

**“The Relationship Between Provincial and Federal Political Parties:
A Perspective from the Ontario Legislature”**

By

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Introduction

The presence of three political parties in the Ontario Legislature that share similar names and ideological positions to three parties in the federal House of Commons begs questions about the relationships between these party ‘cousins.’ The general consensus among some analysts of provincial-federal political party relations has been an emphasis on relative distance and separation. But why then, while observing Question Period as an Ontario Legislature Intern, have I witnessed numerous references to federal political parties, actors and issues? Prompted by these seemingly frequent mentions to examine the relationship between provincial and federal party ‘cousins,’ I have learned that in some ways, the Ontario Liberal, New Democratic (NDP), and Progressive Conservative (PC) Parties are closer than some analysts have previously surmised to the federal Liberal, NDP, and Conservative Parties.

The literature review that follows illustrates that, with the exception of the NDP, Ontario’s political parties are structurally distinct from their federal counterparts. While older literature has tended to focus mostly on this separation, recent work has emphasized the connections that do exist. This paper builds on this work. It examines the references that are made in the Ontario Legislature to federal party ‘cousins’ as further evidence of relatively close connections. Extensive evidence, obtained through Hansard and interviews with Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), illustrates that MPPs are often mindful of the electoral status of their federal ‘cousins.’ As Anna Esselment has noted, “[t]hey want each other to *win*.”¹ They care about the successes and failures of their party counterparts, and are willing to use time in their own Legislature to speak on their behalf.

The limits to this specific indicator of closeness must also, however, be examined. MPPs are not always willing to support their ‘cousins’ in this manner, nor would it always make strategic sense for them to do so. As numerous sources indicate, provincial politicians must put Ontario’s policy interests first, ahead of partisan interests. This necessity is illustrated by the PC Party’s position on the recently introduced Harmonized Sales Tax (HST), which, as this paper will later discuss, is at odds with the federal Conservative government’s position. Moreover, provincial parties are concerned first and foremost with their electoral success, not that of their federal counterparts. Thus, they will not speak supportively in the Legislature of their ‘cousins’ if it might prove detrimental to their own electoral brand. Finally, there are undoubtedly individual differences amongst MPPs, which make some more willing than others to support, and occasionally ‘campaign,’ for their federal counterparts in the Ontario Legislature.

With these limitations in mind, however, it is nevertheless significant to note just how frequently MPPs have used speaking opportunities in the Ontario Legislature to support their party’s counterpart in Ottawa. They have done so publicly and boldly, and in doing so, have offered evidence that provincial and federal parties in Canada are closer than some analysts have previously thought.

¹ Anna Esselment, “Fighting Elections: An Example of Cross-Level Political Party Integration in Canada” (paper presented at the 2008 CPSA Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, June 6, 2008, cited with the permission of the author), 30.

Literature Review

This study is made all the more relevant and necessary given that it is a relatively understudied topic. One way that this paper breaks new ground is through its narrow and detailed focus on Ontario. While there are other works which have examined the relationship between federal political parties in Canada and their counterparts in a number of provinces, few have offered a full examination of Ontario specifically. Having said that, the collection of literature that deals with the interactions between federal parties and their provincial equivalents across Canada provides the essential background and contextual information required to frame this paper.

Much of the literature on the topic of provincial and federal political party connections in Canada emphasizes the separate and distinct nature of the two levels.² Scholars have stressed, for example, the fact that in Ontario, “the two Liberal parties are organizationally distinct and membership in one does not carry with it membership in the other.”³ Similarly, prior to the merger of the Canadian Alliance Party and the Progressive Conservative Party federally in 2003, Dyck argued that “[t]he national Progressive Conservative party and the provincial PC parties are essentially independent organizations.”⁴ Now that there is no federal PC party, this structural separation is more pronounced. The Conservative Party of Canada is distinct both in name and structure from Ontario’s Progressive Conservative Party.

More broadly, David K. Stewart and R.K. Carty have described,

a process that, for some decades, has seen federal and provincial political parties in Canada becoming increasingly disentangled. Parties, even with the same name, that contest elections in the political system’s two different arenas are no longer necessarily linked organizationally nor are their fortunes obviously intertwined.⁵

Similarly, Herman Bakvis has noted that

[r]ather than bridging federal-provincial or interprovincial differences by providing informal avenues for cooperation and consensus building, or for representing regional interests directly in central institutions, the Canadian party system has served to segregate and sharpen conflict between levels of government.⁶

Donald V. Smiley also weighed in on the subject, noting in the mid-1970s that “[a]t the national level there has been an ongoing confederalization of the political parties, a

² Esselment, 4.

³ David K. Stewart and R.K. Carty, “Many Political Worlds? Provincial Parties and Party Systems,” in Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics, ed. Christopher Dunn (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006), 107-108.

⁴ Rand Dyck, “Relations Between Federal and Provincial Parties,” in Canadian Parties in Transition, eds. A.B. Tanguay and A. G. Gagnon (Scarborough, ON: Nelson Canada, 1996), 163.

⁵ Stewart and Carty, 97.

⁶ Herman Bakvis, “Political Parties, Party Government and Intrastate Federalism in Canada,” in Parties and Federalism in Australia and Canada (Canberra: Federalism Research Centre, 1994), 1-2.

tendency in the direction of the organizational separation of parties oriented to federal electoral success from provincial parties of the same nomenclature.”⁷

It is important to note that among most scholars, the generally acknowledged exception to this trend is the NDP. As Stewart and Carty note, for example, “[t]he provincial and federal wings of the party are tightly integrated, and, indeed, membership at one level carries with it membership at the other as well.”⁸ Similarly, Smiley argues that out of the three major parties that had federal and provincial wings when he wrote his article, “the NDP most integrated because of common ideological and policy commitments.”⁹ In spite of this, however, the NDP is still classified in some ways alongside the other two parties for employing important provincial-federal distinctions.

