

Camaraderie Among MPPs at the Ontario Legislature

Ana Curic
Legislative Intern 2005-2006
Ontario Legislature Internship Programme
ana_curic@yahoo.ca
416-325-0040

Paper Prepared for the
Canadian Political Association Annual Conference
York University, Toronto

May 19, 2006

Introduction

Since becoming an intern at Queen's Park, it has become increasingly obvious that politics is very much about relationships. Members of Provincial Parliament (hereinafter MPPs or Members) must constantly interact and communicate with a wide range of people, including other Members, on a vast array of issues. Indeed, from an insider's perspective, Members spend what seems to be an inordinate amount of time with other Members. For example, within their own political party, Members attend weekly caucus meetings, they attend fundraisers and party conferences, they attend events and receptions at Queen's Park, and they also attend caucus retreats which usually take place a couple of times each year. Across political parties, Members sit in the House from Monday to Thursday when it is in session, they sit on and travel with committees, they attend many of the same events, and they can be part of the same parliamentary organizations. Several Members espoused the opinion that "[Members] spend more time with other Members than with [their] own family." Accordingly, it could be inferred that due to the time spent together, and in order for the Legislature to function, there is a sense of camaraderie among MPPs. In contrast, to an outside observer who usually only sees Members in the Legislature and on television where the tone is quite negative, it can appear that, at least across political party lines, there is quite a lot of animosity and very little camaraderie among MPPs.

During the first few weeks of the internship programme, interns attend several meetings with interesting people at the Legislature to get a better understanding of what goes on at Queen's Park. A few of these people mentioned in passing that there was less camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park than in the past. To the outside observer this would make sense, but to an insider that knows how often MPPs must interact, this sentiment would not. Therefore, this paper sets out to discover whether there has been a decrease in the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park, and if so, the possible causes.

In order to do this, several MPPs were interviewed since they would know best whether the level of camaraderie has changed over the years. Despite the amount of time MPPs spend together physically, the vast majority of MPPs that were interviewed were of the opinion that the level of camaraderie among MPPs has decreased significantly. These MPPs also provided several possible explanations as to why the level of camaraderie has decreased. This paper will use the theory of new institutionalism, which argues that politicians are rational actors who make choices based on the institutions that surround them, as the most appropriate explanation for the decrease in camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park.

The Theory of New Institutionalism

There are several books and articles available on the topic of being a politician, many of them being biographies and autobiographies. There are also several books that examine a certain government or political party.¹ Some of these books focus on the relationships among certain politicians or between politicians at a certain point in time. However, there is no systematic longitudinal study that focuses on the topic of camaraderie in general, either at the provincial or federal level. There are however some books and articles that try to determine why politicians think and act as they do and also what affects their behaviour. One such book is David Docherty's *Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa*. Docherty examines the beliefs held by Members of Parliament (MPs) and the actions they pursue and uses the theory of new institutionalism to provide an explanation for the beliefs and actions of MPs.

Friendships form when people believe that relationships are important and act to engage other people and get to know them. Discovering why MPPs decide whether to form friendships

is similar to Docherty's examination of why MPs make the decisions they do about various issues. Accordingly, the theory of new institutionalism will be used as a broad theoretical framework to explain why there has been a decrease in camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park.

Rational choice theory tries to explain why individuals make the decisions they do (for example, in the case of this paper, to become friends with other MPPs or not) and which factors influence their choices (Docherty, 1997). Rational choice is based on three assumptions. First, individuals are rational actors who will "choose the course of action which achieves their preferred goal with the greatest efficiency" (Atkinson and Nigol, 1989, 63). This means that a person's actions will be based on measurable costs and benefits and will be based on self-interest. The second assumption is that rational actors have access to all of the information necessary to make a decision (Docherty, 1997). The third assumption is that institutions play only a minor role and that, when institutions are a barrier, they can be changed easily, although this assumption has been changed somewhat to provide for a larger role of institutions. Docherty states,

At its heart, rational choice is atomistic. By contrast, at the heart of the Canadian political career is a pervasive set of institutional rules and norms. Rational choice assumptions acknowledge that institutional rules constrain choices, yet they downplay the role of institutions in influencing the attitudes of its Members. There is a delicate but important distinction to be made between attitudes and choices, one that is perhaps better understood through an institutional analysis (Docherty, 1997, 17).

New institutionalism suggests that institutions condition outcomes and the choices of people by defining the norms and objectives of the individual within the institution.

This view does not dispute the fact that individuals and groups make policy choices or pursue goals that they perceive to be in their best interest. Rather the framework presumes that choices, goals, and preferences are influenced and shaped by institutions (Docherty, 1997, 18).

In other words, politicians are rational, self-interested, and ambitious, and are constrained only by the rules that govern the electoral system in which they campaign and the legislature in which they serve.

