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ABSTRACT

TORONTO NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 1975 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

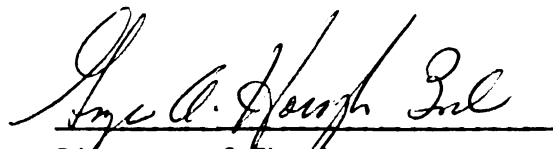
by

Nick Chandler Stout

As scholars and others try to explain the surprising results of the 1975 Ontario provincial election, i.e., the relative success of the New Democratic party and the relegation to minority of the governing Progressive-Conservatives, they doubtless will consider the influence of the news media. This study considers the role of the Toronto press in the campaign. It involves a quantitative analysis to determine the amount of attention paid to each of the three major political parties: the Progressive-Conservatives, the Liberals and the New Democratic Party. It also provides a qualitative assessment to shed light on the attitudes of the Toronto press, such as the way it regarded party leaders, interpreted campaign news and implied electoral preferences. The findings are the result of a meticulous examination of the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and Toronto Sun in which campaign-related articles were measured and assessed for their partisan value.

The study shows that the Tories were given considerably more space than the opposition parties, but that the socialist-leaning NDP tended to receive the best treatment from writers of editorials and commentaries. Moreover, it is shown that the NDP became the centre of attention during the final phase of the campaign and gained a strategic advantage by the prominent news coverage it was given at that time. In a general sense, more attention was paid to the images of the party leaders than to the issues for which they stood. The Toronto press seems also to have had a penchant for describing the campaign as a road show--as a series of events--rather than as a discussion of issues.

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Journalism,
College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State
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Master of Arts degree.


Director of Thesis

TORONTO NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE
1975 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

by

Nick Chandler Stout

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PREFACE

This study was generated by my own involvement in the 1975 Ontario provincial election campaign--as a reporter for Broadcast News Limited assigned to the New Democratic Party tour. I had lived in Canada not even a year at the time, after having landed here quite by chance, and my knowledge of Canadian affairs was primitive at best. The study was undertaken as an extension of an adventure-some and educational experience, and to help me better understand the environment in which I was working. If it removes the albatross of an unfinished M.A. degree, it also enriches, if slightly, journalism scholarship in Canada. And I am pleased to contribute because Canada is a country for which, despite my brief stay, I have developed a profound affection. But most important, I have now repaid a long-overdue debt to the late Professor W. Cameron Meyers--without whom, suffice it to say, there would have been no thesis; indeed, without whom I very probably would not be practicing journalism today.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Study

Whether historians will view the Ontario general election of September, 1975, as a watershed or a temporary aberration in the course of Canadian provincial politics is an open question. It is still too soon to know. What already is certain is that they are bound to regard it with intense interest in that it broke the spell under which the Ontario Progressive-Conservative Party held the province for three decades. It is true that Ontarians¹ stopped short of expelling the party from power, but they denied it the majority to which it had become so accustomed in the provincial legislature; not since 1945 had the combined opposition outnumbered the Progressive-Conservatives at Queen's Park.² Equally as stunning was the success of the socialist-leaning New Democratic Party. That the NDP could supplant the centrist Liberals as the Official

¹About 65 percent of Ontario's 4.8 million eligible voters cast ballots. Toronto Star, Sept. 19, 1975, p. 1.

²Home of the 125-seat Ontario legislature in Toronto. Standings after Sept. 18, 1975: Progressive-Conservatives 51, NDP 38, Liberals 36. Standings at dissolution (117 seats): PCs 74, Liberals 23, NDP 20.

Opposition was to many a signal that a shift was taking place in the political climate of the province. For Stephen Lewis, the ambitious leader of the NDP, the election was a savoring triumph. "There's an amazing change that's happening in Ontario," he was quoted as saying shortly after assuming his new role as Opposition Leader, "and when I look down the road I don't feel precarious anymore."³

As scholars, political analysts and party strategists endeavor to explain what happened, they no doubt will consider the influence of news media on voters. While news media generally are believed to be relatively ineffective in directly affecting voting behavior,⁴ political campaigns seem always to be organized around them. A benchmark study involving the U. S. presidential campaign of 1940 found that people manage to avoid things they do not want to read and hear and that "the people who did most of the reading and listening to the campaign were the most impervious to any ideas which might have led them to change their vote."⁵ Yet scholars concede that news media often may reinforce or even strengthen the pre-determined intentions of voters. Joseph T. Klapper acknowledges that "minor attitude change appears to be a more likely effect than

³Ed Hailwood, "The Feast of Stephen," Toronto Life, December, 1975, p. 38.

⁴John P. Robinson, "Perceived Media Bias and the 1968 Vote: Can the Media Affect Behavior After All?" Journalism Quarterly, LXIX (Summer, 1972), 239.

⁵Paul F. Lazarsfeld. Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gandet, The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 125.

conversion and a less likely effect that reinforcement" but he adds that "this is not to say . . . conversion does not occur nor that under certain circumstances it may not be widespread."⁶ Klapper's conclusions suggest that it would be irresponsible to dismiss news coverage of the 1975 Ontario election as irrelevant in explaining its eventual result. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest the effect of the news media on the voting behavior of Ontarians was substantial.

The press is a vital part of every civic election regardless of its influence on voters. Since news media in Canada subscribe to the social responsibility theory of the press⁷ they argue that self-government is impossible without a press independent of government to enlighten the public. In theory, they pledge to provide information, discussion and debate on public affairs. Moreover, freely-elected politicians clearly depend on the press as a forum in which to make their ideas known and to strike down those of their opponents. They also, conversely, use the press as a sounding board to gauge the general acceptance of those ideas. Colin Seymour-Ure observes in his analysis of the British press vis à vis the British political system that "there seems no doubt at all that politicians do believe newspapers have an impact on the attitudes

⁶Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p. 11.

⁷As outlined in Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).

and behaviour of the mass public."⁸ Indeed, they seem always to be seeking ways to manipulate the media to their own advantage yet habitually complain about their eventual treatment.

It is therefore not unusual for political candidates to blame the news media for their personal failures; the press often is accused of distorting U.S. presidential campaigns. Sometimes the accusations can be turned into advantage as in 1948 when Harry S Truman successfully incorporated the "one-party press" charge into his winning effort. But they usually serve as alibis as in 1975 when the leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, Robert Nixon, held the press largely responsible for his party's third-place finish.⁹ Nixon complained that the news media failed to give proper attention to the way his party addressed certain issues and that they apparently believed the NDP to be more knowledgeable and more sincere than the Liberals. Whether a remark such as this is in fact a weak alibi for a poorly-conducted campaign or a well-founded complaint is a question that need not remain open. This study will provide evidence upon which to judge the validity of Nixon's remark and upon which to further assess the performance of the news media in the 1975 Ontario general election.

The three Toronto dailies were selected as the sample for the study. The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun

⁸Colin Seymour-Ure, The Press, Politics and the Public: An Essay on the Role of the National Press in the British Political System (London: Methven, 1968), pp. 285-86.

⁹Globe and Mail (Toronto), Oct. 6, 1975, p. 7.

were the only dailies to staff the campaign tours of the three party leaders from the outset (although the Canadian Press wire service assigned a correspondent to each tour throughout the campaign). For this reason, Toronto newspapers were free to explore various angles of the campaign; they were not restricted to Canadian Press dispatches. Furthermore, the Toronto papers probably were as representative as any other combination of Ontario dailies. The Globe and the Star are distributed throughout the province; their influence spreads beyond the boundaries of the city and into the rural corners of Ontario. The Sun, a tabloid founded in 1971 following the demise of the Telegram, is one of the few Canadian papers to publish on Sundays. Moreover, its average daily circulation of 115,000 is attained almost entirely by newsstand sales, which implies that most copies sold are, in fact, read. A third reason for making Toronto dailies the focus of the study has to do with the surprising election returns from the city;¹⁰ the NDP did much better than expected in Toronto. Finally, by focussing attention on newspapers within a single city, a comparison can be made between media in direct competition for readers.

According to researcher Jae-wan Lee, "campaign news can be viewed as the attention the press accords to the political news sources and . . . how the news is presented can be viewed as an

¹⁰The NDP took 14 of Metropolitan Toronto's 29 seats for a gain of 7. The Conservatives dropped 3 seats to 12 and the Liberals dropped 1 seat to finish with 3.

indication of the attitudes of the press."¹¹ This study will be founded on both of Lee's axioms; it will involve a quantitative analysis to determine the attention paid to news sources and it will contain a qualitative assessment to shed light on media attitudes. The findings presented herein and the conclusions drawn from them follow a meticulous examination of each issue of the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and Toronto Sun during the campaign period of August 12 to September 18, 1975. Each news story, editorial, commentary, letter to the editor and photograph was counted and the partisan value of each recorded. Moreover, each news story was measured in column inches and each photograph in square inches to determine the space afforded each party. Because of the disparity of column widths within and between newspapers, all measurements of news stories were adjusted to conform to the 10-pica column generally used. Each article--whether it be news story, editorial, commentary or letter--was read and evaluated in an attempt to determine a general sentiment; a composite message of the way the press felt about the campaign. Subjective analyses of this kind always are open to varying interpretations, but it will be shown that trends were evident in respect to the way the Toronto papers defined and interpreted campaign news, drew images of party leaders and spelled their electoral preferences.

It should be made clear at the outset that this study

¹¹Jae-wan Lee, "Editorial Support and Campaign News: Content Analysis by Q-Method," Journalism Quarterly, XLIX (Winter, 1972), 710.

does not propose to impugn individual journalists or their newspapers. It is intended rather to show how the reporters went about doing their work and to suggest ways in which voters were influenced by the media. Lee suggests three problems inherent in covering a political campaign:

First, what is called news in political campaigns largely relies upon opinions of news sources, and the opinions are highly-purposive. Second, the sole purpose of political news sources is to enhance the politicians' candidacies. Third, candidate exposure in election campaigns is an attempt to enhance positive values.¹²

The way journalists deal with these problems would seem to depend on factors impossible to measure, not the least of which are the individual relationships reporters establish with the candidates and their aides. Journalists are bound to trust the judgments of some more than others. Moreover, it would be unfair to criticize a reporter without taking into account the 20-hour days, smoke-filled buses, nauseating air travel, deadline pressures and other factors that might adversely affect otherwise diligent journalists on any given day.

The morning Globe and Mail generally is considered as Canada's newspaper of record. It traditionally supports the Conservative Party and did so in 1975 (its own disclaimer notwithstanding: "ourselves, we prefer the word independent, in that we have no continuing affiliation to any party or person in politics."¹³).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Globe, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 6.

The reputation probably stems from the Globe's affinity for the Tories in the 1940s during the tenure of Conservative Premier George Drew who maintained a close friendship with Globe publisher George McCullagh and who eventually married McCullagh's wife not long after the publisher died. The Globe assigned six reporters principally to cover the 1975 Ontario election: Robert Williamson, Peter Mosher, Mary Trueman, Christie Blatchford, Thomas Coleman (who since has become publicity director for NDP leader Stephen Lewis) and Jonathan Fear. In addition, Queen's Park columnist Norman Webster provided his assessment of the campaign almost daily on the op-ed page.

The afternoon Star supported the Liberal Party as it had done in every provincial election after World War II except in 1963 when it supported the Tories led by John P. Robarts and in 1959 when it remained uncommitted. It is ironic that the only real success of the Ontario Liberal Party in this century--the depression-era reign under Mitchell Hepburn--was attained without the support of the friendly Star. Then-publisher J. E. Atkinson intensely disliked Hepburn and refused to support his party even as he led it to glory. The Star called primarily on Charlotte Montgomery, Andrew Szende, David Allen, Stef Donev, Daniel Stoffman and Brian Valee to report on the 1975 provincial election. Robert Miller provided a regular commentary on an inside opinion page.

The Sun, a morning tabloid with a penchant for exploiting the sensational, has yet to establish a firm precedent in provincial politics but, unlike many tabloids in the United States, its editorial tone generally rings conservative. In 1975, it called for

a Conservative government but recommended an NDP Official Opposition.

It is difficult to compare the Sun's coverage of the election with that of its two Toronto competitors because of the unique way it approached the event. Instead of providing daily news stories of campaign activity, the Sun assigned Connie Nicholson, John Downing and Queen's Park columnist Claire Hoy to rotate among the party leaders and write daily commentaries on their feelings about the campaign. The three columns were displayed together on a common election page but they gave Sun readers an opinionated and subjective, if not distorted, view of the campaign. In addition, John Slinger's "Scuttlebut" column provided daily election humor and gossip.

While studies of press performance are not uncommon in the United States, they are virtually non-existent in Canada. The most recent Canadian research relevant to this study is the 1974 effort of Stephen Clarkson, professor of political economy at the University of Toronto. While trying to determine the effectiveness of the Liberal Party in communicating its platform during the previous Ontario election in 1971, Clarkson monitored four broadcast stations and two Toronto newspapers during the final four weeks of that campaign. He found that in 1971 news media tended to pay more attention to the governing party, i.e., Progressive-Conservatives, than to others; that party leaders were afforded considerably more coverage than local candidates and that news media tended to limit the capacity of parties to communicate their platforms by stressing

only a few major issues.¹⁴ It might be premature to infer from Clarkson's study alone that election coverage of political campaigns in Canada generally is "limited and distorted"¹⁵ as one scholar has done but there is not much else on which to make judgments. While these findings are only incidental to Clarkson's primary objective, they constitute the best available Canadian material on which to base the ensuing study. Indeed, Clarkson prefaced his report with the reminder that "the existing literature is extremely sparring concerning what political information actually gets communicated during elections or between them and how this is done, with what types of consequence."¹⁶ The Canadian literature on the mass media, he said, is thin.

Another study on which this endeavor may be founded concerns the editorial treatment of the socialist party during the Ontario elections of 1943 and 1945. Gordon Hiseler¹⁷ set out to determine whether or not the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation

¹⁴Stephen Clarkson, "Policy and the Media: Communicating the Liberal Platform in the 1971 Ontario Election Campaign," Unpublished paper presented to the 46th annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, June 3, 1974, pp. 17, 18, 21.

¹⁵Frederick J. Fletcher, "Between Two Stools: News Coverage of Provincial Politics in Ontario," in Donald C. MacDonald, ed. Government and Politics of Ontario (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), p. 251.

