

PUBLIC POLICY SOURCES

Number 53

The Uneasy Case for Uniting the Right

Tom Flanagan

Contents

Introduction	3
Why are we talking about uniting the right?	4
The concept of opposition	7
Patterns of opposition	8
Does opposition matter?	11
How can this be true?	15
The bottom line: application to Canada	18
Bibliography	22
Acknowledgements	23
About the author	23



Public Policy Sources is published periodically throughout the year by The Fraser Institute, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

The Fraser Institute is an independent Canadian economic and social research and educational organization. It has as its objective the redirection of public attention to the role of competitive markets in providing for the well-being of Canadians. Where markets work, the Institute's interest lies in trying to discover prospects for improvement. Where markets do not work, its interest lies in finding the reasons. Where competitive markets have been replaced by government control, the interest of the Institute lies in documenting objectively the nature of the improvement or deterioration resulting from government intervention. The work of the Institute is assisted by an Editorial Advisory Board of internationally renowned economists. The Fraser Institute is a national, federally chartered non-profit organization financed by the sale of its publications and the tax-deductible contributions of its members, foundations, and other supporters; it receives no government funding.

For information about Fraser Institute membership, please call the Development Department in Vancouver at (604) 688-0221, or from Toronto: (416) 363-6575, or from Calgary: (403) 216-7175.

Editor & Designer: *Kristin McCahon*

For media information, please contact Suzanne Walters, Director of Communications, (604) 688-0221, ext. 582, or from Toronto: (416) 363-6575, ext. 582.

To order additional copies, write or call

The Fraser Institute, 4th Floor, 1770 Burrard Street, Vancouver, B.C., V6J 3G7

Toll-free order line: 1-800-665-3558; *Telephone:* (604) 688-0221, ext. 580; *Fax:* (604) 688-8539

In Toronto, call (416) 363-6575, ext. 580; *Fax:* (416) 601-7322

In Calgary, call (403) 216-7175; *Fax:* (403) 234-9010

Visit our Web site at <http://www.fraserinstitute.ca>

Copyright © 2001 The Fraser Institute. All rights reserved. No part of this monograph may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

The author of this study has worked independently and opinions expressed by him are, therefore, his own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members or trustees of The Fraser Institute.

Printed and bound in Canada.

ISSN 1206-6257

Introduction

Ever since the beginning of the United Alternative project in May 1998, conservative politics in Canada have revolved around the quest to “unite the right.” The formation of the Canadian Alliance consumed 1998 and 1999; then, after that party did not do as well as its founders hoped in the 2000 election, a new round of efforts commenced to bring the Alliance together with the Progressive Conservatives. Peter White and Adam Daifallah expressed the motivation for this initiative concisely: “Canada can have no strong and united opposition to the Liberals until the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative party find some way to come together again as one” (White and Daifallah, 2001, p. 52).

The underlying premise of such attempts at uniting the right is a belief in the superiority of the two-party alternative-government model of opposition. Hugh Segal, the president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, put it this way in a proposal for bringing the parties together: “Canadians and their democracy are well-served when voters have at least two choices at election time—an incumbent government seeking re-election and an alternative government that offers different priorities and policy choices from which voters can choose” (Segal, 2001). Likewise Canadian democracy is poorly served when voters do not have such a choice. As Joe Clark and Chuck Strahl put it: “The inability of any one opposition party to garner the electoral support necessary to contend for the governing role has seriously harmed the democratic system” (Clark and Strahl, 2001).

Initially, I also accepted this premise as self-evident; indeed, I probably contributed to its acceptance through some of my own writing on the subject (Harper and Flanagan, 1997; Flanagan and Harper, 1998; Flanagan, 1999, 2001b). In addition, however, I felt it was time to apply some scholarly effort to the issues and so suggested to

The Fraser Institute in early 2000 that I write a little book to be called *Getting Together: How Political Parties Cooperate*, with the intention of bringing together material I have been collecting for several years on party coalitions and mergers in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. The Institute agreed to consider publishing this book, and I still hope to write it when I get the chance; acquaintance with the history of cooperation between parties would prove useful to anyone trying to undertake it today.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the book. I started to think seriously about the underlying premise, and the more I thought and read about it, the more it seemed open to question. As I explain at greater length in this *Public Policy Source*, I have concluded that democracy can work well with each of several models of opposition, as long as the fundamentals of constitutionalism, rule of law, respect for property rights and markets, free discussion of public affairs, and a widely distributed franchise are respected.

The two-party alternative-government configuration is one of several workable possibilities; it is not a universally valid model that Canada must rush to adopt, and dire consequences will not necessarily follow if this configuration is not embraced. In short, political science provides no categorical imperative to “unite the right.” While I am not against unification as such, I would place a higher priority on maintaining one or more parties whose policies are compatible with the focus of The Fraser Institute on directing “public attention to the role of competitive markets in providing for the well-being of Canadians.” Personally, I would not find it worthwhile to support a party not committed to competitive markets, even if it were in a position to “unite the right” and seemed poised to win the next election.

This *Public Policy Source* is addressed in the first instance to libertarians—those who want free

markets and individual choice to be the main determinant of public policy—as well as to conservatives—those who like free markets but are also concerned about the maintenance of traditional morality (Boaz, 1997, pp. 291-294). Even though they have some important disagreements with each other, libertarians and conservatives make up “the right” in Canada and so are directly involved in attempts to “unite the right.” I hope this essay will help clarify their thinking about what they have to gain or lose in such efforts.

In a broader sense, it is also addressed to Canadians of all political persuasions. Commentators of many points of view have entered the debate about uniting the right, often in the belief that the two-party alternative-government model of opposition is essential to the health of democracy. Even if they do not support it or want to be part of it, they may think a united party of the right would be beneficial to Canada. Thus, anyone concerned with the functioning of Canadian democracy should be interested in the line of argument developed here. “Uniting the right” happens to be the topic of the day, but at another time it could just as well be “uniting the left,” or “uniting Canadian nationalists,” or “uniting environmentalists.” There is nothing intrinsically conservative or libertarian about the challenges facing the Canadian right today; they are issues of political party competition and institutional structure, not of ideology per se.

Why are we talking about uniting the right?

A recent book on Canadian political parties calls the 1993 federal election “one of the greatest democratic electoral earthquakes ever recorded” (Carty, Cross, and Young, 2000, p. 12). The Progressive Conservatives, who had run a majority government from 1984 to 1993, were reduced to two seats. One new party, the Bloc Québécois, won 54 seats and became the Official Opposition, while another newcomer, the Reform Party, won

52 seats, all but one in the West. The New Democrats fell to seven seats and lost official party status. The only element of continuity with the past was that the Liberals, in opposition for the previous nine years, returned to the position of government, which they have occupied for about 70 percent of the twentieth century.

These results shattered the conventional understanding that Canada was a so-called “two-party-plus” system, in which the Liberals and Conservatives would alternate in office while smaller parties might intermittently elect a few members. Suddenly Canada looked much more like a “one-party-plus” system, in which only the Liberals had broad enough support to elect a government, while other parties might represent particular regional or demographic slices of public opinion (Flanagan and Harper, 1998, p. 170).

Although this seemed at the time to be a novelty in Canadian politics, it was in fact the culmination of an old trend. The 1993 election gave Canada a five-party configuration; but ever since 1921, when the Progressives broke the Liberal-Conservative duopoly that had controlled Parliament since Confederation, there had been at least three, and more often four, parties represented in the House of Commons. Throughout the twentieth century, the Conservatives were not really a full-fledged opposition party able to present an alternative government. They governed in only 31 years since Wilfrid Laurier’s critical Liberal victory in 1896. Moreover, each time they won a majority of seats, it was in special circumstances that could not last:

- In 1911, Robert Borden won a majority with the support of Henri Bourassa’s Nationalists inside Quebec and dissident Liberal protectionists outside Quebec. He was re-elected in 1917 in a wartime coalition with part of the Liberals. Once the war was over, the coalition collapsed and the Conservatives came third in the 1921 election (Beck, 1968).

