

Voting in Canadian Two-Member Constituencies

By NORMAN WARD

FOR several years after 1867, constituencies returning two members were a common phenomenon in Canada in both federal and provincial politics. In some of the provinces, indeed, multiple-member constituencies were not only heavily in the majority, but several returned three and even four members. Limiting attention to those returning members to the federal house, one might expect, if party affiliation alone influenced electors, that in two-member elections two Liberals, for example, should receive virtually the same number of votes. Where a variation occurred in the votes polled by the two representatives of the same party, it would be permissible to conclude that considerations other than the party label had some weight with electors.

A tabulation of election results in two-member federal constituencies proves nothing, of course, beyond the fact that the two representatives of a party sometimes do poll varying numbers of votes. The analytical value of election returns is further diminished by the fact that there have never been more than ten such constituencies in Canada. These have been so distributed that the various sections of Canada have been very unevenly represented, and no deductions can be made regarding voting habits in the different regions. There were two such constituencies in the first Parliament (Halifax, N. S. and Victoria, B. C.) and eight more were added in 1872 (Cape Breton, and Pictou, N. S.; Hamilton and Ottawa, Ont.; King's, Prince, and Queen's, P. E. I.; and Saint John City and County, N. B.). These ten, seven of them in the Maritimes, continued in existence until the redistribution that followed the 1891 census, when King's and Saint John were reduced to one-member areas, and Prince and Queen's were each split into two single-member constituencies. The six survivors lasted until the Redistribution Act of 1903,

when Pictou and Victoria were reduced to returning one member, Cape Breton and Hamilton were each divided into one-member constituencies, and Queen's was re-established with two-members. From 1903 to the redistribution of 1933, Queen's, Halifax, and Ottawa returned two members; and in 1933 Ottawa was divided, so that there are now only two two-member constituencies.

Election results for the two major parties (Liberals and Conservatives) in two member constituencies in every general election since 1887 are shown in the accompanying table. Variation in the votes polled by the two representatives of each party are expressed in each case as a percentage of the vote polled by the party's second man. In Halifax, in 1887, for instance, the two Liberal candidates polled 4,243 and 4,098 respectively, and the difference between these two totals, expressed as a percentage of the lower, is 3.5. This is the figure which appears in the table, and where the variation is less than one per cent, this fact is indicated by an "X".¹ The tabulation has not been taken back beyond 1887 because of the difficulty of ascertaining the party affiliation of candidates in some cases. By 1887, party lines appear to have been drawn with sufficient clarity for party labels to be used in the Canadian Parliamentary Companion (and later, the Canadian Parliamentary Guide), from which sources the table has been compiled.

The sixty-two elections in the table may be classified in a number of ways, but there are two that are of particular interest—viz. the election results in terms of winning candidates, and according to the total number of candidates running in the elections. By the first classification, the results are as follows: 2 Conservatives elected in 29 elections; 2 Liberals elected in 24 elections; 1 Liberal, 1 Conservative elected in 8 elections;

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1. Canadian coverage is incomplete as no attempt was made to contact all voluntary Canadian plans.

Election Returns Federal Two Member Constituencies, 1887-1945
Conservative and Liberal Candidates
Variation in Extra-Party Votes (a)