¹⁶Clarkson, "Policy and the Media," p. 2.

¹⁷Gordon Lindsay Hiseler, "Editorial Opinion of the Ontario Daily Press on the Provincial CCF Party during the Elections of 1943 and 1945: Unrestrained Denunciation or Not," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Guelph University, 1971.

(forerunner to the NDP) was vigorously denounced on the editorial pages of Ontario newspapers as CCF sympathizers had charged at the time. He found a large amount of editorial animosity directed towards the provincial CCF but not so much as to constitute "unrestrained denunciation." Moreover, while concluding that the CCF might have been more successful had it had more press support, Hiseler became convinced that "the party received more objective or favorable treatment than it had a right to expect--given the place of the papers in the provincial society and the traditional political climate of Ontario."¹⁸ But Ontario socialism in the 1940s was a greater menace than in the 1970s. The CCF was a relatively new and unpredictable party in 1943; it represented a fundamental threat to the existing order. The NDP, on the other hand, was established in 1975. Its proposals would have necessitated radical changes, to be sure, but it was accepted as a bona-fide alternative (more so in 1975 than even in 1971); not as a menacing intrusion into a tranquil status quo.

Whether or not the editorial preferences of newspapers generally are manifested in their news columns is still an open question; the vast amount of research on the subject has produced conflicting findings. Researchers G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Taik Sup Auk accept the fact that "many studies suggest moderate bias in the news columns favoring the candidates given editorial

¹⁸Ibid., p. 147.

treatment."¹⁹ This might be true, but in a study of the 1972 U.S. presidential campaign Robert G. Meadow found that the unendorsed candidate received greater newspaper coverage and suggested accordingly that "candidates who make more news receive more coverage."²⁰ This, he said, leads to "the possibility that an aggressive campaign is more newsworthy in the eyes of journalists," something that "raises several questions for political campaign strategists." As the following study will show, it is the latter assessment that will prove most applicable to the 1975 Ontario provincial election.

The Setting

Everyone knew what was coming when Premier William Davis called a news conference for two o'clock Monday, August 11, 1975. Davis had been on a tour of northern Ontario and had spent much of the weekend at a wilderness training retreat near Thunder Bay conferring with Progressive-Conservative Party officials. When he abruptly and prematurely returned to Toronto, there was little doubt the premier would call a provincial election--the second of his tenure in office. The date had even been leaked and the Monday

¹⁹G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Taik Sup Auk, "Newspaper Endorsement and Coverage of Public Opinion Polls in 1970," Journalism Quarterly, LI (Winter, 1974), 654.

²⁰Robert G. Meadow, "Cross-Media Comparison of Coverage of the 1972 Presidential Campaign," Journalism Quarterly, L (Autumn, 1973), 488.

morning papers accurately predicted September 18.²¹

The Tories had been through an unsettling spring. A public opinion poll in February had shown the opposition Liberal Party riding twelve points ahead of the governing Conservatives. Moreover, the Tories had lost four recent byelections. It is true that much of the lost popularity had been regained through the summer--a poll in July showed that the gap had been narrowed to three points--but the Tories were nervous and had little choice but to call a fall election and hope they could wage a successful campaign. If they waited until spring, the premier would be only a few months away from a constitutional deadline (elections must be no more than five years apart although the common interval is four years) and thereby left with little political leverage. Who could predict what terrible things might happen in the interim? Since the last election was in October, 1971, and since nobody savors the prospect of campaigning in the snow, the election had to be now.

The Conservatives had governed the province almost continuously since 1905--the only exceptions being a three-year coalition headed by the Ontario Farmers' Union following the first world war and the eight-year majority government of Mitchell Hepburn's Liberals during the depression. The Tories had not been out of power since 1943 and their government had been a majority without

²¹This date would prove embarrassing for Davis because it prohibited Jews from voting in advance polls which, constitutionally, had to be held on the fifth and seventh days prior to the election or, in this case, September 13 and 11, which were the Jewish Sabbath and Yom Kippur respectively. Davis called the situation "awkward." Star, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 6.

interruption since 1945. Only the Quebec Liberals (1896-1935) and the Social Credit Party of Alberta (1935-1971) had exceeded the reign of the Ontario Progressive-Conservative Party.

Many explanations have been offered for the success of the Ontario Tories. Desmond Morton, a historian at the University of Toronto, suggests it was an accomplished balancing act that had involved "clever political management, an acute sense of public mood and a partially fortuitous continuation of prosperity."²² He adds that Ontario is "relatively easy to govern" and that "her industrial and financial growth has been systematically secured by tariff protection and low cost energy."²³ Professor John Wilson of the University of Waterloo points to the fact that the Ontario Conservatives were able to withstand the industrial transition better than conservative parties elsewhere and that the provincial party never had been dominated by one strong person; never dependent upon charisma for success.²⁴ Indeed, the Ontario Tories have changed leaders about once each decade in maintaining their command of the provincial legislature.

Whatever reasons are attributed to the Tory dynasty in Ontario, they seemed not as important on the eve of the 1975 election campaign as the fact that it had taken hold and had

²²Desmond Morton, "People and Politics of Ontario," in MacDonald, Government and Politics, p. 12.

²³Ibid., p. 5.

²⁴John Wilson, "The Ontario Political Culture," in MacDonald, Government and Politics, p. 213.

almost become an endemic characteristic of the province. The Conservatives were comfortable in their castle when, suddenly, they sensed the bricks about to crumble. They approached the inevitable showdown with uncharacteristic anxiety.

William Grenville Davis assumed control of the Ontario Progressive-Conservative Party on February 13, 1971, after a bitterly-fought leadership convention at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto. Since the party already was in power under then-Premier John Roberts, the choice of the convention would assume the premiership immediately. Davis was elected by just 44 votes of 1,580 cast and was left with the task of reconciling a party torn with frustration and animosity, much of which was directed towards the premier himself. This he did--the legend of his patchwork is told well by Jonathan Manthorpe in The Power and the Tories²⁵--and with a unified party behind him Davis was able to sweep the October, 1971, showdown in convincing fashion. The victory was a landslide--the Conservatives won 78 seats, the Liberals 20 and the NDP 19 in the heaviest voter turnout in 30 years²⁶--and it recalled an arrogant remark of John Roberts: that the Tories might well continue governing Ontario forever.²⁷

²⁵Jonathan Manthorpe, The Power and the Tories: Ontario Politics 1943 to the Present (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974).

²⁶Seventy-three percent of the 4.5 million voters, Toronto Star, Sept. 18, 1975, p. 1.

²⁷Manthorpe, The Power and the Tories, p. 6.

The Conservative landslide of 1971 fell hard on Robert Nixon and not long after the new government was formed he announced his decision to resign as leader of the Liberals. Nixon, whose father, Harry, had been the last Liberal premier of Ontario in the waning days of the Hepburn kingdom, had become party leader in 1967. At that time, the Liberal caucus was unorganized and marred with internal dissent. Many Liberals were disfranchised from party policy, morale was low and some Liberal members of the legislature openly manifested a personal dislike of Nixon. In anticipation of the 1971 election, the party held a policy conference which produced what Nixon called his "blueprint for government." The document became the party platform for the ensuing campaign but the legislature was hardly dissolved before the Tories had torn the blueprint apart at the seams. After they had finished putting price tags on each of its clauses, the total of which suggested an enormous expenditure that was doubly embarrassing to a party committed to fiscal moderation, the Tories had made a mockery of the blueprint and had doomed the Liberals to defeat. However great the shock to Nixon, the Liberal leader recovered quickly and began having second thoughts about his already-announced resignation. The only thing to do was to become a candidate to succeed himself at the 1974 leadership convention. He won handily, but not before he infuriated some of his colleagues who had spent a great deal of time, money and effort organizing their own campaigns on the assumption that Nixon would not be an opponent.

If the 1971 election was disillusioning for Nixon, it

was a nightmare for Stephen Lewis. The New Democratic Party leader had been new at the game; he had been a member of the legislature since 1962, but had been party leader barely a year when he had to go to the people. In retrospect, Lewis described the 1971 NDP campaign as unwisely "strident and absolute and dogmatic."²⁸ The Tories successfully fought the "socialist threat" and Lewis too was on the verge of resignation following the disastrous results. He later said the period from 1970 to 1972 was almost unbearable for him.²⁹

The cloud of confusion that hung heavily over the opposition parties in the aftermath of the 1971 election quickly blew down the halls of Queen's Park and settled over the premier's office. Davis' first full term in office was laced with scandals. There was the \$50,000 donation by the contracting firm of Fidnam (Ontario) Limited to the Conservative Party at a time when the firm was negotiating to build a new headquarters building for the Workmen's Compensation Board. An investigation failed to establish a link between the donation and the award but the appearance of impropriety was difficult to wash away. Then there was the contract between Ontario Hydro and Gerhard Moog, a personal friend of Davis, to build a new Hydro headquarters. Here too, an investigation failed to prove that the premier had intervened. There were charges of conflict of interest in respect to various land deals

²⁸Hailwood, "The Feast of Stephen," p. 30.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 30, 32.

as well as accusations that government planes had been used for private trips.

The scandals reached a peak with the Ross Shouldice affair which implied a government network of political patronage. Shouldice, a Tory fund-raiser and real estate agent in Sudbury, was said to have engineered a government land purchase in Oakville in return for political contributions. The story broke in January, 1975, and presumably was the reason for the Tories' poor showing in the public opinion poll of the following month. The Shouldice affair never was substantiated; indeed it angered Davis so much that he fought the accusation in unprecedented fashion. In a speech January 27 to the annual meeting of the Metropolitan Toronto Board of Trade, Davis called the Shouldice accusations a "crock of sheer nonsense" and discounted them as "sinister, sordid speculation."³⁰ His face was said to be uncharacteristically red with anger as he announced that he only had begun to fight. He succeeded in restoring much of his party's lost popularity (among other things, the government unveiled a budget in April with such attractive features as a temporary reduction in sales tax and a monetary incentive for first-time home-buyers) and by summer the scandals had been virtually wiped from the public mind.

When Davis called the September, 1975, election he asked for a mandate to confront "serious responsibilities at a time in our history that can sensibly be called critical."³¹ He named inflation,

³⁰Star, Aug. 12, 1975, p. B3.

³¹Globe, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 1.

unemployment and the general health of the economy as the main government concerns. He admitted a less-than-perfect record in dealing with these issues but proposed to run on it nonetheless. Davis expressed faith in the voters who he said would find that the government of Ontario had been a "competent, diligent and dutiful partner in the steady upward progress of their community."³²

As Davis spoke, the two opposition leaders waited their turns to enter the media room at Queen's Park to launch their respective campaigns.³³ Robert Nixon went first and named government integrity as the paramount issue of the Liberal campaign. He resurrected the unsubstantiated conflict-of-interest accusations against the government during the past four years in an effort to discredit the Conservatives and assured the electorate that he, Robert Nixon, was ready for the responsibility of office. The other prominent planks of the Liberal Party platform concerned home rule (greater power for local governments), responsible government spending and responsiveness to the needs of people in jobs, housing and education.

³²Sun, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 2.

³³This practice may require an explanation for American readers. Canadian provincial (and federal) parliamentary election campaigns are more cut and dried than U.S. campaigns. They begin with the dissolution of the legislature at the pleasure of the premier and end on a date arbitrarily selected. While every local candidate may not always have been nominated when the election is called, the party leaders who will tour the province will be established and usually well-known. The immediate question concerning the campaign therefore is not who, but how, and the party leaders would be derelict in their duties if they did not immediately counter the premier's reasons for calling an election with explanatory statements of their own.

The New Democratic Party entered the campaign with no apparent illusions about its potential. Its dogmatic approach in 1971, which was geared more towards replacing the Liberals as the Official Opposition than in forming a government, proved disastrous enough to be discarded in favor of a methodological, clearly-defined campaign on specific issues. "The NDP will not deal in abstractions," Lewis said. "Every issue for us has a human dimension and that dimension will be central to everything we say."³⁴ The NDP leader named four specific issues to which, he said, the NDP campaign would stick religiously: housing, which should be "a question of social right, not social privilege;" energy, the cost of which he said was unnecessarily high; land, which he said was either disappearing or not being properly used; and people, whose safety he said the government had put in jeopardy by ignoring occupational health hazards.³⁵ Housing, energy, land and people; the acronym spelled "help" and Lewis vowed to provide it if given a chance.

Such was the setting for the 1975 Ontario provincial election campaign. The Conservatives were seen as treading precariously in uncertain waters; the premier insisting his record was good and asking for a mandate to continue. The Liberals were riding high on a euphoria generated by public opinion polls; their huge lead of the previous winter had been trimmed, to be sure, but they were enjoying a popularity to which they were unaccustomed.

³⁴Star, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 1.

³⁵Star, Aug. 18, 1975, p. 1.

Stephen Lewis was proceeding with renewed confidence and promised to conduct an honest campaign, adhering strictly to the issues he had set forth. He promised that the NDP would work as hard as it could and "if by chance we form a government, we'll cope."³⁶

³⁶Globe, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 1.

CHAPTER II

NEWS AND COMMENT

A Quantitative Analysis

It is clear from Tables 1 and 2 that Toronto newspapers were one in affording considerably more space in their news columns to the Progressive-Conservatives than to the opposition parties during the Ontario election campaign of 1975. This finding, together with Stephen Clarkson's similar finding in respect to the 1971 campaign, suggests that news media do in fact tend to regard a party in power more highly than the opposition, at least during election campaigns.

Specifically, the Conservative Party was the primary subject of 203 news stories which comprised 3,025 column inches.³⁷ In contrast, the Toronto papers published 129 stories about the Liberals (2,109-1/2 column inches) and 151 stories (2,072 column inches) about the New Democrats. What is significant here is that the Liberal Party's rank of Official Opposition did not win it any more coverage than that given to the third-place (at that time) NDP. In fact, the Liberals were the focal point of fewer stories than

³⁷The tabulation does not include columns appearing regularly in the Star and Globe as "news briefs" or under a similar heading.

Table 1. Distribution of news stories.