- In 1930, R.B. Bennett won a majority as the Depression settled in, but it proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. Unable to restore prosperity, Bennett was resoundingly defeated in 1935, and the Conservatives remained out of power until 1967 (Beck, 1968, pp. 191-205).
- In 1958, John Diefenbaker won a huge majority when Maurice Duplessis's Union Nationale machine delivered 50 seats in Quebec. But by 1962 Duplessis was dead, the UN was out of power, and Diefenbaker lost his majority in that year's election (Beck, 1968, pp. 311-328; Flanagan, 1998, pp. 84-85).
- In 1984, Brian Mulroney won another huge majority by recruiting Quebec separatists and nationalists into the party and promising to re-open the constitutional file. He won another majority in 1988 by supporting free trade with the United States, perhaps the only issue on which the Quebec and Western elements of his caucus could unite. But his over-extended coalition fell apart when he could not deliver the constitutional changes that his Quebec followers demanded, and the Tories were reduced to two seats in 1993 (Flanagan, 1998, pp. 86-88).

The weight of historical evidence therefore suggests that Canada has a long-term tendency toward one-party-plus politics, with a weak opposition able only occasionally and for short periods of time to offer an alternative government (Johnston, 2001).

After the 1993 election, the Bloc Quebecois constituted the Official Opposition in Parliament; but having no plans to run candidates outside Quebec, and being dedicated to taking Quebec out of Canada, it was obviously not an alternative government. The Reform Party, which went on to become the Official Opposition after the 1997 election, presented itself as capable of forming a future government; but its support base was too regionally concentrated and demographically

limited to win even a plurality of seats, let alone a majority. Thus, political activists of conservative sympathies, seeing Reform's limitations, quickly started to talk about "uniting the right." In May 1996, the author David Frum, assisted by the young lawyer Ezra Levant, organized the *Winds of Change* conference in Calgary to discuss unification. Chaired by Stockwell Day, it was attended by more than a hundred writers, researchers, and political activists. Federal Tories stayed away, but there was a large contingent of provincial Conservative organizers from Ontario. Preston Manning was not there, but he was represented by Rick Anderson and Cliff Fryers, his chief lieutenants.

Winds of Change recommended a strategy of cooperation at the riding level between Reform and the Progressive Conservatives, including joint nomination of candidates; but Tory leader Jean Charest rejected all such proposals. Reform leader Preston Manning was not so dismissive, but he continued to insist that Reform could win an election on its own. However, after Reform won only 60 seats in 1997, all of them in the West, Mr. Manning made a further move towards cooperation. At the May 1998 Reform Assembly in London, Ontario, he admitted that Reform was unlikely ever to win by itself and unveiled a plan for transforming the party.

Mr. Manning's plan, known as the United Alternative, was not exactly a proposal to "unite the right." It was rather an invitation to people from all quarters of the political compass to form a principled coalition based on points of agreement. Mr. Manning envisioned bringing together not only social and economic conservatives, but also democratic reformers and decentralists (Simpson, 2001, p. 108). But it turned out that most of the people interested in working with Reform were the so-called "Blue Tories," i.e., federal Progressive Conservatives who thought their own party was not conservative enough, particularly after Joe Clark had been elected leader. The Blue Tories were not numerous, but they in-

cluded some prominent organizers and fundraisers, such as Tom Long, chief organizer for Ontario premier Mike Harris, and Peter White, former principal secretary to Brian Mulroney. Thus, in practice the United Alternative turned into an approximation of uniting the right, even if that had not been Mr. Manning's original intention.

In the spring of 2000, after two national assemblies and two internal referendums, the Reform Party transformed itself into the Canadian Alliance, with prominent positions reserved for the Blue Tories. A hotly contested leadership race unexpectedly replaced Preston Manning with Stockwell Day as leader of the new party (Flanagan, 2001a, pp. 288-290). Expectations for the coming federal election ran high. Even though the Progressive Conservatives were still in the field, many thought that the Alliance would be strong enough to reduce the Liberals to a minority government. In what now seems like a euphoric haze of misjudgment, I wrote early in the 2000 election campaign that "an approximation of two-party politics seems to be just over the horizon" (Flanagan, 2000).

In the event, the Alliance did better in the 2000 election than Reform had ever done—25.5 percent of the popular vote, and 66 seats—but it fell well below expectations. In particular, it failed to displace the Progressive Conservatives. Joe Clark got elected in Calgary Centre and his party, although it gathered only 12 percent of the popular vote, won 12 seats, enough to be recognized as a party in the House of Commons.

In the wake of these disappointing results, the *National Post*, widely read among Canadians of conservative views, began calling for the departure of both Stockwell Day and Joe Clark from their leadership positions and quick merger of the parties to present one unified right-wing option to voters in the next election. Also, a group of highly placed Alliance members who had been close to

Preston Manning started a campaign to bring about a quick merger with the Tories. In March 2001, Mr. Manning published an important column in the *National Post*, arguing that a "strategic alliance" with the Conservatives had to be reached quickly and without the "exhausting schedule" of grassroots discussion or the use of approval mechanisms that had been part of the United Alternative (Manning, 2001).

In spring 2001, a dozen Alliance MPs were suspended from caucus for calling for Mr. Day's immediate resignation. Forming themselves into a new "Democratic Representative Caucus" (DRC), they pressed for close cooperation with the Progressive Conservatives. As Mr. Day came under attack from this internal opposition, he and his leading supporters, such as the new House Leader John Reynolds, also emphasized the importance of coming to a quick deal with the Tories. In June, Mr. Day announced that he would ask the National Council to hold an internal party referendum on the subject—later downgraded to a consultative poll to be carried out in fall 2001. When the results were reported in late October, almost 60 percent of respondents said they would like to see an agreement with the Tories to run a single candidate in all ridings in the next election, subject to such agreement being approved by Alliance members in an internal referendum (Alberts, 2001).

The Tories held talks both with Canadian Alliance and the DRC. After a highly publicized meeting at Mont-Tremblant, Quebec, in August 2001, they announced a coalition with the DRC, portraying it as the first step towards creating a broader political movement. Four members of the DRC subsequently returned to the Alliance caucus in early September 2001, but the remaining eight decided to persist with their project of cooperation with Mr. Clark's party. At a meeting in Edmonton held on 12 September, 2001, the 12 PCs and eight DRC members formed themselves into a combined caucus of 20, with officers drawn

from both groups. The Speaker subsequently recognized the PCDCR coalition as a functioning entity for some, though not all, purposes in the House of Commons.

Overall, the conventional wisdom in conservative circles in 2001 was that the highest priority was to defeat the Liberals and get control of the federal government, and that this would require bringing the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives together as soon as possible—preferably in a merger, but at least in some form of electoral coalition. An opposition that could not win an election, it was widely argued, was worthless.

The concept of opposition

Until the late eighteenth century, the British Parliament, especially the House of Commons, was understood as an adviser and counterbalance to the executive power of the Crown. It was expected to deliberate and arrive at a univocal position, to be conveyed to the King by a single “Speaker of the House.” In such a tableau, there was room for disagreement and debate among individuals MPs, but not for a “formed opposition,” that is, for an organized faction pursuing goals as a group. Because the House of Commons as a whole was effectively a loyal opposition to the executive power, there was no need for an internal opposition within the House.

