

“Turncoats, Opportunists, and Political Whores’:  
Floor Crossers in Ontario Political History”

By

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## INTRODUCTION

When the October 2011 Ontario general election saw Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberals win a "major minority", there was speculation at Queen's Park that a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) from the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party or New Democratic Party (NDP) would be induced to cross the floor. The Liberals had captured fifty-three of 107 seats; the PCs and NDP, thirty-seven and seventeen, respectively. A Member of one of the opposition parties defecting to join the Liberals would have definitively changed the balance of power in the Legislature. Even with the Speaker coming from the Liberals' ranks, a floor crossing would give the Liberals a de facto majority and sufficient seats to drive forward their legislative agenda without having to rely on at least one of the opposition parties.

A January article in the *Toronto Star* revealed that the Liberals had quietly made overtures to at least four PC and NDP MPPs since the October election,<sup>1</sup> meaning that a floor crossing was a very real possibility. On the other hand, the fall election demonstrated that Ontarians were divided and unwilling to give the power of majority government to any one party. Considering the polarized political climate and the near-identical share of the popular vote won by the Liberals and PCs, a floor crosser would face particularly close scrutiny at a time when public confidence in politicians and democratic institutions is already circumspect.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of Ontario (LAO) offers an ideal opportunity to study a phenomenon in Westminster-style democracy that has never failed to test the resilience of our parliamentary institutions, that raises the ire of the public, the press, and parliamentarians like little else, and that demonstrates once again that the political is indeed the deeply personal. This phenomenon is crossing the floor.

## SCOPE & SIGNIFICANCE

For the purposes of this paper, crossing the floor refers to the occurrence when a sitting elected representative defects from his/her party and joins the ranks of an opposing party in the same legislature without spending a period of time away from politics. For example, Bob Rae, who was the NDP Premier of Ontario until 1995, resigned his seat in 1996 and his NDP membership in 1998, and then returned to politics as a Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) in 2006, does not meet the criteria of a floor crosser in this paper. Additionally, this definition of floor crossers does not include parliamentarians who resign from their party and sit as independents, nor those who resign their seat to accept an appointment in the public service, as seen most recently with MPP for Kitchener-Waterloo Elizabeth Witmer.<sup>2</sup> Sitting as an independent or resigning one's seat, even if it has political consequences, are very different acts than leaving one's party to join an opposing party, which carries much more severe personal, ethical, and political implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Benzie, "Andrea Horwath not worried about an MPP defecting to Liberals," *Toronto Star* (11 January 2012), <http://www.thestar.com/news/article/1113911--andrea-horwath-not-worried-about-an-mpp-defecting-to-liberals?bn=1>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Regg Cohn, "Why Ontario's historic minority may be history," *Toronto Star* (28 April 2012), <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1170039--cohn-why-ontario-s-historic-minority-may-be-history>.

Furthermore, despite recent occurrences of floor crossing in Ottawa,<sup>3</sup> British Columbia,<sup>4</sup> and Québec,<sup>5</sup> and the relative frequency of the phenomenon in Canadian political history,<sup>6</sup> this paper will focus only on floor crossings in Ontario political history. With the number of parliamentarians who have crossed the floor in Ottawa and the various provincial capitals numbering in the hundreds, limiting the scope to Queen's Park allows me to make this study both more manageable and more detailed. Not only does focusing on Ontario complement my work at Queen's Park during the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme, but it also fills a notable gap in the political-science literature. Apart from hyperbolic media coverage when a party defection happens, there is surprisingly little academic literature written on the topic in general, and no academic articles on floor crossing in Ontario in particular. As it touches on themes such as democratic accountability, voter behaviour, political ethics, the role of political parties in parliamentary democracy, and party discipline, a study on floor crossing is a rich addition to the study of Ontario politics and government.

This study will review and analyze these themes, providing a robust overview of the parliamentary traditions, history, and legality surrounding the phenomenon of floor crossing in Canada. After I have established an understanding of the complexity of the issue, I will analyze in detail the case of the seven floor crossers in Ontario political history, including:

1. Marvin shore: Liberal to PC, 1976;
2. J. Earl McEwen: Liberal to PC, 1984;
3. David Ramsay: NDP to Liberal, 1986;
4. Tony Lupusella: NDP to Liberal, 1986;
5. Anna-Marie Castrilli: Liberal to PC, 1999;
6. Alex Cullen: Liberal to NDP, 1999; and
7. Tim Peterson: Liberal to PC, 2007.

This study will conclude with a summary of themes common to instances of floor crossing in Ontario political history, followed by an analysis of the current LAO that will speculate as to why a floor crossing has not occurred since the 2011 election, even though the razor-thin balance of power make the conditions for such an event so ripe.

## THE THEORY, LEGALITY AND HISTORY OF FLOOR CROSSING

Although crossing the floor is generally lambasted by the media and the public as a reprehensible act of betrayal and opportunism that subverts democracy, an analysis of the issue reveals that it is a complex phenomenon that warrants a deeper consideration of the theory and traditions of parliamentary democracy. By providing an overview of the concept of party

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Leblanc, "As St-Denis defects to Liberals, cracks emerge in NDP's Quebec base," *Globe and Mail* (10 January 2012), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/mp-defects-to-liberals-ndp-decries-lack-of-respect-for-democracy/article2297353/>.

<sup>4</sup> Justine Hunter, "Van Dongen crosses the floor over Clark's leadership," *Globe and Mail* (27 March 2012), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/bc-politics/van-dongen-crosses-the-floor-over-clarks-leadership/article2381860/>.