Nature of Story	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	90	97	16	203
Liberals	59	61	9	129
NDP	69	76	6	151
Communists	3	2	0	5
Independents	1	2	0	3
General	44	147	40	231
Total	262 ^a	374 ^b	67 ^c	703 ^d

^a8 stories treated the Liberals and Conservatives equally, 2 stories for the Liberals and NDP and 1 story for both the Conservatives and NDP.

^b2 stories treated the Conservatives and Liberals equally, 2 stories for both the Liberals and NDP.

^c1 story treated all three parties equally, 1 story for both the Liberals and NDP and 1 story for both the Conservatives and Liberals.

^dReflects adjustments mentioned above.

Table 2. Amount of space given to news stories adjusted to the 10-pica column inch.

Nature of Story	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	1,407	1,445-	172-	3,205
Liberals	958-	1,022-	128-	2,109-
NDP	992	1,002	78	2,072
Communists	33	6-	0	39-
Independents	9	8	0	17
General	942-	3,092-	343	4,378
Total	4,208-	6,351	643	11,202- ^a

^a totals adjusted to account for stories that were rated equally for two or more parties.

the New Democrats although they were given slightly more space.

In comparing the patterns of the individual papers, it should be recalled that the Globe and Mail editorially endorsed the Conservatives, the Star supported the Liberals and the Sun called for a Conservative Government with an NDP Opposition. (The editorial reaction to the campaign will be discussed in detail in Chapter III.) The tables show that the Globe paid much more attention to its preferred party, the Conservatives, than to the opposition. They show also that the paper wrote more frequently about the New Democrats than the Liberals and accordingly gave the NDP more total space. The Star weighted its total news coverage in favor of the Conservatives, its editorial choice notwithstanding. And while it afforded its preferred Liberals more space than the NDP, it wrote fewer stories about them than either the Tories or NDP. The Sun ran little hard news about the campaign; most of its election coverage was signed commentary. Of the sixty-seven news stories that did appear in the Sun during the five-week campaign, forty were of a general nature and did not deal with any particular party. It ran more stories about the Conservatives, whom it endorsed, than of the other two parties combined but it gave the Nixon Liberals, whom it editorially detested, considerably more space than the New Democratic Party on whom it called to form the Official Opposition.

The proportions were similar in respect to front-page appearances (Table 3). The Conservatives appeared on the front page more times (48) than the opposition parties combined (45).

Table 3. Number of news stories appearing on front pages.

Nature of Story	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	24	23	1	48
Liberals	9	16	0	25
NDP	10	10	0	20
Communists	0	0	0	0
Independents	0	0	0	0
General	11	25	1	37
Total	50	70	1	121 ^a

^aTotals adjusted to account for stories that were rated equally for two or more parties.

The disparity was most lopsided in the Globe where the Tories dominated front-page news stories twenty-four times compared to nine for the Liberals and ten for the NDP. The Star gave the Liberals more front-page coverage than the NDP but not nearly as much as it afforded the Conservatives. The Sun ran virtually no news stories, only headlines and photographs on its front pages.

The upshot is that the evidence does not really support the assumption that editorially-preferred parties receive more attention than others. It is true that the pattern of the Globe and Sun would seem to make a case for the validity of the assumption but it probably is better argued, especially in light of the fact that the Star followed the general pattern of covering the Tories more heavily than the opposition parties, that a party in power is inherently more newsworthy and commands a disproportionate amount of attention in spite of its editorial acceptance. Indeed, the fact that the Star ran fewer stories about the editorially-endorsed Liberals than the other parties and that the Sun paid more attention to the Liberals, for whom it urged demotion to third-party status, than the NDP indicates that factors other than editorial preference dictate the manner in which parties are covered during an election campaign.

A final note on news coverage concerns the conspicuous exclusion of the Communist and Independent candidates. The tables reveal how the thirty-three Communist and thirty-four Independent candidates (and even thirteen candidates for the Social Credit Party which did not qualify as an official party for the election)

went virtually unnoticed by the Toronto press.

An analysis of the photographs³⁸ shows no clear-cut pattern. Tables 4 and 5 show that the Star and Globe tended to print larger photos of the Liberals than of the Conservatives and New Democrats and that Conservative photographs were smallest of all in the Globe. But both papers printed more photos of Tories than of Liberals and more of Liberals than of New Democrats (Table 6). The Sun tended to print much larger photos of Tories and Liberals than of New Democrats but the distribution of its pictures was relatively even.

Few election-related pictures appeared on the front pages but of the twenty-one that did, nine featured Liberals, six were of Tories, five concerned New Democrats and six were of a general nature (one was NDP/Liberal and one was PC/Liberal). Again, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that a governing party logically commands more attention. There is no evidence of any other kind of bias.

The distribution of the letters to the editor (Tables 8 and 9) was interesting in that it tended to be contrary to the editorial preferences of the newspapers. The Globe ran more letters denouncing the Conservatives than praising them but its distribution of letters concerning the other parties was even. The Star ran more than twice as many letters criticizing the

³⁸Not included in the tabulation of photographs was a two-and-a-half page spread in the Star of Sept. 12, 1975, that featured pictures of 105 of the 123 local candidates, all of which measured 1 x 1-1/2 inches.

Table 4. Amount of space given to photographs measured in square inches.

Subject of Photo	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	613.5	1,558	529.5	2,701
Liberals	628	1,056	570.5	2,254.5
New Democrats	461	844.5	315.5	1,621
Communists	0	3.5	0	0
Independents	0	0	0	0
General	192	783	670	1,645
Total	1,895	4,151	1,948	7,994.5 ^a

^aTotals adjusted to account for photos in which more than one party was featured.

Table 5. Average size of photographs in square inches.

Subject of Photograph	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun
Progressive-Conservatives	21.1	23.9	52.9
Liberals	26.1	27.0	51.8
New Democrats	23.0	18.7	28.6

Table 6. Distribution of photographs.

Subject of Photo	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	29	65	10	105
Liberals	24	51	11	86
New Democrats	20	45	11	76
Communists	0	1	0	1
Independents	0	0	0	0
General	22	61	105	188
Total	95	222 ^a	136 ^b	453 ^c

^aIncludes one photograph in which both the Liberals and NDP were featured.

^bIncludes one photo in which both the Conservatives and Liberals were featured.

^cReflects adjustments mentioned above.

Table 7. Photographs appearing on front pages.

Subject of Photo	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Progressive-Conservatives	1	4	1	6
Liberals	4	3	2	9
New Democrats	3	1	1	5
Communists	0	0	0	0
Independents	0	0	0	0
General	1	1	1	3
Total	9	8	4	21 ^a

^aTotals adjusted to account for photos in which more than one party was featured.

Table 8. Distribution of letters to the editor.

Nature of Letter	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Supportive of PCs	6	5	6	17
Critical of PCs	8	24	14	46
General Comment on PCs	1	1	0	2
Progressive-Conservatives	15	30	20	65
Supportive of Liberals	2	3	1	6
Critical of Liberals	2	8	6	16
General Comment on Liberals	0	0	0	0
Liberals	4	11	7	22
Supportive of NDP	2	3	1	6
Critical of NDP	2	3	0	5
General Comment on NDP	2	0	0	2
New Democrats	6	6	1	13
General	23	41	17	81
Total	48	87 ^a	44 ^b	179 ^c

^aIncludes one letter equally supportive of NDP and critical of Conservatives.

^bIncludes one letter equally supportive of the Conservatives and critical of the Liberals.

^cReflects adjustments mentioned above.

Table 9. Amount of space given to letters measured in 12-pica column inches.

Nature of Letter	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Supportive of PCs	19	35.5	23	77.5
Critical of PCs	30	72	57.5	159.5
General Comment on PCs	7	4	0	11
Progressive-Conservatives	56	111.5	80.5	248
Supportive of Liberals	9	7	3	19
Critical of Liberals	9	39	11	59
General Comment on Liberals	0	0	0	0
Liberals	18	46	14	78
Supportive of NDP	6	8.5	2	16.5
Critical of NDP	15	14.5	0	29.5
General Comment on NDP	14	0	0	14
New Democrats	35	23	2	60
General	62.5	134.5	50	247
Total	171.5	312	144.5	628 ^a

^aTotals adjusted to account for letters showing equal bias towards two or more parties.

Liberals as it did those supporting the party. The ratio was even more lopsided in respect to the Tories but the NDP was given as many favorable as unfavorable letters in the Star. The Sun, too, ran a preponderance of letters critical of the Tories and Liberals. The only letters appearing in that paper concerning the NDP were in support of the party. All this suggests an effort to manifest objectivity by providing ample space for views other than those of the editorial board. The comparison in terms of total inches tells essentially the same story.

During the course of the campaign, 191 articles appeared in the Toronto press that could be labelled "commentary." These usually were regular columns by well-known journalists. Table 10 shows that each paper ran more commentaries about Conservatives than of the other two parties and that most of these were neutral, i.e., they were judgmental columns about the progress of the campaign rather than pieces of praise or condemnation. But enough opinionated pieces did appear to show a significant attitude of dissatisfaction with the Tories. The Globe and Mail did not run a single commentary distinctly favorable to the Conservatives but it printed four that spelled reasons for discounting them as an attractive choice. The Star ran one favorable but three unfavorable commentaries about the Conservatives and the ratio in the Sun was five to eleven. In total, there were three times as many commentaries downgrading the Tories (18) as praising them (6).

The Liberals were even less fortunate. Only five of forty-eight commentaries about them were supportive while twenty

Table 10. Distribution of opinion columns or "commentaries."

Nature of Column	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Supportive of PCs	0	1	5	6
Critical of PCs	4	3	11	18
General Comment on PCs	7	9	17	33
Progressive-Conservatives	11	13	33	57
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Supportive of Liberals	2	2	1	5
Critical of Liberals	4	4	12	20
General Comment on Liberals	3	3	17	23
Liberals	9	9	30	48
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Supportive of NDP	3	2	4	9
Critical of NDP	0	0	4	4
General Comment on NDP	3	4	16	23
New Democrats	6	6	24	36
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
General	16	19	23	58
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	39 ^a	45 ^b	107 ^c	191 ^d

^aIncludes two commentaries equally critical of Liberals and Conservatives and one which was equally supportive of Liberals and New Democrats.

^bIncludes one commentary equally critical of Liberals and Conservatives and one which treated the Conservatives and New Democrats equally in a general way.

^cIncludes two commentaries equally supportive of Conservatives as they were critical of Liberals and one which was equally critical of Conservatives and Liberals.

^dReflects adjustments mentioned above.

took them to task for one issue or another. The Sun was especially vindictive of the Liberals; it printed just one commentary supportive of the party while running twelve in opposition to it.

The New Democrats had less written about them in the opinion columns than did the Tories or Liberals but they fared better in the nature of attention they did receive. The NDP drew more favorable commentaries (9) than unfavorable (4) and, more significantly, neither the Star nor the Globe ran a single commentary that could be deemed generally critical of the NDP. The Sun ran more commentaries than the Globe and Star combined but this was in accordance with its predetermined format. The Sun replaced normal news coverage with the three daily opinion columns, thereby giving the reader an opinionated picture of the campaign, albeit a picture shaded differently depending on which columnist was reporting on whom.

The most notable aspect of these findings is the absence of criticism of the New Democratic Party. In fact, an analysis of the major columnists (Table 11) shows that only Claire Hoy and Connie Nicolson, both of the Sun, wrote columns that could be deemed generally critical of the NDP. It suggests that the efforts of the party generally were accepted if not applauded by the Toronto press. This overall tendency of the opinion columnists to write negatively of the Tories and Liberals while positively of the NDP will be manifested more clearly when the actual content of the commentaries is analyzed. Similarly, the news stories, whose sheer spacial allocation seems unimportant, take on significance

Table 11. Distribution of opinion columns according to major columnists.

Nature of Column	Webster (Globe)	Miller (Star)	Hoy (Sun)	Downing (Sun)	Nicolson (Sun)	Total
+PCs	0	0	2	1	0	3
-PCs	3	2	1	7	1	14
Neutral to PCs	7	6	7	3	4	27
PCs	10	8	10	11	5	44

+Liberals	0	1	0	0	0	1
-Liberals	3	2	7	2	1	15
Neutral to Liberals	3	1	3	6	4	17
Liberals	6	4	10	8	5	33

+NDP	2	1	1	3	0	7
-NDP	0	0	3	0	1	4
Neutral to NDP	3	0	1	3	12	19
New Democrats	5	1	5	6	13	30

General	7	8	2	6	2	25

Total	26 ^a	21	27	30 ^b	25	129 ^c

^aIncludes two commentaries equally critical of Conservatives and Liberals.

^bIncludes one commentary equally critical of Conservatives and Liberals.

^cReflects adjustments mentioned above.

when their substance and manner of presentation are discussed.

A Qualitative Assessment

All news is of relative importance. And editors of the Sun believed there were more pressing items than a provincial election campaign to display on their front page August 12. The jarring headline read: "Bronfman Set to Pay Son's Ransom Demand"; a grammatically incorrect reference to the kidnapping of Samuel Bronfman, heir to the Seagram's whiskey empire. Immediately below the head, a photograph occupying nearly the rest of the page showed the opening of the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto's national summer fair. The election announcement was relegated to the bottom. It was brief and characteristically flippant: "Bill Says Let's Go." The Sun readers had to turn to the second page before they could learn essentially that Davis would campaign on "economy, law, order."

The Star and the Globe had a different set of priorities and regarded the forthcoming election as the main story of the day, although they differed in approach. The Star announced that "Davis chooses election targets: Nixon, Trudeau"--a head that was immediately contradicted by the lead: "Premier William Davis today insisted he is not using the Ontario election campaign to pick a fight with the federal Liberal government." The story dealt mainly with Davis' speech inaugurating the campaign and, to be fair, it is true that Davis did refer to the federal and provincial Liberals repeatedly as "kissing cousins" during the course of that speech. The Globe displayed the most insight into the immediate character

the campaign would assume. It turned to Robert Nixon's opening remarks in announcing in its lead story that "integrity" would be an "early campaign issue." In so doing, the Globe accurately predicted the topic around which discussion would revolve during the first couple of weeks of the campaign.

