campbell, meanwhile, was doing politics differently in a session with fourth grade children in the eastern Ontario community of Perth. The pictures were pleasing but were overshadowed by the Rideau Hall statement.

⁷ Carol Goar "Week 1: PM and Chrétien Stumble But Campbell Suffers Most Damage." Sunday Star September 12, 1993.

⁸ Patrick Doyle and Tim Harper, "Chrétien Vows Return 'To Good Old Days'." Toronto Star September 8, 1993, late ed.: A1.

⁹ Jane Taber, "Space-Age Campaign Starts Today." Ottawa Citizen September 8, 1993: A1.

Campbell may not have considered her comments a misstep. But as the travelling press corps prepared their opening night coverage, the media most certainly considered it impolitic. CTV News correspondent Leslie Jones, for example, said in her item: "Campbell startled people by saying unemployment will remain high for years."¹⁰ Other journalists, such as CHEX-TV anchor Wally Macht, wondered on air where the blueprint for job creation was in Campbell's new vision.

CBC correspondent Denise Harrington says Campbell's response to Edison Stewart was characteristic; the Conservative leader always seemed to treat such questions as hypothetical or theoretical rather than as a "people" question.¹¹ But Campbell's answer, in more substantive terms, established that there was a significant difference between the Conservative and Liberal positions in policy terms: the Tories would focus on getting the economic fundamentals right and leave job creation to the market; the Liberals, by contrast, were prepared to be more interventionist. The CBC structured its coverage to reflect that divergence.

The Toronto Star's editorial board, having already declared the economy the issue in the campaign, was quick to pounce. Her almost

¹⁰ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 8, 1993.

¹¹ Denise Harrington, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

cavalier response to the plight of 1.6 million jobless Canadians was simply that they must wait until the turn of the century for the unemployment rate to fall below its disgraceful double-digit levels.”¹²

The Globe and Mail coverage broke out Campbell's comments on the jobless rate in a sidebar story by Jeff Sallot. The lead read: “Prime Minister Kim Campbell launched her election campaign yesterday with a sobering prediction that Canada's unemployment rate may not drop significantly until the end of the century.”¹³

In an interview, Global Television Bureau Chief John Burke said: “If you analyze what she [Campbell] said, it was probably fairly honest. What she didn't realize is when you say it as Prime Minister on the first day of a campaign, it has a different impact.”¹⁴ Le Journal de Montreal columnist, Michel C. Auger, a veteran of federal election campaigns, watched the election call on Newsworld. When he heard Campbell's answer, Auger was convinced Campbell had made her first blunder and thought: “We might be in for an interesting campaign after all.”¹⁵

¹² Editorial, “PM Cavalier About Jobs,” Toronto Star, September 9, 1993: A24.

¹³ Jeff Sallot, “Jobless Rate Won't Drop Soon, Campbell Warns,” Globe and Mail, September 9, 1993: A4.

¹⁴ John Burke, personal interview, January 27, 1994.

¹⁵ Michel C. Auger, personal interview, January 31, 1994.

The prime minister added to her campaign problems the next day while touring eastern and central Ontario. In a scrum with reporters seeking clarification of her Rideau Hall statement, Campbell snapped at Ottawa Sun Bureau Chief Bob Fife, who had been badgering the prime minister, stating: "I'm not hearing a lot of hope here." "Well, maybe you need a hearing aid," Campbell bristled when asked where her message of hope was. "I mean I am offering hope to Canadians."¹⁶

Nancy Jamieson says Campbell's outburst at Fife offended many Canadians, including the hearing impaired. And it didn't sound consistent with campaign rhetoric about a new way of doing politics or the politics of inclusion. "You don't scream that if you're about inclusiveness,"¹⁷ Jamieson said.

Later, in an exchange with a French-speaking reporter, Campbell seemed to say cuts to social programs may be inevitable if the federal government could not eliminate the deficit. The lead in the September 10 edition of the Montreal Gazette stated: "For the second day in a row, Campbell's grappling with economic issues raised as many questions as it answered in the campaign for the October 25

¹⁶ Fraser Institute. National Media Archives. Transcripts. CTV News September 9, 1993.

¹⁷ Jamieson, personal interview.

election.”¹⁸ Campbell's French statement, as translated by the Gazette, read: “It's clear, and Canadians know well, that in the end cuts will have to be made to social programs perhaps.” Campbell offered a clarification in English, saying social programs might not have to be cut; cuts might occur only if the deficit isn't brought under control. “The best way to destroy our social programs is to ignore the deficit,” the prime minister concluded.¹⁹

Auger said Campbell's problems in French-language scrums would resurface throughout the campaign. “The second day of the campaign, she was asked twice about cuts to social programs in a formal news conference,” Auger said. “In French she said yes, and then 35 seconds later in English she said no. Her language problem compounded the message problem,” said Auger. “Her French is not bad, but you could never be 100 per cent certain of a quote from her.”²⁰

By Friday night, at a campaign stop in Belleville, Campbell had already changed her campaign tune. That night the Conservative leader had decided her campaign was about hope, after all. And

¹⁸ Gazette News Services, “Day 2: PM Says Canadians May Face Cuts to Social Programs - ‘Perhaps’,” Montreal Gazette September 10, 1993: A1.

¹⁹ Gazette News Services, September 10, 1993: A1.

²⁰ Auger, personal interview.

Harrington says tour organizers had already started to keep Campbell isolated from the travelling press corps.

The weekend analysis pieces were fairly tough on Campbell's Rideau Hall jobless comment. Sun columnist Michel Gratton, a former press secretary to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, stated: "The clumsy damage control of the last few days is a sure sign Tory organizers know their heralded leader Kim Campbell has made the first major gaffe of the campaign."²¹ In a September 12 analysis piece, nationally-syndicated columnist Carol Goar stated: "Kim Campbell forgot the importance of hope . . . It wasn't so much the accuracy of her forecast that would sting voters as much as the apparent heartlessness of it."²²

The Globe and Mail editorial board offered a defence of sorts for Campbell in its September 14 edition under the headline "A Gaffe Is When You Tell the Truth." The editorial read in part: "Let's see if we've got this straight. Kim Campbell says something that everyone acknowledges to be true and it's a 'gaffe.' Jean Chrétien vows to do something that everyone knows will accomplish nothing, and is said to offer 'hope.' Is it any wonder the public thinks the press are out to

²¹ Michel Gratton, "Gaffe Rattles Kim," Ottawa Sun September 14, 1993.

²² Carol Goar, "Week 1: PM and Chrétien Stumble But Campbell Suffers Most Damage," Sunday Star September 12, 1993: A1.

lunch?"²³

The editorial asserts Campbell was right in her statement. The Globe editorial board then offered views on pack journalism. "Nevertheless, to journalists schooled in the traditions of campaign coverage, it sounded like a gaffe. And gaffes, above all, are what political reporters think they are supposed to spot. You could almost hear the murmur of the media comparing notes, each one anxious not to be caught out of the pack consensus. It remained only for the Opposition, notably Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien, to confirm the media's vague impressions. . ."²⁴

The Globe was seriously mistaken, however, in suggesting the furore over Campbell's remarks would have no resonance. Significantly, no other national news organization reflected the supportive position of Campbell's honesty set out in the Globe editorial. The St. John's Evening Telegraph's prediction that the prime minister's words would come back to haunt her turned out to be much closer to the mark.

²³ Editorial, "A Gaffe Is When You Tell the Truth." The Globe and Mail September 14, 1993: A16.

²⁴ Globe and Mail, editorial.

Media "Frames" and the Campbell Campaign

The Globe editorial set out the fundamental conflict and dichotomy of the Campbell campaign. In their desire to do politics differently, Campbell and her advisors had clearly decided to do politics without the media. Inspired by campaign trends in the 1992 U.S. presidential election, Campbell and her coterie were determined to engage in an open, unscripted dialogue with Canadians. In contrast to her predecessor, Campbell would let Canadians see that she didn't pretend to have all the answers, that she would seek their views on possible solutions, that she was so interested in what they had to say that she would actually take notes. And she would do all this oblivious to, and perhaps even in defiance of, the routines of campaign newsgathering. But there was no thought given to explaining this new approach to the press. Reporters interviewed for this paper say the attitude seemed to be: the media will simply have to learn to understand it. In fact, Globe and Mail reporter Hugh Winsor says Campbell said as much to him. Winsor says Campbell believed the onus was on political journalists to understand her, not the other way around; journalists would simply have to learn to deal with her new style.²⁵

Campbell and her advisors failed to fully appreciate that in the absence of any specific or detailed announcements, the media

²⁵ Hugh Winsor, personal interview, March 7, 1994.

entourage would lapse into the journalistic equivalent of insider-baseball -- the inside-the-Beltway form of political reporting that involves the tortuous parsing of every utterance by the candidate.

Harrington says Tory strategists made it clear to her that Campbell's tour would be non-traditional; the Conservative leader would be out among the people, shunning the partisan events that had been the custom in the past.²⁶

The Conservatives were determined to convince Canadians that the Party's new leader constituted change; a clear departure in style, if not in substance from her predecessor.

Party strategists believed images of Campbell out among the people, listening, seeking their views, would reinforce the message that the Tory leader was in fact new and improved, in tune with the 1990's.

However, the Party strategists seemed to believe these televised images would suffice; that there was no need to respond to campaign coverage routines such as the requirement for a substantive daily message.

Influenced perhaps by coverage patterns of campaigns past, where

²⁶ Harrington, personal interview.

each of the three main Party leaders was virtually guaranteed nightly coverage on network newscasts, the Tory campaign failed to appreciate that in the new five party universe of Canadian politics, party leaders would, in effect, have to compete for air time. A substantive message that addressed news frames was required. The Liberals, with their Red Book, and their infrastructure job creation promise, engaged in the battle to control the media frame with a perfect match for the episodic-frame treatment responsibility construct of news coverage. The Conservatives did not. As a result, Campbell's coverage was characterized by two dominant frames -- "gaffe" and "loser," which will be discussed in more detail later.

This new approach was duly reported. But it quickly became apparent the town hall format did not provide the traditional news hook the national media require. "After a few days of showing their new style, we were spending a lot of time trying to figure out what it was she was talking about," says Harrington. "That's where the problem started."²⁷

Interestingly, both Liberal Communications Director, Peter Donolo, and Peter O'Malley, an Ottawa-based communications consultant and former press secretary to former NDP leader Ed Broadbent, believe Campbell's town hall concept had real potential, but suffered from a

²⁷ Denise Harrington, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

failure to provide the media with a message of the day. While the town hall events provided the right visuals, the lack of focus in Campbell's message made scrums, with all the risk that they entail, inevitable.

O'Malley concedes the mainstream national media would not have covered the town hall discussions daily. But he says the PC party should have considered purchasing 30 minutes of network time per week in off-peak time for "infomercials" with funds diverted from the ad campaign.²⁸

Deprived of their daily "Gainsburger," either in the form of a substantive policy announcement or a strategy story, the media settled on Campbell's misstatement of the day as the "lead" for their news reports. A "gaffe" frame began to emerge as the dominant news frame in coverage of the Campbell tour in these very early days. The "gaffe" frame is found in the print and television coverage equally, and proved to be particularly problematic for a campaign trying to play the leadership card. Intertwined with this characterization of Campbell's leadership abilities was the issue designated most important -- jobs. Finally, the story was given a treatment responsibility construct rather than a causal construct, beginning the process of having news consumers assess Campbell in the context of what she was going to do to solve the number one problem, unemployment.

²⁸ Peter O'Malley, personal interview, March 15, 1994.

Michel Auger was underwhelmed by Campbell's attempt to position her town hall sessions as a new style of politics. "There is nothing particularly new about doing town halls or Oprah Winfrey-type cordless microphone programs." Auger concluded Campbell herself wasn't especially comfortable with the town hall format. "There are politicians who like people and there are politicians who don't like people."²⁹

In the days leading up to the campaign, Campbell's Deputy Chief of Staff, Ray Castelli, took CTV Ottawa Bureau Chief Craig Oliver to lunch. Castelli warned Oliver to prepare for an election campaign the likes of which he had never seen. Recalls Oliver, "He said the campaign was just going to blow me away, that us old-style group wouldn't get it."³⁰

Campbell's agents were busy flogging a similar line to less experienced, and arguably less discerning, Ottawa reporters. The Citizen's Jane Taber filed a column that actually claimed a satellite dish in a suitcase ranked as a key Tory campaign weapon.

Journalists weren't the only constituency uncertain as to the

²⁹ Auger, personal interview.

³⁰ Craig Oliver, personal interview, February 4, 1994.

relevance of this new style; Campbell's comments and first campaign foray were also causing some unease among the Conservative Party's rank and file.

Tory supporters such as former Mulroney aide, Ian Anderson, who shared Oliver's doubts received not dissimilar answers to their queries. Whenever anyone questioned the lack of policy or organizational detail, blandishments about a new style of politics were cited to placate the worrywarts. Supplementary questions were shut down with the simple assertion: you are old-style, you just don't get it. It was a political variation on the old "dog whistle" theory -- if you don't get it (if you can't hear the sound), then there isn't anything anyone can do to help you.

Party workers, accustomed to the attention to detail that was the hallmark of the Mulroney/Norman Atkins campaign era, were further perplexed at what appeared to be a lack of operational preparedness in the Tory camp.

Members of the campaign team say there was no comprehensive campaign strategy document as such 48 hours before the election was called. One senior ministerial chief of staff said: "They never did give us the ballot question. We never did know what we were asking the

people to support.”³¹ The ballot question is a key component of a “framing” strategy as the ballot question helps formulate the campaign communications strategy in terms of central themes and core messages. There was no detailed strategy paper to advise those charged with organizing the Prime Minister’s tour; and none of the press officers aboard the campaign plane, including Press Secretary Paul Frazer, ever saw a media relations strategy. Nancy Jamieson was finally asked to write a paper the Sunday night before the election was called setting out key campaign themes. Queries about the status of the campaign’s policy platform evoked evasive responses.

Says strategist Nancy Jamieson: “We did not appear to have a message that was readily understandable on the news on any given night.”³² Jamieson concedes there was a problem with the candidate, but argues the problem was compounded by the fact the campaign strategy committee wasn’t giving the candidate much to say. As a consequence, Frazer and his associates spent all of their time fighting fires.

“We never had any theme, we never had a co-ordinated plan,” adds Randall Pearce. “We never had any go-ahead or direction on how we

³¹ Benoit Long, personal interview, March 15, 1994.

³² Jamieson, personal interview.

were to promote our side of the story." Everything, including speech preparation was done at the last minute; as a consequence, Pearce says, "you could never do the kind of [media relations] set-up you wanted to do."³³

Post-election, Campaign Chair John Tory has taken the brunt of the criticism for the lack of a policy platform. So has pollster and Chief Strategist Allan Gregg, who wrote a pre-writ document that states explicitly that the campaign would be a campaign of "style over substance." However, Tory and Gregg may have been victims of a recalcitrant cabinet. In 1991, the Conservative Party had staged the most successful policy conference in its history. A policy platform committee, co-chaired by Marcel Côté and Sara Band, a Toronto activist, was charged with finalizing a policy document. Their committee met but once, and Jodi White says the committee never produced a single document for the prime minister.³⁴

Policy advisor Geoff Norquay says the explanation, in part, lies in the congenital inability of political parties in power to separate governing from the political process of developing a forward-looking prescriptive set of policies for the future. While acknowledging the

³³ Randall Pearce, personal interview, February 23, 1994.

³⁴ Jodi White, personal interview, February 16, 1994.

1991 policy conference was a success as an event. Norquay notes the elected wing was profoundly distrustful of the views of the party rank and file on such core issues as official bilingualism or immigration. "There was a real fear that the mouth-breathers would say stuff that would prove embarrassing," Norquay said in an interview. The natural governing elite in Ottawa "were kind of afraid of these people in the riding associations because we believed they were significantly more conservative and significantly less sophisticated than we were." The result, says Norquay, is that while Tory ministers and their staff tolerated this grassroots policy exercise, they never took it very seriously. "The view in the bars late at night among the party elite was that we'll get conflicting stuff (in the resolutions) anyway, so we can ignore it all."³⁵

Later, preparations for a Speech from the Throne had produced a range of policy options, fully costed by the bureaucracy. For whatever reason, Campbell and her cabinet colleagues decided to hoist the policy discussion at cabinet sessions in late August. By this point there was a perceived tiredness to the government, and the cabinet. Veteran ministers such as John Crosbie and Don Mazankowski gave way to the Ross Reids and the Gilles Loiselles. These new ministers had not been privy to the long policy development process of certain of the more controversial throne speech proposals. Employment

³⁵ Geoff Norquay, personal interview, March 11, 1994.

Minister Bernard Valcourt's proposed overhaul of social service programs was a case in point. Valcourt's bureaucrats had developed a series of options to re-engineer Canada's social safety net. The plan was innovative, perhaps even radical. Liberal Employment Minister Lloyd Axworthy was so intrigued by the reform proposal that he embraced most of it on assuming responsibility for the portfolio. But in August, with the Finance Department fixating on the fact the reform plan would mean a short-term hit to the federal fiscal position of \$6-billion to \$7-billion, a cabinet with no stomach for a protracted internal dispute/debate decided to leave the proposal on a shelf. It was a decision that would come back to haunt Campbell and her cabinet colleagues in a matter of weeks. The lack of policy would create serious problems for all elements of Campbell's campaign, including the media campaign. Campbell and the Conservatives appeared to be asking Canadians for a blank cheque. And in the post-Meech world of Canadian politics, the electors were in no mood to be giving any party that.

A substantive media message rooted in policy, is the key component of any attempt by a political party to effect the dominant media coverage frame. In the absence of such a substantive message, supported by visual images of the tour, journalists turn to Graham Fraser's campaign correlative. Logistical snafus become the metaphor for a doomed campaign.

This lack of policy meant the Campbell campaign's announcement cupboard was bare, a serious problem for a travelling press corps required to "feed the goat" daily.

If the Campbell campaign wasn't going to make news in the traditional way, then the travelling media with their scrums and queries would have to generate their own news.

Invariably, this ceding of control of the media agenda resulted in statements by Campbell that were impolitic and most definitely off strategy.

Jodi White also argues planning for Campbell's tour was of the last-minute variety. White uses the movie title "Back to the Future" to describe the planning of Campbell's campaign tour. "It wasn't very imaginative," White said. "And we never knew where we were going or what was planned the day ahead," White says of the last-minute style of the campaign.³⁶ Nancy Jamieson shares White's assessment, adding: "I have never been involved in a campaign before where we didn't tour to a theme. I know it's old-style politics. But we weren't touring to support policy pronouncements or campaign themes, we

³⁶ Jodi White, personal interview, February 16, 1994.

were just touring."³⁷ George Stratton and Maria Grant who served as co-directors of Campbell's tour are credited with doing an exceptional job of putting together events precisely because they were operating without the benefit of a detailed strategic tour plan.

The last-minute nature of the tour strategy created problems for Campbell's coverage, beyond the obvious price any tour without a strategic focus would pay. Reporters assigned to the Campbell bus said the town hall format was not "user friendly" for network television cameras.

Radio-Canada producer Catherine Cano said the Campbell tour was consistently running late, crowding media filing times. Media support services were less than adequate. There were few substantive pronouncements and fewer background briefings for the travelling scribes. The tour would set aside media filing time in towns or cities where a lack of technical facilities precluded any possibility of television reporters feeding items back to the networks. On other occasions, newsworthy events would be scheduled after the final feed times for network newscasts. And on those days when Campbell's comments required some clarification, that clarification often wasn't forthcoming until after network crews had fed to nightly news

³⁷ Jamieson, personal interview.

shows.³⁸

The Campbell campaign systematically tried to loop around the national press corps by scheduling interviews with local media; particularly the electronic media. It was Campbell's version of an "Arsenio" strategy. The travelling press corps was not always informed of these interviews; tapes were not always made available either. As a consequence, reporters from the tour were constantly scrambling to catch up with statements made by the Tory party leader.

