

Polls are little to cheer about

The Progressive Conservatives would do well to refrain from loud cheers over the results of the latest Environics provincial political poll.

It gave the Liberals 43-per-cent support among voters, the PCs 34 per cent and the NDP 21.

This compares to Environics' last provincial poll, seven months ago, which gave the Liberals 48 per cent, the NDP 26 per cent and the PCs 25 per cent.

Interim Tory Leader Andy Brandt said he was "exhilarated" by the results, the first time in 18 months the Conservatives have secured a second-place standing in such polls.

Unfortunately, however, this latest poll was taken immediately following the federal election in November, which likely skewed the results.

NDP Leader Bob Rae is convinced of this.

"It's obviously a reflection of what happened in the federal election," he said.

The federal Tories did much better in Ontario in that election than expected, and it is quite possible the high provincial Tory figures are a reflection of their federal cousin's success.

It certainly can't be anything the party has done provincially.

True, it has worked hard both paying down its \$5 million debt and attempting to set up a new constitutional framework to elect a new leader.

But other polls have shown Brandt is known to less than 30 per cent of voters, while Tory policy remains confused and ill-defined.



Queen's Park
Derek Nelson

Thomson News Service

For example, the Conservatives are against government control of auto-insurance rates, yet are in favor of restricting how high rates should be allowed to go.

There's not the slightest evidence that Tory attacks on Liberal failures in housing, over-spending or even health care are seriously affecting Grit standing with the electorate.

Even if one believed this November poll, the 43 per cent recorded by Premier David Peterson's Liberals is still enough to give them a comfortable majority government.

FIGHTING FOR SECOND

The Tory fight remains with the NDP for second place.

While 21-per-cent support is the lowest the Ontario NDP has registered in more than two years, this, too, is likely tied to the federal election results and therefore inaccurate.

There's no reason for the New Democrats to have sagged in provincial esteem.

On the other hand, Rae's comment on the polls that "I think it is probably worse news for Mr. Peterson than anyone else - we're doing fine," is more than a little self-serving.

The difficulty both the Tories

and NDP face is that they are not doing fine. They both have problems.

If the Conservatives remain fuzzy in terms of party image, the NDP appears old-fashioned.

As many commentators have noted over the past decade, New Democrats are the reactionaries of today, always harkening back to the glory days of pre-1973 (oil crisis) when governments in the western world had oodles of money to spend and politics was simply a matter of divying up income.

Since the federal election, even NDPers have started to ask questions about some old-style NDP policies, such as opposition to deregulation, privatization and low marginal taxes.

But this potential move towards moderation in economic matters is more than balanced by forces propelling the NDP toward even more radical policies on the social front.

These political currents want the party to shift further left on employment equity (racial and sexual job quotas), pay equity (state-approved pay scales in all jobs), "housing as a social right" (state-allocated), state-approved day care and freedom of speech restrictions (wherever the thought police detect "racism" and "sexism").

This is likely to happen. But in an age when leadership is increasingly the voters' touchstone when balloting, whether it will mean much in terms of polls is questionable.

More than fair

An interesting point was brought up at the recent annual general meeting of the Georgetown Agricultural Society - the prospect of an amalgamation between Georgetown and Acton to make one larger fair.

With a decline in government grants making it more and more difficult for smaller communities to stage a fair, it would seem like a logical move.

Naturally it would be a long and involved process.

But the concept is a good one. There was even mention of investigating the possibility of using Scotsdale Farm as a site for the event. And taking it a step farther, the concept of a combined fair put on by not only Georgetown and Acton, but Milton as well, was suggested.

Some at the meeting were of the opinion that such a merger would never come about.

But as Councillor Al Cook put it, "That's what they said about the Chambers of Commerce."

Some won't listen



Editor's Notebook

Mike Turner
Herald Editor

I try, I really try to be a good law-abiding citizen.

But these days, it's a little tough, especially when you're coping with the perils of the roadways.

Much attention has been paid to road safety in the past several years, and great strides have been made to improve the situation. It's unfortunate that several near misses had to occur before assertive action was initiated but thankfully, progress is being made.

But people out there are making it very difficult.

Trafalgar Road is a well-travelled stretch of highway not only for the average people, but also for the larger rigs. It's become accepted as a route for the big 18-wheelers.

Recently - and not for the first time - I was making my way up Trafalgar Road after visiting

Oakville. I wasn't in any particular hurry but at the same time, I wasn't dawdling either.

In all honesty, I was travelling at just over the speed limit of 80 kilometres per hour, when all of a sudden... Well, you remember that made-for-TV movie *Duel*. It starred Dennis Weaver as a hapless motorist being stalked by an 18-wheeler.

Now it wasn't all that serious. But a big rig came right up behind me and was no more than 10 feet away from the rear bumper of my little Honda, for several miles down the road.

