

The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada, 1921-1965*

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This paper investigates two common assumptions about the party system: (i) that the influence of the electoral system on the party system has been unimportant, or non-existent; and (ii) that the party system has been an important nationalizing agency with respect to the sectional cleavages widely held to constitute the most significant and enduring lines of division in the Canadian polity. Schattschneider, Lipset, Duverger, Key and others¹ have cogently asserted the relevance of electoral systems for the understanding of party systems. Students of Canadian parties, however, have all but ignored the electoral system as an explanatory factor of any importance. The analysis to follow will suggest that the electoral system has played a major role in the evolution of Canadian parties, and that the claim that the party system has been an important instrument for integrating Canadians across sectional lines is highly suspect.

Discussion of the respective merits of single member constituency electoral systems and various systems of proportional representation is frequently indecisive because of an inability to agree on the values which electoral systems should serve. Advocates of proportional representation base their arguments on democratic fundamentalism. They simply argue that each vote should have equal weight, and that the distortion of the voters' preferences by single member constituency systems is no more to be justified than the use of false scales by a butcher. This idealistic argument is countered by the opponents of proportional representation with the assertion that executive stability is a more basic consideration, and that it is well served by the propensity of Canadian type systems to create artificial legislative majorities. This controversy will not concern us further.

It may be noted, however, that critical analysis of the single member constituency system encounters a cultural bias in the Anglo-Saxon world because of the pervasive hostility shown to systems of proportional representation,² and

*This is a revised version of a paper read at the thirty-ninth annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association at Ottawa, 1967.

¹E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York, 1942), 62, 70; S. M. Lipset, "Party Systems and the Representation of Social Groups," *European Journal of Sociology*, I (1960), 61-3, 80; M. Duverger, *Political Parties* (London, 1965), Book II; M. Duverger, "The Influence of the Electoral System on Political Life," *International Social Science Bulletin*, 3 (Summer, 1951); V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York, 1961), chap. 5. See also A. DeGrazia, "General Theory of Apportionment," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, XVII (1952), and D. A. Rustow, "Some Observations on Proportional Representation," *Journal of Politics*, XII (1950). F. A. Hermens, *Democracy or Anarchy?* (Notre Dame, 1941) and Enid Lakeman and J. D. Lambert, *Voting in Democracies* (London, 1955) discuss proportional representation from opposed viewpoints.

²"We English-speaking peoples," stated Sir Richard Cartwright, "have made a sort of fetish

the executive instability to which they allegedly contribute. Proportional representation has not been seriously considered as a possible alternative to the existing system. It exists in a limbo of inarticulate assumptions that it is responsible for the ills of the French political system, but it is given no credit for the sophistication and maturity of the Swedish political system.

Given this bias there is, no doubt, a tendency to transform a critique of the existing system into advocacy of proportional representation. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to advocate proportional representation, but simply to take a realistic look at some of the consequences of the prevailing system which have received insufficient attention. In any case, the habituation of Canadians to the existing system renders policy oriented research on the comparative merits of different electoral systems a fruitless exercise.

The basic defence of the system and its actual performance

If the electoral system is analysed in terms of the basic virtue attributed to it, the creation of artificial legislative majorities to produce cabinet stability, its

TABLE I

Percentage of votes and seats for government party, 1921–1965

	% Votes	% Seats		% Votes	% Seats
1921	40.7	49.4 (L)	1949	49.5	73.7 (L)
1925*	39.8	40.4 (L)	1953	48.9	64.5 (L)
1926	46.1	52.2 (L)	1957	38.9	42.3 (C)
1930	48.7	55.9 (C)	1958	53.6	78.5 (C)
1935	44.9	70.6 (L)	1962	37.3	43.8 (C)
1940	51.5	73.9 (L)	1963	41.7	48.7 (L)
1945	41.1	51.0 (L)	1965	40.2	49.4 (L)

*In this election the Conservatives received both a higher percentage of votes, 46.5%, and of seats, 47.3%, than the Liberals. The Liberals, however, chose to meet Parliament, and with Progressive support they retained office for several months.

NOTE: The data for this and the following tables have been compiled from Howard A. Scarrow, *Canada Votes* (New Orleans, 1963), and from the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer* for recent elections.

performance since 1921 has been only mediocre. Table I reveals the consistent tendency of the electoral system in every election from 1921 to 1965 to give the government party a greater percentage of seats than of votes. However, its contribution to one party majorities was much less dramatic. Putting aside the two instances, 1940 and 1958, when a boost from the electoral system was unnecessary, it transformed a minority of votes into a majority of seats on only six of twelve occasions. It is possible that changes in the party system and/or in

of our present system, and appear to think that if you will only cut up a country or a province into equal divisions and give every man, wise or ignorant, rich or poor, the right to vote, you have devised a machine which will give you automatically a perfect representation. This is a huge mistake." *Reminiscences* (Toronto, 1912), 314. See also F. H. Underhill, "Canadian Liberal Democracy in 1955," in G. V. Ferguson and F. H. Underhill, *Press and Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1955), 41–3.

Régime électoral et système de parti au Canada, 1921–65

Cet article cherche à évaluer l'influence du régime électoral sur le système de parti au Canada et s'interroge sur l'opinion voulant que ce système ait été un facteur d'intégration nationale. Entre 1921 et 1965, le système électoral a habituellement favorisé, à l'encontre des autres partis, à la fois le plus fort d'entre eux et un autre, plus faible que la moyenne, mais dont la clientèle était fortement régionalisée. En pondérant inégalement selon les régions les votes recueillis par chaque parti, le système électoral faussait en outre leur représentation parlementaire.

Les stratégies électorales, la politique des partis et l'opinion des politiciens et observateurs sur le système politique ont toutes été marquées par l'encouragement du régime électoral lui-même au régionalisme politique. Que le régime électoral ait conféré une signification politique exagérée aux divers particularismes dans la société canadienne, tel est le thème central du présent article ; une illustration importante en est fournie par le rôle de ce régime dans la désaffection du Québec à l'égard des Conservateurs et, à l'inverse, dans la dépendance des Libéraux à l'égard des sièges québécois. Il est évident que ce phénomène a mis en jeu la légitimité et la stabilité du système politique canadien.

En montrant comment le particularisme politique des diverses régions canadiennes est le fruit de l'influence réciproque du régime électoral et du système de parti l'un sur l'autre, l'auteur infirme du même coup l'opinion voulant que ce système ait agi comme facteur d'intégration au Canada. Il termine son article en suggérant que la représentation proportionnelle, malgré ses défauts sous d'autres aspects, contribuerait à réduire la trop grande dépendance d'un parti à l'égard d'une région et, partant, à accentuer la cohésion politique du pays.

the distribution of party support will render this justification increasingly anachronistic in future years.

If the assessment of the electoral system is extended to include not only its contribution to one-party majorities, but its contribution to the maintenance of effective opposition, arbitrarily defined as at least one-third of House members, it appears in an even less satisfactory light. On four occasions, two of which occurred when the government party had slightly more than one-half of the votes, the opposition was reduced to numerical ineffectiveness. The coupling of these two criteria together creates a reasonable measure for the contribution of the electoral system to a working parliamentary system, which requires both a stable majority and an effective opposition. From this vantage point the electoral system has a failure rate of 71 per cent, on ten of fourteen occasions.

This unimpressive record indicates that if other dysfunctional consequences of the electoral system exist they can be only marginally offset by its performance with respect to the values espoused by its advocates. In this paper discussion of these other consequences is restricted to the effect of the electoral system in furthering or hindering the development of a party system capable of acting as a unifying agency in a country where sectional cleavages are significant. Or, to put the matter differently, the stability which is of concern is not that of the cabinet in its relations to the legislature, but the stability of the political system as a whole. Has the electoral system fostered a party system which attenuates or exacerbates sectional cleavages, sectional identities, and sectionally oriented parties?

The effect on major and minor parties

Table II indicates an important effect of the electoral system with its proof that discrimination for and against the parties does not become increasingly severe when the parties are ordered from most votes to least votes. Discrimination in favour of a party was most pronounced for the weakest party on seven occasions, and for the strongest party on seven occasions. In the four elections from 1921 to 1930 inclusive, with three party contestants, the second party was most hurt by the electoral system. In the five elections from 1935 to 1953 inclusive the electoral system again worked against the middle ranking parties and favoured the parties with the weakest and strongest voting support. In the five elections from 1957 to 1965 inclusive there has been a noticeable tendency to benefit the first two parties, with the exception of the fourth party, Social Credit in 1957, at the expense of the smaller parties.