Cano, who had worked as a press assistant on Turner's 1988 campaign plan, said there was a serious upstairs/downstairs problem between reporters and campaign staff.³⁹

CTV correspondent Leslie Jones, who travelled with Campbell for most of the tour, says she never had the sense there was a clear strategy to the tour, nor was there any sign that any thought had been given to an earned media strategy in particular. At one of the early campaign stops at a Crayola factory outside Lindsay, Ontario, Jones asked Campbell's handlers what the story of the event was from their perspective. "No one could answer that question for me," Jones said.

³⁸ Catherine Cano, personal interview. March 8, 1994.

³⁹ Cano, personal interview.

"How can reporters possibly get a succinct two minute item [on a campaign] out when the people running the tour can't explain the purpose of the event?"⁴⁰

Michael Ferrabee, one of Campbell's closest confidantes and the communications director in the Prime Minister's Office, had made an attempt to set out a media strategy for the campaign, only to have his efforts rebuffed by senior strategists. Jamieson confirms the fact that Ferrabee's representations on the need for an earned media strategy were not welcomed by senior campaign advisors.⁴¹

Ferrabee believes Campbell was five years ahead of her time, that the prime minister had a very different way of communicating. Part of that difference, according to Ferrabee, was based on gender. The fatal flaw in the campaign structure, in Ferrabee's view, was the shortage of senior women advisors in the campaign strategy group who understood that women in politics communicate in a very different way from men. "They have different antennae, they use different language and different words mean different things," Ferrabee said in an interview. "That is something we will all have to learn." Even the

⁴⁰ Leslie Jones, personal interview, February 4, 1994.

⁴¹ Jamieson, personal interview.

tour structure, according to Ferrabee, was a Brian Mulroney model.⁴²

In an article published in the Spring 1993 edition of The Journal of Popular Culture, Laurie L. Haag advances the view that there is a connection between gender and communication; that women's talk has some unique characteristics.

Haag cites a study which stated: "Women traditionally talk to each other about personal and affiliative issues that reflect who they are; men traditionally talk about task and power issues that reflect what they do." Adds Haag: "Self-disclosure topics for women typically include personal and family matters and are more emotionally oriented. Men tend to focus their talk on activities. Finally, women generally talk more about people than men do. . ." Haag adds that women are facilitators of disclosure rather than controllers.⁴³

Former American first lady Eleanor Roosevelt once offered the opinion that "every political woman needs to develop skin as tough as rhinoceros hide."⁴⁴

⁴² Michael Ferrabee, personal interview, January 28, 1994.

⁴³ Laurie Haag, "Oprah Winfrey: The Construction of Intimacy in the Talk Show Setting," The Journal of Popular Culture 26.4 (1993) 118.

⁴⁴ Robert Fife, Kim Campbell: The Making of a Politician (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishing Ltd., 1993) 145.

Ferrabee argues campaign events, such as the confrontational structure of the televised leaders' debates, worked against Campbell. Ferrabee readily concedes his view of a gender bias isn't shared universally and indeed is rejected outright by several women journalists. "The media, in particular, do not accept it," Ferrabee said. Ferrabee tested his theory on CBC Newsworld host Anne Petrie at the Queen's Forum. "She basically told me 'you're full of shit'," Ferrabee said.⁴⁵ CTV correspondent Leslie Jones also rejects the gender argument. "I have problems with that," Jones said in an interview. "She (Campbell) was her own worst enemy."⁴⁶ CTV producer Sheila Ryder says Campbell's gender, far from being a negative, had helped her through the leadership bid and the summer. "The fact she was a woman worked very much in her favour," Ryder said.⁴⁷

The CBC's Harrington says Campbell's personality, and not gender as such, was at the heart of her new approach to politics. "That seemed to be the thesis of what they were trying to do. She was a different style of politician [from her predecessor], gender aside." While the Conservative Party obviously hoped the fact Campbell was a woman would have a certain appeal, Campbell herself said many times

⁴⁵ Ferrabee, personal interview.

⁴⁶ Jones, personal interview.

⁴⁷ Sheila Ryder, personal interview, February 4, 1994.

she shouldn't be judged on that basis alone, Harrington said.⁴⁸

Jamieson believes the PC campaign was not sensitive enough to the fact Campbell was the party's first woman leader. Jodi White says the campaign strategy group never really considered gender communications as a separate issue, an oversight White acknowledges is significant in itself. The former chief of staff recalls one instance in which Campbell did express some exasperation at the apparent inability of her campaign team to appreciate the Tory leader was a different political persona than her predecessor. Arriving for a television commercial filming session, both White and Campbell recoiled at the physical set-up. The cameras were arrayed in front of a desk in an office setting with a Canadian flag stuck in the corner. According to White, Campbell took one look at the set-up and exclaimed: "That's Brian Mulroney, that's not me." White says: "She knew in her heart it [the set-up] was wrong and she was absolutely right about that."⁴⁹

Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe says Campbell's emergence posed very particular problems for women in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. "There was a lot of pull on our

⁴⁸ Harrington, personal interview.

⁴⁹ White, personal interview.

consciousness with this one, whether you are overtly feminist or not," McCabe said. As working women in a profession still dominated by a male-oriented corporate culture, women journalists were favourably predisposed towards Campbell, regardless of their personal partisan persuasion, McCabe said. "At some point, you are saying, it's time for a woman."⁵⁰

At a November 1992 conference on women and the media sponsored by the Canadian Association of Journalists, Campbell cited a Toronto Star article by Ottawa Bureau Chief Rosemary Speirs to illustrate her claim women in politics can be treated unfairly by the media. Campbell claimed she hadn't seen the article in question but that her chief of staff had brought Speirs' description of Campbell as "crushingly ambitious" to her attention. Campbell said: "What is it about a woman's success or a woman's aspirations that triggers that term?" The then justice minister went on: "We cannot encourage women to participate and then punish them for their successes, for the effrontery of aspiring to do more." Liberal MP Mary Clancy, who spoke at the same conference, told Ottawa Sun reporter and Campbell biographer Bob Fife that she suspected Campbell's speech was calculated to win support among female reporters who would be

⁵⁰ Aileen McCabe, personal interview, March 11, 1994.

covering the Tory leadership race.⁵¹

Carol Goar says anecdotal evidence suggested Campbell probably enjoyed an advantage over her rivals because she was a woman. There was a willingness to give Campbell an opportunity to prove herself, inspired in part by a sense of adventure, Goar said. In the end, however, Goar, like Harrington, believes the things that undermined Campbell's campaign were not gender-specific.⁵²

In more general terms, CP Ottawa Bureau Chief Kirk Lapointe says his reporters were prepared to cover Campbell's new style of politics. Campbell had spent much time in her brief tenure as Tory party leader talking about doing politics differently. CP reporters did know both Campbell and Reform Party Leader Preston Manning intended to adopt the "town hall meeting" format in a way that hadn't been seen in Canadian politics before. "So we were prepared for that," says Lapointe. "What we weren't prepared for was that in her [Campbell's] case, once this event had taken place and we'd all found a way to write about it, that she would then revert to a scrum and make news in the scrum." The dilemma, says Lapointe, is that reporters assigned to these slightly different town hall events would invariably find their

⁵¹ Fife 149 and 150.

⁵² Goar, personal interview.

leads in the scrums that followed. "So we found ourselves going right back to basics with her and discarding a lot of the note-taking that had taken place in one of these town halls because frankly what she was saying in a scrum or at a unimike was, in our view, of greater interest to the readers." Campbell, says Lapointe, was scooping herself.⁵³

Despite her efforts to establish an image as a new-style politician through the town hall format, Campbell was in fact coming across in the news coverage as an error-prone neophyte demonstrably ambivalent about the record of a government in which she served, with no discernible ideas of her own for the country's future.

Global's John Burke says no one from the Campbell camp ever tried to sit down with the travelling media in the early days and explain precisely what Campbell's new politics of inclusion entailed. "And if you tried to ask that question, you could never get a straight answer because I don't think it had been thought through," Burke said, "either in her own head or in her own group of people whoever they may be."⁵⁴ Burke's observations reflect a consensus among reporters who covered the Campbell tour. Star columnist Carol Goar interviewed Campbell and specifically probed the candidate on what

⁵³ Kirk Lapointe, personal interview, February 28, 1994.

⁵⁴ Burke, personal interview.

she meant by the politics of inclusion. Goar listened to her tape of Campbell's answer and concluded she was hearing words that had no particular meaning. Campbell, says Goar, "didn't have an answer that people could get their minds around."⁵⁵

By standard measurements of what constitutes news, Campbell's staged encounters in town hall settings, where she would sit attentively on a stool taking notes while participants articulated their concerns, ran out of steam for the national media once the novelty factor was exhausted. Without a substantial policy statement to work with, journalists were left with two coverage options -- vague, impressionistic pieces on how the campaign looked and felt, and the daily gaffe. Jones says the travelling media quickly focussed on Campbell's faux pas. "Every day, they and we were side-tracked because something big would explode."⁵⁶

Campbell's "roadies" appear to have been cognizant of the risk her campaign was running because of the lack of specifics, even if her more senior strategists on board were not. Global's John Burke says the tour "wagonmaster" Art Lyon and his associate Paul "Boomer" Throop called into party headquarters through the early weeks urging

⁵⁵ Goar, personal interview.

⁵⁶ Jones, personal interview.

strategists to "give her something to say" because the media were getting restless. Lyon and Throop tried to make the case reporters were focussed on campaign foul-ups, in part because they didn't have much else to write about. "So when you get the guys who are the road handlers and wagonmasters and not policy people saying, 'hey, there is something wrong here,' you know its pretty deep," Burke said."⁵⁷

Unfortunately for Campbell, the warnings of her wagon masters did not spur campaign strategists into providing more focused and substantive media message.

The Politics of Inclusion

A CTV News poll, conducted by the Angus Reid Group, and aired September 11, suggested the Tories had in fact begun the campaign in a competitive position, within the margin of error, when their support was compared to the Liberals. The Liberals were the choice of 37 per cent of decided voters in Reid's poll, the Tories 35 per cent. During the two days Reid's phone bank was in operation (the first two days of the campaign), the media coverage focussed on the "jobs" gaffe -- and the mixed message on social program cuts. Campbell adjusted her message on the economy, within two days declaring: "The number one priority for a Kim Campbell government is the creation of new jobs

⁵⁷ Burke, personal interview.

and economic opportunities for Canadians, starting now." 58

In the early days of the campaign, even as they were reporting her campaign in a "gaffe" frame, reporters were still prepared to concede Campbell's new style might yet catch fire with electors.

A CTV report September 12 highlighted Campbell's campaign style as a "sharp contrast to the tub-thumping rallies staged during the Mulroney years." The prime minister's penchant for low-keyed, more personal events was cited as a case in point. Reported Leslie Jones: "There's nothing unusual about a politician doing morning radio but Kim Campbell does it differently." As tape of Campbell filling in as a morning weatherperson rolled on screen, Jones continued: "No probing questions for her, just fun and games. A great chance for exposure without the risks of an unpredictable media scrum." 59

It is significant that for all her talk about "new politics" in English Canada, Campbell's message for Quebec voters was much different, based on a perception prevalent in English Canada of what Quebec really wants in terms of electoral politics. Campbell's pitch to French-speaking Quebecers was as stereotypical as it was blunt -- vote for me

58 Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 11, 1993.

59 Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, Leslie Jones report, September 12, 1993.

because I am in power. Says Michel Auger: "The whole strategy in Quebec was, 'You want to be in power, you will be in power with me.'"⁶⁰ Appearing at a Montreal rally with leading Quebec candidates, Campbell said that "in the big games, Quebeckers want to be on the ice, not on the bench."⁶¹ The Tory slogan for the Quebec campaign -- "Le pouvoir qu'il nous faut" (we have the power that you need) -- was equally direct. "The Quebec message was very political," said Auger. The Quebec tour was traditional -- partisan rallies with placard waving party faithful. "The way they framed her in Quebec, it was as if she was a different person," Auger said.⁶²

Within 48 hours of the launch, Campbell's handlers had decided the campaign was paying too high a political price for the prime minister's impromptu remarks. CBC correspondent Denise Harrington's September 12 report included the fact: "For two days, she [Campbell] has refused to answer questions from reporters travelling with her. Tories have decided that media questions steer Campbell away from her message. And get her into hot water. It's one of the problems party strategists want to discuss at a meeting

⁶⁰ Auger, personal interview.

⁶¹ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive, Transcripts, CTV News, September 12, 1993.

⁶² Auger, personal interview.

tomorrow.”⁶³ But once again, the dominant frame for this coverage was “gaffe,” albeit with a sub-text of how to avoid any more.

Meanwhile Jean Chrétien and other party leaders were pouncing on Campbell's every verbal misstep. “Cutting social programs ‘en anglais’ and not cutting ‘en français’.” Is it competence or it is integrity, I really don't know,” Chrétien said in a CTV report September 13.⁶⁴ Chrétien, McLaughlin, Bouchard and, to a lesser extent, Manning, made effective use of Campbell's missteps in their own daily media coverage. Manning's reluctance had more to do with his own caution than with any larger principle.

The Liberal party's release of its policy Red Book September 15 proved to be another major campaign embarrassment for the Tories. The Liberals' decision to release the entire policy platform at a single sitting in a budget-style lock-up was seen by reporters as both innovative and daring.

“Everyone's nightmare was Turner's child care announcement in 1988,” Peter Donolo says of the planning that went into the Red Book launch. “We wanted to avoid that essentially, and that drove us to a

⁶³ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News, September 12, 1993.

⁶⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 13, 1993.

lock-up style launch.”⁶⁵ (Turner’s ill-considered, uncoded child care announcement at the beginning of the 1988 campaign was a media disaster.)

The Liberals were determined to identify the cost of their electoral platforms, as well as the sources of funding for all promises. Each detail was explained in the lock-up setting by co-chairs Paul Martin and Chaviva Hosek, and was supported by background documents.

Like evangelist Billy Graham with a copy of the Bible, Chrétien waved a copy of the Red Book before every camera and crowd he could find. Donolo agrees few Canadians have a detailed understanding of any of the Red Book’s specifics, with the exception of the infrastructure program. But he says the voters “knew we had a plan and that was enough for them. That’s what we underlined every single day.”⁶⁶ In contrast to the Campbell campaign, the Liberals were determined to put a positive media frame around Chrétien’s campaign coverage. The frame the Liberals were out to establish was “hope,” supported by a treatment/responsibility construct of “plan.”

Chrétien and company had sought to position the document as a

⁶⁵ Peter Donolo, personal interview, March 16, 1994.

⁶⁶ Peter Donolo, personal interview.

realistic plan to create realistic hope for a better future. Surprisingly, Conservative party preparations for a counter-offensive had been left very much to the last minute. When this student inquired, the day before the Liberal launch, about the state of preparedness of the Tory response, he was invited to put any thoughts he might have on paper and to forward them to party headquarters as soon as possible. Former fisheries minister Ross Reid, in an interview on the Global Television special, "A Shock to the System," conceded the release of the Liberal Red Book put the Conservatives on the defensive and that the Tory campaign basically never regained the initiative.

"One of the things that really struck me about the campaign was that they were trying so hard to have their own agenda that they did lose sight of the fact that it [a campaign] is a competition," Harrington said. "They were trying so hard not to get drawn into a debate . . . I couldn't understand that." It was as if Campbell and her advisors didn't understand the difference between critique and a mud-slinging attack, Harrington says.⁶⁷

By way of illustration, Harrington cites the fact that there were major weaknesses in the Liberal Red Book, yet reporters covering Campbell couldn't get a substantive response from the leader for days. When Campbell did respond in detail, with her "Swiss cheese" visual

⁶⁷ Harrington, personal interview.

prop of a Red Book with holes punched through it, in a speech in London, Ontario, on September 22, she was judged by the travelling media to have had one of her best days in the campaign. But the intervention was a week too late to be effective.

Harrington says Campbell supporters tended to criticize the media for giving the Liberals a free ride in the campaign. "But it was the Tories who were giving Chrétien the free ride," Harrington says.⁶⁸

Campbell's campaign seemed to be operating in a cocoon, Harrington added, "either unaware of or refusing to realize there was a debate going on out there about ideas."⁶⁹

The Liberal Red Book, says the Globe's Hugh Winsor, gave Jean Chrétien the confidence to appear to know what he was talking about. "If he wasn't rock solid, we weren't going to find any holes." Chrétien's self-assuredness "gave people wondering about yesterday's man a sense of confidence as well," he added.⁷⁰

The day the Red Book was released, Campbell provided a quick

⁶⁸ Harrington, personal interview.

⁶⁹ Harrington, personal interview.

⁷⁰ Winsor, personal interview.

sound bite to the networks, stating the plan "doesn't show anything that reflects that he [Chrétien] has the foggiest clue about what's happening in the country."⁷¹ But Tory cabinet ministers, who might have been in a position to offer views on the various proposals advanced in the document, were left to work away in their ridings, well away from the Ottawa media spotlight and venues such as Don Newman's Capital Report on CBC Newsworld.

In an effort to position Chrétien's forces as tax-and-spend Liberals of old, the Tory campaign war room produced a cost analysis that claimed the cost of the Liberal campaign promises exceeded \$22 billion. The counter-attack was aimed at the fiscal heart of the Liberal policy document, the claim that all promises would be paid for out of existing revenues through specific spending cuts and would not add to the deficit. The counter-attack misfired badly. In his introduction, CTV anchor Lloyd Robertson said the war room effort "turned into an embarrassment for the Tories. The Conservatives said that Liberal promises would cost \$22 billion, but a check showed they made a mistake, charging the Liberals \$10 billion too much."⁷² Once again, the Tory news frame was gaffe.

⁷¹ Ross Howard, "Campbell Belittles Liberal Policies," Globe and Mail September 16, 1993: A6.

⁷² Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 15, 1993.

In a post-launch memorandum, dated September 15, to John Tory, Jodi White and National Director Tom Trbovich, "War Room" Co-Director David Small reported the Liberal Red Book was not subjected to the kind of frontal assault that characterized John Turner's release of his policy platform in 1988. Small acknowledges the Conservative counter-offensive experienced some difficulties and erroneously believed the Tories had succeeded in shifting the core issue of the campaign from job creation to economic growth.

However, Small perceptively tried to warn Tory and others that the Conservative party and the Campbell campaign were dealing with a dramatically different media mindset than was the case in either 1984 or 1988. Small, recognized as an effective communications strategist who had played a key role in Jean Charest's leadership campaign, stated bluntly: "The plain fact is that we cannot look to the media to take the kind of critical look at the Liberal campaign that it mounted so cheerfully in 1988." Small was careful to note reporters "may not be explicitly Grit, but there is no mistaking their sour suspicions of our own campaign. This is resulting in a kind of closed-mindedness which, while it may not be fair, or even journalistically 'objective' makes it all the more difficult for us to get what you might call market share in campaign coverage -- especially, it would appear, on television."

Small said the Tories could “speculate endlessly” as to the reasons for these attitudes: laziness, Tory fatigue, the excitement of the change-in-government story, or the effectiveness of the Liberal campaign. “Whatever the reason, the consequence is a difficult if not dangerous mediation between our campaign and the voters who are its target.”⁷³

The memorandum was prescient; but any organized response to this early warning escaped notice.

By the time the campaign returned to Ottawa after the first foray, there was a growing sense among the travelling press corps that the wheels were wobbling on the Campbell bus.