This paper uses new institutionalism as a broad theoretical framework to explain the decrease in camaraderie among MPPs that was identified by those interviewed. It argues that MPPs have decided not to pursue friendships with other MPPs to the same extent as in the past since the institutions that surround them do not provide the same incentives and opportunities to do so as they did in the past.

Methodology

This paper tries to better understand if there has been a change in the level of camaraderie among MPPs and, if so, provide possible explanations as to why this change has taken place. In general, a qualitative methodological approach was followed that consisted of two parts. First, a review of secondary documents was completed to obtain some background information on the topic and to find possible theoretical frameworks that are relevant to the topic. Second, several face-to-face interviews were completed to discover the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of MPPs about camaraderie among Members at Queen's Park. A semi-structured interview format was used as it allows greater room for flexibility during the interview in terms of ordering of questions, their exact wording, and the time spent on each section (Neuman, 2000, 227). In

addition, open-ended questions were used because this study is very much exploratory as well as descriptive in nature.

Members were sent a letter via email to ask for their participation in this study. Current Cabinet ministers were not asked to participate in this study as it was not believed that their schedules would be flexible enough to permit an interview in the time available. However, it is important to note that several of the opposition Members interviewed were formerly Cabinet ministers and could therefore speak to the time they were in Cabinet. In total, 75 letters were sent. Members that did not respond to the letter were not solicited due to time and resource constraints. In general, Members were interviewed from all three political parties and included newly-elected and long-serving Members, males and females, and Members from all across the province with a wide variety of professional backgrounds. Furthermore, Members identities have remained confidential and any identifying characteristics were not mentioned in this paper. This was done so that Members would feel comfortable being open and honest about their opinions.

In total, 33 MPPs were interviewed; this included 31 current MPPs and 2 former MPPs. In addition, 2 people who have never served as Members but have extensive knowledge of the Ontario Legislature were also interviewed.

Due to time and resource constraints, this sampling of MPPs is not truly representative as the selection process was not random and there were some MPPs that were excluded. Nevertheless, it is believed that the sample is still quite representative and that the opinions of those interviewed help provide important insights into camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park.

Defining Camaraderie

Before continuing, it is important to define what is meant by the term 'camaraderie'. For the purposes of this paper, camaraderie is similar to friendship. Camaraderie is assumed to be present when there are relationships which involve mutual knowledge and affection in which each person will welcome the other's company and engage in mutually helping behaviour such as the exchange of advice. Furthermore, camaraderie is assumed to be present when people demonstrate reciprocating and reflective behaviours and form relationships based on values such as loyalty, empathy, honesty and trust. It is important to note that there are different levels of friendship and that some people have different criteria for friendship than others. In general, camaraderie is assumed to be present when Members develop friendships with other Members.

In order to develop a friendship with someone, Members identified two criteria. The first is trust, meaning that:

In order to develop a friendship with somebody you have to be able to let down your barriers and you have to be able to say what you really think. If you do not have trust you cannot have a friendship with someone.

In other words, Members must feel that they can be open and candid with other Members if they are going to consider them a friend.

Second, Members noted that friendships require time; time to talk and get to know one and other:

I cannot be friends with someone I know nothing about. Time is important, time to just talk and get to know someone. That is what friendships are all about, spending time with someone and learning about them.

Why Camaraderie is Important

Aside from being an interesting topic, camaraderie is also an important topic. Members identified the reasons why, in their opinion, camaraderie among MPPs was necessary.

One reason why camaraderie was important to about two-thirds of those interviewed was the same reason that camaraderie would be important to any other person. Having other Members as friends allows MPPs to have someone to talk to, someone to get advice from, provide comic relief, and someone who will show kindness and compassion. Moreover, since there are only 108 MPPs elected to the Ontario legislature, there are very few people that share the experience of being an MPP. Members can share the rewards, the challenges, and everything else that comes along with being a Member. In the words of one long-serving Member, it is important to have camaraderie among MPPs because:

Who really understands what you go through? Nobody wants to hear what happens in here. And If I tell them what happens in here, some of it I don't want it to be out there, it's sometimes about the dysfunctionality of this place, or the functionality, either side of it. [Camaraderie] is important from the perspective of keeping your own sanity.

Another Member was of the opinion that camaraderie was important because:

Toronto is a large city, but it can be a really lonely place. Especially for Members that are far away from home, far away from their families, it can be hard. Having friends makes being away much easier.

The most important reason identified among all of those interviewed for camaraderie is that camaraderie among MPPs helps Queen's Park run more smoothly, efficiently and effectively. Even though majority governments are usually elected in Ontario, Members must still work together on several issues. When opposition Members feel they can be honest with their opinions, and that their constructive criticisms will be taken seriously, the result can be an improvement in the debate that takes place in the legislature as well as an improvement to the legislation that is passed in the House. Opposition Members also might be less inclined to oppose legislation simply for partisan reasons and actually be able to put forth good amendments and support more government bills. At the same time, government Members might be more inclined to consider criticisms and allow more opposition amendments to the Bills being passed.