Rand Dyck, for example, has offered a broad analysis of the relationship between parties at the two levels, by considering how they do or do not work together in a variety of specific categories. These categories include, amongst other things, the existence of joint or separate party membership, connections in party financing, joint or independent election activities, ideological parallels, party leader relationships and activities, and the movement of personnel between provincial and federal levels.¹⁰ Based on these and other criteria, Dyck concludes that, “the degree of integration is generally on the decline in all three parties” and further explains that “many of the factors that contribute to the declining importance of political parties to society in general also make them less vital to their counterparts at the other level of government.”¹¹

Dyck’s comments on larger societal changes beg the question of what other explanations scholars have offered for this perceived separation. A key reason, as Smiley has observed, is the legal requirement for separate election financing. In his words, “[l]ong-run trends in party finance in Canada work in the direction of mutual independence of the federal and provincial wings of the Liberal and Conservative parties.”¹² The separation of party finances is clearly outlined in Ontario’s *Election Finances Act*, which states, “[n]o political party, constituency association, candidate or leadership contestant registered under this Act shall accept funds from a federal political party registered under the *Canada Elections Act* ...”¹³ This legal requirement makes it much simpler for federal and provincial political parties to operate in distinct realms.

Scholars and analysts have also suggested another key factor, which undoubtedly plays a role in structural distinctions. Smiley has noted that “[i]n some circumstances, certainly, the purely partisan interests of a party at one level, particularly if it is in power, adheres more closely to policy imperatives than to the electoral fortunes of its partisan counterparts at the other level.”¹⁴ In other words, it is often pragmatic for political parties at different levels to maintain separation, because it allows them to pursue necessary policies in their jurisdiction, which might not be popular with the party at the other level. The following examples, noted by journalist John Ibbiston, illustrate this point well:

⁷ Donald V. Smiley, *Canada in Question: Federalism in the Seventies* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), 130.

⁸ Stewart and Carty, 107.

⁹ Smiley, 130.

¹⁰ Dyck, 161.

¹¹ Dyck, 187, 186.

¹² Smiley, 137.

¹³ *Election Finances Act* (1990), Section 20.

¹⁴ Smiley, 131.

[t]he federation always worked best when opposite parties inhabited Queen’s Park and Parliament Hill. Frost and St. Laurent; Davis and Trudeau; even Peterson and Mulroney, at least on constitutional matters. Things always seemed to deteriorate, however, when identical parties were in both ministers’ offices. John Diefenbaker had a testy relationship with Leslie Frost; Bill Davis’s relations with Brian Mulroney were far less cordial than with Pierre Trudeau. And there were the epic confrontations between Mitch Hepburn and Mackenzie King.¹⁵

From a partisan perspective, these various actors ought to have been at loggerheads with each other. However, each had to work with the other level of government to achieve desirable results for their constituents. For the pragmatic reasons of governance, provincial political parties will often put their local policy interests before allegiance to their counterparts at the federal level, when the two come into conflict. Thus, they will even work well with a federal government of a different stripe, when there are no complicating factors of party allegiance. As Anna Esselment has aptly summarized, “[w]hen policy clashes with the federal government inevitably occurred, a differentiated form of organization allowed party cousins to compete with one another for public support (Painter, 1991, 269). Disassociation also meant that, when necessary, parties could distinguish themselves from an unpopular affiliate at the other level.”¹⁶

While some literature indicates a significant level of separation between Ontario provincial parties with their federal counterparts, some works have also noted that separation is not the whole story. Rand Dyck has argued, for example, that

[n]ot everything points to increased independence of the federal and provincial wings of Canadian parties, and on an informal basis there remains a great deal of cross-level cooperation. For all three parties, a basic core of activists at both levels ensures a commonality of purpose, and, in all three, close staff and caucus relationships continue.¹⁷

Similarly, Stewart and Carty, in considering provincial PCs and the former conservative Canadian Alliance Party, note that “[i]n practice the degree of real integration of its partisans across levels was not dissimilar to the Liberals... In three – Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta – many supporters, members, and even elected politicians in the provincial PC parties were publicly committed to the federal Alliance Party.”¹⁸

Anna Esselment’s recent work offers the most thorough examination of close connections between provincial and federal political parties. She argues “that party activists and elections serve as critical connections between party cousins and has the effect of producing considerable integration between parties at the federal and provincial

¹⁵ John Ibbitson, *Loyal No More: Ontario’s Struggle for a Separate Destiny* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2001), 151.

¹⁶ Esselment, 4.

¹⁷ Dyck, 187.

¹⁸ Stewart and Carty, 108.

level.”¹⁹ In the case of the PC Party and the Conservative Party of Canada, she notes that “[t]he two Conservative parties also encourage – and sometimes direct – their staffers... to get out and campaign for the Conservative side during an election campaign.”²⁰ Regarding the Liberal Party, she similarly observes,

the core of electoral cooperation between the Ontario Liberal Party and the Liberal Party of Canada Ontario (LPCO) rests on Liberal activists. On the ground, ‘a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal’ and most riding associations will encourage their members to campaign for the party engaged in battle, regardless of the level of the contest.²¹

This paper builds on this recent scholarship, which emphasizes the significance of informal connections between party levels. It builds particularly on Esselment’s work, by illustrating another way that political party cousins in Ontario are connected to their federal counterparts: through supportive discourse in the Legislature.