CBC-TV correspondent Keith Boag’s report on September 12 highlighted the contrast with the Chrétien tour. “Courting the media has always been part of the game, but in this campaign, the Liberals are taking the game to a higher level.” Boag offered the media bus, which he stated “has seduced reporters,” as the visual to illustrate his point. The articulated bus was roomy with a workspace with a table, light and telephone for each reporter. The bus was equipped with a fax machine for print reporters, making deadlines easier to meet, as journalists were able to file from the bus. Said Boag: “On the Tory bus,

⁷³ PC Campaign memorandum, September 15, 1993.

organizers are aware that reporters covering them feel they're not treated as well as reporters covering the Liberals." The Tories tried to counter with tickets to a Montreal Expos game. Boag concluded his report by saying: "The Liberals insist this service to the media is not an attempt to jolly reporters with sympathetic coverage . . . They're just trying to help."⁷⁴ Tory strategists dismissed media complaints about conditions on their campaign bus as just the whining of the overly-pampered press.

CBC's Christopher Waddell believes "how the media gets treated can play a role in how the media covers a campaign." The media today face tighter, and in the case of CBC, more frequent deadlines. "It is easier to cover a campaign where things happen when they are supposed to happen," Waddell added. Reporters are people, he said. They get grumpy after awhile when they are under increased pressure in their jobs because the people they are covering aren't doing theirs. Said Waddell: "There are always points in a campaign, as there are in life, where you have to make a decision as to whether you are going to give someone the benefit of the doubt or not."⁷⁵ Ten days into the Campbell campaign, the travelling media had already come to that point, and the collective answer to the benefit of the doubt question

⁷⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. Keith Boag report, September 12, 1993.

⁷⁵ Christopher Waddell, personal interview, February 28, 1994.

was a resounding no.

As Lapointe and others point out, Campbell's tour was beset almost daily by a controversial news report, usually generated by a comment by the leader in a scrum in response to a reporter's query. One day Campbell seemed to be implying she couldn't provide details on her deficit reduction plans because the country's books were in such bad shape; the next she seemed all over the map on social policy. The prime minister's tour of Atlantic Canada was described in one news account as cod liver oil, without the cod. Beached fishermen looking to Ottawa for support found cold comfort in Campbell's accurate, if less than encouraging observation: "Let's face it, if money was the only solution to this region's problems, they would have been solved long ago."⁷⁶

CBC correspondent Denise Harrington recalls discussing the campaign with CBC radio reporter Laura Lynch near the end of the second week. "We felt then that it [the campaign] was going downhill. We had a sense reasonably early that she [Campbell] couldn't shake the Tory record or the animosity."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 18, 1993.

⁷⁷ Harrington, personal interview.

In conventional campaign coverage terms, Campbell's early days were full of worrying signals, yet the campaign strategists had yet to detect any downturn in opinion polls. And without some sort of objective measure, such as a published poll, reporters were sticking to their "gaffe" frame in their coverage but were not leaping to conclusions about the impact these foul-ups would have in electoral terms on the Campbell campaign.

A Globe and Mail/Comquest poll published September 16 actually put the Tories on top among decided voters (at 29 per cent of the decided vote, compared to 26 per cent for the Liberals and less than 10 per cent for each of the rest). Campbell also continued to run well ahead of Chrétien in the "who would make the best PM" question.

Chrétien, and other party leaders continued to feast off Campbell's scrum offerings. In his September 17 report, CTV's Ken Ernhofer reported: "Jean Chrétien says this campaign is almost too easy. Every morning, he says, he reads what Kim Campbell said the day before and knows that he'll be able to milk it to his advantage."⁷⁸

As stated earlier, CBC correspondent Denise Harrington had been convinced for some time that all was not well on the Tory front. But in

⁷⁸ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News. Ken Ernhofer report, September 17, 1993.

a variation on Sigal's observation that news is not what journalists think but what someone says has happened,⁷⁹ Harrington needed something more than her judgement to produce a television news story. Unlike her colleagues in the print media, Harrington needed visuals or someone willing to go on camera, to tell the story and couldn't rely on a news analysis piece with damning quotes from unnamed and unidentified "sources". Harrington had been discussing her findings daily with Waddell. Finally, they decided to highlight a technical snafu with the Tory satellite system as a metaphor for a campaign in trouble.

The September 19 newscast began with anchor Wendy Mesley's statement: "This was a campaign day like many others for Kim Campbell. Which means she continued to talk about doing politics differently and continued to have trouble campaigning smoothly." As tape of the satellite foul-up rolled, Harrington picked up the theme: "They're trying to get Kim Campbell on an Ottawa TV show for a six-minute interview," Harrington reported. "But two minutes after she finally starts up, the uplink goes down again."⁸⁰ Harrington went on to recite the litany of foul-ups that had plagued the Campbell tour to

⁷⁹ Leon V. Sigal, "Who? Sources Make the News," Reading the News: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture Eds. Manoff and Schudson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986): 27 and 28.

⁸⁰ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Sunday Report. Denise Harrington item, September 19, 1993.

that point: late arrivals, delayed events, lost baggage, hotel rooms not booked, and mixed messages from the party itself. The CBC reporter spoke of the infighting between the road team and campaign headquarters. Campbell supporters uttered soothing words about how there was still plenty of time for detail and substance in the campaign; the priority of the early weeks had been to establish Campbell as a decidedly different person from her predecessor, Brian Mulroney. According to Waddell, Harrington's report was criticized by the National Media Archive of the Fraser Institute for blowing a minor technical glitch into a major news event. But Waddell says the CBC is particularly proud of the piece because it had found an appropriate metaphor to tell the real story.⁸¹ The CBC was reporting Graham Fraser's campaign correlative.

The September 20 CTV poll by the Angus Reid Group put the Liberals and the Tories in a dead heat, each with 35 per cent of the decided vote. Reid projected a Liberal minority government if the expressions of support held through to the end of the campaign. But Reid's soundings finally began to reveal worrying signs for the Tory campaign. Less than half of the respondents who said they voted Conservative in 1988 said they would do so again in '93. The Liberals, by contrast, were holding their 1988 vote. Said CTV anchor Lloyd Robertson: "The question now is whether the Tory stall will turn into

⁸¹ Waddell, personal interview.

a Tory nosedive.”⁸²

Tory strategists were pleased, however, with the result of yet another campaign re-launch, a September 22 tour of southwestern Ontario. A tougher, more combative Kim Campbell emerged as the prime minister launched a blistering attack on what she described as the Liberal party’s absurd economic policies. Leslie Jones and other journalists reported Conservative advisors were admitting that the Liberals had run a better campaign to that point and that the Tories had yet to give Canadians a solid reason to reward the party with a third electoral victory. Campbell’s London, Ontario, performance was supposed to signal that the campaign had finally caught fire.

The London speech, carried live on CBC Newsworld, revealed a more partisan, more focussed Campbell than the new wave political persona showcased in the earlier town-hall-style settings. “Mr. Chrétien and the Liberal party would have us spend money that we don’t have on short-term schemes to create the illusion of prosperity,” Campbell said. “Our plan is to create jobs and give hope to Canadians without breaking the bank or mortgaging our future and the future of our children.”⁸³

⁸² Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 20, 1993.

⁸³ Hugh Winsor, “Campbell Slams Chrétien’s Plan As Inflationary,” Globe and Mail September 23, 1993: A6.

The Conservative leader, for the first time, also set out the rationale for the focus on deficit reduction. "I want to bring deficits down because I want to bring taxes down. And I want to bring taxes down because I want Canadians to have jobs," Campbell added. And then, in a made-for-TV clip, the prime minister concluded: "The difference between the Liberal strategy and our plan is the difference in my view between hype and hope."⁸⁴

CBC's Waddell says his campaign coverage team was impressed with the London tour and did conclude the Tories were getting their collective act together.⁸⁵ Harrington, Jones and others agree.

The explanation, of course, lies in the fact that Campbell was finally playing the media game according to traditional rules, and playing it very well. Her Red Book attack met the accepted definition of what constitutes news in terms of traditional component parts: conflict, relevance, timeliness, simplification, personalization, consonance, continuity, negativity and reference to elites.

Campbell was using the leader's tour in a manner consistent with

⁸⁴ Rosemary Speirs, "Liberal Job Plan 'Absurd,' PM Says," Toronto Star September 23, 1993: A1

⁸⁵ Waddell, personal interview.

Boorstin's definition of a pseudo-event, with the expressed purpose of creating an image that might find some appeal with the electorate.

Heartened by the media response to Campbell's London performance, the Conservative campaign team believed they had affected a successful mid-course correction.

The Tory tour bus then headed to the south shore town of St. Bruno, Quebec.

St. Bruno

As Campbell's tour rolled into St. Bruno, the September 23 editions of the Globe and Mail included a report by Geoffrey York that Ottawa public servants had been working away for months on a radical reformation of social programs that, if implemented, would result in sharp reductions in spending levels.

Geoff Norquay's worst nightmare was about to come true. Norquay had been asked in the late summer to prepare a final draft of a social policy review, which included changes to the unemployment insurance regime, for cabinet. "What happened next to that paper is really interesting," Norquay said. "Enough people knew about it that it was inconceivable to me that we would try to go through the whole

campaign without putting the policy paper out." Norquay acknowledges specific proposals in the social policy review included significant political risks and downsides. "But there was real opportunity, too," Norquay said. "All the details were in place for an announcement." When the policy work grapevine began to include murmurs the social policy paper was deemed too controversial and therefore was headed for the shelf. Norquay says he wrote a memo urging the PMO to go forward; he forecast that if the announcement wasn't made, the Tories would be accused of having a hidden social policy agenda, that a leak would almost certainly occur, and that the leak would probably involve earlier, more politically troublesome drafts. "All of the above came true," Norquay said.⁸⁶

Not surprisingly, reporters questioned Campbell as to the report's contents. Not surprisingly, Campbell said she actually hadn't seen the report in question. But mindful of Campbell's comments on social programs the second day of the campaign, the travelling media decided the issue was worth a supplementary question or two. As Tory strategist Bill Neville noted in a Global Television interview, the Conservative campaign hadn't shown much in policy terms to that point, triggering fears the Conservatives had a hidden agenda.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Norquay, personal interview.

⁸⁷ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

A Canadian Press transcript of the exchange quotes Campbell as stating: "If we're working toward, you know, a scenario, the first budget of the government would be in February of '94. Parliament would come back this fall. I think that there is ample opportunity to engage Canadians in a serious dialogue and to work with the provinces to find the best way to deliver those services." A journalist asked the obvious supplementary question: wasn't it better to have that dialogue during an election campaign? "I think that's the worst possible time to have that kind of dialogue," the prime minister said. "Why is that?" a reporter asked. "Because I think it takes longer than 47 days to tackle an issue that's that serious. It's a very important policy issue," Campbell responded.⁸⁸

The Conservative leader went on to state: "Now I have stated very clearly that I am fundamentally committed to preserving quality social programs in this country, to preserving our health care system, but the issues are much too complex to try and generate some kind of blueprint in the 47 days that's available in an election campaign." In the ensuing exchange, Campbell restated her view that: "This is not the time, I don't think, to get involved in a debate on very, very

⁸⁸ Canadian Press wire service transcript, September 23, 1993.

serious issues."⁸⁹

"This is the statement of somebody who doesn't like people," says Journal de Montreal columnist Michel Auger. In terms of Campbell's campaign, Auger concludes, "from that moment on, it [a Tory victory] was impossible."⁹⁰

A media firestorm ensued, the flames of controversy fed by the opposition parties. (CTV anchor Peter Murphy introduced the September 24 newscast with the statement: "Canadian voters were angry today. They say they've been insulted by the Prime Minister. And some were saying this could be a decisive point in the federal election campaign."⁹¹)

Liberal Communications Director Peter Donolo says when he saw a wire service report on Campbell's statements, he couldn't believe his good fortune. He contacted the Chrétien plane immediately. Eddie Goldenberg, the senior advisor on the plane, greeted news of Campbell's comments with disbelief. A cautious Goldenberg asked Donolo to send him the wire service story before he would turn his

⁸⁹ Canadian Press wire service transcript, September 23, 1993.

⁹⁰ Auger, personal interview

⁹¹ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 24, 1993.

mind to an appropriate response for his leader. Donolo arranged to have the CP wire copy pinned to the wall in the media room set aside for the travelling press corps. Ever obliging, Donolo then arranged to have his leader available for a scrum.⁹²

Primed by Donolo and Goldenberg, Chrétien denounced Campbell's statement as "almost contemptuous towards voters. For me, it's an unbelievable statement that we should not discuss serious matters during an election," the Liberal leader added.⁹³

Globe and Mail reporter Hugh Winsor, who was present for the exchange with Campbell, rejects suggestions the travelling media were indulging in "gotcha" journalism. Given the prominence the Globe gave the story that morning, it is inconceivable that Campbell and her advisors could have gone through an entire day without a question on the issue, Winsor says.⁹⁴ In addition, the exchange with Campbell involved a series of questions and answers, giving the Tory leader every opportunity to clarify her position. A verbatim transcript of the exchange was moved on the Canadian Press wire and carried in several Canadian dailies, giving readers themselves an opportunity to put the

⁹² Donolo, personal interview.

⁹³ Canadian Press wire service copy, September 24, 1993.

⁹⁴ Winsor, personal interview.

comments into context.

CBC's Chris Waddell argues Campbell had to realize a scrum is not a graduate seminar. "A campaign is like court -- everything you say might be taken different ways and can be used against you, and you have to be prepared for that," he said.⁹⁵

Carol Goar was also present for the St. Bruno exchange. Goar concedes "gotcha" journalism happens too frequently in political reporting. But Goar makes the point that such reporting, if over-zealous, was at least prompted by something Campbell did, and not by a mindset on the part of journalists who set out to trap her, or who decided Campbell was a politician worth tearing down.⁹⁶

The exchange highlighted a second fundamental breakdown in the Campbell camp with regard to the travelling press corps -- the campaign seemed slow to detect emerging media problems, and slower still to move to address them. Christopher Waddell says the CBC campaign team had concluded the Liberal campaign was consistently quicker to respond to breaking situations.⁹⁷ SRC

⁹⁵ Waddell, personal interview.

⁹⁶ Goar, personal interview.

⁹⁷ Waddell, personal interview.

producer Catherine Cano says the explanation may lie, in part, in the fact Campbell's media handlers on the road never seemed particularly interested in what the travelling press corps was filing.⁹⁸

The problem at St. Bruno, from the Tory perspective, was Campbell's inexperience, compounded by the fact Campbell initially didn't see anything wrong in what she had said. Her press secretary, Paul Frazer, had not accompanied her on the St. Bruno leg of the tour. Media relations were in the hands of Deputy Press Secretary Marie Josee Lapointe. Leslie Jones recalls Lapointe running around after Campbell's statement warning the press: "You better play this properly." Said Jones: "They knew it was bad, they just had no idea how to handle it."⁹⁹

Jones says veteran wagonmaster Art Lyon visibly blanched when Campbell made her statement. As Jones got back on the media bus, she recalls asking herself: "Is anyone else thinking what I'm thinking, she's just blown the campaign?"¹⁰⁰

Campbell advisor David McLaughlin, the lead speech writer on the

⁹⁸ Cano, personal interview.

⁹⁹ Jones, personal interview.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, personal interview.

plane team, contacted headquarters immediately after the scrum to inform John Tory and Jodi White of the seriousness of the situation. Tory and White drafted a clarifying statement. Jamieson described the statement as "pretty good." In fact, it was as good as it was going to get in those circumstances. "We read it to the people on the plane," Jamieson said, "and I don't know what happened then."¹⁰¹ Campaign advisors believed it was important for Campbell to issue a clarification quickly. "Instead, it hung out there like a bad smell," Nancy Jamieson said.¹⁰² White says she doesn't know what happened to the draft statement once it reached the plane. "I didn't understand it," White said in reference to Campbell's failure to respond in a timely manner. "If you give the reporters 12 hours to let it fester, they [the press] won't forget it."¹⁰³

Many reporters involved in campaign coverage consider the St. Bruno incident a, if not the, defining moment of the campaign. Yet Tory strategists had to work to convince Campbell a clarification was in order. Leslie Jones says Campbell never believed she had said anything untoward. It was only the next day, after she spent 30 minutes on the telephone with campaign headquarters, that Campbell

¹⁰¹ Jamieson, personal interview.

¹⁰² Jamieson, personal interview.

¹⁰³ White, personal interview.

agreed to read a prepared statement. "It looked even more pathetic than the day before, because it was clear that the campaign had lost faith in the candidate," Jones said. "At that point, I felt really sorry for her. I thought, nobody believes in you."¹⁰⁴

The next day, CTV's Jones led her report with the statement: "It was a day for damage control, on television and radio, in English and in French."¹⁰⁵ CBC's Denise Harrington used similar language in her report. Campbell finally read the clarifying statement, but her ill-fated campaign was taking on water. Campbell also claimed the media travelling with the campaign had reported unfairly what she had said in St. Bruno. It was a pattern that would repeat itself with increased frequency as the campaign wore on.

With hindsight, Star columnist Carol Goar said: "It wasn't so much what she said, at least not to me; it was the signal she sent to Canadians. We only get to play this game once every five years and she is saying 'worst possible time to let you into the process, worst possible time to talk about the issues that matter most to Canadians.'"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Jones, personal interview.

¹⁰⁵ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, Leslie Jones report, September 24, 1993.

¹⁰⁶ "Forum on Politics and the Media," Media CBC Newsworld/ Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

New Democratic Party leader Audrey McLaughlin waded into the debate, producing what she described as documented proof of a Tory plan to cut back everything from health care to unemployment insurance.

The impact of the St. Bruno incident on the Conservative campaign was immediate and devastating. The CBC's Denise Harrington says the day after St. Bruno, PC strategists were openly telling her that the party's overnight polling revealed an immediate drop of 15 points in the polls, a free-fall that the campaign never succeeded in reversing.¹⁰⁷

Pollster Allan Gregg, after the campaign, confirmed the fact the Tories were in a competitive position until the incident in St. Bruno, trailing in the party's nightly tracking in 25 "swing" ridings by no more than three per cent. As Edward Greenspon and Jeff Sallot reported in the October 27 editions of the Globe and Mail: "Over the next week (following St. Bruno), they dropped a staggering 12 points. From that point on, the Tories would act out of greater and greater desperation."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Harrington, personal interview.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Greenspon and Jeff Sallot, "How Campbell Self-Destructed," Globe and Mail October 27, 1993: A1 and A8.

University of British Columbia political scientist Richard Johnston, who was conducting nightly tracking, also states the bottom fell out of the Tory campaign following the St. Bruno incident.

Johnston says support for the PC party plummeted 10 points over a span of three or four days between September 20 and September 24. Johnston and his colleague André Blais are continuing their examination of data to determine whether the collapse occurred immediately following Campbell's St. Bruno statement or whether the free-fall began just before.

But the UBC political scientist is unequivocal in his assessment that the "pivotal damage," the "unrecoverable" damage to the Conservative campaign was done prior to the paid advertising campaign or the nationally-televised debates. "There is simply no debating the data," Johnston said in a telephone interview.¹⁰⁹

Johnston believes the loss of Tory support split into two groups. The first group reacted to the notion the Tories had a secret plan to gut social programs, and they went to Chrétien's Liberals. A second, right-of-centre faction was then spooked by Tory denials and went to the Reform Party. Johnston believes Campbell would have been better

¹⁰⁹ Richard Johnston, telephone interview, March 29, 1994.

advised to seize the Geoffrey York story as an opportunity to release the social policy paper, thereby countering opposition charges that, like Mulroney, Campbell had a secret agenda. "The moment the York story surfaced, she should have said there is no secret plan -- here it is," Johnston said.¹¹⁰

The St. Bruno controversy effectively ended Campbell's campaign, in Johnston's view. "At that point, she blew all credibility as a wholly new person."¹¹¹

As Johnston points out, what is of particular significance for this precipitous decline in Tory support is that it pre-dates events usually considered to be of more significance in terms of their impact on voter attitudes in a federal election campaign -- the paid advertising campaign and the televised leaders' debates.