Eighteenth-century statesmen and political philosophers almost unanimously condemned parties and factions (Hofstadter, 1969, pp. 10-13). Some, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Alexander Hamilton, thought that factions were intrinsically evil and should be suppressed. Others, such as David Hume and James Madison, saw factions as dangerous but inevitable expressions of human self-interest. The challenge for statesmen, according to Madison’s famous *Federalist 10*, was to construct an “extensive republic” with a representative system in which factions could

balance each other. The only great writer of the eighteenth century to take a more positive view of faction was Edmund Burke, who in 1770 formulated his classical definition of a political party as “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed” (quoted in Hofstadter, 1969, p. 32).

The practice of parliamentary opposition, in which an organized party criticized the government of the day and stood ready to form an alternative government, grew up slowly in tandem with the practice of responsible government, that is, of the Crown appointing only ministers who could keep the confidence of the House of Commons. In April 1783, King George III dismissed his Tory ministers and appointed a coalition ministry composed of followers of Lord North and Charles James Fox, two men who bitterly opposed one another. The ministry lasted only until December of that year and gave the very word “coalition” a bad name in English politics. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, party lines were fluid and there were numerous hybrid ministries (Butler, 1978, ch. 1). The phrase “His Majesty’s Opposition” was introduced in 1826 as a jest, not a serious term of political analysis. As late as 1867, John Stuart Mill could publish his magisterial *Considerations on Representative Government* without including any discussion whatsoever of organized opposition.

Perhaps the first well-known writer to try to take adequate account of opposition was Sidney Low, in *The Governance of England* (1904). His description of the role of opposition as an alternative government in a two-party configuration has entered the folklore of parliamentary wisdom: “The check on the Government in office is the existence of an alternative Government out of office, ready and able to take its place at any moment; and such an opposition government *in posse* is impossible without the two great well-balanced forces, always mobilized and on the war footing” (quoted

in Barker, 1971, p. 18). Only in the 1960s did the founding of the journal *Government and Opposition* (1965) and publication of a spate of books (Dahl, 1966; Ionescu and Madariaga, 1968; Hofstadter, 1969; Barker, 1971) create the study of opposition as a subspecialty in political science.

Opposition started to receive institutional entrenchment early in the twentieth century. Canada led the way in 1905 by beginning to pay an extra salary to the leader of the largest opposition party. Australia followed in 1920, Great Britain in 1937, and New Zealand in 1951 (McHenry, 1954). Canada also designated Stornoway as the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in 1950, a move that has not been imitated in other parliamentary democracies. Nonetheless, all parliamentary governments now officially recognize opposition in formal ways going well beyond paying the leader. These include paying honoraria to other caucus officers, appropriating money for extra staff, guaranteeing time to speak in floor debates and committee proceedings, and offering the leader confidential briefings and special access to foreign dignitaries.

There is a double rationale to these institutional developments. The first is that parliamentary criticism is intrinsically beneficial and results in better government. This position is a logical successor to the older view that Parliament as a whole acts as a check upon the executive government. Now that the practice of responsible government has virtually fused the executive with the legislature, Parliament as a whole cannot criticize the executive because the executive requires the confidence of the Commons and exercises party discipline to ensure that it remains in power. Hence it is logical for one part of the House, the opposition, to take over the function of criticism; human fallibility requires opportunities for criticism to be built into the political system.

The second rationale for giving institutional recognition to the opposition is that it constitutes an

alternative government ready to take office on short notice. Being only one step removed from the exercise of power, it should be brought into the system so that it will be prepared to exercise power responsibly when the occasion arises. This line of thought has led to labeling as failures those opposition parties that seem unable to win a national election and thereby form a government. In the case of contemporary Canadian politics, as indicated above, this argument has led to the drive to “unite the right” in the name of producing a viable and credible alternative government. Yet there are many difficulties with this conception. Even the most cursory survey of real-world politics shows that the alternative-government model is honoured more in the breach than the observance.

Patterns of opposition

Several patterns of opposition can be identified as ideal types. Like all ideal types, the lines between them are often fuzzy in the real world, but they can be useful as a way of describing recurrent situations. Below is my own classification. Other typologies using other terminology exist (e.g., see Sartori, 1976), but none is universally accepted. The terms I am proposing are italicized when they first appear in the following discussion.

The model advocated by partisans of uniting the right I call *two-party alternative government*. The paradigm of two big parties alternating as government and opposition is conventionally associated with the British parliamentary system, but in fact it has been the norm in Britain only since the end of World War II (Butler, 1978, pp. 112-113). From 1900 until 1945, the three major parties—Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour—participated in a long series of coalition and minority governments, at times also involving smaller parties such as the Liberal Unionists and the Irish Nationalists. Most, but by no means all, of these were so-called “National governments,” designed to meet the emergencies of war and depression.

Since 1945, Conservatives and Labour have taken turns governing by themselves, though Labour ran some minority governments in the 1970s.

Elsewhere, the two-party paradigm emerged in New Zealand in 1936, when a merger of the Reform and United Parties produced the National Party. Prior to that, there had been 25 years of coalition and minority governments involving three main parties plus independents (Bassett, 1982). In 1996, the introduction of proportional representation caused the two-party system to disintegrate, and all governments since then have been coalitions.

In one obvious sense, Canada has also followed the two-party model since Confederation: only the Liberals and Conservatives have ever formed federal governments, and they have always done so as single parties, except for the National Government associated with World War I. Also, prior to 1993, only the Liberals and Conservatives had ever been the Official Opposition (the Progressives won more seats than the Conservatives in 1921 and could have become the Official Opposition if they had wished). But since 1993, three different parties have been the Official Opposition—the BQ, Reform, and the Canadian Alliance; and, as noted earlier, Canada seems to have entered a *one-party-plus* phase, in which only the Liberals have enough support to govern and none of the opposition parties is a credible alternative government.

The United States, of course, also has a two-party system. Since the Civil War, only Republicans and Democrats have occupied the White House, and those two parties have consistently won almost all the seats in Congress. But in the American model of separation of powers, government and opposition do not exist in the same sense as in a parliamentary system. The president and cabinet cannot “fall” before the next election, and there is no alternative government in waiting. The president’s party often does not have a ma-

ajority in both houses of Congress (sometimes it has a majority in neither, as occurred in Bill Clinton’s second term); and even when the president does have a majority, the absence of party discipline means he cannot count on automatic support. In reality, almost all American legislation is written, passed, and amended by bipartisan coalitions. Rather than government and opposition, American politics is better described as an elaborate system of *power-sharing*, in which the two main parties exercise influence roughly proportional to the results of the most recent election.

Beyond the two-party, alternative government model lies the *alternative coalition* model, in which politics is dominated by two more or less stable coalitions of parties, usually described as lying on the left and on the right. Whichever coalition gets more seats in the election will proceed to form a government from among its partners. In practice, however, there are many variations.

Australia is closest to the pure two-party model in that the left is represented by only one party—Labor—and the right consists of a coalition between the Liberal and National Parties that has endured with few breakdowns since formation of the modern Liberal Party in 1944 (Costar, 1994). Since 1996, New Zealand seems to be moving in the direction of competing coalitions, with Labour and Alliance on the left and the National Party and the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, the ACT, on the right; but the Greens and New Zealand First refuse to align themselves in this way and at the present time hold the balance of power over a minority Labour-Alliance coalition government. The French Fifth Republic has seen an alternation in power of left and right coalitions, though the timing of elections means that the president is sometimes from a different side than the majority in the National Assembly. Post-war Germany offers another variation on the theme of alternating coalition governments. The dominant party of the right, the Christian

Democrats, is a permanent coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) with the Christian Social Union, which exists only in Bavaria. The Christian Democrats have occasionally formed a majority government on their own, but more frequently in coalition with the Free Democrats. Once there was even a so-called “grand coalition” with the Social Democrats (SPD). The latter are by far the largest party on the left, but have always had to govern in coalition with the Free Democrats or, more recently, the Greens. The overall picture is one of alternating CDU and SPD governments, but almost always moderated by the need for coalition partners to establish a majority in the Bundestag.