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Press, "Another PQ MNA joins new Coalition Quebec party," *CBC News* (9 January 2012), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2012/01/09/francois-rebello-joins-coalition-avenir-quebec.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Tardi, "Change of Political Allegiance in Parliamentary Life," *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 33.3 (2007): 430-431.

discipline, the competing views of the role of elected representatives in the Westminster system, and the theory, legality and history of party defections, I will show that crossing the floor is a political act that is not necessarily antithetical to parliamentary democracy.

## Party Discipline

The phenomenon of floor crossing cannot be properly discussed without first understanding the concept of party discipline in parliamentary democracy, and its evolution in Canada and Ontario. On a Westminster timescale, the very existence of parties, let alone party discipline, is a recent addition to parliamentary traditions. Indeed, the concept of party discipline represents a break from the eighteenth century view of British MP and philosopher Edmund Burke. As elucidated in his *Address to the Electors of Bristol*, Burke held that parliamentarians are the trustees of the people who rely a great deal on their own conscience, principles, and knowledge of issues to make the best decisions on behalf of their constituents and the nation. Representatives could belong to political parties and consider input from their constituents, but their ultimate actions as elected officials should be based on their own judgment on what is right and wrong.<sup>7</sup>

However, Canadian democracy has evolved in such a way that has made party loyalty far stronger than in Britain.<sup>8</sup> As recently as the 1950s, many parliamentarians viewed representation as being individualistic and had greater loyalty to Parliament and their constituents than to political parties. Over time, however, MPs and MPPs became primarily representatives of political parties, elected to implement a party platform.<sup>9</sup>

Over the years, the advantages of party discipline have become more evident for political parties. Party discipline ensures that the government has sufficient votes to pass its legislative agenda, it allows leaders to devote more time to governing than to rallying the support of party members, and it ensures the stability of the government. Opposition parties benefit from party discipline as well, as it allows them to present a strong and united alternative to the government and to prepare for the time when they may form government. In this way, political parties have overshadowed the constituency-representative role of individual parliamentarians and have come to dominate the daily workings of Canadian legislatures.<sup>10</sup>

The primacy of party discipline is further reinforced because the party, and not individual Members, has the resources to mount the expensive campaigns necessary to win modern elections. The party leadership also has a range of sanctions and incentives to induce parliamentarians to remain loyal.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps most importantly, party politics is a team game, while dissent is a deeply individual act. The desire to be part of a team and be well-liked by one's peers is often enough to discourage dissent and enforce party discipline. In the case of Ontario, party discipline is further solidified by the relatively small size of the legislature. A single vote in the 107-seat LAO is worth much more than a single vote in Westminster, where there are 650 MPs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund Burke, "Address to the Electors of Bristol" (3 November 1774).

<sup>8</sup> David E. Smith and Ian Peach, "Crossing the Floor: Two Opinions," *Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy* (Spring 2012 Newsletter): 11.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Rossignol, "Crossing the Floor and the Party System," *Backgrounders: Library of Parliament, Political and Social Affairs Division* (February 1987): 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 7, 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 12-14.

Party discipline is also helpful for voters, who know more or less the position the party, and by extension their candidate, will take on the political and legislative issues of the day. In this way, party discipline eliminates for voters much of the uncertainty around a parliamentarian's position on complex issues. The democratic trade-off is that individual politicians must almost always toe the party line instead of voting freely or in accordance with their constituents. This problem is exacerbated by the first-past-the-post system in which a representative may win his/her riding with a plurality and therefore not necessarily represent the majority of his/her constituents.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the system of party discipline is deeply entrenched in Canada's legislatures, with debate becoming increasingly polarized and partisan. One of the implications of the strength of party discipline in Canada that is particularly relevant to the topic of floor crossing is that it is virtually impossible to determine on what basis electors in a constituency vote for a particular candidate. It is likely that most people have some level of loyalty to a party and are mobilized by election campaign machines to vote for a party, but it is impossible to deny that some voters are attracted by the qualities of a local candidate, regardless of the banner under which they run.<sup>14</sup>

### **Floor Crossing in Theory and Practice**

Despite the ascendancy of party discipline in Canadian parliamentary democracy, the ability of a party's leadership to maintain caucus cohesion does not come without difficulty. The loyalty of individual caucus members can be maintained through a combination of carrots and sticks, along with constant consultation and communication among caucus members, sound management by party leadership and senior caucus members, and adherence to traditions and party principles. But in a jurisdiction as economically, regionally, and culturally diverse as Ontario, dissent within caucus is bound to surface. As highlighted by Ontario NDP House Leader Gilles Bisson, aggrieved MPPs always have the option of raising their quarrels with caucus and the party leadership. If the grievance cannot be adequately addressed, MPPs also have the option of resigning from the party and sitting as an independent, or resigning their seat altogether.<sup>15</sup> However, nothing can be more dramatic than crossing the floor.

The independence of individual Members is a cornerstone of Parliamentary tradition. Parliamentarians have the freedom to perform their duties without fear of interference. How far this freedom extends, however, is the question at the heart of floor crossing.<sup>16</sup> Does it extend so far as to allow MPPs to abandon their party and the voters who supported that party? Should a floor crosser be subject to electoral sanction, legal regulation, or ethical review? Is crossing the floor a violation of constitutional principles? Is it not possible that a political party can drift from the values and principles for which it claims to stand? Are there not times when, on important matters of war and peace, economy and environment, health and taxation, a reassessment of one's conscience and one's party is justified? As parliamentary scholar Paul Rowe asks, "Has a floor crosser betrayed his or her voters, conscience, party, all of these, or none of these?"<sup>17</sup> All of these questions illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of crossing the floor, raise the issue of to

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Rowe, "Crossing the floor: to whom are legislators responsible?" *iPolitics.ca*, February 8, 2012, <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2012/02/08/paul-rowe-crossing-the-floor-to-whom-are-legislators-responsible/>.