Writing in the Globe, Robert Williamson reported that Nixon surprised reporters by citing integrity as a major issue.³⁹ It was true that the premier had become involved in several scandals during his first term in office, but he had been exonerated in each of them and reporters seem not to have been out of line in calling on Nixon to be specific. Perhaps the Liberal leader had some new evidence of political corruption. Nixon's insistence on challenging the government's integrity also bewildered NDP leader Stephen Lewis, a fact not left unreported. "Integrity is a slippery road," Lewis was quoted as saying at the time, and any party that claims more integrity than any other is "more self-righteous than the NDP at the worst of times."⁴⁰

The call for the Liberal leader to put his cards on the table rang louder than Nixon probably expected. In a speech Tuesday night (August 12) in Sault Ste. Marie at the nominating meeting of then-Transportation Minister John Rhodes, Premier Davis said the challenge to the integrity of the government was "nothing more than obsequious, evasive slander."⁴¹ He angrily challenged

³⁹Globe, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 5.

⁴⁰Globe, Aug. 12, 1975, p. 1.

⁴¹Star, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 1.

Nixon to "put up or shut up"--a phrase seemingly tailor-made for headline-writing copy editors. The Star's red line⁴² dutifully reported the next afternoon: "Put Up or Shut Up on Integrity, Davis tells Nixon." The Globe, characteristically, used an additional preposition that refined the remark into a polite warning.

Subordinating the story to the Bronfman affair, the Globe announced that "Davis tells Nixon to put up or to shut up."⁴³ The Sun handled the premier's speech on page four but, remarkable, the reporter travelling with Nixon at the time, John Downing, devoted his entire commentary to the issue of educational spending and did not mention integrity at all.

The style of Davis' retaliatory speech was as newsworthy as its substance. David Allen of the Star called the address "the toughest Davis has made in four years as premier," and added that it "marks a peak in the personal feud brewing between Davis and Nixon for three years."⁴⁴ Peter Mosher agreed in the Globe that Davis had made "the toughest speech of his political career."⁴⁵ and an unsigned news story in the Sun called the speech a "bitter personal counterattack" on Nixon.⁴⁶

⁴²The "red line" is the headline of a major story (but not necessarily the lead story) which is printed in red ink and which appears daily, often above the masthead, in the Toronto Star.

⁴³Globe, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 1.

⁴⁴Star, Aug. 13, 1975, pp. 1, 3.

⁴⁵Globe, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 1.

⁴⁶Sun, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 4.

The confrontation was accentuated in Thursday's papers. In a boxed item flanked by photographs of the two party leaders, the Star reported on its front page that "Nixon refuses to 'shut up' on integrity."⁴⁷ The story by Charlotte Montgomery quoted the Liberal Party leader as saying

We're talking about the Davis government--the whole collection of ministers which over the last four years wasted our money, made bad administrative decisions and, in fact, had been caught up in the Conservative network of patronage which is costing the taxpayers money.

Montgomery then reported that Nixon had emphasized that he was not questioning the personal integrity of Davis, an angle also picked up by the Globe which reported that Nixon's attacks on integrity were "directed at the government, not Premier William Davis himself."⁴⁸ The Globe also solicited the reaction of Stephen Lewis who it quoted as saying that the Liberal campaign against the premier's integrity indicated a "lust for extinction." Lewis said he never had seen evidence of government corruption and that he had "no evidence of a dishonest premier who lacks integrity."⁴⁹ The Sun, in its opinion column format, ran an article by Connie Nicolson--traveling with Lewis at the time--that said essentially the same thing: Lewis believes integrity is a non-issue.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Star, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 1.

⁴⁸Globe, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 1.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁰Sun, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 3.

Nixon never did produce any evidence of government corruption beyond that which already had been disproved. In fact, his insistence on rekindling burnt-out fires was the cause of some embarrassment to the Globe and Star. The Globe had printed a Canadian Press dispatch on August 14 which quoted Nixon as saying that retiring legislator John Yaremko was one of three Conservative cabinet ministers who had had a conflict of interest during the previous term. Nixon said his information was based on old newspaper reports rather than on Liberal Party research. The actual newspaper accounts upon which the charge was based were discovered two days later and prompted the Globe to write in retraction

The Toronto Star carried a report in January, 1974, about some land dealings of Mr. Yaremko in the Niagara escarpment. The Star subsequently apologized for any suggestion in that story and in later ones that there had been any impropriety on Mr. Yaremko's part.

.
The Canadian Press and the Globe and Mail regret any embarrassment or inconvenience caused by the CP report last Thursday.⁵¹

The Star made amends by pointing out Mr. Yaremko's good record in an editorial August 15.

Nixon's failure to relent in his campaign against the integrity of the government clearly failed to impress the public and, more importantly, it invited the scorn of the news media who were asking for specific incidents that Nixon did not (assume: could not) provide. Charlotte Montgomery revealed her frustration when she wrote in the Star that "Last night, Nixon gave another

⁵¹Globe, Aug. 16, 1975, p. 4.

tough speech on integrity which was hastily prepared and delivered to him as his campaign bus made a one-day swing through Niagara on the way to a nomination meeting in the riding of Hamilton Mountain."⁵² Moreover, Nixon's apparent contradiction during his half-hour interview with Fraser Kelly on CFTO-TV⁵³ made reporters even more uncertain of the Liberal leader's intentions. When Kelly had asked Nixon, probably for clarification, if he was questioning the personal integrity of the premier, Nixon replied: "The premier's and the government's."⁵⁴ The subsequent headline in Monday morning's Globe announced that "Nixon Questions Personal Integrity of Premier Davis."⁵⁵ The afternoon Star, after having had time to contact Davis, front-paged the story that Davis was "angered" by the attacks on his personal honesty.⁵⁶ Robert Miller reported the incident as being "the first time Nixon had gone so far as to question the premier's personal honesty, and it left Davis sounding both hurt and angry."

⁵²Star, Aug. 14, 1975, pp. 1-2. (This brings to mind a comment of Edwin Newman who wrote in Strictly Speaking (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1974) pp. 70-71, that "we in the news business are being unfair to [speech] writers, and inaccurate as well. For years we should have been reporting, 'President Kennedy, in a speech largely written by Theodore Sorenson [sic] and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., said today . . .'" and 'President Nixon, using words and ideas principally supplied by Patrick Buchanan, said today . . .")

⁵³Nixon was to debate Lewis on CFTO-TV but got the entire half-hour to himself when Lewis, angered that the press would not be permitted to accompany him to the studio, backed out at the last minute. This incident and the two debates that did take place will be explained fully in Chapter IV.

⁵⁴Globe, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 1.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 1.

The next day, under the head "Nixon defends attacks on Premier's integrity," the Liberal leader was quoted in the Star as saying his foray was not new and that he did not mean to imply that the premier was corrupt. When asked to define integrity as he saw it, Nixon said: "We're talking about bad judgment in government, misleading policies, political and intellectual integrity."⁵⁷

The apparent turnabout--the notion that Davis' personal honesty was as suspect as the government's--seems to have brought reporters to the premier's defence. Political columnist Robert Miller, who earlier⁵⁸ had said integrity always is an issue and had called on Nixon and Davis to unabashedly state and defend their positions, now, apparently, had made up his own mind on the matter. He wrote that

Liberal Leader Robert Nixon is frequently described as the Mr. Nice-Guy of Ontario Politics.

Why?

His weekend attack on the personal integrity of Premier William Davis was neither honest nor nice.⁵⁹

When Miller's assessment of the integrity issue is compared with earlier comments of his counterparts at the Globe and Sun, the ineffectiveness of the Liberal campaign thus far and the media response to that ineffectiveness becomes clear. Norman Webster wrote in the Globe that:

⁵⁷Star, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 6.

⁵⁸Star, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 7.

⁵⁹Star, Sept. 3, 1975, p. D1.

He's a quality man, Mr. Davis. He is in political trouble at least partly because of gutsy, long-range decisions that have angered groups concerned with short-term and their own narrow interests. There are good reasons to replace a government that has sat for 32 years, but William Davis' integrity and character are not among them.⁶⁰

Claire Hoy, who never tried to hide his intense dislike for Nixon, said essentially the same thing in the Sun:

Let's face it, apart from oodles of petty patronage, this government on a major scale, has been remarkably clean. That's a tough fact to face when you're trying to make integrity stick as the campaign biggie.⁶¹

It may be argued in retrospect that news media overplayed the integrity theme, especially since they apparently agreed with Stephen Lewis that it was not an issue relevant to the election. What probably sustained it as the centrepiece was the delicious confrontation it prompted between Davis and Nixon. When Nixon first suggested that he really was not calling the personal honesty of Davis into question, for example, reporters probably stumbled over each other to get the premier's "reaction." They no doubt were delighted with his frank response ("the hell he wasn't . . .⁶²) for it provided additional flavor to an already juicy story. A penchant for providing a running account of the campaign road show seems to have impeded the media in its effort to discuss the issues they saw as being most relevant to the election.

⁶⁰Globe, Aug. 17, 1975, p. 7.

⁶¹Sun, Aug. 18, 1975, p. 8.

⁶²Star, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 1.

The party leaders, to be sure, were discussing issues other than integrity during these first three weeks of campaigning. Among other things, Lewis was urging Davis to extend the freeze on oil and natural gas prices that was due to expire at the end of September. He was proposing budgetary cuts in Ontario Hydro, the provincial electric utility, and he was calling for more housing starts with a pledge to force developers to build or relinquish their land. Nixon also urged a review of oil and natural gas price increases and criticized the government for allowing what he believed to be a shortage of hospitals in the province.⁶³ Davis, for his part, promised more gun control legislation and vowed to enact a Sunday-closing law that would affect most retail establishments.

While these issues were discussed as they were brought up by the candidates, their appearance in the media was sporadic and usually in isolation. They would seem to surface and then disappear, as a goldfish comes up for food, without undergoing full exposure or causing too much attention. Nixon did manage to briefly shift the focus of the campaign to the quality of education, an issue that probably could have won him votes had he not crossed his fingers and prompted the press to take more interest in his handling of the issue than in its intrinsic merits.

⁶³Not long after the election the minority Conservative government closed some hospitals in the province to cut costs in the health ministry. The NDP strongly opposed the move and motioned a vote of no-confidence on the issue. The Liberals, who had just elected a new leader and thus were not prepared to go to the hustings, supported the government to avoid a spring election.

Nixon maintained that the quality of education was declining in Ontario and vowed to return the three Rs to the classroom. Speaking to the Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation, he promised an administrative shake-up that would save the education system \$50 million. But, as Charlotte Montgomery pointed out in the Star, "Nixon didn't explain how he arrived at that figure."⁶⁴ As it happened, Nixon meant to say \$11.27 million; his original figure had included some non-education-related savings. When the mistake was made clear, the Star so reported it in the following head: "Nixon mistaken in saving, aide says."⁶⁵ But the Globe propagated the misinformation by announcing in a headline that "Nixon promises to cut \$50 million from school costs" while reporting in the ensuing story that "a Liberal Party researcher later questioned Mr. Nixon's statement and said cutting out the [regional] offices could only result in a saving of \$11 million."⁶⁶ John Downing, writing in the Sun, recognized the issue as important and devoted an entire column to praising Nixon's concern with it. But he lamented that "an able performance is ruined by a goof" and said that "most won't know he did well." Downing gauged the public mood accurately when he said people would remember that Nixon "didn't keep his facts straight on a major issue."⁶⁷

⁶⁴Star, Aug. 15, 1975, p. 3.

⁶⁵Star, Aug. 16, 1975, p. 3.

⁶⁶Globe, Aug. 16, 1975, p. 1.

⁶⁷Sun, Aug. 17, 1975, p. 6.

Indeed, Nixon's campaign to restore the three Rs would hereafter be prefaced with the advice that the Liberal leader first brush up on his own 'rithmetic.

The education issue never would receive the attention it probably deserved and Nixon's estimates on costs and spending would be suspect for the duration of the campaign. Robert Williamson later would write in the Globe that "it was only under questioning by Toronto reporters that [Nixon] disclosed a \$7-million price tag on one of his alternatives."⁶⁸ And when Nixon charged in a speech September 8 that Davis had let the economy slide, Charlotte Montgomery would write in the Star that "it was the first time in the campaign that Nixon volunteered detailed figures to support his statements."⁶⁹ Mary Trueman of the Globe was more persistent in this instance and asked the Liberal leader to interpret the "six pages of Statistics Canada figures" in his own words. She wrote that "he pointed to the figures and replied: 'I don't know what that means. It's supposed to back up what I say in the other part . . . sorry Mary!'" The early-edition headline to the effect that Nixon could not interpret his figures prompted a telephone call from the party leader who was quoted in later editions as saying: "Frankly, I thought she was joking. It's incredible to me that she didn't understand them." The late editions also said that Nixon insisted he really did understand the statistics but that he would

⁶⁸Globe, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 5.

⁶⁹Star, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 6.

not say that Trueman had misquoted him.⁷⁰

Nixon's fumbling with figures and apparent political rhetoric about integrity contrasted sharply with Stephen Lewis' precise and articulate campaign. Late in August, John Downing would observe in the Sun that:

The NDP right now is backing its issues with more research than the other parties. There is substance to their [sic] attack. And whether or not you agree with their arguments, you can't fault them for not being specific.⁷¹

The real significance of Nixon's blundering--the story it seems to have told the media and the public--probably was best put by the Globe's Norman Webster who observed in respect to Nixon's error on education costs that "you just will not see Stephen Lewis making the sort of goof Robert Nixon did."⁷²

Lewis' reliability was augmented by an image of sincerity that reporters found hard to ignore. After the NDP leader had addressed the issue of occupational health at a uranium mine in northern Ontario, and had been clearly moved by his conversation with a miner who was dying of cancer, Robert Miller wrote in the Star that Lewis' "issue-oriented campaign . . . reached the height of drama at Elliot Lake . . . where Lewis made a brilliant and emotional speech to 250 miners."⁷³ Similarly, Jonathan Fear noted

⁷⁰Globe, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 1.

⁷¹Sun, Aug. 27, 1975, p. 3

⁷²Globe, Aug. 18, 1975, p. 7.