Within the category of alternating coalitions, then, the main variation is the degree to which the coalitions are identified before the voters go to the polls. In Australia and the French Fifth Republic, for example, the coalitions are always in place before the decisive vote. In the most recent New Zealand election, Labour and the Alliance announced their coalition ahead of time, but no coalitions were announced in the 1996 election and the government was put together afterwards through negotiations between party leaders. In Germany, it is clear that the CDU and CSU will always be together and that the Greens might join in government with the SPD but not with the Christian Democrats. The position of the Free Democrats, however, is less predictable because they have formed coalitions with both the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats.

If alliances are unpredictable most of the time and are firmed up only after the election, one can no longer speak of alternating coalitions. This is, in fact, a very common situation. The general picture in Europe, Japan, and Israel is that of a multi-party system, supported by one of the many forms of proportional representation, in which alternation in government is rare. Change in government usually means recomposing the ruling coalition. Some parties will stay in government,

others may leave, and still others may enter. With or without a change in the participating parties, the complexion of the coalition may also change as a result of the reassignment of portfolios and the entry of new ministers, even of a new prime minister. Following Arend Lijphart (1994), I will call this pattern of change without alternation *consensus government*.

The Swiss have taken consensus government to its highest development with a seven-member collective executive in which the seats are distributed 2-2-2-1 among the four largest parties. All the main parties participate in the government executive, and there is no alternative government, nor even an opposition in the usual sense. It is a perfected system of permanent power-sharing, in which a frequent resort to referenda and citizens’ initiatives provide a check on the discretion of the political cartel in power.

In some countries, the consensus model has led to long one-party-plus periods in which a single party rules with little effective opposition. One case is Japan, in which the Liberal Democratic Party governed continuously without coalition partners from 1955 to 1993 (Johnson, 2000). Another is Sweden, in which the Social Democratic Party, either alone or as the senior coalition partner, has been in power since 1932, except for the interludes of 1976-1982 and 1991-1994, when various non-socialist coalitions governed. Still another case was post-War Italy, in which the Christian Democrats were the senior partner in all coalition governments until 1993, when the electoral system was changed and many of the old parties were reorganized. Ionescu and Madariaga (1968, p. 88) describe this sort of situation as follows:

In such cases, even though the political mechanism functions normally and freely, and the conditions for a peaceful change of government are fully assured, the opposition is unable for long—sometimes very long—periods to win an election. It is of-

ten assumed that if opposition parties fail ever to come to power, there must some deficiency in the institutional mechanism. But this is not necessarily so. The institutions may be there, and function quite satisfactorily, and nevertheless the opposition party or parties fail to secure the requisite number of votes, and are thus transformed into a permanent minority.

Canada may have entered a similar phase of prolonged one-party dominance in 1993, though no one can say in advance how long it will last. The province of Alberta has experienced one-party-dominant government, with very weak opposition, for almost a century. In Alberta no provincial government, once having been defeated, has ever gone into opposition and then returned to power. In fact, no traditional opposition party has ever won an election. Each of the three times that a government in the province has been defeated, it was by a recently founded (United Farmers of Alberta, 1920; Social Credit, 1935) or revitalized (Progressive Conservative, 1971) party. There can be change without alternation.

In sum, there are five main patterns of opposition among stable democracies in the modern world: two-party alternative government, alternative coalitions, consensus government, one-party-plus, and power-sharing. Although consensus government is numerically the most common, each model exists in at least two countries where it seems to have been reasonably successful for a period of several decades or longer. A political scientist recently arrived from Mars would see no *prima facie* evidence that two-party alternating government is the normal or preferred model of opposition.

Does opposition matter?

It is not hard to produce persuasive arguments in favour of the two-party, alternative-government

model of opposition. The two most common arguments run approximately as follows:

1. The two-party alternative-government model gives voters a meaningful choice of ideology at elections. It is taken for granted that the parties espouse different philosophies of government, between which voters can choose on election day.
2. The two-party alternative-government model encourages more honest, efficient, and accountable government. The politicians in power know that another crew is ready and willing to replace them in sailing the ship of state. Those in power, therefore, have incentives to govern honestly, so that the opposition cannot discredit them; to govern efficiently, so that voters will feel they are getting their money's worth; and to govern in accord with people's wishes, so that voters will feel that they are getting what they want.

Such arguments seem convincing when stated abstractly but are open to serious objection on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

As long ago as 1957, Anthony Downs showed that under certain conditions, including high barriers to new-party entry and a unidimensional spectrum of issues, both parties in a two-party system tend to converge on the ideological position of the median voter. This was a theoretical argument, not an empirical observation. It is now widely realized that other factors can affect Downs' theoretical prediction of convergence (Donleavy, 1991, pp. 112-135). But though Downs may not have said the last word, even the most casual empiricism shows that he was on to something.

Generally speaking, post-War politics in the Anglo-American democracies with two-party systems were marked by Downsian convergence of

the two major parties, one nominally of the left, the other of the right. Labour and Conservatives in Britain; Liberals and Progressive Conservatives in Canada; Democrats and Republicans in the United States; Labour and National in New Zealand—all accepted the fundamentals of the mixed economy, the welfare state, and opposition to Soviet expansionism. The parties had more extreme wings, espousing socialism and unilateral disarmament on the left and resolute free enterprise on the right; but the controlling elements of the parties were very close to each other. Richard Nixon's famous statement, "We are all Keynesians now," epitomizes this era.

The post-War convergence lasted until the rise of Margaret Thatcher in Britain (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the United States (1980); in New Zealand until the Labour Party's unexpected lurch back towards capitalism (1984); and in Canada until the foundation of the Reform Party (1987). Throughout these years, the two-party system gave voters more of an echo than a choice. Barry Goldwater discovered this to his dismay in 1964, when he promised American voters "A Choice, not an Echo," and went down to resounding defeat. Of course, politics were often bitterly partisan, as illustrated by the rivalries between Nixon and Kennedy, Pearson and Diefenbaker, Trudeau and Clark; but these partisan differences represented the competition of political teams, not of world views.

Such evidence shows that the two-party, alternative government model of opposition produces a choice of governing teams for voters, but not necessarily an ideological choice or even a choice of alternative policies. Those who want to vote for a party espousing a specific and clearly defined world view or philosophy of government will often feel that the system gives them only echoes, not choices.

But even if ideological choice is not guaranteed, the second argument—that the two-party alter-

native government model produces honesty, efficiency, and accountability—remains attractive. It is consistent with economic arguments about the value of competition, as well as with John Stuart Mill's famous theory of the importance of open debate in a world of limited human knowledge and understanding, where no one can ever be sure beyond doubt about being right. But in the empirical study of politics, plausibility is not the same as proof; actual evidence is required before reaching conclusions.

It is important that the evidence be systematic, not impressionistic. It is easy, as White and Daifallah do, to catalogue the sins of omission and commission of the Liberal government, attribute them to lack of an effective opposition, and predict that a new government would do better (White and Daifallah, 2001, pp. 37-51). But one could have compiled a similar list when the PCs were in power under Brian Mulroney. Indeed, the Liberals did so; it was called the *Red Book*, and it was their campaign platform in 1993. At any point in time, there is always much that any government is neglecting or doing badly, and no shortage of claims that another party could do better. What is needed, however, is hard evidence that this political strife makes much difference in the long run. Do jurisdictions with the two-party alternative-government model of opposition actually fare better over a long period of time than other jurisdictions?

Below are a number of bodies of evidence drawn from sophisticated rankings compiled by impartial experts. None of these rankings is definitive and all are open to criticism, but together they suggest that no strong empirical case can be made in favour of any particular model of opposition. All seem to be capable of working well according to the judgments of well-informed observers.