TABLE II

Bias of electoral system in translating votes into seats

Year	Rank order of parties in terms of percentage of vote				
	1	2	3	4	5
1921	Libs. 1.21	Cons. 0.70	Progs. 1.20		
1925	Cons. 1.017	Libs. 1.015	Progs. 1.09		
1926	Libs. 1.13	Cons. 0.82	Progs. 1.55		
1930	Cons. 1.15	Libs. 0.82	Progs. 1.53		
1935	Libs. 1.57	Cons. 0.55	CCF 0.33	Rec. 0.05	Socred 1.68
1940	Libs. 1.43	Cons. 0.53	CCF 0.39	Socred 1.52	
1945	Libs. 1.24	Cons. 1.00	CCF 0.73	Socred 1.29	
1949	Libs. 1.49	Cons. 0.53	CCF 0.37	Socred 1.03	
1953	Libs. 1.32	Cons. 0.62	CCF 0.77	Socred 1.06	
1957	Libs. 0.97	Cons. 1.087	CCF 0.88	Socred 1.091	
1958	Cons. 1.46	Libs. 0.55	CCF 0.32	Socred 0	
1962	Cons. 1.17	Libs. 1.01	NDP 0.53	Socred 0.97	
1963	Libs. 1.17	Cons. 1.09	NDP 0.49	Socred 0.76	
1965	Libs. 1.23	Cons. 1.13	NDP 0.44	Cred. 0.72	Socred 0.51

Independents and very small parties have been excluded from the table.

The measurement of discrimination employed in this table defines the relationship between the percentage of votes and the percentage of seats. The figure is devised by dividing the former into the latter. Thus $1 - (38\% \text{ seats}/38\% \text{ votes})$, for example — represents a neutral effect for the electoral system. Any figure above $1 - (40\% \text{ seats}/20\% \text{ votes}) = 2.0$, for example — indicates discrimination for the party. A figure below $1 - (20\% \text{ seats}/40\% \text{ votes}) = 0.5$, for example — indicates discrimination against the party. For the purposes of the table the ranking of the parties as 1, 2, 3 . . . is based on their percentage of the vote, since to rank them in terms of seats would conceal the very bias it is sought to measure—namely the bias introduced by the intervening variable of the electoral system which constitutes the mechanism by which votes are translated into seats.

The explanation for the failure of the electoral system to act with Darwinian logic by consistently distributing its rewards to the large parties and its penalties to the small parties is relatively straightforward.³ The bias in favour of the

³D. V. Smiley, "The Two-Party System and One-Party Dominance in the Liberal Democratic State," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXIV (1958), 316–17, discusses the effects of the electoral system on major and minor parties. Schattschneider, *Party Government*, 74–5, and Pendleton Herring, *The Politics of Democracy* (New York, 1940), 182–3 note that the most important third parties in the United States have been sectional.

strongest party reflects the likelihood that the large number of votes it has at its disposal will produce enough victories in individual constituencies to give it, on a percentage basis, a surplus of seats over votes. The fact that this surplus has occurred with only one exception, 1957, indicates the extreme unlikelihood of the strongest party having a distribution of partisan support capable of transforming the electoral system from an ally into a foe. The explanation for the favourable impact of the electoral system on the Progressives and Social Credit from 1921 to 1957 when they were the weakest parties is simply that they were sectional parties which concentrated their efforts in their areas of strength where the electoral system worked in their favour. Once the electoral system has rewarded the strongest party and a weak party with concentrated sectional strength there are not many more seats to go around. In this kind of party system, which Canada had from 1921 to Mr. Diefenbaker's breakthrough, serious discrimination against the second party in a three-party system and the second and third party in a four-party system is highly likely.

Table III reveals that the electoral system positively favours minor parties with sectional strongholds and discourages minor parties with diffuse support. The classic example of the latter phenomenon is provided by the Reconstruction party in the 1935 election. For its 8.7 per cent of the vote it was rewarded with

TABLE III
Minor parties: percentage of seats and votes

	Progressives		Reconstruction		CCF/NDP		Soc. Credit		Créditiste	
	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats
1921	23.1	27.7								
1925	9.0	9.8								
1926	5.3	8.2								
1930	3.2	4.9								
1935			8.7	0.4	8.9	2.9	4.1	6.9		
1940					8.5	3.3	2.7	4.1		
1945					15.6	11.4	4.1	5.3		
1949					13.4	5.0	3.7	3.8		
1953					11.3	8.7	5.4	5.7		
1957					10.7	9.4	6.6	7.2		
1958					9.5	3.0	2.6	—		
1962					13.5	7.2	11.7	11.3		
1963					13.1	6.4	11.9	9.1		
1965					17.9	7.9	3.7	1.9	4.7	3.4

one seat, and promptly disappeared from the scene. Yet its electoral support was more than twice that of Social Credit which gained seventeen seats, and only marginally less than that of the CCF which gained seven seats. The case of the Reconstruction party provides dramatic illustration of the futility of party effort for a minor party which lacks a sectional stronghold. The treatment of the CCF/NDP by the electoral system is only slightly less revealing. This party with diffuse support which aspired to national and major party status never received as many seats as would have been "justified" by its voting support, and on six occasions out of ten received less than half the seats to which it was "entitled." The contrasting treatment of Social Credit and the Progressives,

sectional minor parties, by the electoral system clearly reveals the bias of the electoral system in favour of concentrated support and against diffused support.⁴

Distortion in party parliamentary representation

No less important than the general differences in the way the electoral system rewards or punishes each individual party as such, is the manner in which it fashions particular patterns of sectional representation within the ranks of the parliamentary parties out of the varying distributions of electoral support they received. This sectional intra-party discrimination affects all parties. The electoral system consistently minimized the Ontario support of the Progressives which provided the party with 43.5 per cent, 39.7 per cent, and 29.4 per cent of its total votes in the first three elections of the twenties. The party received only 36.9 per cent, 8.3 per cent, and 10 per cent of its total seats from that province. Further, by its varying treatment of the party's electoral support from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta it finally helped to reduce the Progressives to an Alberta party.

TABLE IV

Percentage of total CCF/NDP strength, in seats and votes coming from selected provinces

	NS	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	BC
1935 votes	—	1.9	32.7	13.9	18.8	7.9	24.8
seats	—	—	—	28.6	28.6	—	42.9
1940 votes	4.5	1.9	15.6	15.6	27.0	8.9	26.2
seats	12.5	—	—	12.5	62.5	—	12.5
1945 votes	6.4	4.1	31.9	12.5	20.5	7.0	15.4
seats	3.6	—	—	17.9	64.3	—	14.3
1949 votes	4.3	2.3	39.2	10.6	19.5	4.0	18.6
seats	7.7	—	7.7	23.1	38.5	—	23.1
1953 votes	3.5	3.7	33.4	10.1	24.6	3.7	19.7
seats	4.3	—	4.3	13.0	47.8	—	30.4
1957 votes	2.4	4.5	38.7	11.6	19.8	3.8	18.6
seats	—	—	12.0	20.0	40.0	—	28.0
1958 votes	2.7	6.6	37.9	10.8	16.3	2.8	22.2
seats	—	—	37.5	—	12.5	—	50.0
1962 votes	3.8	8.9	44.0	7.4	9.0	4.1	20.4
seats	5.3	—	31.6	10.5	—	—	52.6
1963 votes	2.6	14.6	42.6	6.4	7.3	3.4	21.5
seats	—	—	35.3	11.8	—	—	52.9
1965 votes	2.8	17.7	43.0	6.6	7.6	3.2	17.3
seats	—	—	42.9	14.3	—	—	42.9

NOTE: Percentages of votes do not total 100 horizontally because the table does not include Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, or the territories where the CCF/NDP gained a few votes but no seats.

An analysis of CCF/NDP votes and seats clearly illustrates the manner in which the electoral system has distorted the parliamentary wing of the party. Table IV reveals the extreme discrimination visited on Ontario supporters of the

⁴There is an unavoidable problem of circular reasoning here. There is an important difference between saying that the electoral system favours parties which *are* sectional and saying that the electoral system encourages parties to *be* sectional.

CCF from 1935 to 1957. With the exception of 1940 CCF Ontario voting support consistently constituted between 30 and 40 per cent of total CCF voting support. Yet, the contribution of Ontario to CCF parliamentary representation was derisory. During the same period there was a marked overrepresentation of Saskatchewan in the CCF caucus. The 1945 election is indicative. The 260,000 votes from Ontario, 31.9 per cent of the total CCF vote, produced no seats at all, while 167,000 supporters from Saskatchewan, 20.5 per cent of the total party vote, were rewarded with eighteen seats, 64.3 per cent of total party seats. In these circumstances it was not surprising that observers were led to mislabel the CCF an agrarian party.

The major parties are not immune from the tendency of the electoral system to make the parliamentary parties grossly inaccurate reflections of the sectional distribution of party support. Table V makes it clear that the electoral system has been far from impartial in its treatment of Liberal and Conservative voting support from Ontario and Quebec. For fourteen consecutive elections covering nearly half a century there was a consistent and usually marked overrepresentation of Quebec in the parliamentary Liberal party and marked underrepresentation in the parliamentary Conservative party, with the exception of 1958. For ten consecutive elections from 1921 to 1957 Ontario was consistently and markedly overrepresented in the parliamentary Conservative party, and for eleven consecutive elections from 1921 to 1958, there was consistent, but less marked, underrepresentation of Ontario in the parliamentary Liberal party. Thus the electoral system, by pulling the parliamentary Liberal party toward Quebec and the parliamentary Conservative party toward Ontario, made the sectional cleavages between the parties much more pronounced in Parliament than they were at the level of the electorate.