⁷³Star, Aug. 30, 1975, p. 28.

in the Globe that the speech "began with a deep sigh and was at times choked with emotion."⁷⁴

Lewis' people-oriented campaign was far removed from his dogmatic approach in 1971 and it brought its own repercussions from a cynical press. Connie Nicolson wrote in her Sun column that the NDP leader was "concentrating on being nice, quiet and reasonable--making people feel that the old red tide of socialism theme that marked the 1971 campaign is really just a gentle pink-tinged swell."⁷⁵ Nicolson's colleague at the Sun, Claire Hoy, was more cynical in his description of Lewis' image. After writing about Lewis as "the new, moderate, loving, friendly, warm, relaxed, less strident NDP leader," he added parenthetically: "at least that's what he says."⁷⁶ Mary Trueman wrote in the Globe that Lewis' aides had suggested the following adjectives to describe the NDP leader: relaxed, witty, mature.⁷⁷ And Robert Miller wrote in his Star column that "the new subdued and faintly jolly Lewis is in direct contrast to the aggressive Robert Nixon and the pugnacious William Davis, not to mention the old ultra-sharp Lewis."⁷⁸ The NDP leader was not amused by this attention and complained that the press was discussing his character in "a smart-ass way that offends me."⁷⁹

⁷⁴Globe, Aug. 29, 1975, p. 4.

⁷⁵Sun, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 3.

⁷⁶Sun, Aug. 18, 1975, p. 8.

⁷⁷Globe, Aug. 13, 1975, p. 1.

⁷⁸Star, Aug. 16, 1975, p. C1.

⁷⁹Globe, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 4.

When a television reporter asked him how much of his campaign was composed of the real Stephen Lewis and how much was political manoeuvre, Lewis retorted: "Do you want it in percentages or fractions?"⁸⁰

The premier's campaign was primarily defensive; and that part which was aggressive was directed against Nixon more than Lewis. The summer polls, after all, had indicated that the Liberals were the party to beat. But the polls also showed that Davis was preferred over Nixon as premier by 14 percentage points. Perhaps that is why Davis repeatedly referred to the Liberals as "the Nixon party."

Davis had little difficulty warding off the Liberal attack. He emerged virtually unscathed from the defence of his integrity and was able to win forays with figures that involved Nixon's cost and spending mistakes. But the premier was not so easily able to strike down Stephen Lewis. On one occasion, Davis sought to discount Lewis' contention that prime agricultural land in Ontario was going out of production at the rate of twenty-six acres per hour. He said the figure was based on research by university economists who overlooked factors that would reduce it. While the Globe ran a story to that effect under the head: "Davis disputes Lewis figures on loss of prime farmland," it also ran immediately beneath that story another entitled: "It's a blue herring, NDP leader asserts," and quoted Lewis as saying that "all

⁸⁰Globe, Aug. 15, 1975, p. 4.

this nonsense about a group of U of T professors who studied farm acreage between 1960 and 1970 is just so much hokem. The NDP never saw such a study and would never have used it. Talk about a blue herring."⁸¹ Readers might have been left wondering who to believe; was the plight of agricultural land really as bad as Lewis said it was? Those who turned to the Star that day might not have had their question answered but they would have been given an indication of who had a better grip on the issue. Andrew Szende wrote that "Davis said Lewis' claim that Ontario is losing 26 acres of farmland every hour is not accurate, but when reporters asked him for the correct figure he replied he did not know."⁸²

Davis had promised at the outset that he would make no expensive promises and, for the first three weeks, he kept his word. So much so that newsmen were beginning to wonder what the Conservative campaign really entailed. When Davis said he would strengthen gun-control laws, Claire Hoy berated him in the Sun for making law and order an issue in a province that does not have a problem handling crime.⁸³ When he promised laws that would force most retail establishments to close on Sundays, David Allen wrote it off in the Star as "a vague promise" and "action the government has been studying for years and contemplating for months."⁸⁴

⁸¹Globe, Aug. 30, 1975, p. 5.

⁸²Star, Aug. 30, 1975, p. 28.

⁸³Sun, Aug. 17, 1975, p. 6.

⁸⁴Star, Aug. 25, 1975, p. 1.

And reporters seemed always on their guard against the political trick. Davis was criticized widely for giving \$45,000 to North York Mayor Mel Lastman--a Tory candidate--for an experiment in transporting oldsters. Globe columnist Norman Webster called the manoeuvre "cynical politics of a very high order," and said "the Tories will have to go some to top themselves."⁸⁵

The restlessness of reporters with the Davis campaign was obvious. Connie Nicolson observed for her Sun readers that "Boring it certainly is, on the campaign trail with Premier William Davis these late summer days."⁸⁶ Stef Donev noted in the Star that "thousands of people who streamed by Premier William Davis yesterday gave him scarcely a second glance as he and his aides toured Ontario place and the Canadian National Exhibition."⁸⁷ And Star columnist Robert Miller wrote in apparent frustration that:

for 25 days now, Davis has wandered around Ontario telling people what they already know: that Ontario is a fine place to live, work and raise a family. What he has not done is tell people what they want to know, which is whether (and how) it will go on being such a fine place.⁸⁸

The turning point, the spark that would ignite the campaign into full fury came Wednesday night, September 3, when Stephen Lewis had taken his entourage of aides and reporters to

⁸⁵Globe, Aug. 22, 1975, p. 7.

⁸⁶Sun, Aug. 23, 1975, p. 3.

⁸⁷Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

⁸⁸Star, Sept. 6, 1975, p. C10.

the small community of Penetanguishene where he spoke at a dinner sponsored by the Midland Labor Council. The topic of his talk was familiar, rents, but the reaction to it was most unexpected. To place the incident in perspective, it should be recalled that the housing issue was a major plank in the NDP platform and, accordingly, Lewis had been calling for rent controls incessantly, arguing that landlords were needlessly and harmfully raising rents by unreasonable proportions. Just one day previously, Premier Davis had announced that his government would amend the Unconscionable Transactions Act to allow previously-established rent review boards to sue landlords deemed accused of "gouging."⁸⁹ It was a concession to the opposition because before that the Tories were resting on the belief expressed by the then-Minister of Housing, Donald Irvine, that the publicity generated by rent review boards would "shame" landlords into keeping their rent increases in line.⁹⁰ But neither Lewis nor Nixon was satisfied with the Tory promises; both kept calling for rent review boards "with teeth."

Lewis finally made himself heard in Penetanguishene. In a vengeful verbal outburst, Lewis said "most landlords don't know the meaning of shame,"⁹¹ and he described eight cases of rent increases which he believed to be so intolerable as to assume an urgency that precluded the affected tenants from waiting for their days in court. He named names and quoted figures. For example,

⁸⁹Star, Sept. 5, 1975, p. 1.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 15.

⁹¹Star, Sept. 4, 1975, p. 1.

Lewis revealed that forty-year-old Kathleen Ridgeway, a single working mother, had been forced to leave her apartment in Mississauga because of a 53-percent increase in her rent--from \$209 per month to \$319--that would have consumed 41 percent of her monthly income. The NDP leader also told of Paul Forder of Scarborough who had been given five days to decide whether or not to accept a rent increase from \$244 to \$370 per month.⁹²

The following day, the Star ran a front page headline which read: "'Shameless' landlords increased rents 50% Stephen Lewis claims."⁹³ The ensuing story, written by Andrew Szende, outlined each of the eight cases. The Star went further and urged in a sidebar that readers register their own rent-related complaints. The letters came in droves and for the duration of the campaign the Star could be counted on to run such hard-luck stories as "Mother, 6 Children moved from tent to motel room" complete with a six-column by 4-1/2-inch photo of the family.⁹⁴ The lead story in Friday's issue centred on a survey in the Toronto borough of North York; the head read: "Tenant Survey says 92% want rent controls." The red line on Saturday spelled: "Rent Gouging: Who's Telling the Truth," but on the second page readers would find an eight-column head which read: "Lewis renews gouging charges--and tenants agree." The lead story on Monday told of an eighty-five-year-old

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Star, Sept. 5, 1975, p. 1.

⁹⁴Star, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 3.

widow who was using ninety-three percent of her income to meet her rent.

The Lewis campaign clearly had found an issue around which to rally and, apparently, a forum--the Star--in which to stage the show. A Star editorial recalled its earlier stand in opposition to rent controls but now said:

we cannot ignore the evidence presented by New Democratic Party Leader Stephen Lewis, documenting cases in the Metro Toronto area where tenants have had their rents raised by 50 per cent or more at one blow. This certainly looks like gouging A decent society cannot allow people of modest incomes to be pushed out on the streets when there is no alternative housing within their means.⁹⁵

The Globe was more cautious in its discussion of Lewis' revelations but recognized the significance of the issue nonetheless. It subordinated the story to one on Davis asking Ottawa to help keep down mortgage costs but dutifully reported that "50% rent jumps shock audience at Lewis meeting."⁹⁶ The Globe also reported the North York survey on the front page of its Friday issue but on the second page it ran the following story:

Liberals, PCs favor rent review
NDP, Communists want controls

Since the Communist Party had gone virtually unmentioned in the Globe and other papers as well, it is interesting to observe the newspaper's penchant for linking the Communists to the NDP on this vital issue in such a blatant manner.

⁹⁵Star, Sept. 5, 1975, p. B4.

⁹⁶Globe, Sept. 4, 1975, p. 1.

Claire Hoy, who was following Lewis at the time for the Sun, conceded only partial validity to the NDP leader's arguments. "Each case clearly represents injustice," he wrote Thursday morning, "but there is so much of the story he does not tell." Hoy said Davis was only partly responsible for the injustices and accused Lewis of making a "blatant overstatement" in asserting that landlords have no shame. Hoy continued:

He inevitably moves his audience, exhilarates them [sic], draws them into the topic, delights them, scares them and becomes one with them.

But behind all the style there is still the radical Stephen Lewis, the Socialist who would as he said last night, freeze rents if he were Premier.⁹⁷

The Sun usually found more important things to display on its front pages than election news and the rent controversy did not alter that policy. But with the Star playing the story to the hilt, no one--no paper--could ignore Lewis' appeal. The NDP leader now was the focus of the election campaign--at least in the eyes of the Toronto press. His preoccupation with individual rent cases seems to have accentuated the other facets of his campaign, a development clearly manifested in the series of announcements that would follow from the premier.

Davis released a statement on Saturday, September 6, in which he vowed to establish an Institute of Occupational Health to research problems faced by industrial workers. Although the premier never referred to the written statement in his speeches of that day,

⁹⁷Sun, Sept. 4, 1975, p. 3.

the announcement was considered a major development. Brian Valee wrote in the Star that occupational health had emerged as a major issue in the campaign and said in his second paragraph that Stephen Lewis "has continually championed the cause of those workers at Queen's Park." Then, in his third paragraph he reported on Davis' promise to establish the Institute of Occupational Health and quoted the premier as denying it was an election ploy to blunt the NDP leader's attacks.⁹⁸ But David Allen recognized the move as a possible political manoeuvre and reminded his Star readers that Davis "last week attacked . . . Nixon for promising to establish new government agencies."⁹⁹ And in an editorial September 16, the Star said:

It shouldn't require a provincial election to remedy the sorry state of health safety controls in Canadian uranium mines. But it's questionable whether anything would have been done if NDP Leader Stephen Lewis hadn't made a campaign to prevent deaths from lung disaster in the Elliot Lake mines a major issue.¹⁰⁰

The premier's announcement on occupational health was followed closely by a new government policy statement on energy prices. After meeting for three and a half hours with his cabinet Sunday night, Premier Davis announced an extension to November 15 of the freeze on oil and natural gas prices that was due to expire September 30. He said the public and the government both should

⁹⁸Star, Sept. 11, 1975, p. 8.

⁹⁹Star, Sept. 8, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰Star, Sept. 16, 1975, p. B4.

have time to study an interim report from the Royal Commission on Petroleum Pricing that would be released September 24 before any energy policy was firmly established. Mary Trueman wrote in the Globe that the announcement "closely follows a call for indefinite extension of the freeze by . . . Lewis and a statement by . . . Nixon that he, too, would consider extending it."¹⁰¹ Ken Waxman noted in his lead for the Star that both opposition leaders had branded the move as "political desperation."¹⁰² And in an editorial, the Star said that Premier Davis had begun to show his "preference for public relations over policy" and suggested that the forty-five-day moratorium on price increases probably could have been avoided if Davis had come up with an energy policy to follow the freeze when it first became an issue.¹⁰³ The Sun ran a rare news story on its front page that implied strongly that Davis had granted the price freeze under pressure from Lewis and Nixon.¹⁰⁴ The Toronto newspapers clearly were one in seeing the move as a hastily-planned election ploy rather than a carefully-considered policy decision.

The clincher came when the premier addressed the issue of rents. He had, to this point, discussed the issue in stages as outlined previously, revising his position each time in a way that would bring more pressure on landlords to justify their rent

¹⁰¹Globe, Sept. 8, 1975, p. 1.

¹⁰²Star, Sept. 8, 1975, p. 1.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. C3.

¹⁰⁴Sun, Sept. 8, 1975, p. 1.

increases. Now, Davis surprised everyone by saying he had decided to empower rent review boards to roll back suspicious-looking rent increases retroactive to July 30 until the matter could be heard by a court.

Christie Blatchford wrote in the Globe that the announcement could be interpreted in three ways: "as a clarification of the Conservative position on rents, as an elaboration of it and as a reversal of policy--depending on the statements being made, by whom and at what time of day."¹⁰⁵ The Star, under the head "Davis in retreat on rent boards Lewis claims" quoted the NDP leader as saying the announcement represents "a remarkable flip-flop" and shows the premier to be "in full and unlovely retreat." The story also quoted Robert Nixon as saying the Tories are "desperately trying to restore public confidence in their government."¹⁰⁶ The Sun's Connie Nicolson wrote in her column that "Lewis is not boasting when he says that on almost every major issue where he has called for reforms since the campaign began, Davis has responded."¹⁰⁷ And John Downing, writing in the Sun a day later, said he was "almost afraid to write about rent review because the Conservatives might have something new to tell us about their policy at any minute."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Globe, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶Star, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷Sun, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸Sun, Sept. 10, 1975, p. 4.

The new Tory promises did little to lure the tide of public support. Indeed, they clearly were counterproductive in that they focused public attention squarely on the New Democrats whose daily assaults on the state of the province suddenly assumed an almost sanctimonious validity. Stephen Lewis had brought the campaign to his own turf and no amount of political manoeuvre by either Davis or Nixon could alter that fact. Witness the way in which the Star backed into an announcement by Davis of major interest to farm workers.