First is the intriguing case of Alberta. As mentioned previously, Alberta has had a one-party-plus configuration with weak, frag-

mented opposition for the past 80 years, yet it consistently places at the top of Fraser Institute rankings of public policy environments in the Canadian provinces. For example, it was judged to have the best investment climate in 2001, and the best spending and taxation policies in 1997 (Fraser Institute media releases, June 26, 2001, and March 6, 1997).

It should be noted that support for the Liberal opposition soared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Don Getty's Conservative government pursued high-tax, high-spending, high-debt policies. The Liberals, led by former Edmonton mayor Laurence Decore, threatened to outflank the Conservatives on the right and succeeded in getting 40 percent of the vote in the 1993 provincial election. The new PC leader, Ralph Klein, narrowly beat the Liberals, but only by repudiating the policies of his predecessor and making a sharp turn towards fiscal conservatism.

Yet this one episode of two-party competition, important as it was, cannot explain all of Alberta's success. Since the end of World War II, under both Social Credit and PC governments, the province has generally adhered to the economic fundamentals of private property rights, free markets, balanced budgets, and low taxes; and this happened for decades when opposition was so fragmented and weak that there was never any doubt about the re-election of the governing party. Indeed, during this whole period, the only change of party government came in 1971, when the PCs replaced Social Credit after Ernest Manning retired. At least for those who think that economic freedom is an essential aspect of good government, the Alberta experience challenges beliefs about the necessity of adhering to the two-party alternative-government model.

Another challenge comes from the Fraser Institute's annual *Economic Freedom of the World* survey. Table 1 lists the top 10 countries for 1999 as ranked on the Economic Freedom Index (EFI) (Gwartney and Lawson, 2001, p. 9), together with my assessment of the role of opposition in their political systems:

Table 1: Economic Freedom Index Ranking, 1999

Country	Score	Opposition
Hong Kong	9.4	Colonial management, first by the UK, then by China. Opposition unimportant.
Singapore	9.3	"Guided democracy." Opposition unimportant.
New Zealand	8.9	Two-party alternative-government until 1996. Now competing coalitions.
United Kingdom	8.8	Two-party alternative-government.
United States	8.7	Two-party power-sharing.
Australia	8.5	Competing coalitions.
Ireland	8.5	Competing coalitions with some flexibility.
Switzerland	8.5	Power-sharing model.
Luxembourg	8.4	Consensus model.
Netherlands	8.4	Consensus model.

These rankings suggest that the form of opposition in itself cannot be a critical variable in producing policies conducive to economic freedom. The top two countries are not even democracies, while the others in the top ten include examples of the alternative-government, competing-coalition, consensus, and power-sharing models. Also, cultural milieu must be important because the top seven countries are all English-speaking and were at one time part of the British Empire.¹

¹ A recent statistical study of 102 nonsocialist nations (Mahoney, 2001) shows that common-law countries enjoyed an average of $\frac{1}{3}$ faster growth in the years 1960 to 1992 than that enjoyed by civil-law countries. The British cultural and legal heritage may convey economic benefits that have nothing to do with the internal organization of the legislature.

For a longer-term view, consider the six countries that were identified as having achieved consistently high rankings in the period 1975-1995 (Gwartney, Lawson, and Block, 1996, p. 67):

Country	Score (1995)	Opposition
Hong Kong	9.1	Colonial management by the UK. Opposition unimportant.
Switzerland	7.5	Power-sharing model.
Singapore	8.2	"Guided democracy." Opposition unimportant.
United States	7.7	Two-party power-sharing.
Canada	6.9	Weak version of two-party alternative-government model
Germany	6.4	Competing coalitions with some flexibility.

This picture is broadly similar to that for the EFI top 10 in 1999: a variety of models of opposition, together with an overrepresentation of English-speaking countries.

Finally, for a more future-oriented economic perspective, table 3 uses the prospective business environment rankings published annually by the *Economist* magazine. Because the differences between the top 10 were said to be "wafer-thin" (Leger, 2001), these can all be considered examples of successful countries as seen from the vantage of investment prospects:

Country	Rank (for 2001-2005)	Opposition
Netherlands	1	Consensus model
United States	2	Two-party power-sharing.
United Kingdom	3	Two-party alternative-government.
Canada	4	One-party-plus.
Switzerland	5	Multi-party power-sharing.
Ireland	6	Competing coalitions with some flexibility.
Finland	7	Consensus model.
Singapore	8	Guided democracy.
Sweden	9	Consensus model, tending towards one-party-plus.
Hong Kong	10	Colonial management by China.

Seven of the 10 countries in table 3 were also in the Economic Freedom Index top 10 for 1999, although the order of ranking is somewhat different. Again there is the same representation of all models of opposition.

Of course, economic freedom and a favourable environment for business investment represent only one dimension of good government. Let us look, therefore, at the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), which includes gross domestic product per capita but places more weight on life expectancy, adult literacy, and school enrolment. Table 4 lists the top 10 countries for 1999 (see www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0778562.html).

Table 4: United Nations Human Development Index Ranking, 1999

Country	Rank	Opposition
Canada	1	Weak version of alternative-government model until 1993, one-party-plus thereafter.
Norway	2	Consensus model.
United States	3	Two-party power-sharing.
Australia	4	Competing coalitions.
Iceland	5	Consensus model.
Sweden	6	Consensus model, tending towards one-party-plus.
Belgium	7	Consensus model.
Netherlands	8	Consensus model.
Japan	9	One-party-plus.
United Kingdom	10	Two-party alternative-government.

This listing is somewhat different in character from those based on the Economic Freedom Index. Only four of the top 10 countries on the HDI index are English-speaking, versus seven of 10 on the EFI for 1999; and four or five (depending on how one evaluates Sweden) of the top 10 HDI countries have the consensus model of opposition, versus two of the top 10 on the EFI ranking. But the overall picture is still one of diversity with respect to models of opposition. The HDI top 10 include examples of all democratic patterns of opposition: alternative government, competing coalitions, power-sharing, consensus, and one-party-plus.

Admittedly, this evidence does not show that patterns of opposition are unimportant. A properly designed multivariate study might demonstrate statistical correlations between patterns of opposition and policy outcomes.² My conclusion is simpler but also more relevant to contemporary Canadian politics: according to available empirical evidence, no model of opposition is demonstrably best or worst. All models can be found among the countries achieving the world's most enviable economic and social outcomes. There is no overriding necessity to "unite the right" in order to imitate a two-party alternative-government model that, on the evidence, is only one of several workable possibilities.

A wider conclusion, also supported by the same evidence, is that many different forms of democracy can work well. Democracy can succeed with a written or unwritten constitution; with or without an entrenched bill of rights; with a presidential or parliamentary system of government; with first-past-the-post voting, the alternative ballot, and various forms of proportional representation. Given the demonstrated success of all these institutional alternatives, the underlying fundamentals must be the crucial factors: the rule of law; an independent, politically neutral judiciary; respect for property rights and free markets; a widely distributed right to vote; freedom of discussion and political opposition (but not any particular form of opposition).

How can this be true?

These conclusions may seem counterintuitive. Anyone brought up in the alternative-government tradition of opposition, which has long

2 Credible studies exist showing a statistical relationship between proportional representation and various outcomes that many observers, especially on the left, find desirable: higher turnout in elections, greater representation of women in parliament, and greater equality in the distribution of income. See Milner, 1999 and 2001. There is also a parallel line of research on the alleged virtues of consensus government. See Lijphart, 1994 and Crepaz, 1996. But all of these findings depend heavily on what time period is studied, what variables are selected, and how the analyst values political outcomes, as shown by the different conclusions in Basham, Clemens, and Roque (2000).

passed for conventional wisdom in the English-speaking world, is likely to be persuaded by the words of the distinguished NDP Parliamentarian Stanley Knowles: "...the opposition should so conduct itself in Parliament as to persuade the people of the country that it could be an improvement on the government of the day. *No one will deny* [my emphasis] that our system works best when there is a change of government at reasonable intervals" (quoted in Schmitz, 1988, p. 4). Yet the evidence suggests that non-alternating forms of opposition, including even one-party dominance and power-sharing, can work as well as alternation in power. An analogy between economic and political competition may help to explain the situation (Ware, 1979).