<sup>14</sup> Smith and Peach, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Gilles Bisson, Toronto, ON (7 May 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Smith and Peach, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Rowe, 2012.

whom exactly a legislator is responsible in a representative democracy, and frustrate any attempt to draw any conclusions on the topic of party defections.

It is difficult to generalize on the causes of crossing the floor, as each instance has its own particular set of circumstances, personal and political. But it can safely be said that crossing the floor represents a clear break with all of the ties that bind an MPP to their political party, while maintaining the MPP's representative role for his/her constituents. In most cases, MPPs defect in order to indicate, in a dramatic way, their dissatisfaction with the party leadership, more so than because another party's leadership or platform is more attractive.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Legality of Crossing the Floor**

The phenomenon of crossing the floor evokes profound feelings of betrayal and anger, and leads voters to demand accountability and justice. This raises the issue of the legality of crossing the floor, particularly in Ontario for the purposes of this study. Gregory Tardi has examined in depth the legal provisions related to changes in party allegiances. He shows that there are no provisions in Canada's Constitution that deal with loyalty to political parties from either the constitutional, electoral, parliamentary or political perspectives.

The Canada Elections Act stipulates that a candidate in an election cannot withdraw from a nomination by one party to be nominated by another party after the deadline of nominations has elapsed. The law is silent, however, on changes in party before the nomination deadline or after an election. In the event of a party defection, the Canada Elections Act can result in Elections Canada altering the payment of election expense refunds for the candidate and the political party, as well as changing the relationship between the elected candidate and the registered constituency association of the party under which the candidate ran for in the election.<sup>19</sup> But none of this speaks directly to the legality of crossing the floor.

Also noteworthy is that the constitutions of the major federal and Ontario political parties, which are quasi-legal documents, are silent on the topic of defections and changes in political allegiance. This suggests that parties themselves believe changes of allegiance are a political issue and are not to be established in encoded principles. Furthermore, the Standing Orders of the LAO do not create any rules relevant to floor crossing.<sup>20</sup> On the topic of the legality of crossing the floor, simply stated,

Whether one looks at the constitutional text, at the statutes, or at the parliamentary rules or political instruments that complement the law and that are relevant to the actions involved, the conclusion is that no system of binding rules exist which deal with the subject matter of floor-crossing.<sup>21</sup>

Tardi's analysis was confirmed in a phone interview I held with the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, who stated:

Under the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, I have no jurisdiction over the legality of either paying an MPP to cross the floor, or reprimanding an MPP for crossing the floor in order

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<sup>18</sup> Rossignol, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Tardi, 431, 432.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 432-33.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 433.

to accept a Cabinet position. This is a matter of ethics for which the voters would have to decide.<sup>22</sup>

The Integrity Commissioner did say that it is illegal for MPPs to violate the preamble of the *Members' Integrity Act*.<sup>23</sup> The preamble is sufficiently vague, however, as to allow significant discretion in interpretation.<sup>24</sup>

The silence of the law on the issue implies that crossing the floor is a matter to be decided in the political realm, through elections, not in the legal realm. However, several jurisdictions have passed, or attempted to pass, legislation to prevent, regulate, or punish floor crossers. For example, New Zealand passed legislation in 2001 that makes an MP's seat vacant if the MP ceases to be a member of the political party for which he/she was elected. The law was a reaction to an increasing political controversy over MPs changing allegiance between elections, thereby upsetting the balance of power, after the country changed its electoral system to mixed member proportional representation in 1993.<sup>25</sup>

The first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt written rules to deal with floor crossers was Manitoba. An amendment to the province's *Legislative Assembly Act* required a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) who ceases to belong to the party under which he/she was elected to sit as an independent for the remainder of his/her term. Although it prevents MLAs from joining a rival political party during the same term, it does not require the MLA to resign or force a by-election.

In the Yukon, a Private Member's Bill that mirrors the Manitoba provision made it past second reading and was sent to Committee of the Whole in May 2006, but died on the order paper when the 2006 territorial election occurred.<sup>26</sup> At the federal level, Private Member's Bills from NDP MPs Peter Stoffer in 2005<sup>27</sup> and, more recently, Mathieu Ravnagat in 2011,<sup>28</sup> attempted to force floor crossers to either sit as independents until the next general election or run in a by-election. Neither bill made any legislative progress past second reading.

In Ontario, PC MPP Sylvia Jones moved first reading of Bill 18, *An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to promote respect for voters*, on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The bill goes so

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<sup>22</sup> Phone interview with Lynn Morrison, Toronto, ON (18 April 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Service Ontario. *Member's Integrity Act*. E-Laws. (1994), [http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws\\_statutes\\_94m38\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_94m38_e.htm)

<sup>24</sup> The Preamble of the Member's Integrity Act, 1994, reads:

It is desirable to provide greater certainty in the reconciliation of the private interests and public duties of members of the Legislative Assembly, recognizing the following principles:

1. The Assembly as a whole can represent the people of Ontario most effectively if its members have experience and knowledge in relation to many aspects of life in Ontario and if they can continue to be active in their own communities, whether in business, in the practice of a profession or otherwise.
2. Members' duty to represent their constituents includes broadly representing their constituents' interests in the Assembly and to the Government of Ontario.
3. Members are expected to perform their duties of office and arrange their private affairs in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of each member, maintains the Assembly's dignity and justifies the respect in which society holds the Assembly and its members.
4. Members are expected to act with integrity and impartiality that will bear the closest scrutiny.