Claiming that Premier William Davis is running a "defensive campaign," Stephen Lewis . . . predicted yesterday that the government would soon announce a farm income stabilization program "to try and recapture agriculture's support."

Hours later, Davis promised that if the Progressive-Conservatives are returned to power, provincial income taxes will be rebated to seasonal farm workers.¹⁰⁹

Lewis succeeded in riding the tide through to election day. He grabbed headlines by naming landlords who gouged, tenants who suffered, farmers who faced bankruptcy. He showed how a substantial number of the \$1,500 grants to first-time home-buyers introduced the previous spring were going to middle and upper-income families (a \$120,000 home in the York Mills area, five homes in North Rosedale at an average of \$107,000, etc.). In short, he campaigned on a plane that voters could reach; he talked about problems with which people could easily identify. As Lewis made news, Lewis became news, and the press kept the snowball rolling all the way to the polls.

¹⁰⁹Star, Sept. 10, 1975, p. 10.

CHAPTER III

EDITORIAL REACTION

During the five-week campaign for the 1975 Ontario provincial election, a total of eighty election-related editorials appeared in the three Toronto newspapers (Table 12), fifty-three of which were partisan, i.e., they commented directly upon the attributes or shortcomings of the three main political parties vying for victory. The majority of these (thirty) dealt with the Progressive-Conservatives, which is understandable in that the Government would naturally draw more comment than the opposition. The fact that more than half of the Tory-related editorials were critical of the party (only seven of the thirty were supportive) would seem to indicate a general disenchantment with the provincial government. But the aggregate statistics are misleading because two of the three Toronto papers actually endorsed the Conservatives for re-election. The bulk of the negative comment appeared in the one paper that did not: the Toronto Star.

The Conservatives fared best in the Globe and Mail, which ran four editorials in support of its endorsement. The most convincing of these was the September 9 endorsement itself which praised the Government issue by issue. Addressing the economy, the Globe said Ontario had achieved the "highest kind

Table 12. Distribution of editorials.

Nature of Editorial	Globe and Mail	Star	Sun	Total
Supports PCs	4	1	2	7
Critical of PCs	4	14	0	18
Generally about PCs	2	3	0	5
Progressive-Conservatives	10	18	2	30

Supports Liberals	0	3	0	3
Critical of Liberals	2	1	7	10
Generally about Liberals	0	0	0	0
Liberals	2	4	7	13

Supports NDP	2	3	1	6
Critical of NDP	1	2	0	3
Generally about NDP	0	2	0	2
New Democrats	3	7	1	11

General	13	9	5	27

Total	28	37 ^a	15	80 ^b

^aIncludes one editorial equally supportive of Liberals as critical of Progressive-Conservatives.

^bReflects above adjustment.

of credit rating in the world." In respect to housing, it said Ontario had done better than any other province. The editorial noted that the Tories had succeeded in "ensuring that more children receive more education" and recalled that Ontario was the first province to freeze oil and gasoline prices "while searching for means to keep them as low as possible." The Globe also defended the integrity of the Conservative Party. It said the Government had found this issue rough "and we have made it rougher" but that the Tories had responded with "the tightest legislation in the country on election financing, and on conflicts of interest for cabinet members."

In its endorsement, the Globe praised all three party leaders as being "reasonable, intelligent and industrious" and while conceding that both opposition parties had offered "individual initiatives which are sound and attractive," it said they had not "shown us how these initiatives would fit into a comprehensive approach to governing that would enhance the well-being of the province without tilting an already precarious economy into deep trouble." The timing of that comment is interesting because it came just as Stephen Lewis was beginning to make himself heard on rent control and other issues that were central to the remainder of the campaign. Moreover, the reader needed only to glance across the centrefold to see the same accusation levelled against the Conservatives themselves. Whether by design or coincidence, columnist Norman Webster wrote opposite the editorial endorsement of the Conservatives that "the Tories have offered

precious little of substance beyond their own wonderful selves. Mr. Davis has scattered some minor pronouncements along the campaign trail, but there has been no articulation of the Government's plans for Ontario in the next four years."¹¹⁰

The Globe also ran four editorials generally critical of the Tories--but the criticism, to be sure, was aimed at matters of limited importance. As an example, the Globe criticized Premier Davis on the first day of the campaign for his choice of election date. An election on September 18 not only meant that voters would be enumerated (registered) during the month of August when many people would be on vacation, but it also posed special problems for Jews (see Chapter I). The Globe decided that "this was not a satisfactory way for the Government to treat the electorate."¹¹¹ A subsequent editorial voiced disapproval of the way North York Mayor Mel Lastman was announced as a local candidate: during a joint news conference with the premier at which a new dial-a-bus service for the elderly was unveiled. The coupling of the two events struck the Globe as "being a trifle heavy."¹¹² The paper did not hesitate to name Tories it would not support (Ed Havrot, Tom Wardle) but suggested that, all told, the "record of performance in the campaign would argue for a Conservative Government."¹¹³

¹¹⁰Globe, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 7.

¹¹¹Ibid., Aug. 12, 1975, p. 6.

¹¹²Ibid., Aug. 22, 1975, p. 6.

¹¹³Ibid., Sept. 17, 1975, p. 6.

The Conservatives fared poorest in the Star but not as badly as they might have. While praising the governing party for making Ontario a "splendid place to live," the Star said the Davis government had "run out of bold approaches and ideas."¹¹⁴ Of the eighteen editorials in the Star that dealt with the Conservatives, fourteen were critical of the party. The criticism was qualified, however, and it seems as though the Star had second thoughts from time to time. In an early editorial, the Star conceded that "the Conservatives' long-run record in keeping Ontario prosperous and growing is undeniably good." Its point of contention was that the Tories had not demonstrated "new policies to maintain that record in the face of recession, inflation and high energy costs."¹¹⁵ It was equally vague on specifics during the closing days of the campaign when it wrote that

A strong government would manage to stay on course during a five-week election campaign. Yet the Davis Government has tacked and veered so much in that period that it resembles a weathervane rather than the rock of Gibraltar.

.
A change is due, not for the sake of change, but to get rid of an intellectually exhausted government of expediency, and to replace it with fresh ideas, vigor and new direction in the conduct of Ontario's affairs.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Star, Aug. 27, 1975, p. B4.

¹¹⁵Ibid., Aug. 12, 1975, p. B4.

¹¹⁶Ibid., Sept. 16, 1975, p. B4.

One of the specific issues--if it can be called an issue--on which the Star held the Government at fault was "the way it has allowed the provincial courts in the old city hall to deteriorate."¹¹⁷

The Sun called for a reduced Conservative majority on the first day of the campaign and then ran a subsequent formal endorsement. It did not buy the Star's argument for change; the Sun made the opposite case:

All in all, Ontario has had effective, able governments for most of the 32 years of Tory reign. So we think the voters have no realistic alternative but to return Bill Davis--but with a reduced majority, to give the opposition more influence and keep Tory arrogance subdued.¹¹⁸

The Sun was more interested in running down the Liberals than in supporting the Conservatives--and its attacks were venomous. During the second week of the campaign, the Sun dismissed the Liberal leader as incompetent. The editorial was scathing: "Bob Nixon, whose Liberals had more popularity than the Tories last winter, has blown it. He hasn't provided leadership, he's too subservient to Trudeau, he has no program, few strong candidates, Ottawa would play him like a fiddle."¹¹⁹ The most vicious attack came after Nixon, in response to a question by a high school student, said he could not guarantee not to increase the salaries of provincial legislators. The Sun was savage in its editorial

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Sept. 18, 1975, p. B4.

¹¹⁸ Sun, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Aug. 18, 1975, p. 10.

reaction:

May Nixon get his reward in heaven, because God forbid that this will win him votes on earth.

He as much as said he'd be favorably inclined towards a raise for politicians. This statement by Nixon is as good a reason as any (and there are several others) to hope that he is never premier. It is a good reason for voting either Tory or NDP on Sept. 18.

.
The kid who asked Bob Nixon that loaded question deserves our collective gratitude. He revealed a man whose values are distorted, who has an exalted opinion of his trade, who doesn't identify with working people.¹²⁰

The Globe ran only two editorials about the Liberals, both of which were critical. In one of them, it expressed disbelief of the Liberal assertion that mineral production in Ontario was behind that of Canada as a whole. Accusing Nixon of juggling statistics to prove his point, the Globe said "fun with figures is one thing, fraud is another."¹²¹ The Globe also jabbed at the connection between the provincial and federal Liberal parties. In a remark that seemed to lend credence to Premier Davis' description of the relationship as one of "kissing cousins," the Globe suggested that the appearance of Prime Minister Trudeau at Nixon's Liberal Party picnic earlier in the summer soldered the connection between the provincial and federal Liberals--even though both men vowed at the time that Trudeau's appearance was not politically motivated. The editorial then confidently asserted that the

¹²⁰ Ibid., Sept. 9, 1975, p. 10.

¹²¹ Globe, Sept. 13, 1975, p. 6.

resignation of John Turner as the federal minister of finance during the final week of the Ontario election campaign could not have been timed better to have "a more wrenching effect on the confidence in the Liberal capacity to handle the nation's business."¹²²

The Liberals enjoyed the endorsement of only the Star but, strangely, the paper ran fewer editorials about the party of its choice than it did of the opposition. Three of the four editorials dealing with the Liberals were favorable but the Star seems again to have been uneasy--this time with the rhetorical nature of the Nixon campaign. After establishing early that "the decisive factor in the Ontario election is likely to be the assessment the voters make of the three party leaders,"¹²³ the Star found itself faced with Nixon's ill-advised attacks on the Government's integrity. The Star wound up refuting every one of Nixon's allegations of impropriety and concluded that "unless Nixon has new evidence of corruption . . . , we're inclined to agree with Lewis that integrity is a non-issue in this election."¹²⁴ And the paper seems almost to have been begging for credibility when it wrote that Nixon had "struck a responsive chord with his concern for the declining quality of education . . . His emphasis on an adequate supply of housing at affordable prices also touches broad

¹²²Globe, Sept. 16, 1975, p. 6.

¹²³Star, Aug. 13, 1975, B4.

¹²⁴Ibid., Aug. 14, 1975, p. B4.

masses of people."¹²⁵ The Star apparently decided it could better defend its editorial endorsement by discrediting the Government, as indicated by its fourteen editorials to that end, than in building up the Liberals.

The New Democratic Party was unique in that it was the only party to receive more favorable than unfavorable editorial comment in each of the three Toronto papers, although it was the focus of fewer editorials than the other two parties. None of the papers felt comfortable praising the socialists but all were hard-pressed to avoid it.

The Sun was alone in calling specifically for the NDP to form the Official Opposition, i.e., win the second highest number of seats in the legislature, but even it conceded that the notion "might sound strange to some."¹²⁶ It argued that the New Democrats had been the only effective opposition in the legislature for years,¹²⁷ and reasoned, tongue in cheek, that "at least if true socialists ever got in power, they'd end the nonsense of teacher strikes and union blackmail. They'd wreck everything else too, but that's another editorial!"¹²⁸

The Star had stronger reservations about the NDP but did concede that it "qualifies admirably as a strong opposition

¹²⁵Ibid., Aug. 27, 1975, p. B6.

¹²⁶Sun, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 12.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., Aug. 18, 1975, p. 10.

party."¹²⁹ Turning away from specific issues and towards socialist dogma in this early editorial, the Star suggested that the NDP "would prefer to share poverty equally rather than create a widely if imperfectly distributed wealth." The editorial went on to downgrade the NDP because of its heavy reliance on the support of trade unions, and it warned that "no relief from inflationary wage claims and industrial and civil service strikes can be expected from that quarter."

It was shown in Chapter II how this early nervousness dissipated when Lewis began to articulate his issues. The Star's editorial reaction to Lewis' campaign against occupational health hazards and soaring rents was discussed previously and need not be repeated here. The point is that the Star, after dismissing the NDP as irresponsible, dramatically changed course and began to present the party as worthy of consideration.

The Globe also promulgated the evils of socialism and even suggested that the New Democrats were waging a fraudulent campaign by ignoring the basic ideological thrust of their party. It said "electors might have been better informed if Mr. Lewis had undertaken a detailed accounting of how, where and when he would apply socialist principles to the day to day operation of the province."¹³⁰ But the Globe conceded in the same editorial that the NDP had "justification for its lament that the Davis Government

¹²⁹Star, Aug. 27, 1975, p. B4.

¹³⁰Globe, Sept. 17, 1975, p. 6.

takes whole planks from its platform and paints them Conservative blue." It said "the stolen ideas have been good ideas." The editorial went on to scold the Liberals for appearing "more Official than Opposition," and said they "lacked the consistency and inventiveness essential to a party pretending to be the alternative to a government in power." Was this the Globe's way of joining the chorus in calling on the voters to consider the New Democrats as worthy of sitting as the Official Opposition?

Such a chorus did appear to be evident. In fact, it was almost cacophonous as election day drew near. The merits of the NDP campaign clearly impeded editorial writers partial to the Tories. They were left to deal with a Conservative Government waging a campaign on NDP issues and, to be sure, the party was duly scolded--at least in the Globe. But the fact of a prosperous province remained, and provided enough material with which to build a convincing case for the re-election of the Government.

The failure of the Liberals to attract significant editorial support can be explained by their misguided campaign--the epitome of which was their shoddy attack on the integrity of the Government. This blunder contrasted sharply along side the solid NDP effort and seems to have led even the friendly Star to the brink of abandoning ship. What support the Liberals had at the outset seems to have eroded with each mistake.

The New Democrats fought the plague of habitual distrust and managed, remarkably, to gain respect and attention to which they were unaccustomed. Perhaps the achievements of underdogs

always tend to be exaggerated but the figures in Table 12 can speak for themselves. The favorable editorial reaction to the New Democratic Party should be regarded quite simply as a tribute to an honorable campaign.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEBATES

A standing joke among media critics is built upon the "instant analyses" that television network newsmen usually afford presidential speeches, debates and other official messages delivered directly to the public. The viewers, so the joke goes, need the journalists to tell them what they have just heard. That the people should require the press to explain a message they were able to hear for themselves strikes critics as presumptuous and self-esteeming on the part of the media. Even while they probably would not hesitate to accept the opinion of their doctors on the cause of an abdominal pain, they concede no contradiction in refusing to trust professional journalists to dissect political speeches.