Year	Cape Breton		Halifax		Hamilton		King's		Ottawa		Pictou		Prince		Queen's		Saint John		Victoria	
	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L	C	L
1887	X	X	2.0	3.5	X	X	1.8	X	4.1	X	2.4	(1)	6.3	6.6	4.9	1.6	5.8	1.8	15.3	3.3
1891	X	4.0	X	3.9	X	1.7	4.4	4.1	21.9	50.2	1.5	4.4	9.1	3.0	4.2	3.9	8.0	12.8	1.1	9.8
1896	5.8	20.8	9.9	9.4	6.3	1.1	...	...	3.8	9.3	2.1	X	...	...	(2)	...	...	...	6.2	7.2
1900	1.9	X	2.6	3.7	X	2.5	...	...	10.1	3.1	X	2.5	...	...	(2)	...	...	...	5.5	1.1
1904	...	...	5.5	2.1	...	...	...	...	6.0	6.9	...	...	...	...	3.5	4.7	...	...	...	...
1908	...	...	3.8	3.3	...	...	...	...	1.2	3.1	...	...	...	...	X	2.2	...	...	...	...
1911	...	...	3.7	X	...	...	...	...	2.5	2.7	...	...	...	...	1.9	2.6	...	...	...	...
1917	...	...	accl.	accl.	...	...	...	...	1.3	1.6	...	...	...	...	1.1	1.9	...	...	...	...
1921	...	...	15.5	1.7	...	...	...	...	2.5	4.6	...	...	...	...	3.6	7.9	...	...	...	...
1925	...	...	4.4	1.9	...	...	...	...	1.5	2.9	...	...	...	...	X	10.4	...	...	...	...
1926	...	...	4.3	X	...	...	...	...	1.4	X	...	...	...	...	X	4.4	...	...	...	...
1930	...	...	1.6	1.3	...	...	...	...	2.6	X	...	...	...	...	1.4	3.4	...	...	...	...
1935	...	...	2.8	3.6	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	7.0	X	...	...	...	...
1940	...	...	X	13.9	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2.6	X	...	...	...	...
1945	...	...	X	11.8	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	X	4.9	...	...	...	...

(a) The variation being expressed as a percentage of the votes polled by the party's second man in each case.

(1) No Liberals ran in Pictou in 1887.

(2) From 1892 to 1903, Queen's was not a two-member constituency.

2 Conservatives by acclamation elected in 1 election; in regard to this classification that there does not appear to be any correlation between election results and the degree of variation in the votes polled by the two candidates from each party. Two of the eight instances where one representative of each party was returned (Halifax in 1887, 1896, 1900, and 1911; Ottawa in 1900; Queen's in 1917, 1925 and 1945) show somewhat undue variation, but all the other elections, which resulted in both seats being won by one party or the other, show variations ranging from the lowest to the highest in the table. It seems obvious that what really matters when a double election results in a victory for

one candidate from each party is not the variation between the two Liberals, or the two Conservatives, but that between the leading Liberal and the leading Conservative. No matter how close, or how far apart, the two Liberals may be, for example, it is always possible for the leading Conservative to defeat the second Liberal if the latter is even one vote behind his colleague. But by the same token, the gap between the two Liberals could be very wide with no profit to the Conservatives unless one of them could defeat the second Liberal.

By the second classification, the sixty-two elections are divided as follows: 2 candidates (acclamation) in 1 election; 4 candidates in 47 elections; 5 candidates

in 2 elections; 6 candidates in 10 elections; 7 candidates in 1 election; 8 candidates in 1 election. An examination of the fourteen elections in which more than four candidates ran suggests that there are reasons for suspecting, at least, that the introduction of extra candidates is usually a disturbing influence on the relative vote polled by each of the two major parties' men, especially if the extra candidates receive an appreciable vote themselves. To illustrate this point, it is necessary to give the fourteen instances in some detail.

There were elections with five candidates in Ottawa in 1896 and 1911. In the first instance, the fifth candidate was another Conservative, who appears to have served no purpose beyond taking enough votes from his colleagues to let two Liberals win and in the second, the extra man was a socialist who polled less than two per cent of the total vote cast. Neither case shows undue variation in the votes polled by the Liberals and Conservatives, when previous elections are taken into account, but in both cases there is a circumstance which appears to account for the lack of disturbance.

Six candidates contested Victoria in 1887; Ottawa in 1891 and 1921; Hamilton in 1896; Halifax in 1921, 1935 and 1940; and Queen's in 1921, 1935 and 1945. In each of these instances one (and, oddly enough, generally only one) of the parties experienced a variation in the votes polled by its two candidates that is at least slightly out of line with the variations recorded for the party in the preceding and or subsequent elections in that constituency. These disturbances are not always large absolutely, and it is unfortunately impossible to determine how large they must be to be significant. That they are perhaps of no significance whatever, even when comparatively large, may be indicated by the fact that, while disturbances of some sort do appear to accompany most elections contested by more than four candidates, there are some instances in

the table where unusual variations accompanied simple four-man contests (e.g. Halifax in 1896, Ottawa in 1900, Prince in 1891, Saint John in 1891). It does appear, however, that the "more-than-four" elections generally coincide with those for which increased variations are recorded; particularly since World War I.