<sup>25</sup> Tardi, 435-440.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 434, 435

<sup>27</sup> David Gussow, "Crossing the Floor, Conflict of Interest and the Parliament of Canada Act," *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 29.2 (2006): 10.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Macleod, "How would MPPs vote on crossing ban?" *London Free Press* (November 3 2011), <http://www.lfpress.com/comment/columnists/2011/11/03/18917861.html>.

far as to require a by-election if an MPP ceases to be a member of the party under which they were elected, even if he/she chooses to sit as an independent. Bill 18 has not come up for second reading yet, but in interviews conducted on the topic, Liberal and NDP MPPs either outright rejected the bill or indicated lukewarm support for it. Sylvia Jones stated that there was widespread support for Bill 18 in the Ontario PC caucus.<sup>29</sup> The lack of multi-party support for the bill, as well as its introduction's timing amidst the current balance of power at Queen's Park, suggests that the bill was motivated not by principles or strong convictions against floor crossing, but by partisan wrangling to use legislation to prevent the Liberals from gaining a majority through party defections or resignations.

On the surface, legislation to force floor crossers to stand for re-election seems reasonable. It allows parliamentarians to retain the right to cross the floor, thereby maintaining freedom of action and independence. It also gives voters the opportunity to indicate whether or not they support their elected representative and his/her decision to cross the floor. On the other hand, such laws would only serve to strengthen party discipline, which many Canadians already believe to be too strong.<sup>30</sup> One of the themes that emerged from my interviews with current and former MPPs was that floor crossing should not be legislated; it is a political act that voters should judge at the polls.

### **Floor Crossing as a Common Phenomenon?**

Indeed, history seems to indicate that there is a certain level of acceptance among parliamentarians for floor crossing. This view is reinforced by the silence of party constitutions on the issue. Hundreds of legislators at the federal and provincial level have crossed the floor since Confederation. During the conscription crisis of 1917, twenty-one MPs changed sides in the House of Commons.<sup>31</sup> At the federal level, six percent of all MPs between 1867 and 2006 defected from their party, the first occurring less than one year after Canada's first general election. Furthermore, the act does not appear to have had an adverse impact on the careers of floor crossers. In the same 1867-2006 sample, forty-three percent of floor crossers went on to become ministers, parliamentary secretaries, or presiding officers, compared to just thirty percent of MPs who attained such office from the total population of parliamentarians.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, there are also regional trends to floor crossing in Canadian history. Discontented Creditistes and wartime Liberals give Quebec the largest number of party-switching MPs of any province since Confederation. MPs from the Western provinces also have a disproportionate tendency to cross the floor. This can be explained by Westerners' traditional sentiment of alienation from the political system dominated by central Canada, as evidenced by the emergence of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and Reform movements. Similarly, Ontario has the lowest proportion of floor crossers in Confederation.<sup>33</sup> Some interviewees for this paper suggested that party allegiances are less profound in Northern Ontario, where voters have traditionally tended to be attached to local candidates rather than political parties centred in southern Ontario.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Sylvia Jones, Toronto, ON (23 April 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Smith and Peach, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Macleod, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Tardi, 431.

<sup>33</sup> Desmond Morton, "A Note on Party Switchers," *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 29.2 (2006): 5.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Sean Conway, Toronto, ON (2 May 2012); Phone Interview with David Ramsay (2 May 2012).

Nevertheless, the frequency of floor crossing in Canadian history suggests that it is not an uncommon phenomenon. Party defections may simply be reflections of individual and group reactions to highly-emotive circumstances in a constantly shifting political landscape. Ontario's embrace of strong party discipline, along with its traditional tendency to see itself as the centre of Canadian political culture, help to explain why there have been only seven floor crossings in Ontario history.

## CASE STUDIES: FLOOR CROSSERS IN ONTARIO POLITICAL HISTORY

Now that I have established the theoretical underpinnings of party defections, I will conduct a case-by-case analysis of MPPs who have crossed the floor in Ontario history. I will demonstrate how each of these cases reflect the complexity and ambiguity of the topic, raising issues of party discipline, caucus cohesion, and the sometimes-conflicting views of the role of elected representatives in a parliamentary democracy. I will also highlight through these cases the deeply personal and emotional nature of crossing the floor, described by one Liberal MPP as “the most dangerous move in politics... It is like renouncing all of your family and friends—the political equivalent of a breakdown in your marriage.”<sup>35</sup>

### Marvin Shore: Liberal to PC, 1976

“There is nothing better than a faithful but a convert.”<sup>36</sup> – Marvin Shore, 1975.

Marvin Shore, former MPP for London North, crossed the floor from the Liberals to the PCs on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1976. His defection increased the PC government's seat count to fifty-two, while the Liberals were reduced to thirty-five and the NDP held steady at thirty-eight.

Before the 1975 campaign, Shore had been a card-carrying Tory for fifteen years, having worked on former premier John Robarts' leadership campaign in 1961.<sup>37</sup> Allegedly, he became disillusioned with the PCs, assailing Premier Bill Davis' fiscal mismanagement and claiming that the government had lost touch with the people of Ontario. In winning the Liberal nomination in London North, Shore downplayed his former association with the Tories, claiming “There is nothing better than a faithful but a convert.”<sup>38</sup> His election as a Liberal in the September 1975 election was a stunning upset in traditionally Tory London. He capitalized on London North's changing demography, picking up the immigrant vote that had tripled London's population over the previous twenty years.<sup>39</sup>

Less than a year after his election, Shore crossed the floor and re-joined the Tories, adding an extra seat to Bill Davis' minority government. He claimed that he did not feel comfortable with the Liberals as an economic conservative. Although he denied that the move was one of expediency, he also said, “I don't know what the definition is of a political opportunist. It sounds like a compliment. If it is, I accept it.”<sup>40</sup> Some observers at Queen's Park suggested that London North was the shakiest of the Liberal seats in London, and the Tories had been working hard to regain their long-held seat there. Shore likely calculated that the Davis

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Greg Sorbara, Toronto, ON (25 April 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Unsigned, “Liberals pick ex-Tory Shore for London North Campaign,” *London Free Press* (10 May 1975).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Williamson, “Liberal MPP joins Tories second time,” *Globe and Mail* (8 August 1976).