Previous election studies on the impact of news coverage had to contend with these other communication variables. But in the 1993 federal election, the dynamic for the campaign was settled in the early weeks -- before the advertising kicked in, before the leaders' debates occurred, when the only structured source of political messaging was

¹¹⁰ Johnston, telephone interview.

¹¹¹ Johnston, telephone interview.

the news media coverage of the campaign.

Because there were no other possible sources of campaign information, it would appear that, in this instance, shifts in public attitudes are directly attributable to "earned" media coverage.

It was as if Campbell's comments through the first three weeks of the campaign had crystallized the electorate's thinking about the Tory leader. The gaffe frame of the coverage through the first two weeks had finally taken its toll.

As the media furore of St. Bruno reached its peak, an Environics poll conducted for the CBC and released September 26 was the first public survey to reveal that the Tory slide had begun. With a sample of 3,010 and interviews conducted September 17 to 22 (pre-St. Bruno), the poll revealed the Liberals had the support of 36 per cent of decided voters compared to 31 per cent for the Conservatives; Reform support had crept up to 13 per cent, the BQ was at 11 per cent nationally, but was in a clear and substantial lead in Quebec. The NDP trailed badly with 7 per cent support nationally. The release of the poll seemed to legitimize coverage that suggested Campbell's campaign was in serious trouble. Tory momentum was clearly headed in the wrong direction. And, as stated earlier, the slide in Tory fortunes could not be attributed to outside influences such as the ad

campaign or the leaders' debates. But as the CBC's Chris Waddell noted: "The curious thing going on at this time was that the Liberals weren't gaining any support."¹¹²

The Globe and Mail Editorial Board

Conservative campaign strategists, who by now knew the campaign was in serious trouble, intended to silence the criticism that Campbell was long on slogans but short on policy specifics, with major speeches on September 27 and 29. Campbell's appearances were designed to answer the "where's the beef?" questions in advance of the televised leaders' debates scheduled for the first week in October. The first was the oft-promised and long-awaited speech spelling out details of Campbell's plan to eliminate the federal deficit within five years.

As they launched their campaign, the Tories had tried to create deficit reduction as the dominant frame for their media coverage. Campbell's case to the electorate hinged on the argument that deficit reduction was condition precedent for the future economic viability of the country. Strategy memos referred to the need to "reverse the sense of diminished opportunity" that had taken hold of Canadians.

¹¹² Waddell, personal interview.

says strategist Nancy Jamieson.¹¹³ The challenge was to communicate deficit reduction as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The rallying cry for the strategy was Campbell's frequent pledge to eliminate the deficit in five years.

The deficit reduction frame picked by Campbell's advisors as the dominant media frame presented a more difficult challenge than Chrétien's "hope" frame. The sub-text of the deficit frame by definition was more hard times before there can be better times.

Commenting on Campbell's attempts to make deficit reduction her central campaign theme, Star columnist Carol Goar wrote in the September 18 editions: "A good political slogan has to be simple, sensible and sexy. 'The deficit is a killer of jobs' fails on all counts."¹¹⁴

Public opinion research established unequivocally that job creation was running well ahead of deficit reduction as the electorate's issue of choice. Chrétien's Liberals, through the Red Book, were promising immediate direct action on the priority issue, thereby forcing the Tories to a less popular and salient issue. The problem was compounded by Campbell's apparent inability to explain her deficit

¹¹³ Jamieson, personal interview.

¹¹⁴ Carol Goar, "Campbell Fails to Link Loss of Jobs to Deficit," Toronto Star September 18, 1993: D1.

reduction plan in any detail.

The choice of venue -- a high school in Surrey, B.C. -- seemed curious. As her youthful audience listened patiently, Campbell promised that medicare, education and social assistance programs would not be sacrificed. "Let me be clear. There is no secret agenda to cut Canada's social programs." Campbell said.¹¹⁵

Globe reporter Hugh Winsor, who covered the Surrey speech, described Campbell as "going through the motions on something she didn't understand." Winsor refers to Campbell's deficit mantra. He and other reporters decided to press her hard on the issue "because she was mouthing the Koran without really being sure of what was in the Koran. She appeared as a one-issue person and she didn't understand her own issue," Winsor said.¹¹⁶

The prime minister's delivery struck some reporters as wooden. She appeared to be unfamiliar with the text. There was a reason, according to author Peter C. Newman and certain Tory insiders. Two campaign advisors -- Myles Kervin and Janice Charette -- had been dispatched from Ottawa to Vancouver to explain the intricacies of the

¹¹⁵ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, September 27, 1993.

¹¹⁶ Winsor, personal interview.

deficit reduction plan to the Tory leader. The two advisors spent the entire weekend in Vancouver without ever speaking to her. But Newman claimed in a Global television interview that the prime minister had decided to devote the weekend to her personal life.¹¹⁷ (Campbell was beginning a relationship with Russian-born Montreal inventor, Gregory Lekhtman. Among campaign staff, his code name was "Moscow on the St. Lawrence.") The issue here is not a "voyeur" interest in the prime minister's personal life. Rather, campaign advisors were beginning to express concerns at Campbell's lack of focus, as well as her work habits. Reports began to filter back from the tour that prime ministerial briefing books were returned with the seals intact, reports later confirmed by campaign staff.

Senator Marjory LeBreton, an early and ardent Campbell supporter, put the issue as delicately as possible in a Global Television special when she said: "Everyone has to understand that we've a very short period of time, we've got a very attentive audience in the Canadian public and things like that just have to be, ah, set aside."¹¹⁸

The paid advertising component of the campaign kicked in over the weekend of September 26. The Conservative ads featured tightly

¹¹⁷ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

¹¹⁸ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

framed, close-up shots of Campbell speaking directly to voters. "We've got to walk your talk" and "Government has got to get real" were two of the messages. Such media commentators as Carleton University's Prof. Paul Attallah deemed the ads less effective than the first flight of Liberal ads, which featured a statesman-like Jean Chrétien pitching his plan and his team. The Liberal paid media frame supported the earned media frame of "plan" with a sub-text of hope. Campbell's spots seemed disconnected from the media coverage of her campaign.

Campbell headed east following her Surrey speech to release a 32-page policy document, "A Taxpayer's Agenda," to support a major economic speech. The Conservative policy document suffered in virtually all comparisons to the Liberal Red Book. The Star's Rosemary Speirs reported: "Her 32-page blue-covered booklet was hastily assembled by Conservative strategists in an effort to staunch the leak of Campbell's support in opinion polls."¹¹⁹ Pollster Allan Gregg was less charitable in his assessment of the document in a television interview, describing it as "a pathetic little blue book."¹²⁰ And the economic speech, delivered to a Tory rent-a-crowd, was but a modest success. Meanwhile, economists and financial analysts were raising serious doubts as to the detail of Campbell's deficit reduction plan.

¹¹⁹ Rosemary Speirs, "Campbell Finally Unveils Platform," Toronto Star September 29, 1993: A1.

¹²⁰ "A Shock to the System" Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

Unbeknownst to Campbell's chief of staff, Jodi White, the campaign tour committee had set up a crucial event for which the prime minister was ill-prepared -- a session with the Globe and Mail's editorial board. Conservative strategists, who could hear the Reform posse starting to gain on them, were aware of media scuttlebutt to the effect that Globe Editor-in-Chief William Thorsell was thinking seriously about an editorial endorsement of Preston Manning's populist party. An Albertan, Thorsell was informed on the subject of Reform and was not bound by the stereotypical view of Reformers espoused in the fern bars of Yorkville or The Annex.

The Conservative campaign was anxious to expose the intellectual Campbell to the cerebral Thorsell. Yet there was virtually no preparation for the session. Jodi White said: "The very first I heard about it was that morning at the 7.30 a.m. meeting."¹²¹

The session was an unmitigated disaster from the perspective of the Conservative campaign. Campbell launched into a detailed explanation of her deficit reduction plan, complete with charts, statistics and columns of figures. But at a critical moment, it became obvious to the Globe staffers that the prime minister was unfamiliar with the structure of the statistical analysis spread out before them.

¹²¹ White, personal interview.

Campbell offered one explanation. The Globe staff, somewhat deferentially, explained that the prime minister was mistaken; she was reading the statistical chart the wrong way, they said. Campbell called time, moved to the end of the conference table for a tête-à-tête with Frazer, then rejoined the group and admitted she was mistaken. It was the Globe's Hugh Winsor who told Campbell she was reading the figures from a briefing chart incorrectly. "She was badly briefed," he said. That morning the Globe had run a detailed analysis by Ottawa Bureau Chief Edward Greenspon and reporter Alan Freeman that identified the holes in Campbell's plan in some detail, Winsor said. "She obviously hadn't read that article either."¹²²

Campbell believed the media exercised a double standard in its election coverage, subjecting her statements to a more rigorous examination than was applied to Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien. Campbell told Global Television: "When the poll came out showing that I had an approval rating as Prime Minister of, ah, the highest since Pearson, I got a sense that that was a psychological turning point; that some in the media decided that maybe I was getting some kind of free ride."¹²³ Star columnist Carol Goar says she is quite prepared to concede that the press on the Chrétien tour were not looking for red

¹²² Winsor, personal interview.

¹²³ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

flags. And Goar also concedes Campbell was held to a higher standard "partly because she was the prime minister of Canada and partly because reporters are human beings and she [Campbell] made it abundantly clear to those of us who were on the tour that we were beings of lesser intelligence who were there to harass her."¹²⁴ Chrétien, by contrast, treated journalists as only occasionally troublesome, Goar added. Winsor, Auger, Chantal Hébert and others agree reporters do, properly, hold prime ministers to a more exacting standard in terms of the accuracy of their statements. Campbell's chief of staff, Jodi White, does not believe there was a bias in the media coverage, but, like Goar, White believes personal chemistry was a factor. "When they [the reporters] start to think that she is talking down to them, the human element kicks in," White said.¹²⁵

Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe rejects any suggestion Campbell was subjected to some higher, more exacting standard than other party leaders. Citing the specific example of Reform Party Leader Preston Manning, McCabe said "everything he said was picked apart."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Carol Goar, personal interviews, February 8 and March 9, 1994.

¹²⁵ White, personal interview.

¹²⁶ McCabe, personal interview.

Maclean's media columnist George Bain does believe the Ottawa press gallery revealed an anti-Campbell bias in their reportage. "They came out of the gate pretty well decided about which were the good guys and which were the bad guys," Bain said in an interview. The former Ottawa columnist for the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star notes Liberal Finance Minister Paul Martin, attending an employment summit of G7 nations in Detroit on March 14 and 15, 1994, made statements suggesting the Chrétien government's time frame for an improvement in the jobless rate is not dissimilar to the time frame set out by Campbell at the Rideau Hall launch. "Campbell was speaking the truth as she saw it," Bain said. "Yet she got backed into a corner by their kind of slanted reporting." Bain admits Campbell made mistakes, most significantly her failure to be clear about what she had in mind for the country. But his bottom line is that the travelling press corps did in fact give Chrétien and the Liberals a bit of a free ride. "They did, and you can still see it . . . it is apparent today," Bain said. "They [the media] are asking questions now that they didn't ask before but they are asking them in a very deferential way."¹²⁷

Following the session with the Globe and Mail editorial board, a badly shaken Campbell boarded a challenger jet for New York and a speech at the United Nations, leaving the campaign press corps behind. More problems awaited Campbell in New York, where this

¹²⁷ George Bain, telephone interview, March 17, 1994.

student had been asked by the campaign to organize the event.

Instructions to embassy staff from this student and his colleague Stuart Murray to contact other delegations by telephone to invite them to hear Campbell's speech were interpreted as strong-arm tactics by the Malaysian delegation and reported as such by Southam News correspondent Dave Todd. (Canada was involved in a dispute with Malaysia at the time over human rights violations.) Several member nations boycotted Campbell's afternoon speech to protest Canadian budget cutbacks to foreign aid. And a live interview on CNN's international segment, normally carried on CNN's North American network, was bumped and replayed later. Hillary Rodham Clinton's appearance before the Senate committee considering her health care report had run longer than expected and CNN, not surprisingly, had decided to stay with the First Lady. CTV's Washington correspondent, Jim O'Connell, reported Campbell's foray onto the world stage had been a success. Other coverage was equally positive. But the odour of gaffe hung in the air. And as Campbell headed back to Ottawa to prepare for the televised leaders' debates, word of the Globe and Mail editorial board meeting was the flash on the journalistic jungle telegraph.

Analysis pieces carried in major Canadian dailies over the next few days were devastating in their assessment of Campbell's campaign to

that point. The September 30 editions of the Toronto Star carried an analysis by Rosemary Speirs that read: "Prime Minister Kim Campbell denies her election campaign is in trouble, but behind closed doors yesterday her top strategists were considering a major shakeup of her team and style."¹²⁸ An Ottawa Sun report quoted an unidentified Conservative from the Mulroney era as describing the headquarters campaign team as brain dead. Randall Pearce is convinced the source for the story was a Campbell advisor on the campaign plane. The Globe's Hugh Winsor reported in the October 1 editions: "In the meantime, against a background of grouching from several disenchanted Tories, the evidence mounts that Ms. Campbell's principal message about deficit reduction, has misfired. . ."¹²⁹ Tory party guru Dalton Camp, in a column entitled "Why the Tories Are Losing the Election," stated: "Things aren't working well at campaign central and not working much better on the campaign trail where nothing runs on time and no one seems to know what tomorrow will bring." Camp, whose son David was a former law partner and close advisor to Campbell, noted the Tories were still in the hunt at the time of writing, but concluded: "If there is a strategic plan for this Tory campaign, nobody admits having seen it. Yet the hope of getting by without one, entertained earlier on when all the polls were favourable,

¹²⁸ Rosemary Speirs, "Two Parties Hit Election Crisis," Toronto Star September 30, 1993: A1.

¹²⁹ Hugh Winsor, "Pinned Down Tories Regroup to Plan New Offensive," Globe and Mail October 1, 1993: A1, A2.

is now extinct."¹³⁰ Southam News reporter Julian Beltrame quoted another unnamed Tory insider as saying: "She [Campbell] doesn't seem to understand the impact of these sound bites. She still can't believe that the media would make these slips the main focus of their reports the next day and not the things she's saying."¹³¹

In the post-Meech period, Canadians told the Citizens' Forum they wanted straight talk from their political leaders. But Calgary Herald associate editor Catherine Ford says Campbell's candour raised doubts about whether Canadians really wanted to hear it. In a September 30 article Ford wrote: "Remember this when the votes are counted: voters asked for truth. When they got it, they didn't like it." Ford argued Campbell's statements, and coverage, revealed certain home truths about Canadian politics. "There is nothing particularly new or earth-shattering, but if there are any questions why elections are races and not debates, why campaigns are more about quips than substance, the inability of all of us to sit still long enough to digest the truth and reasoned argument may be the simplest answer. Like it or not, and most people don't, Prime Minister Kim Campbell told the truth last week, when she said the future of social programs was too important

¹³⁰ Dalton Camp, "Why the Tories Are Losing the Election," Sunday Star September 29, 1993: A21.

¹³¹ Julian Beltrame, "Mistakes That Plagued Campbell's Leadership Bid Are Still Haunting Her," Ottawa Citizen September 30, 1993.

an issue to discuss during an election campaign.”¹³²

The substance and tone of these reports was reflected in network coverage as well. A media consensus had taken hold. The Campbell campaign had been a disaster; a major shake-up of the team and the style was a minimum requirement.

Jodi White said: “The campaign was dysfunctional all over the place. “She didn’t phone me for the first three weeks of the campaign,” Campbell’s chief of staff said. “And she talked to John [Campaign Chair, John Tory] once. We got our message out twice, maybe. The rest of the time we were on the defensive, reacting.” White continued. “If, in the first three weeks, you only get your message out twice, you are going down.”¹³³

Conservative campaign strategists were convinced negative media coverage had impacted on voters and had caused Campbell’s candidacy to lose momentum.

On October 1st, when the leader’s tour had returned to Ottawa for the televised leader’s debate, Campaign Chair, John Tory, called this

¹³² Catherine Ford, “Painful Truth: Politicians Promise To Tell It But Do Canadians Really Want To Hear It?” Montreal Gazette September 30, 1993: B3.

¹³³ White, personal interview.

writer and asked if a small working group could recommend improvements to campaign media relations. The group met the next day, Saturday, October 2, and produced an eight-page memorandum received by Tory October 3. Participants included Jamieson, advisors Heather Conway and Bruce Anderson (a business partner of this writer's), communications consultant and former PMO deputy principal secretary Ian Anderson, and caucus research director Roxanne Benoit.

Early Days

There is a tendency in certain political circles to dismiss the early days of a campaign as something of a phony war. Strategists will argue voters aren't really paying attention in the early going. They will argue that the campaign begins in earnest only with the launch of the paid media campaign and the nationally televised leaders' debates. Yet the 1993 federal campaign would seem to be at variance with that conventional wisdom; the downturn in Tory fortunes, as charted by published public opinion research, clearly began before the ad campaign and the leaders' debates.

A review of the media coverage of the campaign's early weeks suggests Iyengar and Kinder's theories of the significance of the media "frame" have a particular application to the Campbell campaign.

As stated earlier, the dominant media frame for Campbell's coverage through the first three weeks was "gaffe" with a treatment responsibility construct on unemployment as the salient, or primed issue.

The "gaffe" frame emerged as the dominant frame in Société Radio-Canada's (SRC) coverage of the Campbell campaign as well; although the specific illustrations reflected cultural differences between French and English Canada; both linguistically and journalistically. SRC reporters, for example, highlighted Campbell's failure to speak much French in a predominantly Acadian riding in New Brunswick as evidence the campaign seemed disorganized and lacked focus. SRC reports also zeroed in on statements by Campbell attacking BQ leader Lucien Bouchard which the Tory leader was later required to clarify. Reporters also noted Campbell's predisposition to accuse Jean Chrétien of hiding from the press, even as she was refusing to take questions from her own travelling media entourage.

This "gaffe" frame on the Campbell tour, combined with the treatment responsibility construct on the designated agenda issue of unemployment, defined the Conservative campaign for news consumers. And this frame is more relevant to public attitudes than the textual accuracy of the words uttered by the campaigning leader.

Campbell's claim that all western industrialized nations are wrestling with modest economic recoveries that to date do not seem to include employment growth is fact. As George Bain points out, statements by Liberal Finance Minister Paul Martin at the G7 meeting in Detroit this March sounded strikingly similar to Campbell's Rideau Hall observations.

Policy wonks conducting major reviews of federal government employment and job training schemes are wrestling with the notion that in the information-based, value-added economy of the 21st century, there is work, but no jobs. Anecdotally, neighbours talk about work-sharing and ponder the lifestyle implications of a four-day week.

Yet election coverage of the issue tends not to reflect this reality. In settling on a treatment responsibility construct, news coverage was effectively priming readers/viewers to consider unemployment in the context of what the campaigning politicians were prepared to do in specific program terms to alleviate the problem.

Chrétien responded with a specific treatment-responsibility answer in the form of a joint federal-provincial government-sponsored job creation program targeted for infrastructure improvements. Chrétien went so far as to promise to create jobs before year's end.

Reporters covering the story knew full well that any federal-provincial job creation scheme would require detailed agreements involving all three levels of government. The time required to negotiate these working agreements precluded any possibility of shovels being in the ground before the spring of 1994. No matter. Campaign coverage is about accuracy, not veracity. Chrétien's campaign promise was accurately reported; it was left to the voters to make an assessment as to its merit. The statements of both Campbell and Chrétien were reported in a manner consistent with the journalistic test of objectivity.