Furthermore, the legislative process itself could work more smoothly if there was a high level of camaraderie as there would be more consultation and negotiation regarding the legislative schedule, for example, when the House sits, how much time is allowed for debate, and how much time is allowed for committees. Again, this would decrease animosity among government and opposition Members and could lead to an increase in the quality of debate and legislation. One long serving Members stated:

I think that if there was more camaraderie, Members would be more inclined to be prepared to consider everyone's points when discussing legislation and be more respectful and considerate to people. I think that things would run more smoothly and that we would all be better off for it.

Therefore, a decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs should be of concern to Members as those interviewed believe that it is preventing Members from doing their jobs to the best of their ability. It should also be of concern to citizens since a decline in camaraderie negatively affects the quality of debate and legislation that passes through the House.

Who is Friends with Whom?

Members of the Same Political Party

The most common answer provided by the MPPs interviewed was that they are closest with Members of their own party. There are three main reasons for this. The first is that Members of the same political party share similar views on many important issues. This means that Members can agree on several issues and can discuss topics without getting into disagreements.

I have a lot more in common with people who share the same political views as me. We never have to explain certain things because that is where we are coming from.

Second, and related to the first reason, is that there is a greater level of trust among Members from the same party. One Member stated:

If you do not have trust you cannot have a friendship with someone. If you are going to develop a friendship with somebody you have to be able to let down your barriers and you have to be able to say what you really think. If I was having a conversation with someone from the other party and I talk about somebody in my party in a kind of disparaging way, I might be hearing about that. So, until you have developed that real trust, like this is off the record, you have to be careful.

However, this Member went on to point out that:

...even within your own party, that is one thing that really still kind of troubles me about this job, is that I hear back things that I said, because people love to be able to say so and so told me about blah blah and then it is out there, I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have trusted them.

Nevertheless, Members stated that they were more likely to trust a Member of their own party than a Member from one of the other parties.

Third, as mentioned earlier, Members within the same party spend a large amount of time together, and similar to many other work environments, this means that Members must work and converse together, leading to the development of friendships, even if not on purpose.

There's more opportunity within a caucus to spend some time together because we see each other at caucus meetings, at socials, at party events, etc. So, there is less opportunity to spend time with other Members. How do I see my friends in this caucus? Normally through work. It is very seldom that we find personal time to say let's hang out.

Furthermore, when first elected, Members attend an orientation 'training camp' where they are taught about the procedures at Queen's Park. During this time, new Members are eager to make friends and talk and share stories with the other Members of their group. About one-third of the MPPs interviewed mentioned that they are still close with the MPPs they spent time with at the orientation sessions.

It is important to note that cross-party friendships were more likely to develop between longer-serving Members. As time goes by and Members work and spend time with other Members, one's political party seems to be less of a barrier, since Members gain more independence and develop a greater respect for each other. In addition, long-serving Members are bonded by the experiences they have shared over the years.

Elected at the Same Time

About half of the Members interviewed stated that they were closer with those Members that were elected at the same time that they were. This was especially the case if there was a large caucus at the time of an election, and only a few new Members were elected. This is partly because of the shared learning experience and being the ‘new guys’ among a group of experienced Members.

The other half of the MPPs interviewed stated that they had more in common with Members that were elected at a different time than them. These Members stated that there were other factors that were more important to them, such as an issue, or a shared background, or even similar personalities that caused them to develop friendships.

Women

As one long-serving Members stated:

This is a very male dominated place and still very sexist as much as we would like not to say that. So women will seek each other more so than men will.

The Liberal Party has a women’s caucus, and there have been attempts made to get the women from all parties together for dinner and conversation. About half of the Members interviewed thought that women were often friends with other women, especially within their own party. Among the female Members that were interviewed, about two thirds stated that they were friends with the women in their own party, and that to some extent they sought that friendship out or welcomed it when they were sought after. The other third of interviewed female Members stated that they did not feel that they were more likely to be friends with an MPP if they were a woman. For these women, there were other characteristics when seeking friends that they felt were more important than being a woman.

Geography

About half of the interviewed Members stated that they had more friendly relationships with Members that were from the same geographic area as them. This meant having ridings that were adjacent to each other, or being from regions such as Northern Ontario or Rural Ontario. The reasons most often cited were that these Members often cared about the same issues, shared the same concerns, and attended many of the same events both at Queen’s Park and in their geographical area. Being friends with someone in the same geographic area was even more likely to be the case if that Member was from the same party.

However, one long-serving Member pointed out that being from the same geographical area could have a negative impact on the development of friendships both within a party and across parties due to the often personal nature of issues that affect a Member’s riding.