<sup>38</sup> Unsigned, *London Free Press*, 1975.

<sup>39</sup> Unsigned. *Globe and Mail* (13 September 1975).

<sup>40</sup> Williamson, August 1976.

minority would not last long, and thought his chances at re-election would be better under the PC banner.<sup>41</sup>

Constituents were unhappy, with roughly sixty percent of letters and telephone calls to his office critical of his defection. The *London Free Press* demanded that he resign his seat and run in a by-election under his new party banner.<sup>42</sup> Shore's crossing came as a shock to the Liberal caucus, as he had been one of the party's star recruits in the 1975 election and part of the Liberal sweep of the three London ridings.<sup>43</sup> Shore described his treatment from old friends and acquaintances in the Liberal caucus as cold: "It's like there's been a death. Friends don't want to look you in the eye."<sup>44</sup>

Shore was welcomed by his new party, with Premier Davis calling the switch "a source of tremendous joy," indicating that he would like to see Shore nominated as the London North PC candidate in the next election,<sup>45</sup> and taking Shore and his wife out to dinner at the Albany Club.<sup>46</sup> Shore's warm reception by the PCs angered Gordon Walker, the former Tory MPP who had lost to Shore by 2,200 votes in the September 1975 election and had then lost the PC nomination for the 1977 election to him.<sup>47</sup> London North voters rejected the PCs in the 1977 election, choosing Liberal candidate Ron Van Horne instead. Shore accepted a comfortable civil service job in 1979, amidst reports that Davis had tempted him to cross in 1976 with the promise of such an appointment in the future.<sup>48</sup>

### **J. Earl McEwen: Liberal to PC, 1984**

"J. Earl McEwen is a political hitchhiker of the first order."<sup>49</sup> – Sean Conway, 1984.

J. Earl McEwen, former MPP for the riding of Frontenac-Addington, crossed the floor from the Liberals to the Tories on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1984. *The Globe and Mail* reported that, "after 21 years of trying to get elected as a Conservative member somewhere, he finally managed to break into a Tory caucus by crossing the floor of the Ontario Legislature."<sup>50</sup> A long-time conservative, McEwen was president of a Tory riding association while he was reeve of Kingston Township and ran twice (unsuccessfully) as a federal PC candidate in the 1960s. McEwen had first run provincially in 1971 in a failed attempt as an independent in Frontenac-Addington after losing the Tory nomination. He then won the Liberal nomination by acclamation in 1973 and won the riding with a gradually decreasing share of the popular vote as a Liberal in 1975, 1977, and 1981.<sup>51</sup>

There is no evidence that the Tories had attempted to recruit McEwen, with Premier Bill Davis claiming that the decision was McEwen's own and based on his own political philosophy.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Williamson, "Turncoat MPP finds it lonely," *Globe and Mail* (26 October 1976).

<sup>43</sup> Williamson, August 1976.

<sup>44</sup> Williamson, October 1976.

<sup>45</sup> Williamson, August 1976.

<sup>46</sup> Williamson, October 1976.

<sup>47</sup> Williamson, August 1976.

<sup>48</sup> James Reaney, "Marvin Shore in NDP? Hardly!" *London Free Press* (10 December 1987).

<sup>49</sup> John Stackhouse, "McEwen is 'political hitchhiker': Liberal," *Kingston Whig-Standard* (24 May 1984).

<sup>50</sup> Orland French, "Back with the blue," *Globe and Mail* (23 May 1984).

<sup>51</sup> Robert Stephens, "Ontario MPP crosses floor to join Tories," *Globe and Mail* (23 May 1984).

McEwen said that he felt more comfortable ideologically with the PCs and that he could advance the interests of his riding better with the government.<sup>52</sup>

However, there were reports that the Frontenac-Addington PC riding association had begun searching for new candidates. Specifically, they were eyeing Sally Barnes, former chair of the Ontario Council on the Status of Women and former press secretary to Bill Davis, as a star candidate. It is likely that the aging McEwen saw that the chances of the Liberals forming government were slim and decided to cross the floor so as to become part of the PC government and secure the Tory nomination in Frontenac-Addington before Barnes was approached.<sup>53</sup> A source close to Davis at the time admitted that the PCs found McEwen's crossing and securing of the nomination disconcerting, as they wanted to get Barnes elected and fast-track her into Cabinet. However, McEwen was accepted into the Tory caucus with applause after crossing.<sup>54</sup>

The Liberals were not particularly concerned about McEwen's defection. The move did not in any way affect the balance of power in the Legislature. McEwen was known as "the absent member for Frontenac-Addington" around Queen's Park, having spoken just once in the House during his terms as MPP.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, he had frequently made comments in jest to senior Liberals that he was going to quit the party and run for the Tories.<sup>56</sup> McEwen ran in the 1985 election and lost to the Liberal candidate Larry South by 2,387 votes. The Liberals said the best thing they had going for them was McEwen's reputation as a turncoat.<sup>57</sup>

### **David Ramsay: NDP to Liberal, 1986**

"To this day, Bob Rae scowls a bit when he hears Ramsay's name."<sup>58</sup> – Greg Sorbara, 2012.