Iyengar, however, believes that journalists can follow the rules of objectivity, yet convey a dominant framing in their reporting that actually prevents viewing audiences from making a balanced assessment of the situation.

Chrétien's campaign promise fit the media frame, particularly the treatment responsibility construct. Campbell's attempts to situate the Canadian circumstance in a wider, global context, was sound in terms of a world-wide public policy context, but was demonstrably counter-productive in the context of the media coverage frame. As Campbell pitched up in Ottawa to prepare for the televised leader's debate her first-half foray on the campaign trail did not augur well for the second half to follow.

CHAPTER 5

THE BANDWAGON EFFECT OF CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

Nationally televised leaders' debates have been major campaign events in Canada for 25 years; except for the 1980 federal election when front-runner Pierre Trudeau instructed his Liberal Party negotiators to ensure a leaders' debate didn't happen.

Reporters tend to lapse into the vernacular of prize fighting when covering these events. The first and dominant test of journalistic analysis is whether any knock-out punches were landed. Consequently, much of the preparation by strategists for the various political parties is geared to ensuring such a punch does not land on the beak of their esteemed leader.

Appearing on CBC's Prime Time News, essayist Rex Murphy offered a particular perspective on televised debates: "It is the despairing wisdom of some of us that television and politics were made for each other," Murphy said. "One is a vast wasteland, and the other is a moral desert. They meet most sweetly in the institution we have come to know as the leaders' debate." According to Murphy, a leaders' debate "combines the vicarious brain enhancement of

'Jeopardy' with professional wrestling's commitment to the dignified edification of us all."¹

Murphy, however, does make the accurate observation that the debates have become so burdened by rules and structure that a free-flowing exchange is systematically throttled.

Featuring Mulroney, Liberal Leader John Turner and New Democratic Party Leader Ed Broadbent, both the 1984 and 1988 debates produced single exchanges of high drama. Unfortunately for the NDP, Broadbent did not figure in either. The 1984 clash, over patronage, turned a pro-Tory current into the proverbial tidal wave, mainly because Mulroney was able to exploit Turner's inept defence of patronage abuse for the rest of the campaign. The 1988 exchange, where Turner effectively challenged Mulroney on the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, was equally pivotal -- but with a different result. Turner was not able to press his advantage to victory. Mulroney, by contrast, snapped out of a strategy-dictated somnolent campaign style to fight aggressively for a policy he believed in. But Richard Johnston and his colleagues in the study of the 1988 election conclude Turner's debate performance was pivotal in that it was a critical factor in the Liberals' ability to turn back an NDP challenge and

¹ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. Rex Murphy essay, October 1, 1993.

remain Official Opposition.

The dynamic for the 1993 debate was fundamentally altered by the emergence of two new political formations -- the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party. The first issue for negotiators for the networks and the political parties to resolve was whether or not the leaders of these new formations would be invited to participate. If the answer to that question was yes, then what about other new party leaders such as the National Party's Mel Hurtig?

The issue of format was next. The past practice of a series of one-on-one debates clearly couldn't work with as many as five participants.

Stanley Hartt, a former chief of staff in the Prime Minister's Office, was asked to negotiate with the networks on behalf of the Conservative party. (For the record, the Liberal Party negotiations were handled by Michael W. Robinson, a principal of the Earncliffe Strategy Group. Another principal is this writer.)

The networks had met separately to develop a proposed format for the parties' consideration. The discussions and deliberations actually began informally before the writs were issued.

Hartt's instructions from Campbell strategists were based on the

look of the political landscape at the time the negotiations began. In the days before the writs were issued, Campbell was the new, fresh face, the strong preference of respondents to opinion polls on all leadership attributes. The Tory objective, therefore, was to protect Campbell's front-runner status. Hartt was asked to negotiate a format that would preclude the possibility of any participant landing a knock-out punch. The bad news for the Tories was that Hartt executed his mandate with his accustomed skill and success. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, by the time the leaders gathered at the National Arts Centre for the televised confrontation, Campbell was no longer the front-runner.

There was a second development of some significance. Campaign strategists were well aware that the descriptions of Campbell as being fluently bilingual were overstated. The instructions to Hartt, therefore, were to ensure that the English-language debate occurred first. Because a formal undertaking had been given the Liberal party on this issue at the 1988 round of negotiations, this was not deemed to be a problem. But at the last minute, the PC Quebec campaign team insisted the order be reversed. The Montreal Expos were making a belated and ultimately futile run at the National League East pennant. The October 6 proposed date for the French-language debate risked pre-empting coverage of a key game against the Philadelphia Phillies. The BQ did not want to offend baseball fans. Quebec Tories quickly

agreed. The date was moved to October 3. The switch in dates did not work in Campbell's favour. Because her campaign had lost momentum, Campbell needed a strong performance in the first debate to send the signal she was still a factor to be reckoned with. That task would have been easier in English.

The French-language debate revealed to francophone viewers the fact that Campbell's command of "la langue de Molière" had its limits. The Tory leader misunderstood a question from a member of the studio audience and gave a deficit reduction answer to a question about unemployment. Bloc Leader Lucien Bouchard was strong, Manning put in a unilingual cameo appearance, McLaughlin was energetic if inconsequential. But Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien exceeded expectations. Campbell alienated some Quebeckers with a lame attempt to recreate Lloyd Bentsen's putdown of Dan Quayle in the 1988 vice-presidential debates ("I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. You're no Jack Kennedy.") Campbell took a statement which she attributed to the late René Lévesque to suggest separatists had no business in the federal Parliament. Bouchard firmly put Campbell in her place. But the damage could have been worse had journalists done more homework after the exchange -- Campbell had completely misrepresented Lévesque's statement.

Most Quebec commentators declared Bouchard the victor in the

French-language debate, although enough declared Chrétien the winner to allow the spin doctors to make the case that politically, he had won big.

His success in the French-language debate gave Chrétien a major boost for the English debate. Bouchard's attempts to portray Chrétien as a "vendu" were less successful than the BQ leader had hoped for. And Chrétien's spirited defence of his Québécois roots provided a much sought-after rallying point for Quebec federalists. Campbell, on the advice of former cabinet colleagues such as Marcel Masse and Marcel Danis, had tried to play nationalist cards throughout the campaign and in the debate. The strategy had some merit during the spring party leadership contest. Campbell did succeed in garnering the support of the Tory party's nationalist wing. But in a general election campaign with candidates from a pro-sovereigntist party, led by a staunch nationalist like Bouchard, the strategy was questionable at best. As Auger argued: "You can't play the nationalist card when the nationalists are on the ice."²

The Conservative Party leader appeared to be repeating lines scripted for her by advisors, rather than speaking from any deeply-held conviction.

² Michel Auger, personal interview, January 31, 1994.

CTV anchor Lloyd Robertson, introducing the English-language debate the next night, declared: "It could very well be the most important single night in the election campaign."³ But when the dust had settled, Craig Oliver concluded: "There were no major casualties, no one fell apart, no one committed suicide by committing any terrible gaffes."⁴ Newspaper assessments of Campbell's performance were less generous than Oliver's analysis. Veteran political columnist Stewart MacLeod, writing for the Thomson papers, concluded Campbell had endured many tough moments in the 4 1/2 hours of debate. Referring to a heated exchange with Bouchard on the deficit issue during the French-language debate, MacLeod concluded: "The exchange on Monday night may not have knocked her out of the ring, but it clearly had her leaning on the ropes for a few minutes. It left her rattled."⁵

Bouchard's badgering about the actual size of the federal deficit was damaging to Campbell's candidacy for two reasons. First, Campbell had tried to lay claim to deficit reduction as her issue. The fact she didn't seem to know the size of the deficit for the last fiscal year

³ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News Special October 4, 1993.

⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News, Craig Oliver report, October 4, 1993.

⁵ Stewart MacLeod, "Bouchard Causes Grief for Campbell in Debate," The Guardian [Charlottetown], October 6, 1993: 6.

undermined her credibility. The exchange also raised larger questions about Campbell's competence as the nation's chief executive officer. As Dalton Camp observed in a Global television special: "The assumption was because she had the title of the office, then she must have known all there was to go with that office. She didn't."⁶

Writing in the October 7 edition of the Winnipeg Sun, Christine McKee concluded: "There seems to be a consensus that there was no clear winner. However, those leaders with the most at stake, Kim Campbell and Audrey McLaughlin, may not have done enough to avoid defeat in the case of the former, and lost seats in the case of the latter."⁷

The televised leaders' debates, as is always the case, came down to expectations. Chrétien emerged the big winner because he exceeded the rather modest expectations of him going into the debates.

For Campbell, the imperative in the debates was to generate media coverage to the effect that she had regained momentum lost early in the campaign. Her performance was not sufficiently strong to accomplish that objective.

⁶ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

⁷ Christine McKee, "Tories Left Scrambling," Winnipeg Sun, October 7, 1993: 18.

As the leaders headed out for the final 21 days of the campaign, Campbell had paid a significant price for the failure of her campaign to appreciate the importance of television news coverage in the early going. More importantly, she had failed to appreciate the realities of campaign coverage -- and particularly its predisposition to episodic framing with a treatment responsibility construct -- and plan accordingly.

Because of the dominant "gaffe" frame of media coverage of Campbell's campaign going into the debates, the Conservative leader needed a clear and decisive victory at the leaders' debates to regain momentum. Instead, after two nights under the lights at the National Arts Centre, Campbell's fortunes were obviously in decline.

Her campaign advisors, meanwhile, were planning yet another re-launch. An initial thought to have Campaign Chair John Tory join the leader's travelling entourage was shelved. Instead, it was decided Chief of Staff Jodi White would join the tour to give it more focus in terms of message and to try to improve relations with the media; relations that had deteriorated markedly.

The Death Watch

When White joined the Campbell tour, she was struck immediately

by the sour relationship between the campaign coterie and the travelling press corps. There was a palpable tension between the front of the plane and the back, White said. The Campaign Co-Chair, Patrick Kinsella, had always maintained a distant relationship with the media. He seemed to set the tone for other Campbell campaign staffers. White, who had worked in the gallery in the 1970s before joining then opposition leader Joe Clark's staff, knew many of the reporters personally. On her first day on the tour, White walked back to the press section to say hello. The reaction was immediate, said White. "For the first couple of days, if I just stood and talked to them [the reporters] it was as if I was a conquering hero."⁸ Maclean's writer Mary Janigan and CTV correspondent Leslie Jones independently cite White's addition to the tour as an important development.

Many of the reporters assigned to the Campbell tour commented on the strained nature of the relationship. Gratuitous rudeness seemed to be the order of the day. "Their attitude was 'we don't have to communicate with the press, they have to catch us up'," said Global's John Burke. Burke is sharply critic of Kinsella. "His idea of designing a strategy was how to screw the press, not how to get a message out."⁹ Star columnist Carol Goar said Kinsella "did not have the skills (or the

⁸ Jodi White, personal interview, February 16, 1994.

⁹ John Burke, personal interview, January 27, 1994.

inclination) to alleviate the tensions between Campbell and the press. He regarded the media with ill-concealed contempt."¹⁰ Michel C. Auger says Campbell rarely came to the back of the plane to speak to reporters, and on those rare occasions when she did, Paul Frazer would appear after five minutes to take her back to the front compartment.¹¹ CTV's Leslie Jones believes attitudes towards the media on the Campbell tour originated with the prime minister herself. Citing the "hearing aid" exchange with the Sun's Bob Fife, Jones says Campbell's message was clear: "You're stupid, you're not getting it." Jones says Campbell's attitude toward the media tended to the superior, an opinion Auger, Burke and others share. "She thought we were all stupid," Jones says bluntly.¹²

Campbell later seemed to confirm Jones's assessment.

In a 40-minute interview with Ottawa Citizen reporter Joe Sornberger aboard the campaign plane, Campbell said people who write about politics "haven't the foggiest idea of what's happening out there in the country... don't really understand the government process." The prime minister told the Citizen reporter that in her

¹⁰ Carol Goar, "Tory Machine Crashes," Sunday Star October 24, 1993: A10

¹¹ Auger, personal interview.

¹² Leslie Jones, personal interview, February 4, 1994.

opinion, the Canadian people "are a million miles ahead of the commentary."¹³ The results on October 25 suggest otherwise.

Sornberger wrote that it is the politician, not the press, that has control of coverage even if it looks as if it is the other way around. Yet it is an open question as to how much control the Conservative campaign exercised over its media relations. And if Campbell believed the people who write about politics didn't understand the government process, Campbell's campaign most emphatically did not understand the media process.

For starters, the practice of the campaign staff to refer to journalists as "media maggots" didn't help. And they tended to ascribe media complaints to the petulance of pampered adolescents. The Tories tended to see media relations in the sole context of the physical care and feeding. Lyon and Throop tried to ease the tension with bonhomie but, as experienced campaign hands, both understood full well the media complaints were related to their collective ability to do their jobs and not their creature comforts.

Campbell seemed to have little or no understanding of the dynamics of campaign coverage, particularly on a leader's tour. She

¹³ Joe Sornberger, "Pack Journalism: Campaigns Turn Reporters Into Groups of Howling Dogs," Calgary Herald October 7, 1993: A5.

was exasperated by what she saw as the media's penchant for "gotcha" journalism. She frequently found herself in heated exchanges with interviewers about the accuracy of something they had said or reported. In an October 22 interview with Pamela Wallin, the prime minister aggressively challenged Wallin's opening question on social program cuts. "I never said that, where did you hear that? I don't think I said that," Campbell said.¹⁴

Jamieson, who worked for Campbell in the leadership race, says the former prime minister's understanding of the media is rudimentary at best. Campbell is not a news consumer and has no particular interest in news coverage -- which is a bit like being in the real estate business and not caring about mortgage interest rates. Campbell, says Jamieson, believed that if she could just get out there and chat with the voters, they would come to share her vision. "She rejects the notion that the media has any right to filter her message," Jamieson said.¹⁵ Michael Ferrabee confirms Campbell almost never watched television and read newspapers infrequently. Ferrabee believes Campbell had a real gift for presenting herself to people but did not have a very good understanding of the media or the role the media play in a campaign. "Unquestionably, she paid a price for that,"

¹⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News, October 22, 1993.

¹⁵ Nancy Jamieson, personal interview, January 24, 1994.

Ferrabee said.¹⁶

Macleans National Affairs Correspondent Mary Janigan, a veteran of national campaigns, said in an interview the infrastructure for dealing with journalists on the Campbell campaign was poor. "I don't mean spinning, I don't mean happy talk. If you had a policy question you wanted to put, there was no one there who wanted to talk to you or could be found to talk to you who could give you the answer," Janigan said. Goar's experience was substantially the same.

Janigan said the Campbell tour appeared to be a hierarchical, status-oriented plane, with few staff designated to speak to journalists. Paul Frazer appeared to be harassed, according to Janigan "and was clearly struggling with a fair amount of . . . abuse from the candidate."¹⁷ Van Dusen was in charge of keeping the media in good humour. White was the senior designated spokesperson and far and away the most effective. White, however, did not join the tour until after the televised leaders' debates.

Macleans's, and other news organizations, experienced difficulty in getting any response to requests for interviews with Campbell. The

¹⁶ Michael Ferrabee, personal interview, January 28, 1994.

¹⁷ Mary Janigan, personal interview, February 18, 1994.

magazine had set up an issues piece where the leaders of each party would respond to a series of set questions. The Tories stalled for weeks before finally agreeing, Janigan said. She added that a similar pattern of media relations emerged during Campbell's leadership bid. Maclean's had wanted to put a couple of factual questions, that only Campbell could answer, for a cover story. Calls to her press secretary, Cindy Boucher, were never returned. The cover story appeared. Campbell challenged the Maclean's story and told the Globe's Hugh Winsor that the magazine had never talked to her. Said Janigan: "There were no mistakes, even though she had alleged there had been . . . but we had the proof and satisfied Hugh Winsor. Her press organization broke down and then she alleged that it was our fault."¹⁸ Janigan recalls a further incident at the Tory leadership convention in June. Maclean's wanted to check reports that candidate Jim Edwards had broken a promise to Jean Charest after the Campbell camp had pledged to cover certain of Edwards's campaign expenses. Janigan and colleague E. Kaye Fulton went looking for Boucher. Fulton spotted Boucher at the Chateau Laurier and asked where Campbell was. Boucher told Fulton: "I don't have to talk to you. We won."¹⁹ The pattern, says Janigan, held through the general election campaign.

¹⁸ Janigan, personal interview.

¹⁹ Janigan, personal interview

A resolution test chart featuring 12 sets of five parallel lines, each set oriented at a 45-degree angle. Each set is accompanied by a numerical value representing its resolution. The values are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some values appearing in two orientations (vertical and horizontal) to test different aspects of resolution. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2, 3.6, and 4.0.

MICROGRAPHY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010
ANSI 1010-1 TEST CHART No. 2

Janigan said she also noted a pattern to Campbell's repeated claims of misquote, or statements taken out of context. Having spent hours reviewing old newspaper clippings and school board records, Janigan said: "I had seen a pattern of saying controversial things which caused trouble, claiming spinning or misquote. The journalists then turn on each other, some claiming that a woman had been hard done by and others claiming it is an accurate quote, what can we do. By the time the journalists are finished attacking each other . . ." Janigan says this orchestration of turning journalists on each other was also part of the Campbell media relations matrix.²⁰ Campbell is not the first public figure to employ a variation on the "divide and conquer" strategy with the media. Janigan's point is that Campbell used the techniques on more than one occasion.

The campaign "re-launch" headed to Toronto where the prime minister found herself embroiled almost immediately in another controversy -- this one related to the government's intention to privatize the redevelopment of Terminals 1 and 2 at Pearson International Airport. The deal, negotiated over a prolonged period and opposed by certain employees at Transport Canada, was formally announced in February, 1993 and again in August -- before the writs were issued. The deal was to close on October 7. The Earnscliffe Strategy Group was directly involved in the file on behalf of Claridge

²⁰ Janigan, personal interview.

Inc., the Montreal-based company owned by Charles Bronfman.

The specifics of the Pearson case will likely be the subject of either court action or special legislation in the House of Commons. But the public perception, particularly in the Metro Toronto area, was that outgoing prime minister Brian Mulroney had sold off Canada's only profitable airport to his Tory cronies as some form of unconscionably extravagant annuity. In a curious way, the Pearson airport deal also gave rise to what Liberal Communications Director Peter Donolo concedes was the worst week of the Liberal campaign.²¹ Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien successfully exploited the Pearson signing during a campaign stop in Toronto. But then, having denounced Tory cronyism and favouritism, Chrétien incredibly flew to Montreal for a \$1,000 a head fundraising cocktail party at the home of Senator Leo Kolber, a Claridge principal. The Liberals deliberately withheld information about the event. Campaign Co-Chair Joyce Fairbairn had told reporters Chrétien had no events planned for the evening. Radio-Canada reporter Guy Gendron knew otherwise and when Chrétien arrived at Kolber's Westmount mansion, Gendron was ready, camera rolling.

Campbell was seriously on the defensive over the Pearson airport controversy. Yet Chrétien's hypocrisy in denouncing the deal as Tory

²¹ Peter Donolo, personal interview, March 16, 1994.

patronage hours before he was scheduled to break bread with the principals of the firm that held the majority interest in the Pearson Development Corporation gave her an opportunity to fend off Chrétien's attacks with a counter-attack of her own not just that day, but for the rest of the week. But in the end she was incapable of inflicting any serious damage to Chrétien. Asked why Chrétien didn't get treated any tougher in the press than he did, Janigan says: "Every time Chrétien made a mistake, she made a worse one."²²

By way of illustration, in the third week of September, Chrétien raised the idea of "workfare" during a campaign stop in Newfoundland. But before Campbell could seek some partisan advantage in Chrétien's potentially controversial musings, the Tory leader herself made her St. Bruno comments on social programs.