Ontario Liberal Party

The relationship between the Ontario Liberal Party and the federal Liberal Party of Canada is unique amongst the three Ontario parties that this paper examines, because since 2003, they have been the governing party. As was noted previously, governing parties must place jurisdictional priorities first, ahead of federal partisan considerations. Premier Dalton McGuinty’s provincial Liberals must defend Ontario’s interests by working with the federal government, no matter what party is in power at that level. On the one hand, too many outright gestures of support for their federal cousins might alienate the other federal political parties, who could potentially form government. On the other hand, should the Liberal Party be elected federally, too close of a relationship might hinder their ability to defend Ontario’s interests through criticisms and disputes.

My research illustrates that in spite of these factors, the two Liberal Parties have demonstrated closeness in various ways. Esselment observes, for example, that staffers at one level often work on campaigns at the other level.²² Similarly, MPP Greg Sorbara noted that in terms of grassroots political organizing during leadership campaigns and elections, there is no differentiation between party levels “in calling out the troops.”²³ Volunteers from each level support the other. Similarly, MPP Dr. Helena Jaczek noted a level of collegiality between the two levels. Volunteers on her campaign were encouraged to help their “federal cousins.” She did also note however, that such crossover was not automatic, and that some volunteers helped at one level but did not do so at the other level.²⁴

The connections go beyond this crossover of Liberal ‘troops.’ Another significant illustrator of closeness is found on the floor of the Ontario Legislature, where Liberal MPPs have made statements of support for their federal ‘cousins.’ Not surprisingly,

¹⁹ Esselment, 4.

²⁰ Esselment, 14.

²¹ Esselment, 18.

²² Esselment, 18.

²³ Interview with Greg Sorbara

²⁴ Interview with Dr. Helena Jaczek

supportive discourse most commonly appears during election periods, and it usually comes in one of two forms: through complimentary statements about federal Liberals, and through critical statements about their electoral rivals. A number of particularly interesting examples occurred during the 2004 federal election campaign, when the McGuinty Liberals were in their first year in government.

A few weeks before the 2004 federal election, Liberal MPP Kevin Flynn posed a question to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Joseph Cordiano in Question Period. The question, purportedly about an announcement by federal Liberal leader Paul Martin to invest \$500 million in the auto sector, had clear federal campaign implications. In his answer, the Minister said, “[t]oday's announcement means great news for Ontario's auto sector... It means the federal Liberals get it; they understand the auto sector is vital to Ontario's economy.”²⁵ After praising Martin, the discussion moved to a critique of federal Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper. After emphasizing Harper's supposed failure to make similar investments, Flynn asked, “[w]hat do you think Mr Harper has against Ontario and Oakville's economic prosperity?”²⁶ Minister Cordiano answered, “Mr Harper wants to impose the same Harris-style tax cuts that were imposed on Ontarians and saw 19 new plants located in North America, but not one of them come to Ontario... Those are failed policies.”

A similar exchange occurred on another occasion over child care, a key issue in the 2004 federal election. Liberal MPP Maria Van Bommel noted in a question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services that Harper's platform did not include a public funding plan for daycare and asked, “[w]hy would Mr Harper ignore the evidence and refuse to acknowledge that funding child care and early learning is critical to our children's future?”²⁷ Minister Marie Bountrogianni's answer is instructive:

Mr Harper's Conservatives seem as ideologically bent as the Harris-Eves Conservatives... In contrast to the federal Conservatives, Mr Martin's Liberals get it. They know that child care is important and I applaud their new child care initiative, and I look forward to working with the municipalities in spending the monies...²⁸

These federal election references even extended to the game of bocce, when Liberal MPP Mario Sergio quoted Harper who, during a radio interview, apparently said, “That's where you end up with bocce courts instead of highways.”²⁹ Sergio then asked the Minister of Tourism and Recreation about his views on public funding for bocce. Minister Jim Bradley replied,

It's extremely important. First of all, I'm surprised that Mr Harper wouldn't be aware that sports such as bocce are important for our health and well-being... It has a particular appeal among one of Ontario's largest multicultural communities... I must say to the member that Canada is

²⁵ Hansard, June 14, 2004.

²⁶ Hansard, June 14, 2004.

²⁷ Hansard, June 8, 2004.

²⁸ Hansard, June 8, 2004.

²⁹ Hansard, June 7, 2004.

obviously bigger and more diverse than Mr Harper thinks. No matter what it looks like from Calgary Southwest, Mr Harper has to learn about the diversity of Canada...I'm surprised that Mr Harper would pick on bocce one more time when it's a wonderful sport for all Canadians. I think it's somewhat of an insult to those who play bocce ball.³⁰

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from these examples. It is clear that during the 2004 federal election, Liberal MPPs were willing to make bold public statements in support of their federal cousins. In each of these examples, they took a two-pronged approach to this Queen's Park based 'campaigning.' They explained why, in their opinion, Paul Martin was the best choice for Ontario voters, and also offered direct critiques of his chief electoral rival, Stephen Harper. It is significant that their critiques tied Harper in with the former Ontario PC governments of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, who were generally unpopular in Ontario at that time. Having soundly defeated the PC Party in an election the previous year, the Liberals evidently hoped that emphasizing connections between Harris, Eves, and Harper would make the federal Conservative leader unpopular in the eyes of Ontario voters. The bocce exchange is particularly interesting, because it was a clear attempt to depict Stephen Harper as a westerner unable to understand Ontario's make-up, and whose base in another province would not serve Ontarians well. This tactic was similar to those employed by the federal Liberals throughout the campaign, and thereby illustrates a significant strategy connection.