The way in which the electoral system affected the relationship of Quebec to the parliamentary wings of the two major parties is evident in the truly startling

TABLE V

Liberals and Conservatives: Percentage of total parliamentary strength and total electoral support from Quebec and Ontario

	Conservatives				Liberals			
	Ontario		Quebec		Ontario		Quebec	
	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes
1921	74.0	47.1	—	15.5	18.1	26.6	56.0	43.8
1925	58.6	47.4	3.4	18.4	11.1	30.1	59.6	37.8
1926	58.2	44.9	4.4	18.7	20.3	31.7	46.9	33.4
1930	43.1	38.9	17.5	24.0	24.2	33.7	44.0	30.6
1935	62.5	43.1	12.5	24.7	32.4	34.4	31.8	31.5
1940	62.5	48.6	2.5	16.4	31.5	34.4	33.7	31.2
1945	71.6	52.7	3.0	8.3	27.2	34.6	42.4	33.3
1949	61.0	43.6	4.9	22.6	29.0	31.9	35.2	33.2
1953	64.7	44.2	7.8	26.0	29.8	32.6	38.6	34.2
1957	54.5	42.9	8.0	21.7	20.0	31.1	59.0	38.1
1958	32.2	36.2	24.0	25.7	30.6	33.3	51.0	37.8
1962	30.2	36.9	12.1	21.6	44.0	39.2	35.0	28.6
1963	28.4	37.8	8.4	16.0	40.3	39.1	36.4	29.3
1965	25.8	37.4	8.2	17.3	38.9	38.6	42.7	30.0

discrepancies between votes and seats for the two parties from that province. From 1921 to 1965 inclusive the Liberals gained 752 members from Quebec, and the Conservatives only 135. The ratio of 5.6 Liberals to each Conservative in the House of Commons contrasts sharply with the 1.9 to 1 ratio of Liberals to Conservatives at the level of voters.⁵

Given the recurrent problems concerning the status of Quebec in Canadian federalism and the consistent tension in French-English relations it is self-evident that the effects of the electoral system noted above can be appropriately described as divisive and detrimental to national unity. Brady and Siegfried, among others, have stressed the dangers which would arise should the lines of partisan division coincide with the "lines of nationality and religion,"⁶ the very direction in which the electoral system has pushed the party system. This consequence has been partially veiled by the typically plural composition of the government party. In parliamentary systems, however, the composition of the chief opposition party, the almost inevitable successor to governmental responsibilities over time, is only moderately less significant. The electoral system has placed serious barriers in the way of the Conservative party's attempts to gain parliamentary representation from a province where its own interests and those of national unity coincided on the desirability of making a major contender for public office as representative as possible.⁷ The frequent thesis that the association of the Conservatives with conscription in 1917 destroyed their prospects in Quebec only becomes meaningful when it is noted that a particular electoral system presided over that destruction.

The following basic effects of the electoral system have been noted. The electoral system has not been impartial in its translation of votes into seats. Its benefits have been disproportionately given to the strongest major party and a weak sectional party. The electoral system has made a major contribution to the identification of particular sections/provinces with particular parties. It has undervalued the partisan diversity within each section/province. By so doing it has rendered the parliamentary composition of each party less representative of the sectional interests in the political system than is the party electorate from which that representation is derived. The electoral system favours minor parties with concentrated sectional support, and discourages those with diffuse national support. The electoral system has consistently exaggerated the significance of cleavages demarcated by sectional/provincial boundaries and has thus tended to transform contests between parties into contests between sections/provinces.

In view of the preceding it is impossible to accept any assertion which implies that the electoral system has had only trivial consequences for the party system. The Canadian party system in its present form would not exist had it not been

⁵If 1958 is excluded as a deviant case the contrast is even more glaring, 727 Liberals from Quebec confronted 85 Conservatives, a ratio of 8.6 to 1, in contrast to the ratio of 2.1 to 1 which existed at the level of the voter.

⁶A. Brady, *Canada* (London, 1932), 13-14; A. Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada* (Toronto, 1966), 114.

⁷McLeod is undoubtedly correct in his suggestion that national unity would be served if Canadians were "divided across ethnic barriers on lines of support for competing policies," but he fails to note the barrier which the electoral system has placed, at least historically, in the way of this objective. J. T. McLeod, "Party Structure and Party Reform," in A. Rotstein, ed., *The Prospect of Change* (Toronto, 1965), 18-19.

for the highly selective impetus which the electoral system gave to its development. In more specific terms, it is evident that one of the most basic aspects of Canadian politics, its sectional nature, becomes incomprehensible if attention is not constantly focused on the sectional bias engendered by the single-member constituency system.

Party system as a nationalizing agency

The ramifications of sectional politics are highly complex. Given the paucity of literature on Canadian parties it is impossible to make categorical statements about these ramifications in all cases. Where evidence is sparse, the analysis will of necessity be reduced to hypotheses, some of which will be sustained by little more than deduction.

One of the most widespread interpretations of the party system claims that it, or at least the two major parties, functions as a great unifying or nationalizing agency. Canadian politics, it is emphasized, are politics of moderation, or brokerage politics, which minimize differences, restrain fissiparous tendencies, and thus over time help knit together the diverse interests of a polity weak in integration.⁸ It is noteworthy that this brokerage theory is almost exclusively applied to the reconciliation of sectional, racial, and religious divisions, the latter two frequently being regarded as simply more specific versions of the first with respect to French-English relations. The theory of brokerage politics thus assumes that the historically significant cleavages in Canada are sectional, reflecting the federal nature of Canadian society, or racial/religious, reflecting a continuation of the struggle which attracted Durham's attention in the mid nineteenth century. Brokerage politics between classes is mentioned, if at all, as an afterthought.

The interpretation of the party system in terms of its fulfilment of a nationalizing function is virtually universal. Close scrutiny, however, indicates that this is at best questionable; and possibly invalid. It is difficult to determine the precise meaning of the argument that the party system has been a nationalizing agency, stressing what Canadians have in common, bringing together representatives of diverse interests to deliberate on government policies. In an important sense the argument is misleading in that it attributes to the party system what is simply inherent in a representative democracy which inevitably brings together Nova Scotians, Albertans, and Quebeckers to a common assemblage point, and because of the majoritarian necessities of the parliamentary system requires agreement among contending interests to accomplish anything at all. Or, to put it differently, the necessity for inter-group collaboration in any on-going political system makes it possible to claim of any party system compatible with the survival of the polity

⁸H. McD. Clokie, *Canadian Government and Politics* (Toronto, 1944), 81-3; McLeod, "Party Structure and Party Reform," 4-5, 9, 14; Brady, *Canada*, 102-3; A. Brady, *Democracy in the Dominions* (Toronto, 2nd ed., 1952), 110-12; R. M. Dawson, *The Government of Canada* (Toronto, 4th ed., 1963), rev. by N. Ward, 469-70; J. A. Corry and J. E. Hodgetts, *Democratic Government and Politics* (Toronto, 3rd ed., 1963), chaps. VIII-IX; J. M. Beck and D. J. Dooley, "Party Images in Canada," *Queen's Quarterly*, LXVII (1960), 433; F. H. Underhill, *Canadian Political Parties* (Ottawa, 1957), 4-5. For a critical discussion of brokerage politics see John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto, 1965), 373-7.

that it acts as a nationalizing agency. The extent to which any particular party system does so act is inescapably therefore a comparative question or a question of degree. In strict logic an evaluation of alternative types of party systems is required before a particular one can be accorded unreserved plaudits for the success with which it fulfils a nationalizing function.

Assistance in grappling with this issue comes from an examination of a basic problem. In what ways does the party system stimulate the very cleavages it is alleged to bridge? The question can be rephrased to ask the extent to which an unvarying sectionalism has an autonomous existence independent of the particular electoral and party systems employed by Canadians. The basic approach of this paper is that the party system, importantly conditioned by the electoral system, exacerbates the very cleavages it is credited with healing. As a corollary it is suggested that the party system is not simply a reflection of sectionalism, but that sectionalism is also a reflection of the party system.

The electoral system has helped to foster a particular kind of political style by the special significance it accords to sectionalism. This is evident in party campaign strategy, in party policies, in inter-sectional differences in the nature and vigour of party activity, and in differences in the intra-party socialization experiences of parliamentary personnel of the various parties. As a consequence the electoral system has had an important effect on perceptions of the party system and, by extension, of the political system itself. Sectionalism has been rendered highly visible because the electoral system makes it a fruitful basis on which to organize electoral support. Divisions cutting through sections, particularly those based on the class system, have been much less salient because the possibility of payoffs in terms of representation has been minimal.