Issues in the riding directly affect a Member’s chances of being re-elected and can often be personal. If there is disagreement about what is, or is not being done in regards to a certain issue in a riding, it can lead to animosity. Even within a party, there are issues that divide, for example, urban and rural Members. And an opposition Member will use an issue against a government Member if they think they can gain political points. So, it makes it very hard to be friends then.

Other Factors

Aside from the factors mentioned above, Members mentioned that they are often close with the Members that mentored them when they were first elected.² In addition, Members

spend a lot of time talking with those that sit directly around them in the House and often end up developing friendships. Members also identified personality as a factor as to whether friendships develop. In general, Members with similar personalities, and those Members that were friendly and outgoing and wanted to make friends were more likely to have friendly relationships with a larger number of Members. In addition, Members stated that the same factors that connected people in general, such as sharing common backgrounds, having children of the same age, enjoying the same sports, etc. could lead to friendships among MPPs at Queen's Park.

Has There Been a Decrease in the Level of Camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park?

The vast majority of those interviewed believed that there has been a decrease in the level of camaraderie over the last several years. About half of those interviewed were of the opinion that the situation was starting to get a bit better, but that compared to several years ago, the level of camaraderie is still significantly lower. The other half of interviewees believed that the level of camaraderie has continued to decline over the past several years and they do not see the situation improving in the near future.

Some of the Members who were interviewed did not have much to say on the topic of camaraderie since they were newly elected Members. But, several of these people said that from what they had heard from longer-serving Members or people they knew that served as an MPP several years ago, camaraderie has declined. Two interviewees stated that they did not think that camaraderie has declined, but rather that it increases and decreases at different times. However, they did state that overtime they have noticed at least a small decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs, especially compared to much earlier in the past.

Overall, it is believed among those that were interviewed that there has been a decline in camaraderie among MPPs. Whereas longer-serving Members and former Members recalled friendships that they had developed during their time, several of which are still in tact, it seemed that very few Members today have, or even have a desire to make friends in the true sense of the word. More than half of the Members used the term "political friends" to describe the MPPs they were close with at Queen's Park. Others mentioned that they had a great deal of respect for other Members and that they spoke to some Members more than others. But most Members clearly stated that there was more of a professional collegiality and less of a sincere desire to pursue friendships at Queen's Park. This is not to say that there are not true friendships that form at Queen's Park, but these tend to be rare. Furthermore, it seems that this decline in camaraderie is not just temporary, but rather that there may have been a shift in that Members no longer want to, need to, or have as many incentives and opportunities to develop friendships with other Members. The section below examines the reasons behind the decline in camaraderie.

Explanations for the Decline in the Level of Camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park

Before discussing the reasons why there has been a decrease in the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park, it is important to return to the theory of new institutionalism. As mentioned earlier, this theory assumes that Members are rational, self-interested, and ambitious, and are constrained only by the rules that govern the electoral system in which they campaign and the legislature in which they serve. It is therefore important to discuss the institutions that are present that affect the behaviour of MPPs.

Members are elected into a system that is controlled from the centre. The Premier, and in the case of opposition parties the opposition leaders, wield significant powers and have control

over most of what goes on within their party. This concentration of power significantly impacts what occurs, such as the development of friendships, both within the party and across parties.

One of the most important powers from the perspective of the MPPs is the Premier's ability to appoint Cabinet ministers. "It is true that not every elected Member hopes to be a Cabinet minister, however the vast majority do." Along with a higher salary, Cabinet Ministers have the ability to be involved in executive decision-making, they have a higher profile which can increase their chances of being re-elected, and they can often do more for their ridings than backbench MPPs. Thus, it is understandable why being a Cabinet minister is so desirable. This power of appointment by the Premier allows him to wield a huge amount of power. Members must be partisan and follow strict party discipline, and must be adversarial with opposition Members in order to be 'rewarded'. Even within their own party, Members are always in competition to outdo one another in hopes that they Premier will notice their work and appoint them into Cabinet.

The leaders of the two opposition parties do not have this power – yet. It is true that opposition Members have more freedom and independence than government Members, however, they are cognizant of the fact that if their party wins the next election, their leader will then gain significant powers and what has happened in the past could affect their chances at a Cabinet position. Furthermore, the leaders of the opposition parties appoint critic portfolios. This is important because it is generally understood that Members desire high profile portfolios such as health and education and that opposition Members can be 'rewarded' with greater inclusion into the decision-making process. Therefore, even opposition Members have pressure to tow the party line, be as partisan as possible and to make themselves look better than other Members within their own party.

Another important power is the Premier's ability to appoint committee chairs, committee co-chairs and committee Members. For backbench Members, sitting on a committee is highly desired since committees can do significant work related to their riding and doing a good job on a committee is another way that Members can prove they are worthy of a Cabinet position. Opposition Members sit on the committees related to their critic portfolios, and as mentioned above, their leader chooses those critic portfolios. Just as with government Members, opposition Members can use their committee responsibilities as a way to prove they should be promoted within the caucus, and appointed a Cabinet Minister if and when their party forms government.