In the wake of Chrétien's seeming hypocrisy on the Pearson airport deal, Campbell's counter-offensive was blunted by the October 8 CTV/Reid poll that showed a significant decline in Tory fortunes.

By now, Campbell had switched almost totally to a more traditional campaign-style. But the Conservative leader was, in effect, fighting on three different fronts. The BQ was taking almost all of the Conservative support in Quebec. The challenge from Reform had

²² Janigan, personal interview.

spread from western Canada into Ontario. Campbell had to figure out a way of criticizing Reform without offending Reform supporters. And as for the Liberals, Campbell had to address the issue of the inevitability of a Liberal victory. Campbell was more aggressive in her attacks on the Liberal leader. Responding to Chrétien's tactics, the Tory leader said: "Mr. Chrétien is running what I've referred to as the closed casket campaign. Viewing from three to five every afternoon, please speak in hushed tones. And at all costs, do not ask a question."²³

Chrétien was operating against a more constructive frame, the frame of "hope" which allowed him to make certain statements without paying a political price. By way of illustration, Susan Delacourt's October 9 report in the Globe and Mail quoted Chrétien as saying: "Let me win the election and after that, you come and ask me questions about how I run a government."²⁴ Chrétien's comments came after he had admitted some social programs needed to be changed. Yet Chrétien's comments did not unleash the media maelstrom that Campbell's comments at St. Bruno unleashed.

As Delacourt reported: "With that one statement, Mr. Chrétien

²³ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News . October 9, 1993.

²⁴ Susan Delacourt. "Liberals Go After 'Protest' Vote," Globe and Mail October 9, 1993.

offered a glimpse into the attitude and the strategy that are now driving the Liberal Party in the final weeks of the federal election campaign."²⁵

Delacourt said the statement spoke volumes; it was a statement of confidence uttered by a candidate slipping into the role of front-runner.

Suddenly, the Liberal leader wasn't quite as available to reporters as he had been earlier in the campaign, stopping to field questions only after most news organizations' deadlines had passed, Delacourt noted.

The Tories predictably grumbled about the media's double-standard, wondering aloud why Campbell's St. Bruno comments caused such a flap while Chrétien emerged relatively unscathed from his musing at a Winfield, B.C. apple-packing factory.

Ottawa Citizen media critic Chris Cobb raised the question in a column that appeared October 20. Media coverage of Campbell's statement, in Cobb's opinion, was, "swift and totally damning." Chrétien, by contrast, was barely criticized at all. Cobb concluded: "the comparison serves well as an example of how Chrétien and his

²⁵ Delacourt, October 9, 1993.

PLAN have led a charmed life during this election campaign.”²⁶

However, the answer to Cobb’s question may lie in the positive media frame for Chrétien’s campaign, a frame developed because of the Liberals’ effective use of the policy Red Book. The Red Book became a symbol of hope, synonymous with a plan for the future. At every stop in his campaign tour, Chrétien invited Canadians to read the policy manual carefully. He told voters a Liberal government would be accountable for every commitment set out in the Red Book. The reason the comments cited by Cobb and reported by the travelling media didn’t resonate with news consumers as a mistake was that they had already bought into the idea that Chrétien and his Liberal team had a plan they were prepared to make public that would cover every eventuality. Charges that Chrétien had some sort of secret agenda didn’t scan against this dominant media frame.

The “Loser” Frame

The October 8 CTV/Southam/Angus Reid poll reported the collapse of Conservative support; the party had lost 13 points in the polls in just three weeks and now trailed the Liberals by fully 15 points. Preston Manning’s Reform party emerged as the major beneficiary of the Tory collapse, although the Liberals and the New Democrats had

²⁶ Chris Cobb, “Reporters’ Baffling Kid-Glove Treatment of Chrétien Won’t Last Past Election,” Ottawa Citizen October 20, 1994: A11.

posted slight gains as well.

The reporting of polls showing Conservative party fortunes were in a free fall, was a significant development in the campaign for CBC Radio's Jason Moscovitz. "For me, the turning point of the election was when the published polls suggested [the Conservatives] were going to lose; that's when people decided to put the boots to [them]."²⁷

Globe reporter Murray Campbell noted October 7: "Despite earnest, pre-election vows to concentrate on policy issues, the media, particularly television, have fallen back on the tried and true, concentrating on which party is going to cross the finish line first." Reporter Campbell quoted UBC political scientist Matthew Mendelsohn as saying: "The lead items (on network news) are always about strategy and the polls, what the Conservatives or Liberals or Reform have to do in the next few days or few weeks to salvage their campaign or maintain their lead."²⁸

Campbell observed that the Tories' sputtering campaign had been the focus of much of the media coverage to date, and that the performance of the other political parties had been measured against

²⁷ Moscovitz, personal interviews, January 27, February 7, 1994.

²⁸ Murray Campbell, "Why News Gatherers 'Framed' Campbell," Globe and Mail October 7, 1993: A6.

that frame. He cited a Fraser Institute study that concluded to that point in the campaign, three-quarters of the news coverage references to Campbell had been negative.

Following the release of the CTV/Southam/Reid poll on October 8, John Tory tried to rally the troops in a memo to PC candidates and campaign managers dated the same day. "The volatility of the electorate as reflected in today's poll makes preoccupation about the eventual election outcome at best a crap-shoot and worst, a waste of time." Tory reminded the candidates that at a comparable time in the 1988 campaign, the Conservatives were trailing the Liberals by nine points in published polls. The Conservatives rallied to win a second majority in that campaign. "The challenge then -- as it is now -- is to contrast our realistic plan for both job creation and deficit reduction to the half-baked and misguided promises of the other parties," the memorandum stated. "We won in 1988 by staying the course and not blinking."²⁹

Tory's efforts, however well-intended, could not compensate for the new dominant frame the media was applying to Campbell and her campaign -- the "loser" frame.

Following the leaders' debates, the media coverage began to reflect

²⁹ PC campaign memorandum, October 8, 1993.

a serious horse-race bias. Like the St. Bruno incident, the publication of the October 8 CTV/Southam/Angus Reid poll was a defining moment in the campaign. The collapse of Conservative support revealed by Reid's soundings was nothing short of stunning. The Liberals, as had been the case from the outset, were the choice of 37 per cent of decided voters, but Conservative strength had fallen to just 22 per cent. CBC anchor Peter Mansbridge began his network's coverage stating: "With a little more than two weeks left in the election campaign, a new poll says that support for the Conservatives has dropped like a stone."³⁰

Interviewed by Wendy Mesley on CBC's Sunday Report on October 10, Dr. Darrell Bricker, senior vice-president of the Angus Reid Group, stated flatly that the Campbell campaign was finished. "The reality is that the Tories' momentum really started to slip when people made the decision not to re-elect them in about the first two or three weeks of the campaign," Bricker said. "Right now, the debate is about who is going to replace them, not about whether they should be re-elected."³¹

With the publication of the Reid poll, Chrétien put his campaign on automatic pilot. Chrétien's handlers began to further restrict media

³⁰ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. October 8, 1993.

³¹ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. October 10, 1993.

access to the Liberal leader. Detailed questions on policy issues were deflected with a standard reference to the Red Book. The Liberal leader also shifted the focus of his attack from the Conservatives to Reform and the Bloc Québécois.

Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe, said when the Reid poll was published, journalists could hardly believe what they were seeing. Southam reporters had begun the campaign realizing the story from McLaughlin's camp might well be the demise of socialism in Canada. "Then, all of a sudden, the same thing was happening to Kim," McCabe said.³² The Reid poll confirmed what journalists had sensed on the campaign trail, but the extent of the Tory collapse became the story once the Reid poll was able to quantify it. Campbell, as party leader, was then subjected to even more scrutiny.

The horse-race story may be the most maligned type of campaign coverage. It may also be the most popular. Horse-race coverage has dominated campaigns since at least 1979, about which political scientist R. Jeremy Wilson stated: "The Canadian media, like their American counterparts, tend to portray the campaign as a horserace or game. At election time, our political journalists are transformed

³² Aileen McCabe, personal interview March 11, 1994.

into what James David Barber has called 'electoral bookies.'³³ The coverage, wrote Wilson, is analogous to colour commentary at sporting events.

Carol Goar says journalists indulge in a bit of false piety when they promise not to focus on the horse-race story because the fact of the matter is, that is what readers want to know.³⁴

Campaign strategists have long been aware of the impact published polls can have on voter intentions.

In the 1980 federal election campaign, then PC party national director Paul Curley instructed pollster Allan Gregg to hold a press conference to announce that party research suggested Joe Clark's Conservatives were closing the gap on Pierre Trudeau's commanding lead. Gregg's assertion was factual if somewhat misleading. Clark had started the campaign 20 points back and at the time of Gregg's intervention, had closed to within 10 or 12 points.

Claire Hoy says that in the 1989 Newfoundland general election, Liberal Leader Clyde Wells was spooked by an Omnifacts poll that gave

³³ R. Jeremy Wilson, "Media Coverage of Canadian Election Campaigns: Horserace Journalism and the Meta-Campaign," Journal of Canadian Studies 15.4 (1980-81): 56.

³⁴ Carol Goar, personal interviews, February 8 and March 9, 1994.

Conservative Premier Tom Rideout an 11-point lead. It was published just five days before the vote. Wells and his advisors debated on how to respond to the polls. According to Hoy, they decided to make one up. Hoy quotes a Liberal insider as saying: "We wanted to invent a poll just to balance things out just in case too many people believed the published polls."³⁵

The next day, the line story in the St. John's Evening Telegram reported that a new Liberal poll gave the Grits a 3.5 per cent edge over the Tories. The story stated the poll sample was 421 Newfoundlanders and that it had been conducted by research professionals in the Liberal campaign, supported by an unnamed national polling organization. "The whole thing was bullshit," the Liberal insider told Hoy. "The figures were just pulled out of the air. Clyde knew about it."³⁶

Wells, of course, did lead the Liberals to victory in that campaign, although he was defeated in his own seat.

In their study of the 1984 campaign, Frizzell and Westell observed that newspaper reporting of public opinion research, focussed on

³⁵ Claire Hoy, Clyde Wells: A Political Biography (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1992): 148.

³⁶ Hoy 148.

voting intentions only and consistently gave the impression of the election as a horse-race. And the extent of media interest in polls is clearly reflected in the fact that during the 1988 campaign, fully 15 of 22 national polls reported were actually sponsored by the print media.³⁷

Richard Johnston, in his study Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election, with André Blais, Henry E. Brady and Jean Crête, states that opinion polls are an element of the campaign coverage that no agent, either in the parties or the press, really controls.³⁸ Liberal Communications Director Peter Donolo says poll reporting is the most worrying component of campaign coverage precisely for that reason.³⁹

Once polls begin to detect clear horse-race indications, they make news, which then takes on a cumulative pattern, according to Johnston and his colleagues. "Polls thus have the potential to swing a campaign, provided the audience is paying attention."⁴⁰

³⁷ Guy Lachapelle, ed. Polls and the Media in Canadian Elections: Taking the Pulse. Research Studies, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Vol. 16. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991.): 3.

³⁸ Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry E. Brady and Jean Crête, Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1992): 113.

³⁹ Donolo, personal interview.

⁴⁰ Richard Johnston et al 113.

The Johnston study concluded polls do penetrate deeply into the electorate. "In the pre-debates period around 70 per cent of respondents with a vote intention claimed to have read or heard of a poll in the last seven days," the study says of the 1988 campaign. After the debates, the percentage surged to over 80 per cent.⁴¹

The priming impact of horse-race coverage can be significant. A University of Windsor study cited by Gilsdorf and Bernier concluded: "what may now be influencing voting decision is less where the parties stand on substantive matters than whether they are deemed likely to win or lose."⁴²

In their 1988 study, Richard Johnston and his colleagues, concluded voters' expectations of the outcome are potentially important to their own decision. Voters' interest in horse-race coverage is not simply a matter of "political voyeurism"⁴³ as the authors put it. Some voters may actually have a good reason to vote strategically.

⁴¹ Johnston et al 206.

⁴² Wm. Gilsdorf and Robert Bernier, "Journalistic Practice in Covering Federal Election Campaigns in Canada," Reporting the Campaign: Election Coverage in Canada Frederick Fletcher Ed. Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Vol.22. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991):12.

⁴³ Johnston et al 197.

NDP leader Audrey McLaughlin was confronted with this phenomenon in the 1993 federal election. Party soundings suggested traditional NDP supporters were leaning Liberal because of an overriding determination to defeat the Tories. Toronto Star columnist Michelle Landsberg's writings gave voice to this group. McLaughlin's strategy to deal with the problem was unorthodox. With several days left in the campaign, the NDP leader declared the Liberals were headed toward a majority government. The purpose, says Garry Aldridge, who served as the NDP communications director during the campaign, was to send the message to NDP faithful that the Tories were finished and that they could safely return to the fold and not worry about a Conservative re-election.

Johnston defines strategic voting as a decision to vote for one's second choice to increase the odds of defeating one's last choice. But the simpler notion is the creation of a bandwagon. "Voters are presumed to rally to the party in front, which in turn allows that party to increase its lead still further."⁴⁴ The empirical record suggests voters incorporate national, provincial and local information into a "strategic calculus," according to Johnston et al. "For the bandwagon, national information is at least as valuable as local information. Indeed, for a potential bandwagon in Québec it may be the only relevant

⁴⁴ Johnston et al 199.

information.”⁴⁵

Horse-race coverage continued to be a significant factor in the network coverage of the 1993 campaign.

An analysis of network coverage by the Fraser Institute's National Media Archive concluded: “the CBC nearly doubled the proportion of its total attention to the horse-race coverage from 1988.” (The report did not include actual percentage figures for CBC.) “Meanwhile, CTV decreased its total proportion of attention to the horse-race from 15 percent in 1988 to 12 percent in 1993.”⁴⁶

More significantly, by week six of the campaign, both networks had shifted coverage emphasis markedly in favour of leaders' tours, election predictions and campaign strategy profiles. According to the National Media Archive study, two-thirds of CBC coverage and an astonishing four-fifths of the CTV reports focussed on strategy and the horse-race story.⁴⁷

The bandwagon effect of media poll coverage exacted a significant

⁴⁵ Johnston et al 200.

⁴⁶ On Balance, Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. 6.9 (1994): 5

⁴⁷ On Balance, Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. 6.9 (1994): 5.

price from the federal Tories, to the demonstrable benefit of the Liberal party.

Upon release of Reid's October 8 poll showing the dramatic Conservative slide, the very tone and nature of the media coverage of Campbell's campaign shifted. Reporters moved aggressively to the "Campbell collapse" story, having finally accepted the fact that Campbell not only had no chance of winning the election, but was likely to finish no better than fourth in terms of party standings in the House.

Queries about the Tory standings led to such unconventional statements as Campbell's claim on October 15 that her party was solidly in second place. In fact, the party was second in some regions, third in most, and first in none.

So serious were concerns at Conservative party headquarters about the negative "momentum" stories in the press, unleashed by the October 8 Reid poll, that strategists decided it was necessary to mount a dramatic gesture designed to generate stories suggesting the Tories had reversed the slide. Campaign Chair John Tory says the Chrétien "attack" ad was supposed to be that dramatic gesture. Its impact was immediate, and all negative. By the time Canadians voted on October 25, Tory fortunes had slipped from the 22 per cent level recorded in

the October 8 Reid poll, to just over 16 per cent. The Reform and Bloc Québécois had, by then, syphoned off just about all the Conservative support they were to attract. Almost all of the Tory erosion in the last 10 days went to the Liberals, ensuring the election of a comfortable, national Liberal majority.

The media began listening for the death rattle. Sean Durkan's October 11 column in the Ottawa Sun ran under a headline that read "Tories Titanic Campaign." And in the October 14 edition of the Financial Post, columnist Allan Fotheringham intoned: "There are certain moments in every election campaign when you know everything is over, all the wheels have fallen off the wagon, when everything that goes wrong can only get worse." Citing Campbell's economic lecture to an eyes-glazed group of high school students at M.E. LaZerte High School in Edmonton, Fotheringham describes the scene as follows: "Reading -- instead of talking -- she tells them everything they don't want to know about multinational trade negotiations and GATT and the IMF." Fotheringham reports the scribes have taken to calling Campbell's campaign "The Death Watch."⁴⁸

On tour, reporters' queries tended to be driven by the Conservative

⁴⁸ Allan Fotheringham, "Tory Campaign Becomes a Death Watch," Ottawa Sun October 14, 1993: 12.

Party's standing in the polls. The ensuing coverage may have resulted in the bandwagon effect analyzed by Iyengar and Kinder as well as Richard Johnston and his colleagues. Columnists such as the Financial Post's Diane Francis began to advise conservative readers to come to some assessment as to whether the Reform Party standard bearer or the Conservative Party candidate had the best chance of defeating the Liberal in their particular constituency and vote accordingly.

Campbell, irritated by the media's fixation with her fading electoral prospects, began to make media coverage the substance of her public comments.

She was increasingly vocal about her belief that her campaign was getting an unfairly rough ride from the media. Star columnist Carol Goar believes Campbell was at least partly to blame. In her October 12 column, Goar noted: "Chrétien's favourite topic - job creation - produces colourful speeches and enthusiastic crowds. This is reflected in the news coverage." In contrast, "Campbell has always presented herself as a fresh, intelligent, open-minded politician for the '90s. So journalists measure her by that standard. When she is chippy, or evasive, or doctrinaire, they point out that her behaviour does not match her self-image." Goar said Campbell's aides were slower to sense trouble than Chrétien's team and less effective at squelching it. "A slip of the prime minister's tongue can reverberate

in the headlines for several days," Goar said; and when the Tories did come up with some damage control, it looked slapped together. Goar concluded: "An election campaign isn't an academic exercise. It is a 47-day power struggle that takes place against a backdrop of polls and emotions and deadline pressures."⁴⁹

Former Trudeau press secretary Patrick Gossage says Campbell's media coverage reflected a basic misunderstanding of what an election campaign is. "A campaign is war, it is a battle for the hearts and minds," says Gossage. "The rules of engagement are different than they are at other times. It is an all out attempt to influence public opinion and you, as leader, are the vehicle."⁵⁰

The president of Media Profile, a highly successful Toronto-based public affairs company, Gossage says Campbell did not seem to appreciate the fact that everything a party leader does in an election campaign has a heightened importance. Gossage also believes the Campbell campaign demonstrated a decided lack of discipline, with an obvious communication breakdown between campaign headquarters and the campaign plane. "She was constantly being ambushed by things that shouldn't have happened," Gossage says. "It looked to me

⁴⁹ Carol Goar. "Liberal Tour Hums As Tories Lurch Along Campaign Trail." Toronto Star October 12, 1993: A23.

⁵⁰ Patrick Gossage, personal interview, March 18, 1994.

as if no one had bothered to think through what she wanted to do and then translate that into a suitable television frame.”⁵¹

Writers such as Andrew Cohen in the Financial Post and Joan Bryden at Southam News filed analysis pieces comparing Campbell's 1993 tour to John Turner's 1984 and 1988 efforts. Michel C. Auger had evoked the parallel several months earlier.

As each day's coverage reflected the “loser” frame as the dominant news frame, Campbell's exasperation with media characterizations of her public utterances grew. Instead of exploiting media opportunities to articulate policy, Campbell increasingly used media interviews to air her grievances.

In an interview with Winnipeg Free Press reporter John Douglas aboard her campaign plane, a frustrated Campbell said, “It's like nobody gets the message because I am so different. Expanding on her point, Campbell told Douglas: “I feel that what I am offering is a very new approach and it's hard for me to get that across . . . When I stand up and harangue Jean Chrétien everybody understands that: ‘Rah, Rah, great stuff. Kim puts the boots to Jean Chrétien.’ But the real soundness of my vision, where the hope is, is where the difference is.” And in a statement that is vintage Campbell, the prime minister

⁵¹ Gossage, personal interview.

explained how she was trying to convince Canadians that she is different from her predecessor: "It is hard to get that message across because I am so different that people don't understand it."⁵²

As the travelling press corps became convinced the Campbell story was evolving from the story of defeat to a story of disaster, hypothetical questions about coalition governments or support for minority positions increasingly provided the news hook of the day.