Parties and campaign strategy

An initial perspective on the contribution of the parties to sectionalism is provided by some of the basic aspects of campaign strategy. Inadequate attention has been paid to the extent to which the campaign activities of the parties have exacerbated the hatreds, fears, and insecurities related to divisive sectional and ethnic cleavages.⁹

The basic cleavage throughout Canadian history concerns Quebec, or more precisely that part of French Canada resident in Quebec, and its relationships

⁹The confusion over what the parties actually do is of long standing. Siegfried observed that Canadian statesmen "seem to fear great movements of opinion, and they devote themselves to weakening such movements. . . . Let a question of race or religion be raised, and . . . the elections will become struggles of political principle, sincere and passionate. Now this is exactly what is feared by the prudent and far-sighted men who have been given the responsibility of maintaining the national equilibrium." Less frequently quoted is the directly contrary statement that "The appeal to racial exclusiveness combined with religious bigotry is the first and last cartridge of the politicians of the Dominion. Before thinking of any other reason, or after all other reasons have been exhausted, they come to or return to this." Siegfried, *Race Question*, 113, 130. A similar contradiction is implicit in Robert Alford's statement: "Although the major parties are not distinctly Left and Right in their policies and appeals, they have, by that very token, been an *integrating* force in Canadian society, since they *emphasize* regional, religious, and ethnic representation and compromises rather than either universalistic or class representation." *Party and Society* (Chicago, 1963), 260; emphasis added.

with the rest of the country. The evidence suggests that elections have fed on racial fears and insecurities, rather than reduced them.¹⁰ The three post-war elections of 1921, 1925, and 1926 produced overwhelming Liberal majorities at the level of seats in Quebec, 65 out of 65 in 1921, 59 out of 65 in 1925, and 60 seats out of 65 in 1926. The Conservatives' weakness in Quebec derived from their identification with conscription, the hanging of Riel, and the punitive treatment they received from the electoral system. A contributory factor of considerable importance however, especially in 1921 and 1925, was the vituperative tirade which the Liberals waged against Meighen and the Conservatives, stressing the 1917 crisis and exaggerating the dangers to Quebec should the Conservatives be successful. The 1925 campaign was described by Meighen as one in which "our candidates faced a campaign of hatred and racial appeal even more bitter than that of 1921. Paid organizers went from house to house advising the voters, particularly the women, that if Meighen were elected Prime Minister a war with Turkey would be declared and that the entrails of their sons would be scattered on the streets of Constantinople."¹¹ In view of the ample evidence documented by Graham and Neatby of the extent to which the Liberal campaigns stirred up the animosities and insecurities of French Canada, it is difficult to assert that the party system performed a unifying role in a province where historic tensions were potentially divisive. The fact that the Liberals were able to "convince Quebec" that they were its only defenders and that their party contained members of both ethnic groups after the elections scarcely constitute refutation when attention is directed to the methods employed to achieve this end, and when it is noted that the election results led to the isolation of Canada's second great party from Quebec.¹²

More recent indications of sectional aspects of campaign strategy with respect to Quebec help to verify the divisive nature of election campaigning. The well-known decision of the Conservative party in 1957, acting on Gordon Churchill's maxim to "reinforce success not failure," to reduce its Quebec efforts and concentrate on the possibilities of success in the remainder of the country provides an important indication of the significance of calculations of sectional pay-offs in dictating campaign strategy.¹³ The logic behind this policy was a direct consequence of the electoral system, for it was that system which dictated that increments of voting support from Quebec would produce less pay-off in

¹⁰Pierre Elliott Trudeau observes that French-Canadian Liberals have encouraged their potential supporters to use "their voting bloc as an instrument of racial defence, or of personal gain. Their only slogans have been racial slogans." "Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXIV, 3 (Aug. 1958), reprinted in Mason Wade, ed., *Canadian Dualism* (Toronto, 1960), 256.

¹¹Roger Graham, *Arthur Meighen: And Fortune Fled* (Toronto, 1963), 340. See also Graham, "Arthur Meighen and the Conservative Party in Quebec: The Election of 1925," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXVI (1955), for an analysis of this election in Quebec. For appeals to racial passions in 1921 and 1925 see Graham, *Meighen: And Fortune Fled*, 140–3, 340–3, and Blair Neatby, *Mackenzie King 1924–1932: The Lonely Heights* (Toronto, 1963), 73.

¹²The impact of the conscription issue on party strategy and voter choice in Quebec is discussed in N. Ward, ed., *A Party Politician: The Memoirs of Chubby Power* (Toronto, 1966). Power suggests that with the exceptions of 1926, 1930, and 1935 it was an issue in every election from 1911 to 1940 inclusive.

¹³John Meisel, *The Canadian General Election of 1957* (Toronto, 1962), 167–8.

representation than would equal increments elsewhere where the prospects of Conservative constituency victories were more promising. The electoral results were brilliantly successful from the viewpoint of the party, but less so from the perspective of Quebec which contributed only 8 per cent of the new government's seats, and received only three cabinet ministers.¹⁴

In these circumstances the election of 1958 was crucial in determining the nature and extent of French-Canadian participation in the new government which obviously would be formed by the Conservatives. Group appeals were exploited by the bribe that Quebec would get many more cabinet seats if that province returned a larger number of Tory MPs.¹⁵ Party propaganda stimulated racial tensions and insecurities. A Conservative advertisement showed an outline map of Canada deeply cleft by a hatchet at the Quebec-Ontario border. Above it were the words: "The newspapers predict a shattering triumph for Diefenbaker." Below it the words: "Let us not isolate Quebec." Liberal propaganda retaliated with an advertisement which consisted of twelve outline drawings of Diefenbaker comparing him to previous Conservatives who were stereotyped as anti-French.¹⁶ Neither appeal was well designed to foster easy cordiality and an absence of suspicion and fear between French- and English-speaking Canada.¹⁷

The significance of Quebec representation in explaining the nature of the Canadian party system has often been noted. Meisel states that the federal politician is faced with the dilemma of ignoring the pleas of Quebec, in which case "he may lose the support of Canada's second largest province without the seats of which a Parliamentary majority is almost impossible. If he heeds the wishes of Quebec, he may be deprived of indispensable support elsewhere."¹⁸ Lipson describes Quebec as the "solid South" of Canada whose support has

¹⁴This induced *Le Devoir* to observe "sombrely that the composition of the new Cabinet reduced Quebec 'to the status of a second-class, nearly a third-class province.' Neither the Conservative nor the Liberal parties, it argued, can rule without the support of at least twenty-five French Canadians in the House. 'And it is in the interest of the French-language group to be strongly represented in every government, whatever may be its party name; for every time that group has lacked an influential representation, French Canadians have been subjected to grave injustices.'" J. R. Mallory, "The Election and the Constitution," *Queen's Quarterly*, LXIV (1957), 481.

¹⁵D. H. Wrong, "Parties and Voting in Canada," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXIII (1958), 403.

¹⁶J. M. Beck, "Quebec and the Canadian Elections of 1958," *Parliamentary Affairs*, XII (1958-59), 95-6. Siegfried, *Race Question*, 163-4, 207-8 provides examples of the importance of French-English cleavages on election results and on party appeals at the turn of the century. As late as 1962, in some parts of Quebec, the Liberals tried to "link Diefenbaker with the historic 'Tory enemies' of French Canada. The names Borden, Meighen, Bennett, and Drew are still spat out as epithets by Liberal orators on the hustings." P. Regenstreif, "The Liberal Party of Canada: A Political Analysis," PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1963, 477.

¹⁷By the 1963 election the politics of sectionalism once more reduced the Conservatives to a token effort in Quebec, "largely directed to holding the few seats they had. The Prime Minister himself did little more than show the flag. . . ." John Saywell, ed., *Canadian Annual Review for 1963* (Toronto, 1964), 23. In the 1965 campaign the major parties exchanged sectional insults, with the Liberals charging that the Conservatives did not have and would not gain meaningful representation in Quebec, to which the Conservatives retorted that the Liberals would lack representation elsewhere. John Saywell, ed., *Canadian Annual Review for 1965* (Toronto, 1966), 85.

¹⁸John Meisel, "The Stalled Omnibus: Canadian Parties in the 1960s," *Social Research*, 30 (1963), 383-4.

contributed at different times to the hegemony of both parties, a fact which is basic in explaining the strategy of opposition of the two major parties.¹⁹ An important point is made by Ward in his observation that Liberal dominance in Quebec contributes to "internal strains in other parties." He adds the fundamental point that it is the electoral system which "by throwing whole blocks of seats to one party" fosters for that party a "special role as protector of the minority," while other parties are baffled by their inability to make significant breakthroughs in representation. Prophetically, as it turned out, he noted the developing theory that opposition parties should attempt to construct parliamentary majorities without Quebec, thus facing French Canadians with the option of becoming an opposition minority or casting themselves loose from the Liberals.²⁰

Ward's analysis makes clear that the special electoral importance of Quebec and the resultant party strategies elicited by that fact are only meaningful in the context of an electoral system which operates on a "winner take all" basis, not only at the level of the constituency but, to a modified extent, at the level of the province as a whole. It is only at the level of seats, not votes, that Quebec became a Liberal stronghold, a Canadian "solid South," and a one-party monopoly. The Canadian "solid South," like its American counterpart, is a contrivance of the electoral system, not an autonomous social fact which exists independent of it.