The leaders of the parties also have the ability to refuse to sign nomination papers, preventing a Member from running in another election. Although this does not occur frequently, a leader can pressure a Member, through their significant powers, not to run in another election by making their time at Queen's Park difficult. The leaders can refuse to sign nomination papers, or can parachute another candidate into a Member's riding.

These powers give leaders, and especially the Premier, significant control and Members are aware that in order to get ahead and into Cabinet, they must follow the orders coming from the centre. This means adhering to strict party discipline and constantly trying to make the other parties look bad. Within a party, this means working hard and competing with Members from your own party to get ahead and eventually get appointed to a Cabinet position.

Clearly, the leaders of the different parties have significant powers, especially the Premier. However, over the past several decades, the executive level has slowly but surely increased the amount of power it wields, especially over those who sit on the government side of the legislative branch. In *Governing From the Centre* Donald Savoie (1999) convincingly argues that power has shifted to the Prime Minister and the central agencies. He provides a thorough

outline of the substantial changes in governmental structure and political practices that have enhanced the power at the centre. For example, Savoie argues that the electronic media, which has a personality focus, has resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on the leader of a political party (Savoie, 1999). Increasingly, electoral victories are seen as the result of the leader of a party doing a good job, and less with the popularity of an individual Member. Therefore, the victory of a Member is increasingly based on the leader and the political party and not the Members themselves. This means that leaders can control Members since in a sense, Members owe their victories to the leaders.

Some authors such as Graham White (2005) have suggested that Savoie and others over-exaggerate the amount of power concentrated in the executive in Canada. Nevertheless, even White agrees that the degree of concentration is still significant and much greater than in other countries with similar systems.³

Savoie's study of the concentration of power at the centre focuses on the federal government in Canada. But White points out that the provincial governments in Canada closely resemble those in Ottawa as they are both, "premised on identical constitutional precepts of responsible government – with all the implications for structure, operations, and power relationship that entails – and located within a broadly similar set of political traditions and values" (White, 2005, 54). However, not only do both levels of government operate similarly, but Young and Morely (1983) argue that "provincial government is premier's government...the extent of his authority is significantly greater than his federal counterpart" (54). White states that the scale and complexity of government in even a large province such as Ontario, is quite different from that in Ottawa, "The smaller scale and less complex character of provincial government" offer the Premier, "greater scope for exercising personal control and direction..." (White, 2005, 55). For example, a Prime Minister no longer has the time or ability to be in control of a Department. In contrast, in Ontario, Premier McGuinty not only has a large degree of control over the government in general, but he also is in charge of his newly created Ministry of Research and Innovation. It is generally agreed among academics that power is centralized in the executive at the federal level. It is therefore understandable why White believes that this is even more so the case at the provincial level since the smaller scope and scale of government makes it easier for the Premier to maintain strict control.

The MPPs who were interviewed outlined many possible reasons for the decline in camaraderie they identified. It will be shown that the three main reasons identified are the result of the increase in power at the centre. In other words, the decline in camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park is the result of an increase in the leaders' powers, especially the power of the Premier.

Increase in Partisanship and Party Discipline

Almost everyone that was interviewed was of the opinion that there has been an increase in partisanship in the Ontario legislature and that this has resulted in the decline in camaraderie among MPPs. More than half of those interviewed were quick to blame the media for the increase in partisanship and the more adversarial nature of the legislature. They argue that the media, which is most likely to play short clips which are negative and adversarial in tone, have created a sort of "gotcha politics". However, the media alone cannot explain an increase in partisanship. Many Members stated that the media is instead a tool used by Members who have rationally decided that, in a job where exposure is very important both to up your profile in the party and to get re-elected, they will pander to what the media will most likely show. If

Members instead focused on meaningful debate and criticisms, that is what would have to be shown to the public, but instead, Members have chosen to pursue personal, often mean, attacks on the other parties. Therefore, the presence of the media does not explain the increase in partisanship that has resulted in a more adversarial tone at Queen's Park.

Instead, the stricter party discipline that comes with a greater concentration of power at the centre has led to an increase in partisanship and the corresponding detrimental effects that has on camaraderie among MPPs. The chances of an MPP having a successful career often has more to do with the Members' willingness to follow the party line rather than speaking out for the needs of their constituents, although this too is important. Since the leader of a political party has the ultimate say in who stands as a candidate in elections, it is in the interest of a Member to keep the leader's office happy and to follow the whip's instructions on how to vote on a bill. As mentioned earlier, the leader's power applies not only to who is allowed to stand for election, but also to who is selected for Cabinet positions if the Member's party forms government. This system of rewards and punishments can be effective in maintaining the support of Members, since most Members of the legislature want to maintain their seat, and hope for perks such as Cabinet postings or other rewards for 'good behaviour'. As more power has become concentrated in the centre, the leaders have been able to enforce stricter party discipline over Members.