In economics, the theoretical ideal is known as perfect competition. It would exist if a number of conditions were met: such a large number of sellers and buyers that no one can set a price; perfect information; and an undifferentiated, divisible, and transferable product. Given these conditions, economists can show that perfect competition leads to market-clearing prices and the efficient allocation of resources. The conditions, however, are hardly ever met. Markets exist in a real world of imperfect information and differentiated products. Moreover, most markets are dominated by only a few, sometimes very few, buyers or sellers. Air Canada, for example, is the only large airline left in Canada; and before its acquisition of Canadian Airlines, there were only two large airlines—still far from the theoretical ideal of perfect competition.

Competitive forces exist, however, even in a *de facto* duopoly or monopoly. Small airlines, such as WestJet, can compete successfully with Air Canada in specific or niche markets, thus nibbling away at the larger firm's overall profitability. International travel is highly competitive, so Canadians can choose among airlines if they wish to leave the country. The more expensive domestic travel becomes, the more travelers may choose to

vacation or do business elsewhere. For shorter trips, air travel has to compete with railway, bus, and passenger car alternatives, again putting limits on Air Canada's ability to extract monopoly prices from the market. Finally, the owners and managers of monopolistic companies know that, if they perform inefficiently, their company might be taken over through merger or acquisition. Competitive forces would be even stronger if government policy did not prohibit foreign-owned airlines from flying domestic routes (cabotage); but even in the absence of cabotage, Air Canada is pressed from many sides. Although the theoretical model of perfect competition is not attained, the market can still function with reasonable efficiency.

Economic competition is different in important ways from political competition in a democracy. Economic agents typically sell a limited number of products to buyers who make voluntary decisions whether or not to purchase. Political decision-makers, in contrast, impose a bundle of involuntary outcomes upon all those residing within their jurisdiction. But the basic point of the comparison I wish to make here is still valid: political competition, like economic competition, can be effective in the real world under a wide variety of conditions, even if it does not live up to a theoretical ideal.

Assume for the sake of argument that the two-party alternative-government model is the theoretical ideal because it lets the voters periodically select which team of politicians they want to manage the affairs of state. Of course, the alternative-government model may not be so theoretically perfect if we take into account Downs' argument about convergence. Moreover, even in cases where the competitors are genuinely different ideologically, the two-party alternative-government model has been criticized for producing "discontinuity," i.e., stop-start disruptions in public policy (Finer, 1975, pp. 13-14). As an example of this line of thought, consider the installa-

tion of the National Energy Program by the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau in 1981 and its repeal by the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney in 1986. A consensus or power-sharing model that included a substantial element from the West, for example, might never have passed the NEP in the first place.

However, assume for the sake of argument that the ideal would be to have two parties, each capable of winning an election and governing, and each presenting a distinctly different philosophy of government to the voters at each election. (It would presumably be even better to present the voters with more than two options, but then it would be unlikely that all such parties would have enough support to be able to form a government.) Even if this traditional British model of government and opposition exists in only a small number of cases, the competing-coalition model is not too dissimilar. But what keeps governments reasonably honest, efficient, and accountable when there is only one viable governing party, or when change means only a slight adjustment in the composition of the governing coalition, or when government is dominated Swiss-style by a permanent cartel? Below are some possible answers to that question.

- *Small parties.* A governing party cannot completely ignore small opponents, even if they seem unlikely to prevail in the next election. Small parties can become big parties. To preserve its hegemony, a governing party will often appropriate policy ideas from smaller opponents, as the Liberals did during the last decade with respect to balanced budgets, tax cuts, and firmer resistance to Quebec separatism. Another example comes from the behaviour of the NDP government of British Columbia in the run up to the 2001 campaign. Knowing from polls how the Greens were cutting into their traditional base of support, the NDP tried to fend them off with a series of environmental measures, such as prohibiting

the grizzly hunt. This process is similar to the dynamic that prevails in the world of business. Air Canada cannot afford to ignore WestJet and Canada 3000 simply because the latter are much smaller companies; rather, Air Canada tries to beat them back by offering similar products.

- *New parties.* The possibility of new-party entry into political competition is the equivalent of contestability in economic markets. As long as there are no legal barriers to entry, a governing party cannot afford to become complacent even if there seems to be no viable opponent at the moment. With modern techniques of communication, organization, and fundraising, a political entrepreneur can quickly fill a competitive void by founding a new party. The possibilities are multiplied in a federal system such as Canada's, where a party competing at one level may decide to enter the other level as well. Ever since the founding of the Reform Party in 1987, politicians in the western provinces have had to reckon with the possibility that Reform might enter provincial politics. Therein lies part of the explanation for the adoption in the early 1990s of the citizens' initiative in Saskatchewan, and the initiative and recall in British Columbia. Reform had "road tested" these policies and shown their popularity with western voters. It seems plausible, though it cannot be proven definitively, that the movement of Premiers Klein of Alberta and Filmon of Manitoba toward balanced budgets was partially motivated by the same factors. They must have considered that, if they did not represent the desire of their conservative supporters for balanced budgets, the federal Reform Party, or some breakaway element within it, might move in on their base, as the Reform Party of British Columbia actually did try to do.
- *Takeovers.* Just as corporations can be taken over and given a new direction, so can politi-

cal parties. A striking example from the recent past is Ralph Klein's victorious race in 1992 against Nancy Betkowski to replace Don Getty as leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and premier of Alberta. Mr. Klein's victory meant a new team at the top and a strikingly different policy direction. It was almost equivalent to a change in governing party (Cooper and Kanji, 2000).

- *Jurisdictional competition.* Globalization means that governments today are increasingly constrained by the decisions of other governments, as well as by impersonal economic forces. Some examples:
 - ◆ The consequences of decades of protectionism and interventionism in New Zealand forced the Labour government into a radical departure in economic policy in 1984. Labour and National governments continued with subsequent waves of reform through the mid-1990s as necessity proved more important than party labels (Russell, 1996).
 - ◆ Reckless accumulation of public debt would eventually have led to financial crisis in Canada. Finance minister Paul Martin finally took decisive action to balance the budget when he came to realize this in 1995 after the Mexican peso crisis (Greenspon and Wilson-Smith, 1996, p. 236).
 - ◆ For decades in the United States, people and capital left the high-tax states of the northeast for the low-tax states of the south and west (Frum, 2000, p. 325). Massachusetts eventually had to legislate deep tax cuts in order to escape its nickname, "Taxachusetts." In Canada, tax cuts in Ontario and Alberta set up pressures for similar cuts in other provinces. Critics on the left might decry this as a "race to the bottom"; but whether one approves or disapproves, it is clear that governing parties

have to pay attention to what other governing parties are doing. Such pressures also extend from one level to another in a federal system. The decision made by the federal Liberals in 2000 to offer tax cuts came after most provinces had already demonstrated the political popularity of lower taxes.

Such evidence does not prove that the two-party alternative-government model of opposition is unimportant or undesirable. It does, however, suggest that the absence of the alternative government model of opposition is not a catastrophe, because other competitive forces continue to constrain and guide governing parties as long as the democratic process is open. A principle of anticipated reaction leads governing parties to operate, at least to a degree, as if they faced an opposition party or a coalition that could displace them in the next election. They know that, if they do not take the possibility of opposition seriously, that possibility could become a reality.