Why did Liberal MPPs use their provincial Question Period to support the campaign of their federal 'cousins'? Partisanship is the obvious explanation, but it goes beyond this. The polls which preceded the election, suggesting that Martin might fair poorly in Ontario, were also significant. These worrisome polls might have prompted MPPs to support their federal 'cousins,' in an effort to tip the electoral balance in their favour in Ontario. In the end, "the Liberals swept the vote-rich region."³¹ This explanation gains more credence after considering the recent federal election in Fall 2008, which unlike the 2004 example, saw a decided lack of campaigning by Liberal MPPs at Queen's Park. Throughout the election, federal Liberals and their leader Stephane Dion performed poorly in polls across the country. Whereas in 2004 Martin was the front runner, Dion's 2008 campaign was a long-shot indeed.

While support for Martin by Liberal MPPs in 2004 had the potential to provide the boost he needed to win in Ontario, an endorsement of Dion was a risk. If, as they ultimately did, the federal Liberals lost the election, McGuinty's government would have associated his party's brand with the unpopular federal Liberals. Beyond this concern over brand popularity amongst Ontarians, McGuinty's government would also have had to work with the very federal Conservative government which they had alienated throughout the election. Rather than take that risk, McGuinty did not publicly endorse or campaign for the federal Liberal Party.³²

³⁰ Hansard, June 7, 2004.

³¹ CTV.ca News Staff, "Defying pundits, voters paint Ontario Grit red," [CTV.CA](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20040629/election2004_ontarioresults_20040628?s_name=Autos&no_ads=), <http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20040629/election2004_ontarioresults_20040628?s_name=Autos&no_ads=>, June 29, 2004.

³² Steve Paikin, "McGuinty Refuses to Support Dion," [The Agenda - TVO.org](http://www.tvo.org/cfmx/tvoorg/theagenda/index.cfm?page_id=3&action=blog&subaction=viewpost&blog_id=43&post_id=8072), <http://www.tvo.org/cfmx/tvoorg/theagenda/index.cfm?page_id=3&action=blog&subaction=viewpost&blog_id=43&post_id=8072>, September 8, 2008.

This strategic decision was made in the midst of McGuinty's 'fairness' campaign, which focused on securing more federal transfer payments, rather than the unequal amounts Ontario has traditionally received.³³ McGuinty encouraged all federal parties to respond to this campaign, declaring, "I want all Ontarians, again, independent of how they vote, to push all their candidates and ask them if they're prepared to stand up for fairness when they get to Ottawa..."³⁴ By demanding something no federal government had given Ontario for years, McGuinty's 'fairness campaign' placed his government in an adversarial position with whichever party would eventually take power in Ottawa. Had he openly supported the federal Liberals, this partisan connection might have limited his ability to criticize them for failing to provide 'fairness' for Ontario, had they won the election. Support for Dion would similarly have alienated Harper, likely compromising his willingness to cooperate with McGuinty's 'fairness' campaign. Liberal Party connections were still visible in 2008, in the sense that McGuinty did not criticize Dion outright for his platform's failure to address the 'fairness' issue. When pressed by then NDP leader Howard Hampton to acknowledge that his platform did not meet the 'fairness' criteria, however, McGuinty also did not defend Dion. This issue illustrates the fluid approach that a governing party must take to federal partisan politics. In 2008 Ontario Liberals maintained their distance, though they did not completely sever the connection.

This fluidity was further illustrated in December 2008 when the minority federal Conservative government faced defeat after delivering their fall economic statement. When PC MPP Elizabeth Witmer asked the McGuinty government to "commit to the people in this province that you will bring in your own budget within two weeks of the federal budget,"³⁵ Dwight Duncan responded,

...there is a question as to whether or not that federal budget would even pass. What I can assure the member is this: We won't conduct ourselves the way the Harper government did. We will focus on stimulus... Let me assure the member, we will not-I repeat, not-conduct ourselves the way the Harper government's conducted itself in these matters.

Shortly after an election in which the McGuinty Liberals did not endorse Dion, Duncan illustrates that their federal 'cousins' are never too far from the minds of Ontario Liberals. During an election in which a Liberal defeat was all but inevitable, they did not connect brands. When, however, the minority Conservative government's survival was in serious doubt, a prominent Liberal MPP contributed to the many criticisms of Harper's policies and actions.

In spite of this willingness to support their federal cousins when conditions are right, the literature review outlines evidence that provincial-federal relations have sometimes proven easiest when different parties have been in power at the two levels. It is easier for the McGuinty Liberals, for example, to criticize the Harper government for failing to give 'fairness' to Ontarians, than it would be with a Liberal federal government. For example, no partisan connections restricted Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan

³³ Paikin, "McGuinty Refuses to Support Dion."

³⁴ Hansard, Sept. 29, 2008.

³⁵ Hansard, December 8, 2008.

from stating that, “at the very time recession and the downturn in the economy in Ontario is happening, the federal government is looking for ways to not assist Ontario. So we will be really fighting this tooth and nail.”³⁶ Similarly, the federal Conservative government was extremely critical of the McGuinty government in 2008 over their tax policies. Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, for example, described Ontario as the “last place” businesses would want to invest across the country.³⁷ It is unlikely that Flaherty would have been so publicly critical of a PC government in Ontario.

