



From the Editor / L. Ian MacDonald

Campaign 2015

Welcome to our special issue on Campaign 2015. The election may not be until October 19, but the campaign has already begun. One of the unintended consequences of a fixed election date, coming out of a majority House, is a permanent campaign.

In this context, the parties can spend as much as they want on their leaders' tours, and on ad buys, until the writ is dropped five weeks before the vote. Not to mention earned media, actually free media, on outlets such as YouTube. Only when the election is called do campaign spending limits kick in.

It all comes down to a struggle for control of the agenda, to the message and the messenger.

Andrew MacDougall, now a senior consultant at MSLGROUP in London, is a former communications director for Prime Minister Stephen Harper. MacDougall knows of which he writes, and says the struggle will frame the ballot question.

Brad Lavigne was communications director for Jack Layton in the NDP's successful 2011 campaign and later Layton's principal secretary when he was opposition leader. He looks at the disruptive innovation of social media in elections—from Facebook and Twitter to LinkedIn and Tumblr—and its impact on campaigns. Twitter may be an echo chamber, but what an echo.

Respected political strategist Robin Sears takes a look at what the parties need to do in the campaign. Sears asks: why not have an election about issues? If only.

Tom Axworthy, who was principal secretary to Pierre Trudeau, and his Conservative co-author Rana Shamoon consider Harper's bid to win a fourth consecutive election, a feat accomplished only by Sir John A. Macdonald among Conservative leaders (though he won four consecutive majorities, while Harper won a majority only in 2011). For most of the last century,

the Liberals were considered Canada's Natural Governing Party. For nearly a decade, Harper and the Conservatives have replaced them in government. But now in Justin Trudeau, they write, "the Liberals have a leader with the most identifiable name in Canadian politics, and even his severest critics will acknowledge that Trudeau is a tremendous retail politician with a sunny personality."

Then we look at four policy boxes that might well frame the ballot question—the economy, foreign affairs, the environment and social policy, notably child care and family benefits. BMO Financial Group Chief Economist Douglas Porter provides an overview of the Canadian economy and fiscal frameworks, and in spite of plunging oil prices, finds the fundamentals in pretty good shape.

Foreign policy isn't usually a factor in Canadian election campaigns, but 2015 may prove to be an exception. As prime minister, writes Jeremy Kinsman, "Harper enjoys an Airbus-borne platform with on-board media channeling stories that spokesmen script," as seen at the G20 leaders' summit when he told Vladimir Putin "I'll shake your hand, but you need to get out of Ukraine." Theatrical gestures aside, Kinsman suggests the country needs a change on the foreign policy front and comes down hard on Harper for his secretive and polarizing style.

On the environment and climate change, the road to COP21 in Paris in November and December runs through the Canadian election in October. Canada is set to get only halfway to its 2009 Copenhagen target of reducing GHG emissions to 17 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020. And that was before the even more ambitious goals announced by Barack Obama in the US-China accord in November. David McLaughlin provides us with an environmental update for Campaign 2015.

On social policy, it's clear that the Conservatives have played for home ice advantage in putting out their family and child care benefits programs nearly a year ahead of the election. Spouses with children will be able to do income splitting up to a ceiling of \$2,000, and the Universal Child Care Benefit will be increased from \$100 to \$160 per month. The first seven months' increase—\$420 for each child under the age of six—will be deposited in voters' bank accounts in July, just weeks before the election writ is dropped.

Geoff Norquay provides a short history of child care policy in Canada, going back to the 1980s. Minister of Social Development Candice Bergen, herself a mother of three children, offers a spirited defence of the government's family policy, while Opposition Leader Tom Mulcair explains the NDP's proposal for \$15 a day national daycare.

Two important regions, Quebec and the Greater Toronto Area, tell us a lot about what to look for in the campaign. Bernard St-Laurent tells us why Quebec is different, and Patrick Gosage reflects on lessons of the Toronto mayoralty campaign for the federal GTA vote.

Finally, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May tells us why her party should be included in the leaders' debates and the larger national conversation, which is one of the reasons why we have included her on our cover. She's earned her way there.

Elsewhere, in a timely and poignant piece, Yaroslav Baran reflects on the situation after the parliamentary elections in Ukraine, where he has been a leader of Canadian observer teams for several elections.

Finally, Paul Miller of the University of Alberta writes of the impact of winter on Canadian rail operations. There's a "tipping point", he suggests, of -25 minus degrees, where the Polar Vortex makes railway operations challenging. **P**