The evidence of an increase in party discipline is widely documented, but how does this relate to a decline in camaraderie among Members of the legislature, specifically between Members of different parties? With the increase in control of individual Members by the executive comes a corresponding increase in partisanship. Since the executive wants its legislation passed, the willingness of Members to openly question and debate their own government's legislation fades. This leads to a situation where Members stick to the party line, with little regard or consideration for the concerns of opposition Members. The adversarial nature of the Westminster political system is made even more so because when the will of the executive becomes the only consideration for individual Members, valid concerns are often ignored, frustrating opposition Members. The adversarial nature of the political system in addition to strict party discipline also often leads to personal attacks in the legislature. One Member stated:

When I was first elected, things ended in the legislature and Members were usually pretty good about not making attacks personal. Today, I do not think this is the case. Members are attacked personally, or take what is said personally, and they keep this anger with them when they are out of the House.

It thus becomes hard for a Member to set aside what was said in the House and become friends with a Member that engages in personal attacks. Unfortunately, strict party discipline and the willingness of Members to do anything to be rewarded in an adversarial system means that personal attacks have become more frequent. It also destroys the already small amount of trust Members from different parties have for one another. Without trust, it is unlikely that real friendships will form.

The situation which is created when the governing party (as well as opposition parties) holds tight control over their backbench Members is an atmosphere of enhanced partisanship as it emphasizes the differences between political parties, and thus the elected Members of each party. The possibility of a reward or the threat of punishment has the power to outweigh the sense of camaraderie which Members may feel for one another. The willingness of Members to

stick to the party line often means painting all Members of an opposing party as the same, and this further creates cleavages between Members of the legislature. Furthermore, across parties, the increase in personal attacks that comes with stricter party discipline has resulted in the stifling of camaraderie among MPPs from different political parties.

Committee Work

Another factor affecting camaraderie that was mentioned by the majority of Members who were interviewed was the decrease in committee work. According to most Members, especially long-serving Members, committees use to meet much more frequently, had greater responsibility, and would travel much more. Committees force Members to engage in tripartite work and force Members to spend time getting to know each other. Members mentioned that Queen's Park can be a very tense and partisan place and that just being physically outside of the building can help Members relax, let their guard down and open up – and that a committee is the perfect place for this to happen. One long-serving Member stated:

When I first came here, we used to spend much more time on committee on the road. So it would force you to be with Members from other parties for longer periods of time... You would have a long period of time where your committee went to Thunder Bay, went all over the place. So you would have to break bread with other people, so that developed those relationships which I think is a big part. The longer I see you across the table from me, or if we are having dinner together, the harder it is for me to be partisan with you or to keep not trusting you. You have to be with people to get to know them and be able to appreciate them. Members have to have the opportunity to spend time together and you don't do that in the Legislature.

But, it is important to examine why there are fewer committees today than in the past. When asked what or who is responsible for the decrease in committee work, most of those interviewed gave the obvious answer – the Premier. Several Members were of the opinion that the decrease in the number of committees, the responsibility of committees, and the travel of committees started in the early 1990s and has continued for various reasons such as Premiers wanting to have more control and push through legislation, and/or cut costs. The Premier's office has wide discretion in deciding when or even if bills will go to committees, as well as if and for how long committees will travel, among other things.

Therefore, the decrease in committees is the result of the Premiers over the last several years deciding that committees should play a less important role. More than half of those interviewed stated that things have started to get better with the election of the current government. While committees still meet less and travel less than they did several years ago, they are nonetheless meeting more and beginning to travel more than they have in the very recent past. Interviewed Members were of the opinion that this was, again, because of the current Premier, who seems to want to have more opposition involvement, even if it is sometimes superficial, in legislation.

In summary, since committees can often be an environment where friendships develop, the decrease in committee work has contributed to the decline in camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park. However, the Premier has the power to decide if and when committees meet and travel. Therefore, the concentration of power at the centre, which gives power of committees to the Premier, has resulted in a decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park.

Increase in Members' Workload

One Member who has a family history at Queen's Park recalled the early days at Queen's Park. Members would have a desk at the Legislature and would use their time writing letters and speeches and doing research themselves. MPPs did not even have constituency offices. This is in stark contrast to Queen's Park today. Members have several staff at the legislature, in addition to several staff in their constituency offices (Members who have large ridings have more than one constituency office). Even newly elected Members stated that they did not fully comprehend the scale of the workload originally:

...as a City Councillor, I had one staff and we were very busy. Now at Queen's Park, I have six staff and we are struggling to get things done!