These statements were facilitated by the lack of partisan connections between politicians. However, it is important to again emphasize the unique position of governing parties, which sometimes serves to limit their closeness to federal ‘cousins.’ Indeed, the provincial Liberals had a similar, though less public, conflict over equalization payments in 2003, when their federal ‘cousins’ were in power under Paul Martin. Greg Sorbara explained that as Finance Minister, he publicly advocated on behalf of Ontario, even if this meant criticizing federal government policy.³⁸ Esselment notes that “[m]any Ontario MPs were angry with their provincial cousins for pressing their interests publicly with a possible election in the offing.”³⁹ Though some federal Liberals did not appreciate the criticism, Sorbara felt that it was important for Ontario, and kept it up.⁴⁰ Thus, while it might be easier to be more vehement and vocal in public criticisms of a federal government of a different partisan stripe, party connections certainly do not prohibit provincial governments from putting their policy interests first.⁴¹

For a governing party, therefore, public rhetoric about federal cousins ebbs-and-flows, following the tide of provincial policy interests, the potential for partisan successes, and the likelihood of political gains and losses. There is extensive evidence that the governing party in Ontario will put its policy needs and interests ahead of support for its federal cousins. However, there is also much to suggest that the performance of federal cousins is a consideration. At certain times, when the conditions are right, Liberal MPPs have illustrated relative closeness to the federal Liberal Party. This evidence goes beyond connections through electoral volunteering, and extends to the floor of the Legislature.

Progressive Conservative Party

The evidence that the Ontario Liberals have at certain times been willing to support their federal cousins in the Legislature is mirrored in the Progressive Conservative Party case. Out of the three parties under examination, the PC party is the most structurally distinct from its federal counterpart. Indeed, the PC and federal Conservative Party are completely separate from each other, to the point of having different names. Frank Klees emphasized this separation, noting that at the provincial PC convention after the merger of the federal PC and Canadian Alliance Parties, there was a proposal to change the provincial PC name to match the federal change. Klees spoke in

³⁶ Les Whittington and Rob Ferguson, “Ontario fears wealth-sharing shutout,” Toronto Star, November 1, 2008.

³⁷ Les Whittington, “It’s politics as usual for Flaherty: Federal minister’s feud with McGuinty no surprise, but carries some obvious risks,” Toronto Star, March 10, 2008.

³⁸ Interview with Greg Sorbara

³⁹ Esselment, 28.

⁴⁰ Interview with Greg Sorbara

⁴¹ Esselment, 21.

opposition to that proposed change, and it did not pass.⁴² Klees explained the need for this distinction, noting that the provincial party's focus must be on provincial issues, which are often very different from federal ones. Therefore, he argued that “[a]nything we can do structurally to help with that distinction, we should be doing.”⁴³

Though structurally distinct, the two parties can legitimately be considered ‘cousins.’ The Conservative and PC Parties both sit on the right side of the Canadian political spectrum, and many actors who are associated with one party are also actively involved in supporting the other. This is perhaps best illustrated by the specific personnel connections that the two parties have shared. As Esselment outlined, Jim Flaherty, John Baird and Tony Clement were all PC cabinet ministers, who have since been elected federally and are now cabinet ministers in Stephan Harper’s government. Peter Van Loan is another Harper cabinet minister, whose roots stretch back to the PC Party, for which he previously has served as president.⁴⁴ Beyond personnel connections, there have also been occasions when actors at one level have publicly supported the other level. For example, Stephen Harper once referred to then PC leader John Tory as “the next premier of Ontario.”⁴⁵

Further research in the Ontario Legislature confirms a level of closeness between the two parties. Before PC MPP Lisa MacLeod was elected to the Ontario Legislature, she worked for the federal PC Party as its National Policy Process Coordinator. MacLeod’s involvement continued after the emergence of the new Conservative Party of Canada. MacLeod explained that “right up to the day I was elected, I worked for the federal Conservative party.”⁴⁶ She also described a close relationship with her riding’s federal counterpart, a Conservative MP, noting that they share volunteers and philosophies, and that she has worked as his campaign manager.⁴⁷ Frank Klees emphasized the importance of maintaining structural distinctions at the *party* level. However, he also noted that on the specific issue of his own *individual* involvement, he both supports and holds membership with the federal Conservatives.⁴⁸

Connections between the parties, similar to the Liberal example, have also been illustrated in the discourse of the Legislature. Just as the Liberals advocated in the legislature on behalf of Paul Martin during the 2004 federal election, so too did PC MPPs offer criticisms of him. A number of references centered on a controversial health premium, which the McGuinty government introduced in early 2004. During the election, then MPP John Baird sought to connect that unpopular provincial tax with the federal Liberal brand. In the midst of the campaign, he asked Dalton McGuinty, “[b]efore you asked working families in Ontario to pay more in taxes... Did you do anything to get the federal Liberals and Paul Martin to restore the funding cuts implemented since he first became finance minister?” In a supplementary question, after further emphasizing Martin’s responsibility for health care funding cuts, he stated, “[t]he bottom line is, you are committing highway robbery in Ontario, and Ontario voters know that Paul Martin is driving the getaway car.” Baird’s critique of Martin continued when he said, “Premier, if

⁴² Interview with Frank Klees

⁴³ Interview with Frank Klees

⁴⁴ Esselment, 15.

⁴⁵ Whittington, “Its Politics as Usual for Flaherty.”; Esselment, 15.

⁴⁶ Interview with Lisa MacLeod

⁴⁷ Interview with Lisa MacLeod

⁴⁸ Interview with Frank Klees

you won't call a referendum and allow Ontario voters their say, they are going to have their say on June 28 when they go to the polls and defeat Paul Martin, the real health care villain in the province of Ontario." McGuinty responded, "I hope the member opposite is registered in Ontario as a lobbyist on behalf of his federal counterparts, because apparently he is devoting all of his time and energies to supporting their cause."⁴⁹ John Baird's line of questioning during the 2004 federal election campaign illustrates that, while the federal Conservative Party no longer carried the same name as the provincial PC party, strong connections remained. This connection manifested itself through his effort to prove a link between the McGuinty Liberals, who were facing a severe backlash over the health premium, and the Martin Liberals, who were seeking election.