The bottom line: application to Canada

According both to political theory and to empirical evidence, the two-party alternative-government model is not the only acceptable form of opposition; other configurations have worked well at various times in many jurisdictions. That finding, however, does not really settle the contemporary Canadian debate. Even if everything can work somewhere, sometime, the two-party alternative government model might be better for Canada here and now.

I would be the first to support a merger of the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties if I thought it would produce not only a party that could win an election fairly soon, but also a party that was consistently conservative in the sense of respect for principles of individual property rights, competitive markets, smaller

government, and traditional morality. The evidence, however, suggests that such a party, even if it could be constructed, would probably fail to meet both criteria.

To date, the two major attempts at fusion have produced more heat than light. The founders of the Canadian Alliance succeeded in detaching a group of so-called Blue Tories from the Progressive Conservative party, but they did not deliver a death blow to the PCs. After the Mont-Tremblant meeting in August 2001, the PCs announced the formation of a loose coalition with the Democratic Representative Caucus; but the latter are in reality only a breakaway group from the Alliance, thus repeating the previous pattern by which an element of one party went over to the other. In both cases, the desire of a minority to work with the other party has seemingly stiffened the resolve of the remaining majority to keep its party alive and steer its own course.

According to the *National Post* as well as to White and Daifallah (2001), the difficulty in bringing the parties together is mainly a problem of leadership. In their view, if only Joe Clark and Stockwell Day would get out of the way, merger would proceed without impediment. But they are insufficiently attentive to real and profound ideological differences between members of the two parties. While the parties share common ground on some (not all) fiscal and economic matters, they are far apart on other important issues. For example, while Joe Clark opposed the Liberal government's Clarity Act, and the PC party still officially endorses Quebec's right of self-determination, the Alliance supported the Clarity Act and generally takes a tough line against Quebec separatism. On the aboriginal front, the Tories support the "inherent right of aboriginal self-government," while the Alliance wants self-government to be equivalent to municipal government and has called provocatively for private property rights and an end to tax exemptions on reserves.

For these and many other reasons, every empirical study conducted by political scientists has shown that there is greater distance between Tory and Alliance members and supporters than there is between either and the Liberals. In fact, the Liberals are the most common second choice among partisans of both parties. On several dimensions of political choice, the Tories are now perceived as lying to the left of the Liberals (Flanagan and Harper, 1998, pp. 177-185; Nevitte et al., 2000, pp. 98-101; Johnston, 2001, pp. 11-12). This gap between the members and supporters of the two parties will make it difficult to engineer a peaceful unification, no matter who the leaders happen to be. Even if merger is attained, so many supporters might be lost in the process that the final whole would be less than the sum of the original parts.

Beyond the ideological cleavages loom problems of party democracy. The Alliance membership list is said to have reached 270,000 names in the course of the recent leadership race and federal election. Although many of those were temporary members brought in by the excitement of a leadership race and federal election, the party's membership is still large by Canadian standards. The internal political culture of the Alliance, moreover, emphasizes majority rule and calls for direct membership participation in selecting the leader and deciding major issues of party policy. The PCs, on the other hand, have a much smaller membership (said to have reached about 90,000 in their last leadership race) and a less populist internal culture. Mr. Clark was chosen leader by a direct ballot of members, but the operating rule was not one member, one (equal) vote. Rather, each constituency association was weighted equally, no matter how large or small its membership. The party never did release figures on how many members actually voted for Mr. Clark.

Merging these two parties, with their different cultures and unequally sized memberships, will not be easy. In a purely democratic scenario (ma-

majority rule; one member, one vote), the Tories will fear being swamped by the greater number of Alliance members. But if the Tories get special protection or privileges because of their smaller numbers, the Alliance members, particularly those who used to be Reformers, will perceive the arrangement as a throwback to the undemocratic manipulation that caused them to leave other parties in the first place. It is hard to see a solution to this conundrum unless one of the parties collapses so completely that it is just a matter of picking up the shattered pieces—but that would be more of an acquisition than a merger.

Assume for the moment that all of these difficulties could be overcome, that it would be possible to effect a happy merger in spite of differences in ideology, internal culture, and membership base. The new party might constitute an alternative governing team, but would it present an alternative philosophy of government? The views of Joe Clark and Chuck Strahl, as presented shortly after negotiating their coalition at Mont-Tremblant, portend otherwise. Here are some excerpts from their essay (Clark and Strahl, 2001):

One of the reasons to believe our working coalition will, in fact, work in Parliament and may well lead to broader co-operation, is because we accept and *embrace* [emphasis added] the fact voters have occasionally contradictory values. In Canada, tolerance is twinned with a desire to preserve a traditional set of values. In Canada, taxes can feel too high, but spending cuts can feel too harsh. In Canada, free trade can be embraced, but *laissez-faire* economics rejected.

...We share a view that less government is generally better, that governments must limit their costs and pay off their debts, that free market economies work better than planned ones. We share a commitment that issues of environmental safety, and of personal health and security cannot take a back seat to purely economic priori-

ties. We share a belief in tolerance, a need to hear the majority wherever possible, but to protect minorities whenever necessary. Whether you call these principles right, centrist, or leftist, they will influence the positions we take...

Mushy prose like this doesn't offer much reassurance that the cooperative movement which Messrs. Clark and Strahl claim to be building will be conservative in any serious sense. In fact, they explicitly deny that it will be conservative:

...most voters don't consider themselves "right wing," and curiously those that do, vote Liberal more than anything else. The lack of a self-styled right-wing party doesn't make people vote Liberal. Offering them such an option wouldn't make them abandon the Liberal party. And more importantly, it wouldn't reflect the interests of the vast majority of Canadians.

The columnist George Jonas quickly lampooned the ideas set forth by Clark and Strahl: "Dear voters! You might say that if you like Liberal ideas, or if you like the way the Liberals govern Canada, you should vote Liberal. We say you're mistaken. If you like the way the Liberals govern, you should vote Clark & Strahl" (Jonas, 2001). The approach adopted at Mont-Tremblant and articulated by Messrs. Clark and Strahl is essentially to offer voters a choice of governing teams without a choice of governing philosophies. From the perspective of political science, it is a return to Downsian convergence.

The history of convergent two-party politics in Canada, as well as in other countries, suggests that, while competition may be keen, even bitter, the chief result of victory at the polls is to determine which team of party loyalists will receive patronage appointments and contracts from the public purse. In other respects the parties tend to mirror each other. During the 1980s, for example, the Mulroney government continued and even extended policies earlier introduced by Liberal

governments: deficit spending, public health insurance, pay and employment equity, regional economic development, generous unemployment insurance, aboriginal self-government, official bilingualism, and multiculturalism (Flanagan, 1995, pp. 40-41). During the 1990s, the Liberals left in place and even extended the innovations the Mulroney Tories had made: tighter money, lower marginal rates of income tax, the GST, and NAFTA, although they opposed those measures at the time they were enacted. Of course, one can find policy differences between the Mulroney and Trudeau governments (e.g., the Mulroney government repealed the National Energy Program), as well as between those of Diefenbaker and Pearson, or Bennett and King; but such differences tend to reflect circumstances rather than consistent philosophical orientations (by 1986 falling energy prices had made the National Energy Program pointless).

During the twentieth century, genuine policy change in Canada has come not so much from the (infrequent) alternation of the two big brokerage parties as from the efforts of smaller parties with a clear ideological outlook. From the 1940s through the 1980s, the CCF/NDP proposed and the Liberals disposed: unemployment insurance, old age pensions, national health insurance, and other aspects of the welfare state. During the 1990s, it was a similar story, with the Liberals still disposing but Reform and the Alliance proposing: balanced budgets, downsizing government, decentralization, and tax cuts. Advocates of uniting the right have often belittled such accomplishments, saying they want to govern, not just to be “the NDP of the right.” But for philosophical conservatives and libertarians for whom changing public policy is the main purpose of engaging in politics, the NDP is an attractive role model.