David Ramsay, former MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane, left the NDP to join the Liberals on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1986. He was the first NDP MPP to leave the Ontario caucus by defection to another party. He is also one of the few floor crossers to get re-elected under their new party banner. On top of re-election, he quickly became a Cabinet Minister in David Peterson's government and went on to serve as a Liberal MPP until 2011.

I had the privilege of speaking with David Ramsay directly about this case. He explained that he had always felt that he didn't belong ideologically to the NDP. He felt trapped by the NDP's dogmatic positions on unions and labour rights. He also had a friendly personal relationship with David Peterson and liked the Liberals' policies toward Northern Ontario, where people felt alienated from Queen's Park at the time. He began seriously thinking about switching parties as early as January 1986, but his wife, Kathy, and Robin Sears, principal assistant to Bob Rae at the time, dissuaded him.<sup>59</sup> Members of the Liberal riding association in Timiskaming also approached Ramsay's campaign chairman in 1986 about making the move.<sup>60</sup> In September of that year, he met with Liberal Education Minister Sean Conway, who advised Ramsay to sit as

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<sup>52</sup> Nick Martin, "Silent Liberal joins Tories," *London Free Press* (23 May 1984).

<sup>53</sup> French, 1984.

<sup>54</sup> Martin, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> Harvey Schachter, "'Tis the season for the birds," *Kingston Whig-Standard* (25 May 1984).

<sup>56</sup> French, 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Dowd, "Most notorious turncoat," *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal* (29 May 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Sorbara, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Christie, "No fanfare as new Liberal takes seat," *Toronto Star* (October 17, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> Alan Christie, "Cabinet job didn't figure in defection, MPP says," *Toronto Star* (October 7, 1986).

an independent and seek the Liberal nomination in Timiskaming for the next election, adding that crossing the floor was the kind of thing that gives politicians a bad name.<sup>61</sup>

When he eventually crossed in October 1986, Ramsay said that he had been finding it increasingly difficult to toe the party line. He was angered because businessmen in his riding would approach the provincial government directly or through a lawyer when they wanted something instead of going through him.<sup>62</sup> The watershed moment occurred when the Ontario wheel-trans workers went on strike, leaving many disabled people stranded in their homes. The NDP refused to vote them back to work, and Ramsay felt that they should have some sympathy for the disabled instead of clinging to their intransigent unionist views. Ramsay explained to me that he had initially become involved with the NDP in 1982 at the behest of close friends and did not fundamentally understand what he was getting into. At heart, he was a liberal and felt more aligned ideologically with the Liberal Party, which allowed him to be flexible and pragmatic in making policy decisions.<sup>63</sup>

Ramsay's crossing came amidst widespread speculation that the Peterson government would name him Minister of Northern Development and Mines, as they were lacking seats in the North after René Fontaine, Liberal MPP for Cochrane North, was forced to resign due to conflict-of-interest charges.<sup>64</sup> No one I interviewed could confirm that Ramsay had been offered a cabinet position, but most MPPs at the time, as well as the media, believed it was part of the deal. The addition of Ramsay to the Liberal ranks did not immediately affect the balance of power in the Legislature, as the two-year Liberal-NDP accord continued until the 1987 election. Ramsay promised not to accept a Cabinet position in his first few months as a Liberal were it offered to him, saying it would be unfair to Members who had served with the Liberals for years.<sup>65</sup>

Ramsay was initially judged harshly for his defection. Lorrie Goldstein called him a "crass opportunist... who let his ego get in the way of his loyalty" and who was "beneath contempt."<sup>66</sup> Bob Rae and other members of the NDP severely criticized Ramsay, one former caucus mate going so far as to call him early one morning to tell him he would never speak to him again. Rae, who was in China on a trade mission when he found out about the crossing, was particularly irate because Ramsay had participated in a top-level NDP strategy session less than a month earlier and would be able to reveal the discussion to the Liberals.<sup>67</sup> The NDP riding association in Timiskaming passed a motion calling for Ramsay to pay back the \$28,000 used to elect him as an NDP Member.<sup>68</sup> Ramsay himself emphasized the severe emotional and personal distress of the crossing and the erosion of friendships, both in his hometown and at Queen's Park, as a result of his crossing.<sup>69</sup>

The Liberals welcomed Ramsay with open arms after holding a caucus meeting to determine if he would be a suitable ideological fit for the party. Peterson extended his trust to Ramsay and expressed sympathy for the emotional anguish Ramsay was experiencing at the

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<sup>61</sup> Conway, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Christie, "No fanfare," 1986.

<sup>63</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> P.J. Wilson, "Ramsay will turn down cabinet offers," *North Bay Nugget* (October 7, 1986).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Lorrie Goldstein, "Grits pluck a turkey," *Toronto Sun* (October 7, 1986).

<sup>67</sup> Christie, "No fanfare," 1986.

<sup>68</sup> Gary Struthers, "Give us back the money, riding NDPers tell Ramsay," *North Bay Nugget* (October 10, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

time.<sup>70</sup> The only Liberal that was irritated was George Lefebvre, the mayor of Latchford and a member of the Timiskaming Liberal riding association who was seeking the Liberal nomination for the next election. Eventually, in a show of party unity, Lefebvre supported Ramsay in the 1987 election campaign.<sup>71</sup>

Although the Liberals received just ten percent of the popular vote in Timiskaming in 1985, Ramsay won the 1987 election by over 4,000 votes. In view of the unsuccessful track record of floor crossers winning re-election, Ramsay credits his local popularity, as well as the traditional tendency for Northerners to be attracted to the candidate rather than the party.<sup>72</sup> His victory is also likely explained by the popularity of the Peterson government at the time, particularly its policies in Northern Ontario.<sup>73</sup> Ramsay was made Minister of Correctional Services in October 1987, and went on to serve in cabinet for northern development, agriculture and food, natural resources, and aboriginal affairs before ending his political career in 2011. He also ran for the Liberal leadership in 1992.