The electoral system is to politicians as the price system is to businessmen. If the latter found marked differentials in the returns they received for their commodities in different sections of the country this would have, to say the least, important consequences for the staff in the salesroom. It seems clear that the staff in the salesroom of the political parties is importantly conditioned in its conduct by the imperfections of the political market in which the parties sell their goods.

Quebec constitutes the most striking example of the sectional nature of party strategy, electoral appeals, and electoral outcomes. It is, however, only a specific manifestation of the general principle that when the distribution of partisan support within a province or section is such that significant political pay-offs are likely to accrue to politicians who address themselves to the special needs of the area concerned, politicians will not fail to provide at least a partial response.²¹

¹⁹Leslie Lipson, "Party Systems in the United Kingdom and the Older Commonwealth: Causes, Resemblances, and Variations," *Political Studies*, VII (1959), 27-8. See Ward, *A Party Politician*, 389, 392 for Power's recognition of the importance of Quebec to the Liberals.

²⁰N. Ward, "The National Political Scene," in Wade, ed., *Canadian Dualism*, 266, 272.

²¹Sir Richard Cartwright argued in his *Reminiscences*, 352, that because the provinces differ in wealth and interests, "the temptation to the poorer provinces to sell themselves to the party in office is always very great and is certain to be traded on by practical politicians on both sides."

Graham, *Meighen: And Fortune Fled*, 299, 303, describes the pressures on Meighen to devise an attractive western policy as otherwise his party "has not the ghost of a chance on the prairies in an election." In contrast to King's assiduous courting of the prairie provinces, waffling on the tariff and promises of special western policies, Meighen decided to preach the tariff to the unconverted. He was rewarded with ten seats and King with twenty in 1925.

Liberal courting of British Columbia in 1925 by reducing rates on flour and grain going to Pacific ports for export is noted in Walter R. Sharp, "The Canadian Elections of 1925," *American Political Science Review*, XX (1926), 111 n. 3. Lionel H. Laing, "The Pattern of Canadian Politics: The Elections of 1945," *American Political Science Review*, XL (1946)

The tendency of parties "to aim appeals at the nerve centers of particular provinces or regions, hoping thus to capture a bloc geographical vote,"²² and to emphasize sectional appeals, are logical party responses within the Canadian electoral framework.

Electoral system and party policy

The effect of the electoral system on party policies has already been suggested in part in the preceding indication of its impact on election campaigns. The inquiry can be extended by noting that the electoral system affects party policies both directly and indirectly. The direct effect flows from the elementary consideration that each party devises policy in the light of a different set of sectional considerations. In theory, if the party is viewed strictly as a maximizing body pursuing representation, party sensitivity should be most highly developed in marginal situations where an appropriate policy initiative, a special organizational effort, or a liberal use of campaign funds might tip the balance of sectional representation to the side of the party. Unfortunately, sufficient evidence is not available to assert that this is a valid description of the import of sectional considerations on party strategies. The indirect effect of the electoral system is that it plays an important role in the determination of who the party policy makers will be.

The indirect effect presupposes the preeminence of the parliamentary party and its leaders in policy making. Acceptance of this presupposition requires a brief preliminary analysis of the nature of party organization, especially for the two major parties. The literature has been unanimous in referring to the organizational weakness of the Liberals and Conservatives. Some of the basic aspects and results of this will be summarily noted.

The extra-parliamentary structures of the two major parties have been extremely weak, lacking in continuity and without any disciplining power over the parliamentary party. The two major parties have been leader-dominated with membership playing a limited role in policy making and party financing. Although there are indications that the extra-parliamentary apparatus of the parties is growing in importance, it can be safely said that for the period under review both major parties have been essentially parliamentary parties.

Some suggestive explanations of this situation have been offered, particularly by Regenstreif. These include the absence in Canada of several important stimuli which have facilitated the development of party organization in the United States and Great Britain. The stimuli resulting from a powerful mass-membership left-wing party and by serious restrictions on campaign expenditures as in Great

provides a sectional interpretation of the 1945 election in terms of results and to a lesser extent of strategy.

²²H. A. Scarrow, "Distinguishing between Political Parties—The Case of Canada," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, IX (1965), 72. He also notes (75-6n) the tendency of a candidate to appeal for support "on the ground that only his party has a chance of winning office, and that consequently the voters of the district or region had better jump on the winning bandwagon if they want to be represented in the cabinet. Diefenbaker made wide use of this appeal in Quebec in 1958." Paul Hellyer appealed to prairie voters for Liberal support in the 1965 federal election to "elect more members to the Government side to make sure the views of this area are considered." *Winnipeg Free Press*, 29 Oct. 1965.

Britain, are absent in Canada. Unlike the American situation Canadian parties are not responsible for voter registration. Compared to the United States Canada also has a paucity of elections and elective offices, and party spoils have constituted a less attractive inducement to organizational work for the party.

In these circumstances of weak extra-parliamentary organization, it is evident that the parliamentary party, or more specifically the leader and his trusted parliamentary colleagues, has had few institutional party restraints to contend with in the development of policy.²³ Thus, the contribution of the electoral system to the determination of the parliamentary personnel of the party becomes, by logical extension, a contribution to the formation of party policies.²⁴ Scarrow has asserted that "it is the makeup of the parliamentary party, including the proportional strength and bargaining position of the various parts, which is the most crucial factor in determining policy at any one time."²⁵ While this hypothesis may require modification in particular cases, it is likely that historical research will confirm its general validity. For example, the antithetical attitudes of Conservatives and Liberals to conscription in both world wars were related not only to the electoral consequences of different choices, but also reflected the backgrounds and bias of the party personnel available to make such key decisions.²⁶ The generally much more solicitous treatment of Quebec and the French Canadians by the Liberals than by the Conservatives is similarly explainable. It is not accidental that bitter criticisms of family allowances as bribes to Quebec came from the Conservatives, while the recent emphasis on unhyphenated Canadianism has also been a Conservative contribution.²⁷

The significance of the electoral system for party policy is due to its consistent failure to reflect with even rough accuracy the distribution of partisan support in the various sections/provinces of the country. By making the Conservatives far more of a British and Ontario-based party, the Liberals far more a French and Quebec party, the CCF far more a prairie and BC party, and even Social Credit far more of an Alberta party up until 1953, than the electoral support of these parties "required," they were deprived of intra-party spokesmen proportionate to their electoral support from the sections where they were relatively weak. The relative, or on occasion total, absence of such spokesmen for particular sectional

²³The CCF seems to have been an exception. See Walter D. Young, "The National CCF: Political Party and Political Movement," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1965, for an analysis of the special role played by the central office, in effect by David Lewis, for long periods in the formation of policy and strategy.

²⁴The fact is that influence in caucus and party is conditioned by seniority. N. Ward, *The Canadian House of Commons: Representation* (Toronto, 2nd ed. 1963), 140–3, is relevant here with its implication that the spokesmen for the sectional strongholds of the party will enjoy a pre-eminent position compared to the more fluctuating representation where the party is weak.

²⁵"Distinguishing between Political Parties," 69. See also John R. Williams, *The Conservative Party of Canada: 1920–1949* (Durham, NC, 1956), 14–15, and Ward, "The National Political Scene," 268–70, for related comments.

²⁶See the interesting analysis of the 1935 election by Escott Reid which asserted that the difference in ethnic composition of the Liberal and Conservative parliamentary parties would incline the Liberals to isolationism and the Conservatives to a more imperialistic policy. "The Canadian Election of 1935 and After," *American Political Science Review*, 30 (1936), 117–18.

²⁷See Regenstreif, "Liberal Party," 472–7, and Alford, *Party and Society*, 258, for party policy differences and party images related to French-English relations.

communities seriously affects the image of the parties as national bodies, deprives the party concerned of articulate proponents of particular sectional interests in caucus and in the House, and, it can be deductively suggested, renders the members of the parliamentary party personally less sensitive to the interests of the unrepresented sections than they otherwise would be. As a result the general perspectives and policy orientations of a party are likely to be skewed in favour of those interests which, by virtue of strong parliamentary representation, can vigorously assert their claims.