While an examination of Hansard during the 2004 election period shows a marked increase in the frequency with which Paul Martin was mentioned by PC MPPs, there is also a clear decline after the election occurred. This trend mirrors Esselment's focus on election periods as times when provincial-federal party connections are apparent.⁵⁰ This point was further illustrated during the 2008 federal election, which again saw references to the federal Liberal leader. Similar to Martin in 2004, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion was mentioned in a negative context by various PC MPPs in 2008. This tactic was employed to further deepen Dion's unpopularity, and to thereby contribute to federal Conservative seat gains in Ontario. During a bill debate, PC MPP Lisa MacLeod said, "[y]ou know, Stéphane Dion's got his green shift and Dalton McGuinty's got his blame shift."⁵¹ During another debate, MacLeod offered a more explicit criticism of Dion's carbon tax. She first quoted Warren Kinsella, a prominent Liberal operator at both the provincial and federal levels, who had raised questions about Dion's green shift. She further said, "[a]t this time of economic uncertainty, Ontarians cannot afford to experiment with Stéphane Dion's risky carbon tax."⁵²

The green shift also received attention from PC MPP Tim Hudak, who asked Finance Minister Dwight Duncan,

Minister, when you were speaking about Stéphane Dion's new plan to increase taxes through his so-called green shift, you said that 'massive shifts in tax burden at a time when there's uncertainty' would be a mistake. Will you take your own advice and scrap the new McGuinty tax on tires and electronic goods?⁵³

Taking advantage of the provincial Liberal's aforementioned hesitancy to connect their brand to Dion's unpopular one, Hudak's statement can be interpreted as an effort to discredit Dion by showing that even his provincial 'cousins' did not support his policies. John O'Toole also leveled criticism at Stéphane Dion during a debate over the state of Ontario's economy. He said,

let's not be dissuaded in the election. Who would you sooner have their

⁴⁹ Hansard, May 19, 2004.

⁵⁰ Esselment, 4.

⁵¹ Hansard, September 23, 2008.

⁵² Hansard, September 24, 2008.

⁵³ Hansard, October 8, 2008.

hand on the tiller? Stéphane Dion, who's going to increase taxes, or Stephen Harper, who's going to steady as she goes? That's what the question should be about, and Mr. Harper should have a strong minority government and have to work co-operatively in these troubled times. I would be satisfied with that outcome, but to swing right over and bring in another taxing-and-spending Liberal-I don't think so.⁵⁴

When asked about references to federal actors, Lisa MacLeod explained that from the PC perspective, “its more of a values issue. We tend to agree with our federal counterparts.”⁵⁵ In other words, PC members made critical comments about Dion’s green shift not only to help the Conservative Party’s electoral results, but also because they disagreed with the policy on a fundamental level. Like the Liberal Party, however, the PC Party is also acutely aware of the policy differences that drive distinct jurisdictions.⁵⁶ While many MPPs are willing to support their federal counterparts in the Legislature at times of heightened partisanship like elections, there are also limits on their willingness to do so. MPPs are first responsible to their constituents, and they must represent their provincial interests, or risk losing their seats. Thus, Frank Klees explained that because provincial issues are so different from federal ones, there are times when the PC Party has to take different positions from the federal Conservatives. While he supports the federal party, “I also don’t hesitate to disagree with any position the federal party might take.”⁵⁷ Equally, Lisa MacLeod noted that her party will sometimes disagree with the federal Conservative Party, “because provincial policy issues are different from federal ones.”⁵⁸

An example of this difference occurred recently, when the McGuinty government announced their intention to harmonize the sales taxes in their 2009 budget. Harmonization was supported by federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, but has been harshly criticized by PC MPPs. Interim PC leader Bob Runciman asked the Premier in Question Period, “[h]ow can you, in good conscience, once again break faith with the people of Ontario and bring in new taxes that will hurt the most vulnerable during these difficult times?”⁵⁹ The HST policy was a highly visible, highly unpopular decision amongst many Ontarians. Though their federal counterparts encouraged it, it made sense politically for PC MPPs to oppose the provincially unpopular tax.

The Ontario Liberals have responded to PC critiques of the HST by reminding them that it was their federal counterparts who wanted the province to adopt it. Minister Duncan deflected PC criticisms by boldly saying, “[i]t's about building a competitive tax system to lead Ontario to that next generation of growth. I'm with Jim Flaherty and the federal Conservatives: This is the right deal for Ontario and for Canada.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Liberal MPPs often yell out the name “Jim Flaherty” in the Legislature while PC MPPs are asking critical questions about the HST. In so doing, they are attempting to discredit the PC Party for not supporting the HST, in spite of the support given to this budget measure by federal Conservatives. The HST situation illustrates the limits of provincial-

⁵⁴ Hansard, October, 9, 2008.

⁵⁵ Interview with Lisa MacLeod

⁵⁶ Esselment, 21.

⁵⁷ Interview with Frank Klees

⁵⁸ Interview with Lisa MacLeod

⁵⁹ Hansard, March 25, 2009.

⁶⁰ Hansard, March 31, 2009

federal party connections. The Ontario Liberals have spoken supportively of the federal Conservatives, based on their mutual position of support for the HST. Similarly, PC MPPs have staked out a different position on the HST from their federal cousins. In both cases, the parties have pursued the policy positions that they feel are either best, or more politically expedient, instead of partisan lines based on connections with federal counterparts.