The Conservative Party leader found herself in the awkward position of having to confirm the fact her party was running second; a fading second at that.

During an appearance on CBC Radio's As It Happens, Campbell was asked by host Michael Enright if it hadn't been a mistake to admit in public that her campaign was running a bad second. "How could I possibly say anything else?" Campbell retorted. "Don't you think people are tired of posturing? Well, they are not going to get it from me," the prime minister continued. "We are in second place. We know that. But it is there for us to win . . . But I'm not going to spread a bunch of 'meadow muffins' around the country in order to do that.

⁵² John Douglas, "Campbell: A Very Different Approach," Winnipeg Free Press October 12, 1993: A1.

That is just old style.”⁵³

The prime minister then defended herself against media charges her campaign was plagued by gaffes. “The only reason they are gaffes is because somebody in the media thinks you shouldn’t tell the truth to people.”⁵⁴ Campbell believed the Canadian people appreciated her candour, even if the media did not. “The reason why I do keep telling the truth is because I think the people are way ahead [of the pundits].” The prime minister did concede, however, that the media are influential in a campaign. “You do spin things.”⁵⁵

Campbell sounded the same theme later in the day in an interview with CTV anchor Lloyd Robertson. “I don’t know why people seem to think it’s such a problem to tell the truth,” the former prime minister said. “I mean, I am so tired of people posturing.” The Conservative leader repeated her commitment to do politics differently, but “in order to communicate that vision, I’ve had to go to more traditional venues. What media was comfortable with is if I’m giving a speech in front of an audience and they can just sort of take the clip out and that

⁵³ David Vienneau, “Voters Want Truth, Campbell Insists,” Toronto Star October 15, 1993: A14.

⁵⁴ David Vienneau, October 15, 1993.

⁵⁵ David Vienneau, October 15, 1993.

gets the message out.”⁵⁶

Campbell's campaign tour headed into Quebec on October 14. But at campaign headquarters, strategists were awaiting the creative results of a decision taken some days before. The campaign leadership had concluded the prime minister's new style of politics hadn't connected with the electorate, for a number of reasons. The campaign had lost momentum. Their own public opinion soundings confirmed that Canadians had quit paying any attention to Campbell. It was time for a dramatic intervention.

The Weekend From Hell

Conservative strategists were increasingly troubled by the tone of the media coverage as the campaign headed into its final phase. As stated above, the media were beginning to fixate on “horse-race” style coverage. Party pollster Allan Gregg informed Campaign Chair John Tory that the Conservatives had to do something to shatter the perception that Tory support was in a free fall. Gregg told Tory the campaign had to generate news stories reporting that the Conservatives were closing the gap. The decision was made to unleash an “attack” ad. After all hard-hitting ads attacking former Liberal

⁵⁶ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive, Transcripts, CTV News, October 14, 1993.

leader John Turner's credibility were deemed to have been an effective weapon in the 1988 "bomb the bridge" counter-attack fashioned by Gregg following the televised leaders' debate.

Negative advertising was a defining feature of American politics in the late 1980s. And Clinton guru James Carville confesses the 1992 Democratic presidential campaign had more negative ads than supporters of the man from Hope would care to admit. Few admit to liking negative advertising, although many advertising professionals believe they work because of our predisposition to retain negative information. Even Liberal party Ad Campaign Director Kevin Shea admits the Liberals had produced a flight of negative ads for the 1993 campaign, just in case.⁵⁷

The task of executing the Chrétien attack ads fell to veteran creative director Tom Scott. Gregg, Tory and Scott settled on a format of two 30-second spots. The scripts, based on "streeters" would question Chrétien's competence. The final product was focus group tested. Tory was told the new spots tested about the same as any negative ad ever tested.

The first airing occurred during a Blue Jays baseball game on the

⁵⁷ "Forum on Politics and the Media," Media CBC Newsworld/Queen's University 1993-94 Forum. Tapes.

CTV network Thursday evening October 14. The ads featured still photos of Chrétien; none was flattering, and at least one seemed to exploit Chrétien's physical disability, a construct first articulated by former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis as a CBC Prime Time News panelist. The sound track included unidentified voices claiming they would be "embarrassed" to have Chrétien as prime minister.

The ad provoked a visceral reaction from many Canadians. John Tory confirms that the first calls to party headquarters were mostly from irate Conservatives.⁵⁸ The reaction at PCHQ, however, was somewhat muted. Strategists knew attack ads are never popular with the public or the party rank and file for that matter. What the strategists wanted to know was whether or not the ad was working.

The February 1994 issue of Saturday Night magazine features a smiling Chrétien on the cover and a headline that reads: "The Face That Sank a Thousand Tories." The article by Kenneth Whyte concludes: "Inasmuch as they [the ads] were intended to catch the public's eye and get the Tories moving in the polls, the ads were a smash. By Monday, Canada's founding party was hurtling headlong and in flames from nine years of government to depths where it was

⁵⁸ John Tory, personal interview, February 23, 1994.

possible to lose all but two Commons seats and regard oblivion.”⁵⁹ The storm, however, did not break immediately. Tory says he returned to his Ottawa hotel room thinking the hostile reaction to that point was no more than expected.

An October 14 Tory campaign memorandum sets out “talking points” for spokespersons to deflect criticism of the Chrétien attack ad. The suggested media lines were:

- “- our ads focus on the very questions we have been asking Mr. Chrétien for the last three weeks;
- “- we are simply raising questions about leadership -- questions that Canadians themselves are asking;
- “- the photographs are not the issue -- they are no different than the cover of the most recent Maclean's magazine and were taken in one day last week. Our new radio ads ask the same questions in the same manner.”

A second-line defense was set out to be “responsive only” -- to be used to respond to supplementary questions. Specifically, the media lines were:

- “- These ads have nothing whatsoever to do with Mr. Chrétien's looks. They have everything to do with his leadership abilities.
- “- The voice-overs in the ads are real Canadians expressing real

⁵⁹ Kenneth Whyte. “The Face That Sank a Thousand Tories” Saturday Night February 1994: 16.

concerns they have with Mr. Chrétien's leadership potential. They are not actors!"⁶⁰

At the Friday morning strategy meeting, Nancy Jamieson insisted the ad should be pulled immediately and recommended Campbell apologize to Chrétien. But Allan Gregg's view that the campaign should simply tough it out prevailed. Those Conservatives who had called headquarters to voice their concerns/criticisms about the Chrétien ad were dismissed by one senior advisor as "chocolate soldiers" -- folks who melt whenever the heat gets turned up. Campaign Chair John Tory was designated chief defender of the ad and agreed to a series of media interviews that morning in which he insisted the ad did not seek to exploit a physical deformity but merely raised valid questions about Chrétien's competence.

Campbell, campaigning in the Quebec City region, had not seen the ads at this point, nor had her Chief of Staff Jodi White, a fact White says is simply "outrageous."⁶¹ Pressed by reporters for a comment, Campbell first had to confess she hadn't actually seen the ad. As Deputy Press Secretary Tom Van Dusen Jr. explained to reporters: "Why should she? She's got professionals who do that. Besides, she

⁶⁰ PC campaign memorandum, October 14, 1993.

⁶¹ White, personal interview.

hasn't got time to sit around watching television."⁶² Later, she announced she had asked her staff to have the ad removed. According to reporters on the Campbell tour, only when pressed did the prime minister actually extend an apology to Chrétien.

Meanwhile, Conservative candidates such as former CFTO broadcaster Isabel Bassett and Etobicoke-Lakeshore MP Patrick Boyer were denouncing the 30-second spot. Whyte, in his Saturday Night article, says television coverage of the attack ad on CTV and CBC characterized the ad as the last desperate dirty act of a dying campaign. "Given that the great majority of voters never saw the ads, the television coverage was crucial," Whyte states.⁶³ The lead on CBC Prime Time News illustrates Whyte's point. Anchor Pamela Wallin introduced the item as follows: "The Conservative Party is dealing with a fiasco tonight. Its new television ads about Jean Chrétien have provoked a huge wave of scathing criticism. Even some Conservatives are calling the ad insensitive, distasteful, offensive and a disgrace."⁶⁴

As he had throughout the campaign, Chrétien was quick to turn the ill-conceived personal attack to his partisan advantage. Speaking to a

⁶² Jim Coyle, "So Many Mouths, So Many Feet," Ottawa Citizen October 17, 1993: B1.

⁶³ Whyte, 16.

⁶⁴ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive, Transcripts, CBC Prime Time News, October 15, 1993.

gathering of the Liberal party faithful in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Chrétien said: "God gave me a physical defect. I've accepted that since I was a kid." Chrétien told the audience people laughed at him when he was young because of his deformity. "But I accepted that because God gave me other qualities and I'm grateful."⁶⁵ Chrétien's response, on reflection, does appear a touch contrived. But it clearly resonated with Canadians. Peter Donolo says Chrétien had not seen the ad himself the night before. But the Liberal leader's comment defined the issue. "More people remember what he said than remember what was in the commercial," Donolo said in an interview.⁶⁶ The Chrétien attack ad allowed the Liberals to launch a sustained counter-attack, denouncing Campbell for embracing the old-style, negative politics, while invoking the memory of Brian Mulroney. The ads were pulled from the Tory buy late Friday afternoon, to the anger and dismay of Allan Gregg, who insisted the attack ads were having the desired effect. Gregg claimed the Thursday night rolling poll in 25 bellweather ridings recorded a sudden surge in Tory strength. His assertion left other strategists shaking their heads in disbelief.

Even after the debacle of October 25, Gregg remains convinced the Tories should have run the Chrétien attack ads for the duration of the

⁶⁵ Edward Greenspon, Ross Howard and Susan Delacourt, "Tories Try To Recover From Goof," Globe and Mail October 16, 1993: A6.

⁶⁶ Peter Donolo, personal interview.

campaign. "Ask yourself, do you think the result would have been worse if they would have run on air to the end of the campaign? Of course the answer is no, because the results couldn't have been worse."⁶⁷

Gossage says Liberal strategists understood Chrétien's manner of speech might emerge as an issue in a general election campaign.

A year or so before the writ was issued, a small group of senior advisors tabled the issue for discussion. The group included Chrétien confidante Eddie Goldenberg and former Pearson and Trudeau advisor Dick O'Hagan, a sage and widely-respected strategist. The group considered whether Chrétien's impediment should be described for what it was -- a physical disability resulting from childhood illness. The purpose was to establish Chrétien's unusual facial expressions as something beyond his control, a deformity, albeit a relatively minor one. The final decision was left to Goldenberg who gave the order to proceed. The strategy was a success, the issue was laid to rest in political junkie circles and with key media opinion leaders. There were a few discreet references to the childhood illness in media coverage. Apparently, the quiet initiative went undetected by Conservative party strategists who, Gossage says, had long held the

⁶⁷ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

view that Chrétien's image would be his final undoing.⁶⁸ Consequently, when the Conservative ad appeared to be trying to exploit Chrétien's physical handicap for partisan purposes, media commentary was swift and critical.

Campbell headed to Montreal where she set the wheels in motion for a second controversy. In the course of an interview with writers at the Montreal daily La Presse, the prime minister appeared to be criticizing Brian Mulroney, former finance minister Don Mazankowski, and leadership rival Jean Charest. Campbell told La Presse the Conservatives had governed for eight years in a manner that sapped the credibility of the political process. She seemed to minimize Mulroney's contribution to the 1984 and 1988 federal campaigns, hinted Jean Charest's policies during the leadership were less than adequate and rejected Mazankowski's approach to deficit reduction. Campbell's comments, as reported, so incensed Transport Minister Jean Corbeil that he drafted, and then released, a letter to Campbell demanding that she apologize for "insulting Quebeckers" in addition to her cabinet colleagues. CBC's Denise Harrington led her news report that night with the words: "Another day, another crisis, and another apology from Kim Campbell."⁶⁹ Corbeil then added to

⁶⁸ Gossage, personal interview.

⁶⁹ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. The National, Denise Harrington report, October 16, 1993.

Campbell's joy by boycotting a party brunch the next day. Her Quebec campaign director, Senator Pierre-Claude Nolin, then made news with his candid admission that the Tories were going nowhere in Quebec and were certain to lose the election.

The La Presse incident, says Jodi White, was "goofy." Campbell "didn't understand what she had done," White said.⁷⁰ Once again, the prime minister made damage control more difficult because she did not recognize, understand, or appreciate the fact she had said something that detracted from her main message.

White described the attack ad/Corbett letter/Senator Nolin's subsequent interview sequence as "the lost weekend from hell."⁷¹ The impact on the Campbell campaign was "devastating," according to La Presse correspondent Chantal Hébert. "Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong," Hébert told CBC's Wendy Mesley on Sunday Report (October 17). "Part of the reason I suspect is that the campaign go off on the wrong foot. They basically didn't do their homework and almost ad libbed this campaign from Day One."⁷²

⁷⁰ White, personal interview.

⁷¹ White, personal interview.

⁷² Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Sunday Report, Panel, October 17, 1993.

David Vienneau's lead in the October 17 editions of the Sunday Star read: "With eight days left in the federal election campaign, the Progressive Conservative Party is self-destructing."⁷³ Southam columnist Christopher Young posed the question: "What has brought this brilliant and promising leader . . . to a state where she babbles nonsense to keep her spirits up. Gone with the wind; like Ophelia, stressed out by too much pressure, too many disappointments, too wide a gap between inflated hopes and stark realities."⁷⁴ Young stated Campbell struck the right note with her politics of inclusion references at the beginning of the campaign, but then seemed to forget all about it.

Syndicated columnist Allan Fotheringham said the problem with the Campbell campaign was that "the ego dominates . . . The truth is that the prime minister is a lousy campaigner . . . Seeming perky in hand-shaking sessions, she doesn't know how to rouse a crowd, how to build to a punch line, how to tell a joke, how to ridicule. This is a university lecturer and you're supposed to pay attention. Or else."⁷⁵

⁷³ David Vienneau, "PM Takes Responsibility For Tory Campaign Dive." Sunday Star October 17, 1993: A10.

⁷⁴ Christopher Young, "Kim Campbell Has Forgotten the Right Notes." Ottawa Citizen October 17, 1993: B2.

⁷⁵ Allan Fotheringham, "Personality With a Capital I." Ottawa Sun October 17, 1993. Comment: 2.

CBC essayist Rex Murphy summarized his thoughts on the Campbell campaign with the phrase: "From Madonna to Pia Zadora in six cruel weeks . . . The only difference between the Campbell campaign and the retreat from Moscow was that Napoleon wasn't required on the way back to drop in to MuchMusic and campaign with Ziggy." Murphy continued. "Before the anti-Chrétien ads, the much-heralded new politics consisted of extending the known boundaries of ineptitude."⁷⁶

Toronto Star columnist Richard Gwyn compared the prime minister to a summer star, plunging like a meteor to earth. "A monumentally incompetent campaign that tried to sell Campbell to Canadians as a celebrity personality, unsupported by any coherent program. An almost complete breakdown in communications between the campaign strategy team in Ottawa and Campbell on the road."⁷⁷

What is significant about these political obituaries is twofold: they reflect a consensus of media opinion, and they all appeared well before Canadians actually cast their ballots, in some cases, as much as two full weeks before. Thanksgiving weekend should have been a peak period for the Campbell campaign. Instead, weekend coverage featured the first cuts in a political autopsy.

⁷⁶ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CBC Prime Time News. Rex Murphy Essay, October 21, 1993.

⁷⁷ Richard Gwyn, "Star of the Summer Plunges Like a Meteor to Earth," Sunday Star October 24, 1993: B3.

Through the last week of the campaign, Campbell's media coverage was characterized by a sense of the inevitable. Searching for new angles, the media queries were about hypothetical scenarios involving unity coalitions with the Liberals or an anti-Liberal merger with Reform. The campaign was continually sideswiped. At a rally in Guelph, Ontario, on October 19, candidate Bill Scott was warming up the crowd. Taking a page out of Campbell's book of candour, Scott told the crowd that barring some miracle, the Tories weren't going to win on October 25. Campbell, oblivious to Scott's remarks, arrived a few minutes later urging people to elect a first Kim Campbell government.

And Campbell's cabinet colleague, Garth Turner, presumably thought he was being constructive when he advised Quebeckers to vote for the candidate who had the best chance to defeat the Bloc Québécois, even if that candidate happened to be a Liberal.

The October 22 CTV/Reid poll of 3,300 respondents pointed to a solid Liberal majority. Chrétien's forces were the pick of 43 per cent of decided voters; the Tories and Reform were tied at 17 percent, the BQ was at 14 per cent nationally, but a whopping 52 per cent in Quebec. The NDP was down to 7 percent. In his introduction, CTV anchor Lloyd Robertson stated: "For Kim Campbell, this campaign has

been a nightmare of fumbles and bad plays, mistakes that may yet be enough to push Reform into second spot. That's the scenario the Tories are trying to circumvent, as the strategists begin to entertain the spectre of defeat -- stunning defeat."⁷⁸ Working with the Reid poll, reporters began to speculate that the Tories could be reduced to fewer than 30 seats. Privately, Conservative campaign strategists placed the number at somewhere between zero and 12.

Star columnist Carol Goar's analysis on the final day before the vote noted: "Kim Campbell climbed aboard the fabled Tory election machine with a wave and a smile. She should have brought a mop and a repair kit."⁷⁹

In a bid to generate some sense of momentum for her campaign, Campbell devoted her last campaign foray to an airborne "whistle stop" tour that touched down in four cities; her home town of Vancouver was the final stop.

Election night was an unmitigated disaster. As the results rolled in from the east, cabinet minister after cabinet minister went down to ignominious defeat. Appearing on national television that night,

⁷⁸ Fraser Institute, National Media Archive. Transcripts. CTV News. Lloyd Robertson. October 21, 1993.

⁷⁹ Carol Goar. "Tory Machines Crashes," Sunday Star October 24, 1993: A10.

pollster Allan Gregg said: "This was the failure of an entire organization, can't say it was one person." Campbell's quip: "Gee, I'm glad I didn't sell my car"⁸⁰ was bittersweet for her supporters. The self-deprecating humour was one of her more attractive features. Her predisposition to use the first person singular was not.

Southam News correspondent Julian Beltrame, in a post mortem piece carried in the October 26 editions of the Ottawa Citizen, acknowledged Campbell had been a media rising star. "With the star billing came scrutiny however and the more the media probed, the less flattering became the picture." Beltrame said Campbell's leadership run presaged her ill-fated federal election campaign. "She proved to be an inept campaigner, a weak debater and error prone," Beltrame said. Following the leadership, Canadians were less prepared to give the self-described wood nymph the benefit of the doubt. "So when she suggested that an election was not the time to debate serious issues such as social programs, the public mood swung against her."⁸¹

Beltrame's conclusion is consistent with the argument the failure of the Campbell campaign to effect the dominant media frame on

⁸⁰ CBC News, Election Special, October 25, 1994. Transcript.

⁸¹ Julian Beltrame, "A Cautionary Tale of Ambition: The Rise and Fall of Kim Campbell," Ottawa Citizen October 26, 1993: B3.

campaign coverage triggered a series of events that culminated in the debacle of October 25.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the immediate aftermath of the October 25 vote, Conservative Party supporters were just this side of catatonic. The party did garner more than two million votes, yet the entire Commons caucus could be accommodated at a table for two in the parliamentary dining room.

Campaign Chair John Tory, interviewed for a Global Television special "A Shock to the System," said the result reduced him to tears.