So I thought, OK I'll give it a little juice, and I sped up to about 90 km-h (which by the way is about top-end for my Honda).

The big rig stayed on my tail and eventually, on a relatively safe stretch of road, he passed - meaning he was going well in excess of 90 km-h.

As I said, this isn't the first time this has happened. I'm not sure if it's just a "power thing" for the drivers or if they're paid in such a manner that every second spent on the highway is costly.

The road safety message is getting around, but it's pretty obvious there are some people out there it hasn't reached yet.



Government cheques are always honored

By GIL HARDY
Ottawa Bureau

Thomson News Service

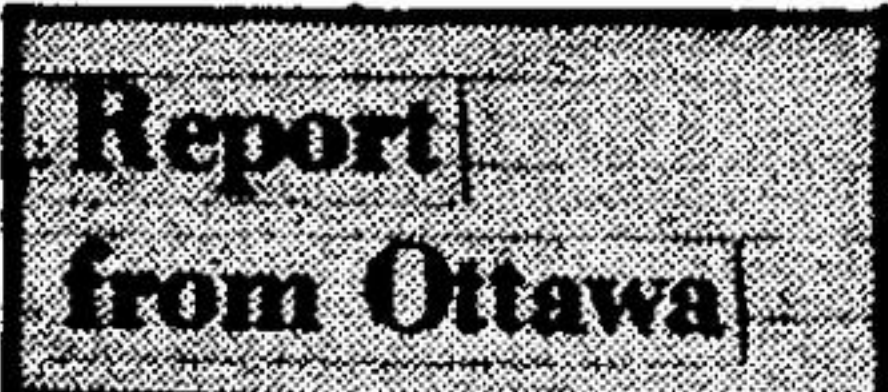
Jack Weinman remembers the time a farmer from Western Canada walked into the local bank to cash his crop insurance cheques - all 22 years worth.

"He was buying a farm," says Weinman, director of the banking and cash management branch of the Department of Supply and Services, the federal department that issues most government cheques.

"If he had put the money into a bank account, he could have bought two farms but he didn't trust the banks," Weinman says.

The real message behind his story is that government-issued cheques are always honored, regardless of age. Ottawa has a record of every cheque issued since Confederation - from tax refunds to old-age pension payments.

Weinman's job is to keep track of



federal payments. And if balancing your cheque book once a month is an impossible task, think of Weinman's responsibilities.

Each year, the government issues 170 million cheques for everything from unemployment insurance to CF-18 fighter jets. The cheques are worth upwards of \$140 billion annually.

Cheques are mailed around the world. In fact, there are residents of the Soviet Union receiving pension cheques from Canada.

At the end of the 1987-1988 fiscal year last March 31, there was \$2.5 billion in outstanding (uncashed) cheques from that 12-month period. There was another \$4.8 billion in cheques outstanding for 9 years.

UNCASHED CHEQUES

Every fiscal year, any cheques uncashed for a decade are transferred to "non-tax revenue." But that doesn't mean they are worthless.

"Government cheques are never stale-dated," Weinman says. "We honor them 40, 50, 60 years later. But for accounting purposes, we don't record as an outstanding cheque items that are over 10 year old."

And that can present some special problems for his office. Such as the time they were asked by a bank to verify a cheque from a government program they knew nothing about.

The cheque involved payments made in connection with a 1945 Victory Bonds program.

"All of a sudden, someone turned up with a cheque from this and we didn't know what the hell it was. Somebody managed to find a box that showed what was still outstanding in that program and was able

to verify that the cheque hadn't been cashed," Weinman says.

The oldest cheque he has seen was dated 1919. Weinman says cheques more than 10 years old are often pension payments squirreled away in cookie jars or shoeboxes by mistrustful seniors.

"Some people just don't bother cashing them. A lot of people who grew up in the Depression just don't trust banks and they only cash them when they need them."

It isn't unusual for someone's estate to yield as much as \$10,000 worth of uncashed cheques. But some day there may be a way of avoiding the problems senior citizens face trying to get to the bank to cash cheques.

DIRECT DEPOSITS

The government and the banking industry are discussing the possibility of direct deposits for a range of "social payments" such as pensions, child allowances, unemployment insurance and others. The system would be strict-

ly on a voluntary basis; individuals would have to apply to have money deposited directly into their accounts.

"The demand is there. If you have older parents or relatives, trying to get them to the bank is no fun," Weinman says.

The government's major concern with direct deposits is ensuring there is no added cost to people receiving cheques on a regular basis.

"We don't want to get pensioners onto the system and then find out they are open to all kinds of service charges. It shouldn't really cost them any more than it does now to cash a cheque - which is zero."

The banks are salivating at the prospect of getting huge sums of money directly deposited. Processing costs are less and the money is there for them to invest profitably.

"They've got a cheap source of deposits," Weinman says.