Let me conclude this discussion with several propositions:

1. The empirical evidence from other democracies shows no obvious superiority of the two-party alternative-government model of opposition. Jurisdictions with several different forms of opposition routinely obtain top scores on a number of economic and social ranking systems.
2. Political theory suggests a strong, albeit not invariable, tendency for the main contenders in a two-party system to converge on the position of the median voter, thereby offering voters a choice of governing teams but not of policies.
3. Canadian history in the twentieth century largely conforms to the pattern of two-party convergence.
4. Policy innovation in Canada has come mainly from smaller parties espousing a consistent philosophy, even if they have not been able to win elections and form a government.

If these four propositions are true, a fifth proposition follows, which can serve as the last word of this essay:

Conservatives and libertarians who see politics as a means of effecting change in public policy are more likely to achieve their goals by supporting parties with a consistent free-market outlook than by submerging themselves in “big tent” parties that may sometimes win elections but have no clear agenda for changing public policy.

Bibliography

- Alberts, Sheldon (2001). "Alliance Gets OK to Seek Coalition with Tories." *National Post*, October 24.
- Barker, Rodney, ed. (1971). *Studies in Opposition*. London: Macmillan.
- Basham, Patrick, Jason Clemens, and Debbie Roque, (2000). "Do Different Political Systems Produce Different Economic Outcomes?" *Fraser Forum*, May.
- Bassett, Michael (1982). *Three Party Politics in New Zealand, 1911-1931*. Auckland: Historical Publications.
- Beck, J.M. (1968). *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada.
- Black, Conrad (1998). *Render Unto Caesar: The Life and Legacy of Maurice Duplessis*. Toronto: Key Porter.
- Boaz, David (1997). *Libertarianism: A Primer*. New York: Free Press.
- Butler, David, ed. (1978). *Coalitions in British Politics*. London: Macmillan.
- Carty, R. Kenneth, William Cross, and Lisa Young (2000). *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Clark, Joe and Chuck Strahl (2001). "Building 'Big Tent' Conservatism." *National Post*, August 22.
- Cooper, Barry and Mebs Kanji (2000). *Governing in Post-Deficit Times: Alberta in the Klein Years*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Monograph Series on Public Policy and Administration, No. 10.
- Costar, Brian, ed. (1994). *For Better or For Worse: The Federal Coalition*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Crepaz, Markus M.L. (1996). "Consensus versus Majoritarian Democracy: Political Institutions and Their Impact on Macroeconomic Performance and Industrial Disputes." *Comparative Political Studies* 29 (1): 4-26.
- Dahl, Robert, ed. (1966). *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Donleavy, Patrick (1991). *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Elkins, David J. (1976). "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows: The B.C. Party System in the 1952 and 1953 Provincial Elections." *BC Studies* 30 (Summer): 3-26.
- Finer, S.E., ed. (1975). *Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform*. N.p.: Anthony Wigram.
- Flanagan, Tom (1995). *Waiting for the Wave: The Reform Party and Preston Manning*. Toronto: Stoddart.
- _____ (1998). *Game Theory and Canadian Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- _____ (1999). "The Alternative Vote: An Electoral System for Canada." In Henry Milner, ed. *Making Every Vote Count: Reassessing Canada's Electoral System*. Peterborough, Broadview Press: 85-90.
- _____ (2000). "Canadian Alliance Metamorphosis." *National Post*, October 25.
- _____ (2001a). "From Reform to the Canadian Alliance." In Hugh G. Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn, eds. *Party Politics in Canada*, 8th ed. Toronto: Prentice Hall.
- _____ (2001b). "How to Co-operate and Beat the Liberals." *National Post*, June 15.
- _____ (2001c). "The Alternative Vote." *Policy Options*, July/August: 37-40.
- Flanagan, Tom and Stephen Harper (1998). "Conservative Politics in Canada: Past, Present, and Future." In William D. Gairdner, ed., *After Liberalism: Essays in Search of Freedom, Virtue, and Order*. Toronto, Stoddart: 168-192.
- Frum, David (2000). *How We Got Here—The 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (for Better or Worse)*. Toronto: Random House Canada.
- Greenspan, Edward and Anthony Wilson-Smith (1996). *Double Vision: The Inside Story of the Liberals in Power*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada.
- Gwartney, James and Robert Lawson (2001). *Economic Freedom of the World: Annual Report 2001*. Vancouver: The Fraser Institute.
- Gwartney, James, Robert Lawson, and Walter Block (1996). *Economic Freedom of the World: 1975-1995*. Vancouver: The Fraser Institute.
- Harper, Stephen and Tom Flanagan (1997). "Our Belligerent Dictatorship." *The Next City* January: 35-40, 54-57.
- Hofstadter, Richard (1969). *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Ionescu, Ghita and Isabel de Madariaga (1968). *Opposition: Past and Present of a Political Institution*. London: C.A. Watts.
- Jonas, George (2001). "If You Like the Grits, Vote Clark & Strahl." *National Post*, August 24.
- John, Stephen (2000). *Opposition Politics in Japan: Strategies under a One-Party Dominant Regime*. London: Routledge.
- Johnston, Richard (2001). "A Conservative Case for Electoral Reform." *Policy Options*, 22 (July-August): 7-14.
- Leger, Kathryn (2001). "Canada Fourth Best Place to do Business: Report." *National Post*, August 15.
- Lijphart, Arend (1994). "Democracies: Forms, Performance, and Constitutional Engineering." *European Journal of Political Research* 25 (1): 1-17.
- Mahoney, Paul G. (2001). "The Common Law and Economic Growth: Hayek Might Be Right." *Journal of Legal Studies*, 30 (June): 503-525.
- Manning, Preston (2001). "Strategic Alliance for a New Conservatism." *National Post*. March 10.
- McHenry, Dean (1954). "Formal Recognition of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliaments of the British Commonwealth." *Political Science Quarterly* 69 (3): 438-452.
- McMahon, Fred (1996). *Looking the Gift Horse in the Mouth: The Impact of Federal Transfers on Atlantic Canada*. Halifax: Atlantic Institute of Market Studies.
- McMahon, Fred (2000). *Road to Growth: How Lagging Economies Become Prosperous*. Halifax: Atlantic Institute for Market Studies.
- Nevitte, Neil, Andre Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Richard Nadeau (2000). *Unsteady State: The 1997 Canadian Federal Election*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, Marcia (1996). *Revolution: New Zealand from Fortress to Free Market*. Auckland: TVNZ.
- Sartori, Giovanni (1971). "Opposition and Control: Problems and Prospects." In Barker, *Studies in Opposition*: 31-37.
- _____. (1976). *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Volume I.
- Schmitz, Gerald (1988). *The Opposition in a Parliamentary System*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament Research Branch.
- Segal, Hugh (2001). Terms of Union for the Right. *National Post*, August 16.
- Simpson, Jeffrey (2001). *The Friendly Dictatorship*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- Ware, Alan (1979). *The Logic of Party Democracy*. London: Macmillan.
- White, Peter G. and Adam Daifallah (2001). *Gritlock: Are the Liberals in Forever?* Toronto: Canadian Political Bookshelf.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Preston Manning and Gordon Gibson for their kindness in reading a draft of this paper and making several helpful suggestions. Neither, however, fully supports the conclusions I have reached.

About the Author

Tom Flanagan is a professor of political science at the University of Calgary, a senior fellow of The Fraser Institute, and a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He has written extensively on Canadian politics and history. His most recent book, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (2000), won the Donner Prize for the best book on public policy and the Donald Smiley Prize for the best book on Canadian government and politics in the year of publication.