PC MPP Elizabeth Witmer reflected on the complementary language that Liberal MPPs have recently directed at federal Conservatives. In the past, she noted, the Liberal government argued that Ontario PCs are closely connected to the federal Conservatives. According to Witmer, they would try “to tie you to the federal party, [because] they often think the public doesn’t like that.” She has noted the change, however, and suggests that “they [the Liberals] are probably more closely in line with the feds right now than we are.”⁶¹ This further illustrates the tendency of politicians, when given the choice between partisan politics and protecting local political and policy interests, to choose the latter. This point was made further evident when the race to replace PC leader John Tory heated up in March 2009. In response, “the Prime Minister warned his MPs not to let the Ontario race create rifts in the federal party.”⁶² With a weak minority government that had only recently narrowly avoided defeat, Harper did not want provincial party connections to cause problems for his federal party.

The evidence clearly indicates that the floor of the Legislative Assembly is sometimes a stage for partisan comments and support of federal party counterparts. However, that provincial-federal closeness is dependent on timing and context, and it is often a carefully calculated decision.

New Democratic Party

The literature consistently presents the NDP as the most cohesive party from a provincial-federal point of view. As was previously noted, those who sign up as members of the NDP simultaneously join both the federal and provincial party wings.⁶³ Interviews with NDP MPPs at Queen’s Park further confirm that the two party levels are indeed quite close. NDP MPP France Gelinias explained, for example, that in her riding of Nickel Belt, there are separate executives for the provincial and federal branches, but there is also overlap. In particular, the two levels hold meetings one after the other, and sometimes agenda issues at the two meetings are related.

The nature of interactions between MPs and MPPs in ridings that are held by the NDP provincially and federally also indicates a significant connection. France Gelinias described a close relationship with the MP in her riding, NDP MP Claude Gravelle. She explained, for example, that before Mr. Gravelle was elected for the first time in 2008, she brought him to all the riding events that she could, to introduce him to people.⁶⁴ She further noted that she talks “to Claude at least weekly, sometimes more” and that they often share updates with each other on key happenings at each of their levels.⁶⁵ Similarly,

⁶¹ Interview with Elizabeth Witmer

⁶² Campbell Clark, “PC family ties complicate Ontario leadership race,” Globe and Mail, March 20, 2009.

⁶³ Stewart and Carty, 107.

⁶⁴ Interview with France Gelinias

⁶⁵ Interview with France Gelinias

NDP MPP Paul Miller pointed to his close connection with Wayne Marston, the NDP MP from his riding of Hamilton East – Stoney Creek. Miller noted that come election time, he “assisted Wayne with advice, he utilized my contacts and vice versa.”⁶⁶

It seems logical to conclude that the connections between provincial and federal party levels within ridings are closer when the MP and MPP are of the same party stripe. This certainly seems to be the case in the NDP examples above, and it also appears to be an accurate assertion in the PC case. MPP Lisa MacLeod explained that “obviously people with the same conservative values work together, whether at the riding level or more broadly... I know that many of my colleagues have close relationships with their federal counterparts.”⁶⁷ It is important to note, however, that these close relationships between MPs and MPPs of the same political stripe do not preclude cooperation within ridings by politicians from different parties. MPs and MPPs must represent their constituents first and foremost, and this sometimes means cooperation across party lines. For example, Liberal MPP Dr. Helena Jaczek explained that her riding’s federal counterpart is a Conservative, and that they have attended various infrastructure funding announcements together. She described a “collegial relationship,” based on the fact that they “both want the best for their constituents.”⁶⁸ More research is needed on interactions between MPs and MPPs of different political stripes. A key question to investigate, for example, is how criticisms of MPs by MPPs of a different political stripe might impact on the treatment of a riding by the federal government, and vice versa with the provincial government. While further research into this area is necessary, however, it is certainly clear that in the case of NDP MPPs, they often work closely with federal MP counterparts in their ridings. They also work on behalf of federal NDP candidates, who are not incumbents, in their electoral aspirations. Michael Prue, for example, has “campaigning in every federal election for the NDP candidate in my riding.”⁶⁹

Based on the evidence of strong connections between NDP MPPs and federal NDP actors, it is logical to assume that this relationship also extends to the rhetoric used on the floor of the Legislature. Indeed, the evidence suggests that, particularly during election periods, the NDP has taken a supportive stance in the Legislature towards their federal ‘cousins.’ The tactics employed in the run-up to the 2004 federal election are similar to those used by the PC Party. NDP MPPs criticized the election’s front-runner Paul Martin, while promoting their federal party leader, Jack Layton. For example, Ontario NDP leader Howard Hampton said to Dalton McGuinty in Question Period, “[b]efore the election last year, you and your good friend Paul Martin both said you would give two cents a litre of the provincial gas tax and two cents a litre of the federal gas tax for public transit and municipal transportation. So far, neither of you have delivered.”⁷⁰ Prior to the same election, during an evening debate, MPP Peter Kormos plugged Layton. He encouraged those watching on television to change the channel and “watch the balance, the final hour, of the federal leaders’ debate. We’re awful proud of Jack Layton and the work he’s been doing in this campaign across the province. I am

⁶⁶ Interview with Paul Miller

⁶⁷ Interview with Lisa MacLeod

⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Helena Jaczek

⁶⁹ Interview with Michael Prue

⁷⁰ Hansard, March 29, 2004.

confident that he's going to give Mr Martin the same drubbing tonight that he gave him en français last night.”⁷¹

An examination of Hansard during the recent federal election period reveals a similar example. Hampton again criticized the federal Liberal leader, and again connected the Ontario Liberal brand to that criticism. As was already mentioned, McGuinty did not endorse anyone during the 2008 campaign, but rather focused on his ‘fairness campaign’ for federal funding in Ontario. Hampton seized upon his unwillingness to endorse Dion, and argued that McGuinty should criticize his federal ‘cousin’ for a platform that was unresponsive to his ‘fairness campaign.’ In Question Period, he said to McGuinty,

[t]he Liberal platform of Mr. Dion only offers help for seasonal workers, a proposal that will create more inequalities and unfairness between laid-off Ontario workers and workers in the rest of the country... My question: When will the Premier acknowledge that his federal Liberal cousins have rejected his fairness for Ontario workers campaign and won't get the job done for laid-off Ontario workers?