### **Tony Lupusella: NDP to Liberal, 1986**

"I felt hurt and rejected by the New Democratic Party and now it's me that is rejecting the New Democratic Party."<sup>74</sup> – Tony Lupusella, 1986.

Tony Lupusella, first elected as the NDP candidate for Dovercourt in 1975, followed in David Ramsay's footsteps and crossed from the NDP to the Liberals during the same legislative session. Lupusella's defection, which came after recurring bouts of depression and a nasty failed Dovercourt NDP nomination battle in August 1986, gave the Liberals fifty-one seats in the Legislature, the same as the governing Tories, but insignificant in the context of the Liberal-NDP accord.

Lupusella was hospitalized during 1981 after having a nervous breakdown and was frequently absent from the House throughout his tenure as MPP due to depression and mental problems.<sup>75</sup> When a seat-redistribution split his riding of Dovercourt, he was forced to run against his caucus mate and NDP House Leader Ross McClellan for the nomination. Lupusella claimed that Rae had asked him to retire from politics because of his mental illness. When Lupusella refused, the NDP establishment threw its support behind McClellan in Dovercourt for the August 1986 nomination. In a "dirty campaign" during which McClellan allegedly used Lupusella's mental problems against him and that culminated in a packed NDP riding association nomination meeting that was marred by fist fights in the crowd, McClellan came out on top, with 348 votes to Lupusella's 290.<sup>76</sup>

After losing the nomination, Lupusella accused the party of hypocrisy, saying the same party that championed the rights of the disabled sidelined him because of his mental problems.<sup>77</sup> Rae claimed that the party had treated Lupusella with "compassion and solidarity", and had

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Unsigned, "MPP David Ramsay to carry Grit banner for Temiskaming," *North Bay Nugget* (March 26, 1987).

<sup>72</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Conway, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Mark Kennedy, "Toronto MPP quits NDP, hoping to join Liberals," *Ottawa Citizen* (18 December 1986).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Stanley Oziewicz, "Liberals open ranks to NDP defector," *Globe and Mail* (14 January 1987).

offered to arrange a public sector job for him.<sup>78</sup> His anger at the NDP eventually led him to defect in December 1986. The Liberals under Peterson reluctantly embraced Lupusella, with particular reservations coming from the Dovercourt Liberal riding association. Former Liberal candidate Gil Gillespie had already announced his intention to contest the Liberal nomination, along with former Liberal MPP Danny de Monte.<sup>79</sup>

The Liberal nomination contest in summer 1987 was plagued by controversy. There was a sense of illegitimacy in Lupusella's candidacy among Liberal stalwarts, especially since he had narrowly defeated Gillespie as an NDP candidate by just seventy-seven votes in the 1985 provincial election.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Lupusella's opponents accused him of signing up members from outside the riding, former NDP members, and even false names and dead people. A riding association official even warned that the association executive will resign en masse if any of the names submitted in Tony Lupusella's membership drive were permitted to stand. Gillespie's supporters claimed that Lupusella's "racist" recruitment of the Italian community undermined the ethnic diversity cultivated by the Liberals. They also charged that the Premier was meddling in the nomination contest to favour Lupusella.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, Lupusella emerged victorious in the nomination contest, which his opponents called a sham. During his short acceptance speech, Gillespie supporters taunted him by chanting "NDP, NDP!" Gillespie refused to shake Lupusella's hand after the nomination.<sup>82</sup>

Lupusella then went on to defeat his former NDP caucus mate Ross McClellan in the 1987 provincial election. Observers attributed Lupusella's victory to the mass popularity of the Peterson government, the mobilization of the Italian community in Dovercourt behind Lupusella, and the bleeding of the PC vote to the Liberals.<sup>83</sup> Three years later, Lupusella was handily defeated by the NDP candidate in the 1990 provincial election. Lupusella's case characterizes the bitter tensions that can arise between floor crossers and their new parties. It also raises the question of the effect of riding redistributions on party defections, which warrants further study.

### **Anna-Marie Castrilli: Liberal to PC, 1999**

"The dogs may bark, but the caravan moves on."<sup>84</sup> – Dalton McGuinty, 1999.

Anna-Marie Castrilli announced on May 5th, 1999 that she would cross the floor from the Liberals to the PCs, the same day that then-Premier Mike Harris called an election. First elected as the MPP for Downsview in 1995, her defection came after the riding was eliminated through redistribution, forcing her to compete for the Liberal nomination in the new riding of York Centre against caucus mate Monte Kwinter. York Centre is made up of sixty-nine percent of the old Downsview riding and sixty-seven percent of Kwinter's old Wilson Heights riding. Dalton McGuinty decreed that nomination disputes arising from redistribution would be decided by seniority, which meant Kwinter, a fourteen-year veteran, would run in York Centre. The

<sup>78</sup> Unsigned, "A human tragedy," *Ottawa Citizen* (23 December 1986).

<sup>79</sup> Oziewicz, 1987.

<sup>80</sup> William Walker, "NDP defector Lupusella faces tough Liberal battle," *Toronto Star* (28 June 1987).

<sup>81</sup> Stanley Oziewicz, "Lupusella is accused of unfair practices in nomination contest," *Globe and Mail* (27 June 1987).