The joke may be carried further to include those who review plays, concerts and other public performances. The witticism would have the theatre-goer eagerly thumbing through the morning papers to find out whether or not he enjoyed the show. While there may be some basis for humor here, the fact remains that people depend upon journalists to interpret political messages, to differentiate new policy from old, to sift the rhetorical from the relevant, just as they expect the theatre critic to contrast the current performance with past renditions, expose

less-than-obvious flaws in professionalism and comment on other factors bearing upon the general merit of the show. It is therefore incumbent upon this study to give special attention to the televised debates between the three party leaders during the 1975 Ontario election campaign, and to concentrate on the way they were discussed by the Toronto press.

Televised political debates are intended primarily as forums in which policy differences can be accentuated; where the pledges that emanate from the hustings can be scrutinized. By stacking the planks of one party platform alongside those of another, the debate is expected to better prepare the voters to make their eventual choices. But recent political debates have taken on the added dimension of confrontation--and in that respect one expects a winner and a loser. They are contests not unlike heavyweight boxing matches in which points are awarded by pre-selected judges for effective "scores," all of which are tallied at the conclusion of the event. In political debates, the news media are self-appointed judges and their verdicts have the potential for affecting voters as much as the debates themselves.

The political debates of the 1975 Ontario election campaign came about after a good deal of bickering among the three parties and two television networks. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation had proposed one three-man debate--a format preferred by the Liberals and accepted by the New Democratic Party. But the Conservatives insisted on the round-robin format proposed by CTV which called for three debates, each of which would involve two

party leaders. The eventual schedule called for a Nixon-Lewis debate on August 30, a Davis-Lewis debate on September 6 and a Nixon-Davis debate September 13. These would be taped in the morning at CFTO-TV in Toronto and broadcast the same evening. CFTO political director Fraser Kelly would serve as moderator. The programs would be carried on the CTV network in Ontario and would be made available to any other television or radio station that wanted them. That the Tories had insisted on the CTV plan struck no one save John Slinger of the Sun as being particularly significant. He observed that

People sometimes forget the warm links between the CTV affiliate CFTO, which is owned by John Bassett, and the Dalton Camp-Norman Atkins crew that pilots the Tory operation. They're the people who engineered the federal leadership success of Robert Stanfield.¹³¹

It is not clear when CFTO first voiced its intention of barring the press from the morning tapings, but the policy was evident enough on the day prior to the first scheduled debate^{*} between Nixon and Lewis for the two leaders to demand that it be rescinded. Nixon was quoted as having said on Friday, August 29, that "it will have to be opened up. I am insisting on it as a condition of taking part."¹³² Lewis took a similar stand. The threatened withdrawals had little effect on CFTO, however, as evidenced by the armed guards at the station gates who had been ordered to refuse admission to the press. Lewis honored his

¹³¹Sun, Aug. 18, 1975, p. 5.

¹³²Globe, Aug. 30, 1975, p. 4.

commitment and told one reporter at the scene: "I don't believe CFTO should be dictating the terms of the election campaign. They view the program as a television scoop rather than a legitimate exercise in public affairs."¹³³ Nixon, on the other hand, entered the studio. The result was a half hour of prime time for the Liberal leader, who answered questions put to him by Fraser Kelly.

The press reacted on three fronts: the performance of Nixon, the ethical decisions of the leaders regarding their participation and the conduct of CFTO-TV. It generally was believed that Nixon gained little by snubbing Lewis and claiming the half hour for himself. Star columnist Robert Miller wrote sarcastically that "Nixon sounded well-informed, confident and firm handling those questions and soft challenges from Fraser Kelly."¹³⁴ Claire Hoy of the Sun, a chronic Nixon-hater, was more vindictive; he could not forgive the Liberal leader for breaking a promise and said that "if you ever had the slightest doubt about whether you can believe Bob Nixon or not, that question should have been answered at the CFTO gate yesterday."¹³⁵ The television critic for the Globe, Blaik Kirby, was among the few who were favorably impressed by Nixon's performance. Kirby said Nixon

had an honest, earnest, serious and never pompous tone in his answers; you might almost call it a Stanfield image. These days, that's quite possibly

¹³³Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹³⁴Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹³⁵Sun, Aug. 31, 1975, p. 6.

more persuasive than cold, flippant, arrogant brilliance.
Nixon is not brilliant.¹³⁶

Lewis was widely praised for his refusal to take part and most columnists believed he would easily have won in open debate. The Globe wrote editorially that

Stephen Lewis, to his credit, refused to enter the station. Robert Nixon, to his shame, tossed principle and former declarations aside . . .

As a debate, it was no contest; Mr. Lewis won hands down.¹³⁷

Sun columnist Claire Hoy said he usually does not agree with Lewis but described the NDP leader as being "without parallel in Ontario politics in the art of debating." He said Nixon was not a good debater and "simply would have been clobbered."¹³⁸ John Slinger was not convinced that Lewis' morals would win him any points. He wrote in the Sun that:

Lewis forgets that not many people in the vastness out there care a tinker's dam for the problems of the press--who could have seen the debate later last night anyway--and that a lot of folks are a mite suspicious of the media and disinclined to sympathize with a stand on their behalf.¹³⁹

His observation seems to have been borne out by the cynical letter to the editor of the Globe. David Turnbull, of Mississauga, Ontario, concluded that "it is clear the winner is . . . Lewis

¹³⁶Globe, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 5.

¹³⁷Globe, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹³⁸Sun, August 31, 1975, p. 6.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 3.

because he managed to get the press on his side without delay."¹⁴⁰

CFTO had cited "technical and professional" reasons for barring reporters from the scene. It was an excuse Star columnist Jack Miller deemed to be "pathetically weak."¹⁴¹ An editorial in the Globe said the hiring of three armed policemen to guard the station entrance "was a scurrilous thing to do--and by a station that has so little concern for informing the public that during the first two weeks of the campaign it offered almost no coverage of the campaigns of the three leaders by its own reporters." The editorial went on to say the decision was "gross and stupid . . . , not least in its implication that the working press is lawless."¹⁴² Globe columnist Norman Webster called the CFTO excuse "the purest brainwash" and urged that steps be taken to ensure it is not repeated for the Lewis-Davis debate. Webster was especially saddened that Ontarians were denied the opportunity of seeing Lewis in debate, saying "they might find that his policies, his personality, and his ability to skewer flabby answers merit their consideration."¹⁴³

Blaik Kirby, the Globe's television critic, was one of the few who defended CFTO, but even he could not accept the given explanation. Kirby believed CFTO should have said "It's our show

¹⁴⁰Globe, Sept. 3, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁴¹Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁴²Globe, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁴³Ibid, p. 7.

and we want our station to have it first." He reasoned that no newspaper columnist would tolerate CFTO looking over his shoulder during an exclusive interview with a party leader.¹⁴⁴ That viewpoint was shared by the society columnist for the Sun, Joan Sutton. She called the complaints by the press "petulant and childish," saying that CFTO "has a perfect right to ban reporters from one of its own news events if it chooses to do so." Sutton said she would never feel obligated to permit other journalists to sit in on an interview of hers because "that's just the way the game is played."¹⁴⁵ Jack Miller of the Star wondered how John Bassett, "the super-Tory president of the Channel 9 operation," must have felt after allowing Nixon a half hour of prime time¹⁴⁶ and suggested in a subsequent column¹⁴⁷ that Davis demand equal CFTO time for a solo performance.

In defence, CFTO's vice-president for news and public affairs, E. J. Stuebing, argued in a letter to the Sun that "this taping only becomes a public event when it appears on the air." He called the taping itself "a production of the program in the studio" which "in no sense can be termed anything else."¹⁴⁸ In a parenthetical reply, the Sun said only that the whole affair "proved Nixon's principles to be more 'flexible' than Lewis."

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴⁵Sun, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷Star, Sept. 6, 1975, p. H1.

¹⁴⁸Sun, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 12.

Whether or not Lewis' non-participation won him the first debate, his philosophical stand left him in a quandary. Unless CFTO was prepared to change the rules, Lewis would be compelled by principle to boycott the second debate as well. A third-place candidate needs all the public exposure he can get and Lewis' political advisers were uneasy about the NDP leader missing two rare opportunities to confront his opponents. The NDP campaign manager, Gerald Caplan, sought the opinions of reporters on the tour and found that the votes were split about equally between those who believed Lewis should debate and those who urged him to resist.¹⁴⁹

The dilemma was on the minds of editorial writers as well. The Globe urged Lewis to debate Davis and "lay the whole issue of the conduct of the program before Mr. Davis as the first item to be debated." It reasoned that "Mr. Davis, who has already called a royal commission to probe other aspects of television, could hardly refuse."¹⁵⁰ But the NDP leader came up with a different idea. He urged the premier in a letter to insist that reporters be allowed to view the taping, telling Davis that he "could not bring himself--on simple principle--to enter CFTO premises . . . through a literal cordon of armed policemen and security guards."¹⁵¹ The premier's reply was released to the press and published:

¹⁴⁹Globe, Sept. 5, 1975, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰Globe, Sept. 3, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁵¹Star, Sept. 1, 1975, p. 6.

I have given careful consideration to your letter to me on this matter. It is my feeling that I have agreed to debate with you under the format and guidelines developed by CFTO, which were established following discussions with representatives of each of the parties. I did not attach any conditions then and I would not think it reasonable for me to attempt to do so now.

I urge you again, therefore, to change your mind and debate with me on Saturday. In addition to being leader of a major party, you are recognized as a skillful debator and it would be unfortunate if the viewing audience did not have the opportunity of hearing your views. Surely what matters to the electorate is that the leaders discuss the issues.¹⁵²

It is not clear whether Lewis' eventual decisions to go ahead with the debate was prompted by Davis' letter or the fact that his political advisers could not bring themselves to forfeit another half hour of prime time. John Slinger predicted in his Sun "Scuttlebut" column that

The explanation will be that the New Democrats thought they had an agreement with Nixon not to appear unless the rest of the press could get in and that Nixon welshed. The NDP will say there never was such an agreement with Davis so, obviously, the circumstances are completely different.¹⁵³

The Globe explained Lewis' decision as the ultimate victory of one of two conflicting principles: that all events in an election campaign should be public, and that it is "the clear duty of a party leader to use every available opportunity to explain and define his party's philosophy and practice."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²Star, Sept. 3, 1975, p. 4.

¹⁵³Sun, Sept. 2, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴Globe, Sept. 6, 1975, p. 4.

Lewis did argue to the end that reporters should have been able to watch the taping because it is "good to see what happens before, what distractions there are during, what it's like afterwards."¹⁵⁵ But there were those, such as Clare Hoy of the Sun, who believed Lewis had sold out. Hoy reasoned that "the principle that meant so much to Stephen Lewis a week ago has not changed one bit. Only the politics of it has." Hoy refused to accept the argument that the best interest of the electors demanded that the debate take place because "if that was [sic] true this weekend, it was true last weekend as well."¹⁵⁶

The debate itself centred on issues put forth by Lewis. The two leaders talked primarily about the loss of prime agricultural farmland, the lack of adequate housing and the increasing cost of rent. Since a large part of the encounter was a battle of statistics that could not readily be checked, the debate provided no clearcut winner. But Stephen Lewis, by virtue of his having taken command, seems to have come out on top. Star columnist Robert Miller gave it to the NDP leader--but with reservations.

The way I saw it Lewis won. But his victory was hollow in that he achieved it by default. Davis was content to defend himself and his policies, instead of attacking Lewis and the New Democratic vision of a state-run tomorrow today.¹⁵⁷ Debates,

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Sun, Sept. 7, 1975, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷A reference to the official slogan of the New Democratic Party: "Tomorrow Starts Today."

like wars, are won by the side that mounts the best and last offensive.¹⁵⁸

Claire Hoy, writing in the format of a news story this time rather than in his familiar Sun column, called the Davis-Lewis debate "a polite exchange of ideas with very little new information."¹⁵⁹ Globe reporter Robert Williamson said that "Lewis, as expected, took command of the debate after the opening statements . . ." and that the premier "appeared tense and nervous at the outset . . . but was well-briefed and armed with statistics to challenge what have been some of Mr. Lewis's major criticisms of the campaign . . ."¹⁶⁰ Globe reporter Mary Trueman polled five undecided voters whose consensus was that the debate was "good entertainment but inconclusive." One of the five felt that Lewis should have buttoned his jacket.¹⁶¹

The final debate--between Nixon and Davis--was "everything it promised to be--and less." The assessment was made by Robert Miller in the Star¹⁶² who perhaps described the event more accurately than anyone else. It was bound to be an explosive encounter because of the mutual disrespect--it bordered on hatred--that Davis and Nixon were known to have had for each other. A Globe editorial had warned that "Mr. Davis likely will come to the

¹⁵⁸ Star, Sept. 9, 1975, p. D1.

¹⁵⁹ Sun, Sept. 7, 1975, p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Globe, Sept. 8, 1975, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶² Star, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 6.

encounter angry" because "he dislikes Mr. Nixon . . . and is deeply offended by the attacks on his (Mr. Davis's) integrity."¹⁶³ That being so, it is ironic that the Liberal issue of integrity was not discussed to any significant degree. More important, the social and economic issues that were raised were quickly overshadowed by the combative nature in which they were debated.

Daniel Stoffman described the debate in the Star as "an angry shouting match" that developed after the premier accused Nixon of "running a campaign based on 'misrepresentation, inaccuracies and falsehoods.'"¹⁶⁴ Bruce Kirkland, also of the Star, was more specific but no more favorably impressed:

A careful monitoring of the exchange disclosed that Davis asked Nixon seven major questions about policy that Nixon failed to answer. Nixon asked Davis five major questions which Davis ignored . . .

By the end, both seized on the other's lack of answers as proof of the rightness of his side.¹⁶⁵

Robert Williamson of the Globe selected a Davis attack on Nixon as his lead and quoted the premier as saying "the Liberal party and its leader have waged one of the worse election campaigns seen in politics."¹⁶⁶ The story began on the front page and continued on page two under a headline that read: "Nixon rebuked by Davis in bitter TV debate." Whether all this implies that Davis

¹⁶³Globe, Sept. 9, 1975, p. 7.