Ontario Campaign Co-Chair Paul Curley, reflecting the fact that electoral politics can be a blood sport when it comes to personal reputations, said: "If we had won, everybody would have said we were heroes; we lost, so we're bums."¹

University of Toronto historian Michael Bliss, interviewed for the same Global program, described the electoral wreckage as "one of the most amazing smash-ups in the history of democratic politics." According to Bliss, "The potential of the Conservatives for reviving

¹ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

nationally is near zero.”²

The reasons for the crushing defeat were numerous and varied. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a constituency that believes the result was pre-ordained.

Globe and Mail columnist Jeffrey Simpson argued on October 23, for example that the real reason for the defeat was the fact that the Mulroney government had failed the twin test Mulroney himself had set -- the twin test of solving the problem of Quebec nationalism while reducing the burgeoning federal debt. That failure, says Simpson, resulted in a radicalization of options, a radicalization which found voice with the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party.

Others suggest the blame should be laid exclusively at Mulroney's door; his personal unpopularity so embittered voters that they couldn't wait to vent their electoral spleen on the Conservatives. Author and columnist Peter C. Newman, currently working on a book on the Mulroney era, told Global host Peter Kent: "Brian Mulroney really is the Count Dracula of Canadian politics. You know, they had to drive a stake through his heart to make sure he was dead -- the feeling was

² "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

that strong.”³

Former Conservative party president Dalton Camp, writing in the October 27 edition of the Toronto Star, stated the reasons for the collapse were at once broader and more basic. “The cause for the debacle cannot be traced to the Tory leadership convention, nor blamed on the campaign, as bad as it was,” Camp wrote. “What was obvious on election night was that the party’s core vote had withered to the point where it no longer could claim a constituency anywhere.”⁴

Campbell herself, currently a fellow at the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, is said by confidantes to be working on a book which will set out her perspectives on the events of last fall. In her public statements since the campaign, Campbell appeared to embrace the argument that she simply could not carry the accumulative burden of the last nine years.

The former prime minister’s advisors believe Campbell did not have enough time to establish herself as a different style of politician in the eyes of the electorate. Campbell’s former chief of staff, Jodi White, says Mulroney had left his departure too late. “Two months just

³ “A Shock to the System,” Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

⁴ Dalton Camp, “Tories Wandered Off Their Familiar Turf,” Toronto Star October 27, 1993: A25

isn't long enough," White said. "It was a horrendous scramble."⁵ Michael Ferrabee agrees, likening the looming election date to an oncoming train. "The reality was, calling an election today, or tomorrow, or next week were almost the only options she had," Ferrabee said. "It might have been different had the previous leader stepped down in year three."⁶

There is no minimizing the impact of policy initiatives implemented during the Mulroney years such as free trade, the GST and the constitutional proposals on the psyche of Canadians. Perceived abuses of power, fed by charges of patronage and cronyism, further angered the voters.

The electorate, especially after the Charlottetown referendum campaign, had decided it would have a change in the style and substance of its national government. What was left to be decided in the 1993 campaign was which party and which leader would best give expression to that declared desire for change.

As established in Chapter Three, veteran parliamentary correspondents believe Campbell had a real opportunity to become

⁵ Jodi White, personal interview, February 16, 1994.

⁶ Michael Ferrabee, personal interview, January 28, 1994.

that agent for change. "She represented more change to the Ottawa press corps than Jean Chrétien did," said Southam News General Manager Aileen McCabe. The fact Campbell was a markedly different political personality than her predecessor, the fact she is a woman, and the fact the top echelon of the federal cabinet had changed all underscored the preparedness of the electorate to at least take another look at the Tories, McCabe said. "We wrote about it several times, that it looked as if the Tories were going to pull it off," she said.⁷

McCabe's observations were echoed by many of the journalists and strategists interviewed for this paper. Indeed, the lead in the October 27 Globe and Mail story by Edward Greenspon and Jeff Sallot reads: "Until she made her disastrous statement about campaigns not being the place to discuss serious policies, Kim Campbell was in contention to be prime minister."⁸

If these veteran reporters' analyses are sound, their observations beg the questions: why didn't Campbell pull it off? What went wrong with the fabled Conservative campaign team? What was wrong with Campbell's strategy in general, and her media strategy in particular?

⁷ Aileen McCabe, personal interview, March 11, 1994.

⁸ Edward Greenspon and Jeff Sallot, "How Campbell Self-Destructed," Globe and Mail October 27, 1993: A1, A8.

And how much did that failure have to do with the devastating election defeat?

Political scientists have long agreed that general elections are now largely media events. Despite the fact very few people ever have direct contact with a party leader or even a campaign event, opinionation occurs among electors because of messages received via the media.

Those media messages can be “earned” (a description applied to coverage generated by the campaign itself) or “paid” (commercial messages purchased by the political parties according to limits set under the Canada Elections Act and allocated and enforced by the Broadcast Arbitrator).

As discussed in Chapter One, the influence of media coverage on voter intentions has been the subject of scholarly study for more than 50 years. The dominant paradigm through the early decades was the self-selective school of Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates, who articulated the two-step flow of communications theory. Having considered carefully the problem of variables in voter decision-making, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues considered media coverage to be, in effect, an exercise in opinion reinforcement, and they concluded the media did not have the manipulative power that had been supposed.

Lazarsfeld's theories gave rise to a conventional wisdom about political campaigns that could be summarized by a lyric from Paul Simon's song The Boxer: "a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." As noted in Chapter 2, campaign strategists came to see the early weeks of any national campaign as the equivalent of the 1939-40 Phony War with low voter interest. The electoral battle was not deemed to be well and truly joined until the paid advertising campaign kicked in and the nationally-televised leaders' debates had occurred. Strategists for Kim Campbell in 1993, on the basis of the campaign they conducted, would seem to have been predisposed to that campaign convention.

However, as discussed in Chapter One, a third school of thought emerged in the late 1970s and through the 1980s between the selective attention school developed by Lazarsfeld and the earlier magic bullet theory. This third school held that items receiving prominent news attention tend to be the issues people think are important. Sociologist Todd Gitlin wrote of a "frame" clamped over an event by news coverage, and offered the thought that story lines which fit the frame are most likely to be selected by the media.

A series of election studies reached conclusions that, while independent of each other, collectively point to an evolution of

thought consistent with the third school's argument that news matters not because it tells people what to think, but more precisely because it tells people what to think about. By way of illustration, in a series of studies⁹, Harold Clarke and his colleagues concluded our brokerage party system produces a highly volatile issue agenda and highly changeable party leader images. Because of a higher tendency to "flexible partisanship" in Canada compared to other industrialized democracies, there are more "loose" votes in Canadian elections and, as a consequence, some voters are more susceptible to media messages than others. Because Canada's political parties are organized as power brokers around leaders, election campaigns can come down to the measure of a party leader and the perception of how that leader will deal with salient issues.

If Campbell's senior strategists considered these theories in planning their campaign, it was not apparent to either the reporters who covered the tour or campaign workers who worked on media relations.

In a dominant episodic frame, with a treatment responsibility construct, Campbell found herself in the position of being measured by electors against their assessment of what she, as head of government,

⁹ Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon Pammett, Absent Mandate: Interpreting Change in Canadian Elections (Toronto: Gage Education Publishing Co., 1991) 37.

was prepared to do directly to alleviate the issue voters had come to see as most salient -- unemployment.

Because of the "gaffe" frame of Campbell's coverage, the "pictures in people's heads" that Lippmann identified as important in terms of voter intentions were of an inexperienced, seemingly insensitive party leader offering little or no hope to the electorate.

The Campbell campaign did not have a detailed "earned" media strategy that reflected the desirability of using the media to reach a wider audience or that was considerate of the structures and routines of newsgathering, particularly during a writ period. As a consequence, Tory strategists were unable to affect the coverage frame.

As she prepared to launch her bid for the Conservative Party leadership, Campbell and her advisors had carefully crafted a compelling image. A woman of accomplishment, fluently bilingual, from Western Canada, with equal fondness for Phil Spector and Gilbert and Sullivan, a policy wonk and baby boomer, Campbell seemed to be the personification of "new and improved"; she seemed almost as exciting a departure from her predecessor as Pierre Trudeau, circa 1968, was from his. That image, however, acquired a certain tarnish during the leadership campaign itself.

The first televised candidates' debate during the leadership contest revealed Campbell's grasp of the issues to be something less than encyclopedic. The second, in Montreal, suggested the individual who had first described Campbell as fluently bilingual might have overstated the case a touch. And Campbell's characterization of herself as a victim of chauvinism because she wasn't offered a tenure-track position at a west coast university became suspect when it was revealed that Campbell had not actually completed her post-graduate studies in political science. The summer barbecue tour was designed to refurbish the image, while building on Campbell's positive leadership attributes.

As stated earlier in this chapter, Campbell began the general election campaign in a competitive position in terms of party preference, according to published polls at the time. And she enjoyed a marked advantage over Jean Chrétien on leadership attributes -- particularly on the direct question of which party leader, in the opinion of respondents, would make the best prime minister.

However, her leader's tour, as pseudo-event, failed to sustain these positive leadership images. The early tour, with its town hall format, was better suited to a thematic rather than an episodic television frame. The thematic frame worked to a certain extent during the summer; but, because of the structures and routines of newsgathering

outlined in Chapter Two that apply during an election campaign, the thematic frame could not possibly be sustained through a writ period. The town hall format, at least initially, generated the right visual images. But for the national media at least, the format had a limited shelf-life. The disinclination of the Campbell campaign to meet minimum media requirements by providing the proverbial "daily Gainsburger" (a term former NDP advisor Peter O'Malley claims to have co-authored with Ottawa Citizen editor Jim Travers in the 1979 federal election¹⁰) compounded the framing problem. Finally, strategists declined to explain to reporters in any meaningful way what Campbell's new politics, the politics of inclusion, actually meant; they thereby failed Boorstin's test of the public's burning desire to know how the rabbit disappeared.

Strategist Nancy Jamieson says when U.S. Democratic Party political consultant Phil Noble was asked to comment on news clips of Campbell's first forays on the campaign trail, Noble gave the tour 10 out of 10 on visuals, and 0 out of 10 on content.¹¹

As Iyengar and Kinder observe, however, a media frame is not a constant, life-long proposition. It is subject to change, which is why

¹⁰ Peter O'Malley, personal interview, March 15, 1994.

¹¹ Nancy Jamieson, personal interview, January 24, 1994.

the leader's tour is the front line of an election campaign, the place where the joust between the media and political managers to control the frame occurs.

Campbell came through the summer tour with a positive media frame. Her September 2 announcement on the helicopter purchase signalled a new round of media scrutiny. And her misstatements of the early days, as defined by the media, began the process of reconstructing the dominant frame.

During the first two weeks of the campaign, the travelling press corps settled on a dominant frame for the campaign and that frame was "gaffe." The episodic "gaffe" frame with the treatment responsibility construct on the salient issue, the jobless, proved problematic for the Campbell campaign.

As set out in detail in Chapter Four, the "gaffe" frame set by the media was particularly troublesome for the Tories who were trying to play the leadership card. And in attempting to construct their own media frame around deficit reduction as the means to an end -- the end being the future economic viability of the country -- the Conservative strategists added to their campaign woes. The "deficit-reduction-as-means-to-an-end" frame was more difficult to establish, given the dominant episodic framing of television news. And opinion

research also suggested deficit reduction was significantly less salient as an issue for the public than employment.

Liberal Leader Jean Chrétien, in sharp contrast, came into the campaign with a decidedly less positive image than Campbell. In his early days as Liberal Party leader, Chrétien showed the effects of his "séjour" in the private sector. Despite his extensive cabinet experience, Chrétien mishandled the Meech Lake file and his party's position on the Gulf War. He seemed tentative in his public appearances; his health was the subject of media speculation; he was dismissed by his political opponents, and even certain Liberals, as yesterday's man. Chrétien's handlers began to address this image problem in the pre-writ period with a few pseudo-events of their own. A colour photograph of an athletic-looking Chrétien water-skiing found its way onto the cover of Maclean's. And a campaign photo of a relaxed Chrétien in a denim shirt from the Gap store had the twin effect of taking 10 years off Chrétien's image while making him appear hip, in tune with new fashion trends.

Aware of Chrétien's limited appeal in Quebec and the widespread unease in the rest of the country as to his leadership abilities, Liberal strategists decided to develop a campaign strategy that would emphasize the strength of the Liberal team and the soundness of its policy platform.

The Liberal Red Book was an integral component of the Chrétien media strategy and contributed immeasurably to the media frame around Chrétien. The Red Book allowed the Liberal leader to deflect detailed policy questions -- never his political long suit. According to several senior press gallery reporters who covered Chrétien on tour, the success of the Red Book launch and its acceptance by the public, boosted Chrétien's confidence perceptibly.

Chrétien's media strategy was also geared to respond to television's episodic treatment of campaign coverage. Borrowing heavily from techniques used to great effect by the Clinton campaign, Chrétien's handlers ensured that he, and they, were accessible and responsive on a "same news cycle basis" in the early weeks in the campaign. The Liberal Quick Response Team ensured the party's position on any campaign development was made available to reporters before they filed their stories.

The Liberal campaign succeeded in creating a positive frame for Chrétien's coverage; his dominant frame was "hope." The Red Book provided his response to the treatment responsibility construct. And the picture in electors' heads was a picture of a confident party leader with a detailed plan to create jobs directly.

Campbell, by contrast, seemed to be campaigning without a policy platform. Hers was a campaign of style over substance, a campaign that stressed leadership but seemed error-prone. Even on the issue Campbell had set out to make her own -- deficit reduction -- the Tory leader seemed unable to adequately explain her own deficit reduction plan in any detail. Television news pays little attention to policy, unless reporters conclude the candidate doesn't have any. Having reached that conclusion, reporters then report it as a fact incessantly. The Conservative Party's failure to produce a comprehensive policy platform played right into reporters' hands.

Through the first three weeks of the campaign, before the paid ads kicked in, before the leaders' debates were held, Campbell and her advisors flunked Graham Fraser's campaign correlative badly. Her seeming unwillingness in St. Bruno to discuss issues many electors considered the life-blood of the nation -- health care, post-secondary education, unemployment programs -- seemed arrogant and high-handed and typical of someone who actually didn't know what he or she was doing.

Campbell's failure to execute a successful earned media strategy in the first weeks of the campaign was the root cause of her ensuing difficulties. The Conservative campaign's failure to influence the media frame around the Campbell candidacy acted as a trigger that set

off a series of actions and reactions that culminated in the party's crushing defeat and Campbell's personal defeat in her riding of Vancouver Centre.

Media coverage of the campaign, and its dominant "gaffe" frame, in the absence of any other campaign information, stands as the cause of the downturn in support for the Conservative party in the early weeks, and even more particularly, the collapse of Campbell's personal leadership ratings.

The trend lines downward were detectable within 14 days of the campaign launch, when voter interest has long been presumed to be relatively low. The September 26 CBC/Envirographics poll, which was in the field September 17 to 22, is a case in point.

The St. Bruno incident, as stated in Chapter Four, seemed to crystallize Canadian public opinion, both in regard to the Conservative Party and to Campbell herself. The ensuing free-fall in Conservative Party support in a matter of hours, confirmed by Allan Gregg and by Richard Johnston of UBC, raised the stakes for subsequent campaign events.

Campbell's campaign was caught, inexorably, in a downward spiral; that spiral was triggered by the adverse public reaction to media

coverage of the early weeks of the campaign.

The Conservative party leader's performance in the televised leaders' debates, the Pearson airport controversy, the Chrétien "attack" ad, the lost weekend from hell set off by the La Presse interview on October 15, and the bandwagon effect of the horse-race coverage in the final weeks all contributed to the crushing defeat on October 25. Campbell's inexperience, her ill-conceived attempt to distance herself from the policies and cabinet personalities of a government in which she served, her flashes of temper with staff and the media, her under-developed political antennae -- all were factors in the rout.

The free-fall in Conservative Party support was matched by an equally dramatic drop in judgements about Campbell's personality. The headline over an October 27 Richard Gwyn column in the Toronto Star told the tale: "Star of the Summer Plunges Like a Meteor to Earth."

Campbell and her supporters blame the media for her electoral flame-out. In a poignant exchange with reporters in Vancouver the day before the vote, captured by SRC's cameras, George Campbell, the Tory leader's father, said: "The media seem to build up an icon --

which is an image. And then they seem to proceed to tear it down."¹²

The meteoric nature of Campbell's leadership may be attributable to Gertrude Robinson's theory, as outlined in her study for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, that women politicians are only ever judged by the media at the extreme ends of the scale -- either very good or very bad.¹³

Campbell's career also reminds one of Boorstin's observation that a celebrity is destroyed the same way a celebrity is created -- by publicity.

What makes the 1993 campaign distinct, and therefore of particular interest and importance, however, is that the result was actually settled in the first 15 days. In the same way that Johnston's 1988 study concluded the campaign itself mattered and (because of the way it mattered, all campaigns are important), the 1993 campaign would suggest that media coverage of this campaign was significant in terms of voter intentions.

¹² "Téléjournal - Société Radio-Canada October 24, 1993. Tapes.

¹³ Robinson, Gertrude J. and Armande Saint-Jean, with the assistance of Christine Rioux. "Women Politicians and their Media Coverage: A Generational Analysis." Women in Canadian Politics: Toward Equity in Representation. ed Kathy Megyery, Vol. 6. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991): 152

Former NDP strategist Peter O'Malley says good campaign coverage and good media relations cannot, in and of themselves, win a federal general election. If they could, O'Malley says, Ed Broadbent would have been prime minister. But O'Malley believes bad media and bad coverage can exact a high price in terms of voter attitudes. "The Tory campaign illustrates that in some significant ways," O'Malley said.¹⁴

Queen's University political scientist George Perlin, interviewed for Global Television's post-election special, said Campbell's summer success was an illusion, a public opinion blip generated by the excitement of the leadership convention and sustained by the fact no other political leader was competing for media attention during July and August.¹⁵

What may be a more accurate assessment is an analogy involving the purchase of a new car. The owners, in this case the Canadian electorate, have decided to trade in their old automobile. And they have pretty much decided not to buy the same kind of car they have been driving for the last nine years. But as the purchase date approaches, the company that produces the make they are now driving unveils a model they claim is new and improved. The owner

¹⁴ Peter O'Malley, personal interview, March 15, 1994.

¹⁵ "A Shock to the System," Global TV, January 16, 1994. Transcript.

decides that new model is at least worth a look. But everything about the deal -- price, styling, performance -- will have to be perfect before they will recommit. The test drive proves to be less than satisfactory. The purchaser decides to go with a different model -- in this case, the Liberal Party -- after all.

Campbell's belief that she did not have sufficient time to establish herself as a politician with a style different from her predecessor may offer her some comfort, but that raises as many questions as it answers. As prime minister, Campbell did have the option of bringing the House back in September if she believed she needed more time to put her particular stamp on her government. The Tory leader called the election when she did precisely because she and her advisors believed they could win an early fall campaign.

The failed earned media strategy was not the only reason for Campbell's defeat, although it was representative of a larger failing of the campaign overall. But because it was so inept, so early, the campaign was over for all intents and purposes by the time the earned media phase of the campaign was concluded.

The Liberal Party in general, Campaign Manager John Rae and Leader Jean Chrétien in particular, deserve full credit for mounting an effective campaign and, in particular, a sound media campaign.

But as Liberal communications guru Peter Donolo concedes: "We wouldn't have been so good if the Conservatives hadn't been so bad."¹⁶

¹⁶ Peter Donolo, personal interview, March 16, 1994.

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APPENDIX A

POLL TRACKING OF 1993 CAMPAIGN

ANGUS REID TRACKING

SOM-La Presse-TVA TRACKING

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