If a bias of this nature is consistently visited on a specific party over long periods of time it will importantly condition the general orientation of the party and the political information and values of party MPs. It is in such ways that it can be argued that the effect of the electoral system is cumulative, creating conditions which aggravate the bias which it initially introduced into the party.²⁸ To take the case of the Conservative party, the thesis is that not only does the electoral system make that party less French by depriving it of French representation as such, but also by the effect which that absence of French colleagues has on the possibility that its non-French members will shed their parochial perspectives through intra-party contacts with French co-workers in parliament.²⁹

The Conservatives have experienced great difficulty in recruiting capable French-Canadian representation into the hierarchy of the parliamentary party, a difficulty partly related to the discrimination of the electoral system which gave the party only a small pool of talent to work with. It has also been suggested that the parliamentary party has provided a most uncongenial habitat for those few French Canadians who did survive the rigours of electoral competition to take their seats as Conservative MPs. John R. Williams claims that the Ontario-dominated parliamentary group played an important role in the decline of the Conservative party in the King era.³⁰ The parliamentary party with its disparaging comments about Quebec and miserable treatment of French-Canadian colleagues seriously damaged the party in Quebec. French-Canadian Conservatives refused to run for re-election or crossed the floor to join the Liberals. On at least two occasions the departing French Canadians "publicly renounced the party because of the parliamentary group's hostility toward them and their race."³¹ In marked contrast is the evidence of Ward that French-English relations within the Liberal party are "regarded by both as good," although they seem to be based on peaceful coexistence rather than on mutually intimate understandings.³²

²⁸Other factors not considered here also influence party policy and attitudes. Meisel has cogently argued that the Liberals entered the 1957 federal election with a national approach remarkably insensitive to regional needs, an approach born of long and intimate contact with a centralist-oriented civil service and a lack of feedback from backbenchers in the Commons. By contrast, the Conservatives, who entered the election as an Ontario party in terms of existing parliamentary representation, proved remarkably sensitive to the needs of regions and groups neglected by the Liberals. John Meisel, "The Formulation of Liberal and Conservative Programmes in the 1957 Canadian General Election," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXVI (1960).

²⁹In the mid-fifties Ward made the general point that all opposition parties had "little experience in dealing with French Canadians as trusted colleagues in caucus," with a resultant development of traditions reflecting that fact. "The National Political Scene," 267.

³⁰*Conservative Party*, 197-200.

³¹*Ibid.*, 197-8.

³²"The National Political Scene," 269-70.

While a lengthy catalogue of explanations can be adduced to explain the divergent orientations of Liberals and Conservatives to Quebec and French Canada the electoral system must be given high priority as an influencing factor. A strong deductive case therefore can be made that the sectional bias in party representation engendered by the electoral system has had an important effect on the policies of specific parties and on policy differences between parties.³³ Additionally, the electoral system has helped to determine the real or perceived sectional consequences of alternative party policy decisions. Politicians engaged in party organizational and electoral work are, in Chubby Power's words, "inclined to gauge policies and administrations primarily in the light of their effect on the voting proclivities of the population, and to assess their value in terms of electoral success or failure, rather than on any other consideration."³⁴ This thesis, a practitioner's echo of Schumpeter's suggestion that politicians are individuals who deal in votes,³⁵ is far from constituting a total explanation of the factors which influence policy, but it is clear that no politician in a competitive party system can overlook the electoral consequences of his actions. In particular instances, the desire to win over a section in which the party is weak may lead to neglect of an area in which the party already has strong representation. King's courting of the prairie provinces and neglect of the Maritimes in the first half of the twenties constitutes a revealing instance of this phenomenon.³⁶ Whether a party directs attention to the sections where it is strong, as a result of the assertiveness of intra-party spokesmen, or whether attention is lavished on a section where a major breakthrough is deemed possible, is a matter for investigation in each case. From our perspective the basic point is that both reflect the politics of sectionalism as stimulated by the single-member constituency system.

In some cases the sectional nature of party support requires politicians to make a cruel choice between sections, a choice recognized as involving the sacrifice of future representation from one section in order to retain it from another. This, it has been argued, was the Conservative dilemma in deciding whether or not Riel was to hang and in determining conscription policy in the First World War. Faced with a choice between Quebec and Ontario, in each case they chose Ontario. It should be noted that these either/or sectional choices occasionally thrown up in the political system are given exaggerated significance by an electoral system capable of transforming a moderate loss of votes in a section into almost total annihilation at the level of representation. If only votes were considered, the harshness of such decisions would be greatly mitigated, for

³³The history of the CCF reveals that the sectional backgrounds of party MPs did not orient the party in the direction of its western supporters. In fact, the party rapidly moved away from its agrarian stronghold and became, from the viewpoint of the national leaders, and especially David Lewis the most important person in the determination of party policy, a party with an urban, industrial, working class, and central Canada orientation. Young, "The National CCF," 127-8, 131, 132, 139-40, 148-9, 159-60, 166, 200-1, 204, 249-50, 310.

³⁴"Of course," he continued, "times and circumstances do arise where profound personal convictions conflict with party success or personal ambition, and where one must make decisions that one knows to be unpalatable to the voters." Ward, *A Party Politician*, 318.

³⁵J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York, 3rd ed., 1962), 285.

³⁶Neatby, *King: The Lonely Heights*, 66-7. See also 222-4.

decisions could be made on the basis of much less dramatic marginal assessments of the political consequences of alternative courses of action.

Electoral system and perceptions of the polity

A general point, easily overlooked because of its elementary nature, is that the electoral system has influenced perceptions of the political system. The sectional basis of party representation which the electoral system has stimulated has reduced the visibility of cleavages cutting through sections. The effect of this on the perceptions and conduct of political activists has already been noted. Academics have also been misled and frequently have imputed a monolithic partisan unity to the sectional particularisms of Canadian society.³⁷ The resultant misconception has identified particular sections with particular parties and particular parties with particular sections.³⁸

It has been argued that the fragmentation of the electoral struggle into several hundred individual constituency contests, in contrast to the American system, prevents Canadians from identifying a "genuine regional influence" on election outcomes.³⁹ The fact is, however, that commentators have been far from reluctant to interpret election phenomena in sectional terms. A hasty survey of political literature finds Quebec portrayed as "the solid Quebec of 1921," western Canada described as "once the fortress of protest movements," since transformed "into a Conservative stronghold," eastern Canada depicted in the 1925 election as having "punished King for his preoccupation with the prairies," and the Conservative party described in 1955 as "almost reduced into being an Ontario party,"⁴⁰ when in the previous election 55.8 per cent of its voting support came from outside that province.

The use of sectional terminology in description easily shades off into highly suspect assumptions about the voting behaviour of the electorate within sections. One of the most frequent election interpretations attributes a monolithic quality to Quebec voters and then argues that they "have instinctively given the bulk of their support" to the government⁴¹ or it is claimed that "the voters of Quebec

³⁷E. P. Dean provides several striking examples in "How Canada Has Voted: 1867-1945," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXX (1949). Duverger, who argued that "Parliamentary strength is always much more important than real strength in the country," provides a British illustration of the way in which this perceptual bias operates: "The fact that the Labour party had obtained only 48.7% of the poll in 1945 was completely obliterated by the fact that it controlled 390 votes in the Commons; public opinion itself considered Labour as having a strong majority." *Political Parties*, 400.

³⁸The provisions of Sections 51 and 51A of the BNA Act allocating parliamentary seats to provinces are important contributing factors in facilitating provincial or sectional interpretations of election results. As a byproduct the system precludes the possibility of electoral boundaries crossing provincial boundaries and makes the province a natural and easy unit for interpreting election results. In addition, of course, it transforms struggles over representation into struggles over provincial rights. I am indebted to Professor Walter Young for drawing these factors to my attention.

³⁹J. E. Hodgetts, "Regional Interests and Policy in a Federal Structure," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXXII (1966), 10.

⁴⁰W. L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, 1963), 450; R. Cook et al., *Canada: A Modern Study* (Toronto, 1963), 254; Neatby, *King: The Lonely Heights*, 74, and Underhill, "Canadian Liberal Democracy in 1955," 40.

⁴¹F. H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), 54.

traditionally seem to want the bulk of their representation . . . on the government side of the House. . . ."⁴² Several authors have specifically suggested that in 1958 Quebec, or the French Canadians, swung to Diefenbaker for this reason. To Regenstreif this was because otherwise he would have formed a government without French support, which would have meant "that their entire way of life would be at stake. . . . Their solution was to help form the new government that was obviously going to be created anyway and thereby avoid the much-feared isolation that would otherwise be their lot."⁴³ A recent analysis of New Brunswick politics argues that the strong tendency for MPs from that province to be on the government side of the House "must be" because "it seeks to gain what concessions it can by supporting the government and relying on its sense of gratitude."⁴⁴

The tendency of the electoral system to create sectional or provincial sweeps for one party at the level of representation is an important reason for these misinterpretations. Since similar explanations have become part of the folklore of Canadian politics it is useful to examine the extremely tenuous basis of logic on which they rest. Quebec will serve as a useful case study. The first point to note is the large percentage of the Quebec electorate which does not vote for the party which subsequently forms the government, a percentage varying from 29.8 per cent in 1921 to 70.4 per cent in 1962, and averaging 48 per cent for the period 1921 to 1965 as a whole. In the second place any government party will tend to win most of the sections most of the time. That is what a government party is. While Quebec has shown an above average propensity to accord more than fifty per cent of its representation to the government party (on eleven occasions out of fourteen, compared to an average for all sections of just under eight out of fourteen⁴⁵) this is partly because of the size of the contingent from Quebec and its frequent one-sided representation patterns. This means that to a large extent Quebec determines which party will be the government, rather than exhibiting a preference for being on the government or opposition side of the House. This can be tested by switching the representation which Quebec gave to the two main parties in each of the eleven elections in which Quebec backed the winner. The method is simply to transfer the number of seats Quebec accorded the winning party to the second main party, and transfer the latter's Quebec seats to the former. This calculation shows that had Quebec distributed its seats between the two main parties in a manner precisely the opposite to its actual performance it would have been on the winning side on seven out of eleven occasions anyway.⁴⁶ It is thus more accurate to say that parties need

⁴²McLeod, "Party Structure and Party Reform," 10. He adds that this is not "peculiar to Quebec."