¹⁶⁴Star, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶⁶Globe, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 1.

won the debate is an open question but it proves how the selection of quotations can flavor a story. Williamson went on to say that

Mr. Davis gave the impression of standing on the right-hand side of truth. He tried to pin Mr. Nixon down on some of the Liberal research errors . . .

Mr. Nixon tried to stay on the attack, evading questions and probably confusing viewers with statistics, while not giving much idea of exactly how he would cut government spending.

CFTO received more than 300 calls after the Davis-Nixon debate, almost all of which were critical of the party leaders and host Frazer Kelly. Globe columnist Scott Young noted that Kelly had announced that the order of the opening remarks had been decided by the "toss of a coin" and defended the moderator for his lack of intervention in the debate. "By letting them go at it," Young reasoned, "we got a sense of the dislike Premier William Davis and Liberal Leader Robert Nixon have for one another; we saw them as they are in stress situations."¹⁶⁷

And reporters had plenty to say about this particular stressful situation. Stoffman wrote that "Davis appeared flustered toward the end of the debate . . ."¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the premier was caught addressing Fraser Kelly, whom he knew well, as Mr. Fraser. As Star columnist Robert Miller saw it,

Even staunch partisans were left unsettled by Davis's uncharacteristic belligerence, by Nixon's clumsy attempts to be chummy (he kept calling the

¹⁶⁷Globe, Sept. 17, 1975, p. 37.

¹⁶⁸Star, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 1.

Premier "Bill" even after Davis made it coldly clear he was not interested in getting to know "Mr. Nixon" on a first name basis) . . .¹⁶⁹

And Claire Hoy, in character, did not hesitate to exercise his full right of opinion in the Sun:

If there's one impression that strikes me about it all it's that Davis does manage to convey the aura of a responsible, concerned leader, while Nixon comes off as the somewhat whiny school kid who keeps getting his facts confused even though a few of his points may be good.¹⁷⁰

And Globe columnist Norman Webster, who mused that the debate provided a sample of everyday routine at Queen's Park, noted that

Two very interesting things were on display--two things that are central to this campaign and the way it has unfolded. The first is the Nixon campaign style.

The Liberal leader has gone steaming ahead with accusations, statistics and remedies, neither responding to challenges nor, in public at least, letting the Davis counterattacks get under his skin. Attack, attack; never explain, never justify. It has been a clever tactic.

The other notable thing was the tightness of William Davis. Mr. Davis was so woundup he jumped all over the lot, letting Mr. Nixon slip away.¹⁷¹

So who won the debate? Most journalists considered the word "debate" a misnomer and were reluctant to name either participant. But for Globe columnist Scott Young, the winner was obvious: "The main message the debate gave to me could be spelled

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ Sun, Sept. 14, 1975, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Globe, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 7.

out in two words: Stephen Lewis."¹⁷² Star television critic Dennis Braithwaite commented similarly that

If these two clumsy, rude, fatuous, opportunistic, disingenuous . . . ill-informed politicians are the best the province can offer, then there is indeed no real choice and very little hope . . .

. . . The winner Saturday? Why, Stephen Lewis . . .¹⁷³

If the debates were not persuasive, they still were central to the three campaigns in that they tended to appeal to emotion rather than intellect. There is evidence that the reaction of the Toronto press was so inspired. The aborted Lewis-Nixon debate actually generated a sub-debate on the ethics of the two participants--and it was on this that the originally scheduled match ultimately was decided by the Toronto press. Similarly, the open display of temperament in the Davis-Nixon affair became a larger issue than any social or economic concern. The only debate that came off principally as intended was the Davis-Lewis encounter. It also generated the least excitement of the three.

Perhaps the penchant on the part of the media for building images explains why they judged the debates on character rather than on issues. It certainly explains how Stephen Lewis managed to win two debates in which he did not even participate.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁷³Star, Sept. 15, 1975, p. D7.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

There lived this ambitious man named Billy Blue. Now Billy had big plans for his future. He had been running this kingdom and he wanted to continue. Just three people blocked his dream: Mary Public, the princess who owned the country; and two ugly step-brothers, Big Bob and Stephen the Clever-tongued, who didn't much like his succession planning or how he did his work around the house.

--John Downing, Toronto Sun, August 19, 1975

This caricature serves well to illustrate how the Toronto press regarded the 1975 Ontario election campaign as a fight among three party leaders whose respective personalities carried as much political weight as the issues for which they stood. On election day, the Globe pointed out that 127 promises had been made during the five-week campaign and went on to summarize them. What was not apparent at the time was the subordinate role these issues had come to play in relation to the manner in which they had been presented to the public through the press. It has been shown how Nixon's fumbling of the educational spending issue led to the fading of the issue itself while Lewis' skillful presentation of his case for rent control led the press to build an issue that had not received much attention when the campaign began.

In the first chapter of this study, a reference was made to a remark attributed to Robert Nixon in which the Liberal leader suggested the press considered the NDP more knowledgeable and sincere than the Liberals. It seems that Nixon's remark has some validity (and it seems he might also have used the word "reliable" since, unlike his own experience, none of Stephen Lewis' statistical assertions was disproved). Nixon was right in saying that on some issues the Liberals and NDP were philosophically congruent, at least in a general sense. Both had called for a reduction in the cost of energy, both had advocated more housing starts and both had recognized a need for rent control. But it was Lewis who was able to convince the people of this by staging a campaign to which the press could easily respond. The thesis is that the press was more favorably inclined towards the NDP than the Liberals and even the Conservatives, not because it agreed with Stephen Lewis' political philosophy, but because it was impressed with the NDP leader's defence of that philosophy. The evidence presented in Chapters II, III and IV was intended to show that this was brought out in spite of editorial and other arguments to the contrary.

This proposition is not without the implication that Toronto reporters were unfairly partial towards the NDP (editorials, commentaries and news stories are, after all, written by different groups of people), and for that reason it requires closer examination. There is, to be sure, a basis for believing in an inherent affinity for the NDP on the part of the press. Jonathan Manthorpe, in his study of recent Ontario politics, wrote in respect to the

early 1970s that

Of the three parties in the New Democrats in general had the best relationship with the Press Gallery . . . The NDP members and party officials in general had franker and more open dealings with reporters than did the other parties. As a body reporters like blunt honesty, and the New Democrats seemed prepared to display that quality.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, reporters on the NDP tour in 1975 made no secret of their respect for Lewis because of his rare accessibility. The NDP leader knew most reporters on the tour by name, consulted them on occasion for advice and rarely was unavailable for questioning. Toronto magazine writer Barbara Amiel suggests Lewis cultivated this rapport himself because he wanted the press and electorate to "embrace precisely the same policies and person they had feared in 1971."¹⁷⁵ [emphasis added]

This relationship contrasted markedly with Robert Nixon's penchant for punctuality that frequently left reporters behind filing stories while the campaign bus or plane headed on towards the next stop. And Premier Davis won few new friends by declining even to ride on the same bus with the reporters assigned to cover him. Star reporter David Allen was so upset about the Tories' poor campaign planning that he felt compelled to complain openly that

Travel arrangements have been changed without notice to the media, which pay their reporters' own way on the tour. Reporters themselves are often given no time to write and transmit their stories

¹⁷⁴Manthorpe, The Power and the Tories, pp. 179-180.

¹⁷⁵Barbara Amiel, "The Remaking of a Socialist," The Canadian, November 29, 1975, p. 8.

and Davis made major speeches in out-of-the-way places without the presence of the TV crews the party bosses cater to.¹⁷⁶

The NDP avoided such criticism, possibly because its campaign manager, Gerald Caplan, took the time to apologize to the press corps for the grueling schedule at the outset of the campaign and to promise that it would not be typical.¹⁷⁷

But whatever the relationship between the press and the New Democratic Party, there is no solid evidence to suggest either the party or its leader were the beneficiaries of sympathy. Indeed, the story of this thesis is how the NDP persuaded a highly-skeptical press to issue what amounted to a subtle endorsement. The evidence presented in the preceding chapters shows that the press, rather than playing favorites, gave an effective campaign its due. Robert Meadow's conclusion (Chapter I) that "candidates who make more news receive more coverage" becomes applicable here. While the NDP may not have been afforded as much space in Toronto newspapers as the Conservatives, it succeeded in gaining a strategic advantage by grabbing headlines and holding them on up to the eve of the election. More important, Lewis' success with his case for rent control created the bandwagon effect that political candidates dream about--because the issue then, of course, swells to include the parade as much as the floats of which it is composed.

¹⁷⁶Star, Sept. 13, 1975, p. B5.

¹⁷⁷Globe, Aug. 14, 1975, p. 4.

Lewis had a remarkable sense of the public mood. He identified the issues with which people were most concerned and avoided those not on the list. Ronald Rutledge realized this to his frustration in the Star:

The Conservatives have patched up relations with the teachers, and hope they have allayed public anxieties about basic skills and rising costs.

The Liberals, determined not to be cheated out of a promising issue are talking about the erosion of standards, and the necessity for a core curriculum. . . .

Meanwhile, the New Democratic Party . . . has chosen to say almost nothing so far about these issues, presumably on the grounds that the public is not interested. The most irritating thing of all is that the NDP appears, on this point at least, to be right.¹⁷⁸

Journalists in acknowledging Lewis' effective campaign often tried, sometimes desperately, to downplay the NDP leader's success. In a column generally favorable to the New Democrats, the Globe's Norman Webster felt it necessary to remind his readers of Lewis' appearance in debate with Premier Davis in which Webster said Lewis "bent principle for higher political motive."¹⁷⁹ This comment was made after the columnist had called the NDP "the only party that has run a campaign with real integrity--soundness, honesty and a package that hangs together," and had described Lewis himself as "something of a linguistics superstar, an almost disturbingly articulate man who speaks in sentences that form paragraphs, pages and then monographs of coherent thought, laced with humor."

¹⁷⁸Star, Sept. 8, 1975, p. C3.

¹⁷⁹Globe, Sept. 11, 1975, p. 7.

Claire Hoy of the Sun seems to have had the most difficulty in reconciling himself to the effectiveness of the NDP campaign. He was adamant in insisting that socialism just could not happen in Ontario. On September 3, Hoy lauded Lewis' concern over mercury pollution but concluded that the NDP leader, "for all his humanity, knows what his chances are." The following day, Hoy wrote about Lewis' "persuasive arguments" for rent control that were made with "a frightening command of the language." But again he concluded that "even Stephen Lewis, with all his style, cannot sell the message of his politics. People are just not ready for him." And on September 5, Hoy praised Lewis' assertion that oil prices were too high and said "it's refreshing in these mad times to see anybody take a serious look at a serious subject." But once again Hoy felt it necessary to tell his readers, lest they forget, that "he won't gain very many votes on the issue." What makes Hoy's remarks even more interesting is the way he turned the argument around in respect to the Conservatives. In reference to a Tory promise of tax credit on certain mortgages, Hoy predicted that Robert Nixon would "repeat his charge that Davis is practicing chequebook politics and buying votes, which of course he is." But Hoy wondered "how many people will worry about that when they get their \$500 cheque in the mail."¹⁸⁰

Lewis was lucky, to be sure. He could not have forecast the political benefits that resulted from his non-appearance at the first scheduled debate. Nor could he have engineered the open feud

¹⁸⁰Sun, Sept. 12, 1975, p. 5.

between Premier Davis and Robert Nixon that worked to his advantage. And Lewis said after the election that he considered the occupational health issue to have been a bonus. He said it was not an issue on which votes normally are won but that "in a sense that gives it even more importance, because the party was speaking to an issue about which we felt so strongly that we were willing to plunge in, even though the electoral implications were nil."¹⁸¹ But as Lewis saw it, if these were breaks, they were nothing when compared to the way the Star unexpectedly supported him on the rent issue. The NDP leader was quoted as saying some weeks after the election that

The great and savage irony is that Beland Honderich [publisher of the Star], in the middle of the night, came to the conclusion that the possibilities for circulation improvement in his competition with the Sun for the apartments of Toronto, by playing rents to the hilt, was more important than the Liberal party. And so he gave to the New Democrats, at the psychological turning point of the campaign, an issue played to the point of obsession, day in and day out for six days, as though the Liberals didn't exist.¹⁸²

The phenomenon was not unlike the ratings game played by television networks. A program normally is discontinued when its audience drops below a certain level--regardless of its social value--and replaced with something that generates more appeal. And often it is the production technique--the polish more than the substance--that determines success. So it was with the press coverage of the 1975 Ontario provincial election campaign.

¹⁸¹Hailwood, "The Feast of Stephen," p. 35.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 23.

Stephen Lewis packaged the NDP issues of housing, energy, land and people so that they would arouse the electorate.

Professor Clarkson, in concluding that the press limits the capacity of parties to communicate their platforms by stressing only a few issues, told only half the story. The rest is the story of how the press selects the issues it does stress. When the opposition parties became aware of Stephen Lewis' technique they, apparently unable to duplicate the feat, turned to the very issues made popular by the NDP. It did not work because the press was less interested in the new positions of the opposition than in the fact of their switching. Gerald Caplan, the NDP campaign manager, said it best when he told reporters on the tour: "Face it, you are our whole campaign."¹⁸³

This study does not purport to be definitive. As a record of the election campaign itself, it falls short by omitting a number of incidents--such as Stephen Lewis' beneficial radio chat with conservative commentator Gordon Sinclair and Robert Nixon's pledge to dismantle the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry. And as a study of the Toronto press, it affords no opportunity for rebuttal or clarification by the reporters and newspapers named. But as in all scholarly endeavors, limits had to be imposed to prevent the study from straying from the central point, that is, to describe the way the Toronto press covered the 1975 Ontario election campaign.

¹⁸³Sun, Aug. 15, 1975, p. 4.

The study does not explain why the majority government of the Progressive-Conservative party came to an end in Ontario. Nor does it examine the issues of the campaign in their social and economic contexts; that job is left to political scientists and historians. But if it sheds some light on the role of the press in shaping political campaigns, if it shows how the press might sway public thought, indeed make up the public mind, and the factors that enter into the decision-making process, then it will have served its general purpose. And if it places the 1975 Ontario election under a brighter light, if it adds a new dimension to the interpretation of the election results, then it will have been doubly useful because it will serve the historians and political scientists who may want to look further into the event itself.

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