In his supplementary question, Hampton took the theme further, arguing that the federal NDP platform offered the best deal for Ontarians. He asked McGuinty, “when is the Premier going to endorse Jack Layton and the NDP as the right choice for laid-off Ontario workers?”⁷² Given that the Ontario NDP is widely acknowledged to have the closest relationship with its federal party counterpart, it is not surprising that Hampton was so explicit in his support for Layton.

As with the other parties, the NDP is sometimes criticized for connections to their federal ‘cousins.’ Other MPPs occasionally attempt to connect the NDP brand with their federal ‘cousins,’ in ways that are expected to be unpopular with voters. When asked a question about provincial daycare funding, for example, Minister George Smitherman replied,

I was one of those who was disappointed that the New Democrats at the time, in the federal Parliament, took down a party that was implementing a national child care plan. This was a piece of progress that many had awaited for decades and decades, and instead they pulled the political trigger, all so that they could elect one or two additional members of the Legislature.⁷³

In reference to Smitherman’s comments, which dealt with the defeat of Martin’s minority government and therefore his proposed child care funding package, Michael Prue commented, “what that had to do with me is beyond me.” According to Prue, such comments are “used as a tool.” When the Liberals have nothing with which to “attack

⁷¹ Hansard, June 15, 2005.

⁷² Hansard, September 29, 2008.

⁷³ Hansard, March 12, 2009.

[the] provincial party, [they] attack [the] federal party.”⁷⁴ The evidence suggests that this tactic is used universally by all three parties in the Ontario legislature. While each have their own connections, they also jump at any opportunity to emphasize the connections of the other parties, in an attempt to link them to unpopular federal moves.

Perhaps no figure better illustrates the often interesting relationships between provincial and federal party cousins than the former Ontario NDP Premier, and current Liberal MP, Bob Rae. After his election to the House of Commons, Jim Coyle wrote that “[u]p in Ottawa, new and rebranded Liberal MP Bob Rae will have to wear out his vocal cords if he hopes to appear in the federal Hansard more often than he still does in the provincial version.”⁷⁵ His name constantly comes up in Question Period, in the context of Liberal ministers defending their record by arguing that it compares favourably to the PC and NDP governments before them. Whenever Rae’s former NDP government is mentioned negatively in this manner, NDP MPPs are quick to point out that he is now a federal Liberal MP. For example, Howard Hampton once followed George Smitherman’s comments by saying, “the Acting Premier isn’t helping Bob Rae’s leadership campaign with that answer.”⁷⁶ On another similar occasion, he said, “I think the McGuinty government is protesting against that well-known Liberal, Bob Rae. I say to you: He’s all yours; protest against him all you want...”⁷⁷ Recently, when Minister Jim Watson argued that the McGuinty government had seen lower rent increases than the NDP government of the early 1990s, Cheri DiNovo responded, “I would remind the Minister of Housing that we in the New Democratic Party are no fans of the Liberal Bob Rae, either.”⁷⁸

References to Rae’s move to the federal Liberals illustrates that like the other parties, NDP MPPs also emphasize the provincial-federal connections in the Liberal Party. By emphasizing that Rae is now a Liberal MP, they attempt to deflect criticisms of the former NDP government’s record, while also tying any seemingly negative aspects of that record to the current federal Liberal Party. When Liberal MPPs offer harsh criticisms of the former NDP government, they are also inherently criticizing that government’s Premier, Bob Rae. Though Liberal MPPs are careful to not mention his name in the process, the NDP caucus makes every effort to convince them that any critique of Rae, now actually bodes worse for the Liberal Party than the NDP. It is interesting to note, further to this point, that when Bob Rae ran for the federal Liberal leadership, Greg Sorbara co-chaired his campaign.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to prove that provincial and federal party ‘cousins’ are not such distant relatives as some analysts have previously suggested. Rather, building upon recent work, it has argued that there are connections that bind parties of similar names and ideological stances, across jurisdictional lines. The MPPs who were interviewed for this paper indicated varying levels of activity on behalf of their ‘cousins,’ but the consistent theme was at least some basic level of connection. Moreover, Hansard

⁷⁴ Interview with Michael Prue

⁷⁵ Jim Coyle, “Rae’s ghost walks halls of Legislature,” *Toronto Star*, April 14, 2008.

⁷⁶ Hansard, Nov. 20, 2008.

⁷⁷ Hansard, Nov. 2, 2008.

⁷⁸ Hansard, April 9, 2009.

⁷⁹ Interview with Greg Sorbara

illustrates that connections are not only revealed in ridings during election campaigns. They are also on display at Queen's Park.

It is important to acknowledge the limits to this conclusion. The examples of MPPs who have supported their 'cousins' in the Legislature certainly reflect, to an extent, personal choices by those who are more involved than others at the federal level. There is also extensive evidence that open support for federal 'cousins' is not a consistent policy, nor is it an unwavering commitment. It is dependent on pragmatic considerations about Ontario's policy needs, with a primary focus on the prospects for success of the provincial brand.

Having said that, there are also too many examples of MPPs of all political stripes supporting their federal 'cousins,' to disregard what is no doubt an important indicator of close connections. The work of MPPs is highly partisan by nature, and it only makes sense that they both follow, and feel a sense of connection to partisan politics at the federal level. As this paper has illustrated, those connections are often on display in the Ontario Legislature.

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