The very busy workload means it can be hard for Members to meet the second equally important necessity for friendship to develop that was mentioned earlier - time. The vast majority of Members believed that they are busier now than Members were in the past.

Developments in technology means that there is more information available which can be accessed faster and Members can communicate more easily and quickly with others. For example, whereas it used to take days for Members to receive and then respond to constituent letters, constituents can now email Members instantly and responses can be sent often within the same day. Technology has made it easier for Members to access information and respond to requests, so that MPPs "can do in one day what used to take me a week".

The efficiencies created by technological developments mean that MPPs can do things more quickly. However, at the same time as technology has made it easier for Members to do their job, there has been a large increase in the workload, and in the demands and the expectations of MPPs. MPPs stated that more is expected of them than in the past. Technology has meant that thorough responses are wanted immediately. Moreover, constituents expect much more from their Members. One Member stated:

I remember growing up in the 60s, you never saw your MPP because it was expected that they would be at Queen's Park. If you saw your Member while the House was in session it was like, my god, you are not working! Nowadays it's like, where are you? Your constituents want access to you 24/7.

Members are expected to be at their riding more often, helping constituents, attending events and meetings. MPPs gave examples of constituents expecting them to personally pick-up and deliver documents and forms to Ministries, and expecting Members to find them employment among others requests.

This increase in demand and workload means that Members spend less time with other Members than in the past. Members today are more likely than Members in the past to go back to their ridings during the week, and if their riding is close to Toronto, almost on a nightly basis. Members will also be in their offices working as opposed to at social events or doing extracurricular activities with other Members. Every extra minute a Member has is devoted to fulfilling their House duties or dealing with constituency issues. This results in Members having no energy to pursue friendships, as one newly elected Member stated:

I have no time or energy at the end of the day. All I want to do when I get some time is crash, or spend time with my family. Unfortunately, making friends with other Members is not a priority.

When asked why their workload has increased, Members pointed to an increase in expectations both within their own party and within their constituencies. However, many were at a loss to explain why there are greater expectations today than in the past. Many of the long-serving Members were of the opinion that the increase in workload is their own fault, since they have actively taken on more work to raise their profile in the party. One Member stated:

[MPPs] will not say no if the leader's office asks them to take on more House duties or to speak more in the House. Members want face time. The leader's office will notice and this is good if you want to be in Cabinet one day, which almost all Members do. It is also good because in the next election they can tell their constituents about all the times they spoke about important issues.

Once in Cabinet it is understandable that ministers have very little time to pursue friendships. Between their Cabinet portfolio, being part of executive decision-making, being in demand to speak at fundraisers and events, and all the while having to serve your constituents, Cabinet ministers do not spend more time than necessary in the House and do not have time to attend many other functions. Furthermore, Cabinet ministers do not sit on committees, which as mentioned above, can be an environment where many friendships can develop. Former Cabinet ministers stated that they became friends, and often remained friends, with their parliamentary assistant because they were able to spend time with them, and also discuss important and confidential ministry information which meant that there was trust in the relationship. In addition, friendships sometimes formed among Cabinet ministers since they spent time in Cabinet meetings and there is obviously a level of trust among Cabinet ministers who discuss highly confidential matters on a regular basis. Cabinet ministers do not have the time that backbench Members do to pursue friendships. Therefore, if backbench Members are not developing many friendships, it is understandable that Cabinet ministers are even worse off when it comes to becoming friends with MPPs at Queen's Park.

In terms of the increase in workload in their constituencies, many of the long-serving, and even of the newly-elected Members, again were of the opinion that Members were to blame because they have taken on more work as a way to get re-elected.

It is the Members fault to a large degree because we have all worked really hard at trying to find ways to provide good service to our constituents and be present in order to be re-elected, and now people are demanding it, so that increases the workload.

There has been an increase in the amount of literature sent out to constituents including calendars, newsletters, and magnets. All of these include contact information and when having a problem, it is not unreasonable that a constituent would call the number of the Member whose magnet is on their fridge. In addition, Members are attending more events, speaking to constituents, and telling them to 'call me if I can help you'. Again, it is not unreasonable to expect that constituents would have their Member at the top of their mind when having problems.

It turns out that MPPs themselves admit that they are in large part to blame for the increase in demands and expectations by their party and by their constituents that has led to an increase in their workload. Members have taken more responsibility within their party as a way to get noticed and hopefully one day be appointed to a Cabinet position. They also hope that it will increase their chances of getting re-elected. Members have also taken on and actively sought out more work in their constituencies, again, as a way to gain profile within their party, but also in their ridings which will increase their chances of being re-elected. In other words,

Members have decided that based on the opportunity structure present and the electoral system they run in, it is within their best interest to take on more responsibility and have a much larger workload. However, this has resulted in Members having less time to develop friendships which has negatively affected the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park.