⁴³P. Regenstreif, "The Canadian General Election of 1958," *Western Political Quarterly*, XIII (1960), 362-3. See also Wrong, "Parties and Voting in Canada," 403-4.

⁴⁴H. G. Thorburn, *Politics in New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1961), 176. New Brunswick, Thorburn argues, "has been on the winning side whenever this could be divined with any accuracy before the election" (183); see also 49.

⁴⁵The sections have been defined as Maritimes/Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, and British Columbia.

⁴⁶In 1925 and 1957 the Liberals and Conservatives respectively have been identified as winners for the purpose of the above calculation.

Quebec in order to win than to say that Quebec displays a strong desire to be on the winning side.

One final indication of the logical deficiencies of the assumption that Quebec voters are motivated by a bandwagon psychology will suffice. The case of 1958 will serve as an example. In 1957 when there was no prediction of a Conservative victory, Quebec voters gave 31.1 per cent of their voting support to the Conservative party. In 1958 that percentage jumped to 49.6 when predictions of a Conservative victory were nearly universal. On the reasonable assumption that most of the Conservative supporters in 1957 remained with the party in 1958, and on the further assumption, which is questionable, that all of the increment in Conservative support was due to a desire to be on the winning side, the explanation is potentially applicable to only one Quebec voter out of five.

In concluding this critical analysis of a segment of Canadian political folklore it is only necessary to state that the attribution of questionable motivations to Quebec or French Canada could easily have been avoided if attention had been concentrated on voting data rather than on the bias in representation caused by the single-member constituency system. The analysis of Canadian politics has been harmfully affected by a kind of mental shorthand which manifests itself in the acceptance of a political map of the country which identifies provinces or sections in terms of the end results of the political process, partisan representation. This perception is natural since elections occur only once every three or four years while the results are visible for the entire period between elections. Since sectional discrepancies between votes and seats are due to the electoral system it is evident that the latter has contributed to the formation of a set of seldom questioned perceptions which exaggerate the partisan significance of geographical boundaries.

Electoral system, sectionalism, and instability

Individuals can relate to the party system in several ways, but the two most fundamental are class and sectionalism.⁴⁷ The two are antithetical, for one emphasizes the geography of residence, while the other stresses stratification distinctions for which residence is irrelevant. The frequently noted conservative tone which pervades Canadian politics is a consequence of the sectional nature of the party system.⁴⁸ The emphasis on sectional divisions engendered by the electoral system has submerged class conflicts, and to the extent that our politics has been ameliorative it has been more concerned with the distribution of burdens and benefits between sections than between classes. The poverty of the Maritimes has occupied an honourable place in the foreground of public discussion. The diffuse poverty of the generally underprivileged has scarcely been noticed.

Such observations lend force to John Porter's thesis that Canadian parties have failed to harness the "conservative-progressive dynamic" related to the Canadian class system, and to his assertion that "to obscure social divisions

⁴⁷Schattschneider, *Party Government*, 111. This point is made by Clokie, *Canadian Government and Politics*, 87-9, in a discussion implying that class cleavages are more real than sectional cleavages.

⁴⁸Porter, *Vertical Mosaic*, 373-7; F. H. Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto, 1960), 167.

through brokerage politics is to remove from the political system that element of dialectic which is the source of creative politics."⁴⁹ The fact is, however, that given the historical (and existing) state of class polarization in Canada the electoral system has made sectionalism a more rewarding vehicle for amassing political support than class. The destructive impact of the electoral system on the CCF is highly indicative of this point. It is not that the single member constituency system discourages class based politics in any absolute sense, as the example of Britain shows, but that it discourages such politics when class identities are weak or submerged behind sectional identities.

This illustrates the general point that the differences in the institutional contexts of politics have important effects in determining which kinds of conflict become salient in the political system. The particular institutional context with which this paper is concerned, the electoral system, has clearly fostered a sectional party system in which party strategists have concentrated on winning sections over to their side. It has encouraged a politics of opportunism based on sectional appeals and conditioned by one party bastions where the opposition is tempted to give up the battle and pursue success in more promising areas.

A politics of sectionalism is a politics of instability for two reasons. In the first place it induces parties to pay attention to the realities of representation which filter through the electoral system, at the expense of the realities of partisan support at the level of the electorate. The self-interest which may induce a party to write off a section because its weak support there is discriminated against by the electoral system may be exceedingly unfortunate for national unity. Imperfections in the political market render the likelihood of an invisible hand transforming the pursuit of party good into public good somewhat dubious.

Secondly, sectional politics is potentially far more disruptive to the polity than class politics.⁵⁰ This is essentially because sectional politics has an inherent tendency to call into question the very nature of the political system and its legitimacy. Classes, unlike sections, cannot secede from the political system, and are consequently more prone to accept its legitimacy. The very nature of their spatial distribution not only inhibits their political organization but induces them to work through existing instrumentalities. With sections this is not the case.

Given the strong tendency to sectionalism found in the very nature of Canadian society the question can be raised as to the appropriateness of the existing electoral system. Duverger has pointed out that the single-member constituency system "accentuates the geographical localization of opinions: one might even say that it tends to transform a national opinion . . . into a local opinion by allowing it to be represented only in the sections of the country in which it is strongest." Proportional representation works in the opposite manner for "opinions strongly entrenched locally tend to be broadened on to the national plane by the possibility of being represented in districts where they are in a small minority." The political significance of these opposed tendencies "is clear: proportional representation tends to strengthen national unity (or, to be more

⁴⁹*Vertical Mosaic*, 373–4.

⁵⁰Alford, *Party and Society*, 339; Porter, *Vertical Mosaic*, 368–9; V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, 109; Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York, 2nd ed., 1947), 152.

precise, national uniformity); the simple majority system accentuates local differences. The consequences are fortunate or unfortunate according to the particular situation in each country.”⁵¹

Sectionalism and discontinuities in party representation

It might be argued that the appropriate question is not whether sectional (or other) interests are represented proportionately to their voting support in each party, but simply whether they are represented in the party system as a whole proportionately to their general electoral strength. This assertion, however, is overly simple and unconvincing.

An electoral system which exaggerates the role of specific sections in specific parties accentuates the importance of sectionalism itself. If sectionalism in its “raw” condition is already strong, its exaggeration may cause strains beyond the capacity of the polity to handle. By its stimulus to sectional cleavages the electoral system transforms the party struggle into a struggle between sections, raising the danger that “parties . . . cut off from gaining support among a major stratum . . . lose a major reason for compromise.”⁵²

This instability is exacerbated by the fact that the electoral system facilitates sudden and drastic alterations in the basis of party parliamentary representation. Recent changes with respect to NDP representation from Saskatchewan, Social Credit representation from Quebec, and the startling change in the influence of the prairie contingent in the Conservative party, with its counterpart of virtually eliminating other parties from that section, constitute important illustrations. The experience of Social Credit since 1962 and more recent experience of the Conservative party reveal that such changes may be more than a party can successfully handle.

Sudden changes in sectional representation are most pronounced in the transition from being an opposition party to becoming the government party. As Underhill notes,⁵³ it is generally impossible to have more than one party with significant representation from both French and English Canada at the same time. That party is invariably the government party. This has an important consequence which has been insufficiently noted. Not only are opposition parties often numerically weak and devoid of access to the expertise that would prepare them for the possibility of governing, but they are also far less national in composition than the government party. On the two occasions since the First World War when the Conservatives ousted Liberal governments, 1930 and 1957, their opposition experience cut them off from contact with Quebec at the parliamentary level. Even though the party was successful in making significant breakthroughs in that province in 1930 and especially in 1958, it can be suggested that it had serious problems in digesting the sudden input of Quebec MPs, particularly in the latter year.

The transition from opposition to government therefore is a transition from

⁵¹*Political Parties*, 383.

⁵²S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (New York, 1963), 13. The extensive literature on cross-pressures is relevant here with its emphasis that multiple group membership and identification have “the effect of reducing the emotion in political choices.” *Ibid.*

⁵³*Image of Confederation*, 53–4.

being sectional to being national, not only in the tasks of government, but typically in the very composition of the party itself. The hypothesis that this discontinuity may have serious effects on the capacity of the party to govern is deserving of additional research. It is likely that such research will suggest a certain incongruity between the honorific status symbolically accorded Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and an electoral system which is likely to hamper the development in that party of those perspectives functional to successful governing.