Cape Breton in 1887 provides the sole example of an election with seven candidates. In addition to two Liberals and two Conservatives, the election in question was contested by three Independents, who among them polled more votes than the man who led the list. This appears to have had no effect on the position of the major parties' men, and is in this respect an exception to the general rule. Finally, an example of an eight-man contest is provided by Halifax in 1945, when two CCF, one LPP, and one Independent were added to the list of candidates. The total vote polled by the extra candidates was about 60% of that polled by the second Liberal, who was elected. There is here again a significant variation between the votes for the representatives of one party, bringing the total of such instances to eleven out of the fourteen elections contested by more than four candidates.

Further investigation may prove much of the commentary to this (by no means an exhaustive) analysis to be misleading. It seems difficult, however, to escape the conclusion that there are circumstances in which considerations other than party affiliation have significant influence on election results, even though most elections in two-member constituencies tend to bear out the general proposition that a party's candidates should receive virtually the same number of votes. These considerations, whatever they are, sometimes appear to have weight with electors when they must choose among four candidates representing two parties, and also when they are faced with five or more men representing more than two parties. The implications for ordinary single-member constituencies (assuming that election returns in a few scattered double constituencies can have relevance

to voting elsewhere in the country) may be considerable, but conjecture should not be substituted for a deeper analysis of Canadian general elections.

Perhaps it is worth emphasizing, in conclusion, that the number of votes between the first and second Liberal, for example, in any election, is a measure only of minimum variation in party support. To argue otherwise is to assume that *all* the voters who voted for the man who ran second, also voted for the one who came first—so that the only “delinquent” party supporters are represented by the surplus of the first total over the second. In actual fact, the

number of electors in a constituency who vote for *both* Liberals, or both Conservatives, might be very small without there being a wide variation in the total votes received by the two representatives of each party. A single elector in a two-member constituency, voting in a four-man contest, can do so in ten ways (for any one of the candidates alone, and for any of six possible combinations of two votes) and the total vote in the constituency could conceivably include an equal number of each of these ten ways of voting, yet the two Liberals, or the two Conservatives, might still poll nearly equal totals.

Revamping Congress

By DON ROWAT

TO other peoples of the world who look hopefully to the United States for a successful example of democracy in operation, Congress presents a rather strange spectacle. As the representative arm of government, it could be expected to appear as the mighty engine that drives the great democracy purposefully and steadily toward its ends under the enormous power of a free people. Yet what, to them, is the actual picture? Congress turns down international treaties. Its reactionary members have a field day holding up progressive measures. Democrats are always deserting their party to vote Republican or vice versa. The President never seems to get any sort of unified program through its two Houses. If the House of Representatives fails to tear it to pieces with its Committees, then the Senate is sure to bludgeon it to death with its words. In short, it nearly always seems to be using its extensive power for the wrong purposes.

Evidence that Congressmen themselves are beginning to worry a little about this state of affairs is the recent Report of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, presented to both Houses on March 4, 1946, by Senator LaFollette and Representative Monroney. About a year ago this Committee was set up jointly by the Senate and the House of Representatives to find out how Congress could be “streamlined” to meet the demands of war and the problems of reconstruction. It was created, the Report recalled, in response to “a widespread Congressional and public belief that a grave constitutional crisis exists in which the fate of representative government is at stake”.* Evidence of the importance attached to the subject are the facts that this was only the seventeenth Joint Committee established in the last hundred years and that Congress had appointed to it its most experienced leaders from both Houses and both parties. Operating like a Canadian Royal Commission, the Committee held hearings for months and heard evidence from individuals, organizations, politicians at all levels of government, and the best

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*Senate Report No. 1011, p. 1.