Conclusions

Members of Provincial Parliament in Ontario, both long-serving and newly elected, are of the opinion that there has been a decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park. Several reasons were identified, including less committee work, an increase in partisanship, and increases in workload. However, further probing of MPPs revealed that, as the theory of new institutionalism claims, Members are rational, self-interested, and ambitious and are constrained only by the rules that govern the electoral system in which they campaign and the legislature in which they serve. The system in which Members are elected to is one in which there has been an increasing concentration of power at the centre. Leaders, and especially the Premier, have the ability to control Members and affect the decisions and actions they pursue. Since the early 1990s, the Premiers have pursued changes such as decreasing the amount of committee work, that have resulted in a decrease in the opportunities and incentives for Members to develop friendships.

As mentioned earlier, the decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs at Queen's Park is cause for concern since it can prevent the Legislature from running smoothly, efficiently, and effectively. Many of those interviewed agreed that the decline in the level of camaraderie among MPPs is a problem, but did not know how to address the issue. This paper is exploratory in nature, but suggests that it is important to look at the centre. In other words, the increasing power of the leaders, and especially the Premier, needs to be addressed. It is not until the leaders realize the importance of camaraderie among MPPs and pursue changes that provide MPPs with some independence, and allow for more opposition input and involvement, that the level of camaraderie will begin to increase, as has been seen with the current Premier's decision to allow more bills to go to committee. However, it does not seem that these important changes are likely to take place since it is not in the leaders' best interest to pursue them.

ENDNOTES

¹ For example, see Patrick Monaghan (1995), Storming the Pink Palace: The NDP in Power: A Cautionary Tale and Cameron and White (2000), Cycling into Saigon: The Conservative Transition in Ontario.

² For more information pertaining to mentors see Carolyn Thomson (1993), *'This Place': The Culture of Queen's Park* in Graham White, ed., Inside the Pink Palace: Ontario Legislature Internship Essays, pp. 3-4 and Julia Lyndon Deans (1993), *The ABCs of Being an MPP: The Role of Socialization of New Legislators at Queen's Park* in Graham White, ed., Inside the Pink Palace: Ontario Legislature Internship Essays, pp. 30-31.

³ For example, Christopher Garner and Natalia Letki compare the levels of backbench dissent in the Canadian Liberal government with those of the British Labour government. The 1997 Parliament in the UK witnessed 96 rebellions by backbench Labour MPs. Moreover, the number of [Labour] MPs prepared to vote against the Government at some point in the Parliament was 133, around half of Labour's backbenchers. The figures from Canada's 36th Parliament show a striking contrast, as the total number of Liberal backbenchers who dissented from the party line on at least one occasion is 16. Thus, while in the UK the total percentage of Labour backbenchers dissenting from party lines exceeded 40 percent, for the same time period in Canada the total percentage of Liberal backbench dissenters was 13 percent.

Another way of looking at dissent in the two Parliaments during this period is by the total number of government bills that attract dissenting votes. Between 1997 and 2001, the Labour Government introduced 154 bills into Parliament, of which 23 (15%) attracted dissent from the backbenches, while in Canada the Liberal Government introduced 134 bills into Parliament, with 4 bills (3.7%) attracting dissent.

The fact that the levels of backbench dissent differ between the two Parliaments would not be particularly interesting, if not for the high level of similarity between all other aspects of these two systems. The two countries' Houses of Commons operate along similar lines, with similar rules and procedures. In fact, from the late 1960s onward, the push in institutional reforms to the Canadian House of Commons has been that of emulating Westminster. As a result, the Canadian House of Commons, as it is presently constituted in terms of the vast proportion of procedures and institutional structure, mirrors that of Westminster.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkinson and Nigol. 1989. *Selecting Policy Instruments: Neo-Institutional and Rational Choice Interpretations of Automobile Insurance in Ontario* in Canadian Journal of Political Science (22), pp. 107-35.
- Deans, Julia Lyndon. 1993. *The ABCs of Being an MPP: The Role Socialization of New Legislators at Queen's Park* in Graham White, ed., Inside the Pink Palace: Ontario Legislature Internship Essays. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 21-40.
- Docherty, David. 1997. Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Garner, Christopher and Natalia Letki. 2005. *Party Structure and Backbench Dissent in the Canadian and British Parliaments* in The Canadian Journal of Political Science. Cambridge University Press (38), pp. 463-482.
- Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2000. Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 4th Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Savoie, Donald J. 1999. Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Thomson, Carolyn. 1993. *'This Place': The Culture of Queen's Park* in Graham White, ed., Inside the Pink Palace: Ontario Legislature Internship Essays. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 1-20.
- White, Graham. 2005. Cabinets and First Ministers. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Young, Walter D. and J. Terence and Morley. 1983. *The premier and the Cabinet* in J. Terence Morley et al, eds., The Reins of Power: Governing British Columbia. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, pp. 45-82.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.