The electoral system as a determinant of the party system

Students of Canadian politics have been singularly unwilling to attribute any explanatory power to the electoral system as a determinant of the party system.⁵⁴ Lipson has argued that it is not the electoral system which moulds the party system, but rather the reverse. Essentially his thesis is that parties select the type of electoral system most compatible with their own interest, which is self-perpetuation. He admits in passing that once selected the electoral system "produces a reciprocal effect upon the parties which brought it into being."⁵⁵

Lipson's interpretation is surely misleading and fallacious in its implication that because parties preside over the selection, modification, and replacement of particular institutions the subsequent feed-back of those institutions on the parties should not be regarded as causal. In the modern democratic party state, parties preside over the legal arrangements governing campaign expenses, eligibility of candidates, the rules establishing the determination of party winners and losers, the kinds of penalties, such as loss of deposits, which shall be visited on candidates with a low level of support, the rules establishing who may vote, and so on. Analysis is stifled if it is assumed that because these rules are made by parties the effect of the rules on the parties is in some sense to be regarded as derivative or of secondary interest or importance. Fundamentally the argument concerns the priority to be accorded the chicken or the egg. As such it can be pursued to an infinite regression, for it can be asserted that the parties which make a particular set of rules are themselves products of the rules which prevailed in the previous period, which in turn. . . . It might also be noted that parties which preside over particular changes in electoral arrangements may be mistaken in their predictions about the effect of the changes. It is clear that the introduction of the alternative ballot in British Columbia in 1952 misfired from the viewpoint of its sponsors, with dramatic effects on the nature of the provincial party system which subsequently developed.

⁵⁴For example, in recent articles Leon Epstein has specifically downgraded its importance, "A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties," *American Political Science Review*, LVIII (1964), 48, 57-8, and McLeod, in an extensive catalogue of factors relevant to explaining the party system, does not discuss the electoral system, except for incidental mention of its contribution to single party dominance. McLeod, "Party Structure and Party Reform," 9. The views of Lipson and Meisel are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Smiley is an exception in according some significance to the electoral system. He notes that the system favours sectionally based minor parties, and that it was "strategic" in destroying the Canadian two-party system between 1935 and 1953. "The Two-Party System and One-Party Dominance," 316-17.

⁵⁵"Party Systems in the United Kingdom and the Older Commonwealth," 20-1.

The only reasonable perspective for the analyst to adopt is to accept the interdependence of electoral systems and party systems and then to investigate whatever aspects of that interdependence seem to provide useful clues for the understanding of the political system.

In a recent article Meisel explicitly agrees with Lipson, asserting that parties are products of societies rather than of differences between parliamentary or presidential systems, or of electoral laws.⁵⁶ This argument is weakened by its assumption that society is something apart from the institutional arrangements of which it is composed. It is unclear in this dichotomy just what society is. While it may be possible at the moment when particular institutions are being established to regard them as separate from the society to which they are to be fitted, this is not so with long-established institutions which become part and parcel of the society itself. Livingston's argument that after a while it becomes impossible to make an analytic distinction between the instrumentalities of federalism and the federal nature of the society they were designed to preserve or express is correct and is of general validity.⁵⁷ To say therefore that parties are products of societies is not to deny that they are products of institutions. The only defensible view is once again to accept the interdependence of political and other institutions which comprise society and then to establish the nature of particular patterns of interdependence by research.

Confirmation of the view that electoral systems do have an effect on party systems is provided by logic. To assert that a particular electoral system does not have an effect on a particular party system is equivalent to saying that all conceivable electoral systems are perfectly compatible with that party system and that all conceivable party systems are compatible with that electoral system. This is surely impossible. Any one electoral system has the effect of inhibiting the development of the different party systems which some, but not necessarily all, different electoral systems would foster. To accept this is to accept that electoral systems and party systems are related.

Approaches to a theory of the party system

This paper has suggested that the electoral system has been an important factor in the evolution of the Canadian party system. Its influence is intimately tied up with the politics of sectionalism which it has stimulated. Sectionalism in the party system is unavoidable as long as there are significant differences between the distribution of party voter support in any one section and the distribution in the country as a whole. The electoral system, however, by the distortions it introduces as it transforms votes into seats produces an exaggerated sectionalism at the level of representation. In view of this, the basic theme of the paper in its simplest form, and somewhat crudely stated, is that statements about sectionalism in the national party system are in many cases, and at a deeper level, statements about the politics of the single-member constituency system.

⁵⁶He supports his argument by noting that both the two-party system and its successor multi-party system existed within the same institutional framework. "The Stalled Omnibus," 370.

⁵⁷W. S. Livingston, *Federalism and Constitutional Change* (Oxford, 1956), 7-9.

The suggested impact of the electoral system on the party system is relevant to a general theory of the party system but should not be confused with such a general theory. The construction of the latter would have required analysis of the import for the party system of such factors as the federal system, the relationship of provincial party organizations to the national party, the nature of the class system, the underlying economic and cultural bases for sectionalism, a parliamentary system of the British type, and many others. For this discussion all these have been accepted as given. They have been mentioned, if at all, only indirectly. Their importance for a general theory is taken for granted, as is the interdependencies they have with each other and with the electoral system. It is evident, for example, that the underlying strength of sectional tendencies and the weakness of class identification are interrelated with each other and with the electoral system as explanations of sectionalism in Canadian politics.⁵⁸ For any one of these to change will produce a change in the outcomes which their interactions generate. We are not therefore suggesting that sectional tendencies are exclusive products of the electoral system, but only that that system accords them an exaggerated significance.

Concentration on the electoral system represents an attempt to isolate one aspect of a complex series of interactions which is only imperfectly understood and in the present state of our knowledge cannot be handled simultaneously with precision. In such circumstances the development of more systematic comprehensive explanations will only result from a dialectic between research findings at levels varying from that of individual voters through middle-range studies, such as Alford's recent analysis of class and voting, to attempts, such as those by Scarrow and Meisel,⁵⁹ to handle a complex range of phenomena in one framework.

We can conclude that the capacity of the party system to act as an integrating agency for the sectional communities of Canada is detrimentally affected by the electoral system. The politicians' problem of reconciling sectional particularisms is exacerbated by the system they must work through in their pursuit of power. From one perspective it can be argued that if parties succeed in overcoming sectional divisions they do so in defiance of the electoral system. Conversely, it can be claimed that if parties do not succeed this is because the electoral system has so biased the party system that it is inappropriate to call it a nationalizing agency. It is evident that not only has the electoral system given impetus to sectionalism in terms of party campaigns and policy, but by making all parties more sectional at the level of seats than of votes it complicates the ability of the parties to transcend sectionalism. At various times the electoral system has placed barriers in the way of Conservatives becoming sensitively aware of the special place of Quebec and French Canada in the Canadian polity, aided the Liberals in that task, inhibited the third parties in the country from becoming aware of the special needs and dispositions of sections other than those represented in the parliamentary party, and frequently inhibited the parliamentary

⁵⁸Alford, *Party and Society*, 42–9, discusses various factors sustaining sectionalism.

⁵⁹Scarrow, "Distinguishing between Political Parties," and John Meisel, "Recent Changes in Canadian Parties," in Hugh G. Thorburn, ed., *Party Politics in Canada* (Scarborough, 2nd ed., 1967).

personnel of the major parties from becoming attuned to the sentiments of the citizens of the prairies. The electoral system's support for the political idiosyncracies of Alberta for over two decades ill served the integration of that provincial community into the national political system at a time when it was most needed. In fact, the Alberta case merely illustrates the general proposition that the disintegrating effects of the electoral system are likely to be most pronounced where alienation from the larger political system is most profound. A particular orientation, therefore, has been imparted to Canadian politics which is not inherent in the very nature of the patterns of cleavage and consensus in the society, but results from their interplay with the electoral system.

The stimulation offered to sectional cleavages by the single-member constituency system has led several authors to query its appropriateness for national integration in certain circumstances. Lipset and Duverger have suggested that countries possessed of strong underlying tendencies to sectionalism may be better served by proportional representation which breaks up the monolithic nature of sectional representation stimulated by single-member constituency systems.⁶⁰ Belgium is frequently cited as a country in which proportional representation has softened the conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons, and the United States as a country in which the single-member constituency system has heightened cleavages and tensions between north and south. Whatever its other merits, the single-member constituency system lacks the singular capacity of proportional representation to encourage all parties to search for votes in all sections of the country. Minorities within sections or provinces are not frozen out as they tend to be under the existing system. As a consequence sectional differences in party representation are minimized or, more accurately, given proportionate rather than exaggerated representation—a factor which encourages the parties to develop a national orientation.

⁶⁰Lipset, "Party Systems and the Representation of Social Groups," 76–7; Duverger, *Political Parties*, 382–4.