<sup>82</sup> D'Arcy McGovern, "Lupusella wins nomination at stormy Liberal meeting," *Toronto Star* (29 June 1987).

<sup>83</sup> Walter Stefaniuk, "Party surge carries Lupusella to win in battle of incumbents," *Toronto Star* (11 September 1987).

<sup>84</sup> Robert Benzie, "McGuinty opens campaign with MPP defecting," *National Post* (6 May 1999).

Liberals allegedly tried to compromise and offered Castrilli other Toronto ridings, but she was adamant about York Centre.<sup>85</sup>

Castrilli claimed she had been inspired after reading the PC election platform “Mike Harris’ Plan to Keep Ontario on the Right Track”, prompting her to abandon the Liberals.<sup>86</sup> Few at Queen’s Park believed her. Throughout her previous term, Castrilli had been an outspoken critic of Harris, especially on health care and education. Only weeks earlier, Castrilli accused Harris of cutting essential programs and valuing money over people.<sup>87</sup> The timing of her defection was damaging for McGuinty, who was seen at the time as a ditherer who was having difficulty holding his party together.<sup>88</sup>

This helps to explain why the PCs welcomed Castrilli when she sought the Tory nomination in Parkdale-High Park. Although Harris and the PCs were initially reluctant to accept a Liberal who had so scathingly attacked their policies, she successfully won the nomination. They rallied behind Castrilli in the lead-up to the 1999 election, with Tory stalwart Joe Clark and Harris himself visiting Parkdale-High Park to bolster her campaign.<sup>89</sup> The PCs saw the riding as a particularly desirable battleground, as Castrilli was pitted against Gerard Kennedy. However, Kennedy succeeded in winning the riding in the 1999 election with nearly fifty-five percent of the vote, compared to Castrilli’s thirty.

A power struggle within the Liberal establishment could explain Castrilli’s defection to the PCs. Greg Sorbara referred to Castrilli as a “princess” who did so poorly in the 1996 Liberal leadership race “that she was demoralized.”<sup>90</sup> Castrilli had run for the Liberal leadership race in 1996, eventually bowing out and throwing her support behind Dalton McGuinty.<sup>91</sup> Her support was crucial to McGuinty’s leadership nomination, as her votes decisively undercut frontrunner Gerard Kennedy and shunned fellow Italian-Canadian Joe Cordiano. Kwinter and his supporters had worked to nominate Kennedy. It is possible that Castrilli viewed McGuinty’s decision to make Kwinter the candidate for York Centre instead of her as a snub.<sup>92</sup> Her feeling of injustice was exacerbated by the fact that Monte Kwinter’s son, Richard, was York Centre’s riding association president and decided when a nomination vote was held.<sup>93</sup> Castrilli declined to be interviewed for this research paper, explaining that she had been asked many times to speak on the issue of her defection and has always declined and that her

decision was a private one based in large part on a feeling of disassociation from a Liberal Party that changed from the one that (she) joined. To explain the details leading up to (her) decision would require revealing facts about the workings of the Ontario Liberal caucus and the policies and practices of the Liberal Party of Ontario during (her) tenure, something which (she is) loathe to do at this present time.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>85</sup> John Gray, “Ex-Liberal Castrilli gives grief to old party,” *Globe and Mail* (May 8 1999).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Eric Dowd, “Stick to one party or the other,” *Canadian Press* (25 July 1999).

<sup>88</sup> Christina Blizzard, “York Centre: Blood and red ink,” *Toronto Sun* (12 June 1998).

<sup>89</sup> Charlie Gillis, “Deserter Castrilli is coolly received,” *National Post* (29 May 1999).

<sup>90</sup> Sorbara, 2012.

<sup>91</sup> James Rusk and Wallace Immen, “MPP quits Liberals to enter Tory race,” *Globe and Mail* (6 May 1999).

<sup>92</sup> Gray, 1999.

<sup>93</sup> Enzo Di Matteo, “A sad end to budding career,” *Now Magazine* (28 January 1999).

<sup>94</sup> Email from Anna-Marie Castrilli (18 April 2012).

This is further indication of the deeply personal and emotional character of floor crossing. Like Lupusella's case, it highlights the need for further study on the effect of riding redistributions on party defections.

### Alex Cullen: Liberal to NDP, 1999

"(Alex Cullen) is in danger of becoming the Ben Johnson of Ontario politics—he's prepared to run anywhere at anytime against anybody for anybody. I wouldn't be surprised if next week he decided he was going to run in PEI at a horsetrack against a car and another person." – Dalton McGuinty, 1998.<sup>95</sup>

Alex Cullen won the riding of Ottawa West for the Liberals with fifty-three percent of the vote in a 1997 by-election prompted by the resignation of Bob Chiarelli to become Regional Chair of Ottawa-Carleton. His time as a Liberal MPP was brief, as he failed to secure the Liberal nomination in the new riding of Ottawa West-Nepean in September 1998. He was expelled from the Liberal caucus in October 1998 and sat as an independent for a month before crossing the floor to the NDP on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1998.

Cullen was an outspoken and independent-minded MPP. Rosario Marchese described him as a "pain in the ass for the Liberals".<sup>96</sup> He was the only parliamentarian in all of Canada to vote against the non-binding, largely-symbolic Calgary Declaration that would affirm Quebec's unique position in Canada. This irked many of his Liberal colleagues,<sup>97</sup> and Cullen claims that his position on the Declaration mobilized prominent Ottawa Liberals, including the McGuinty and Chiarelli families, to find a candidate in the newly-created riding of Ottawa West-Nepean that would take the nomination instead of him. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1998, Rick Chiarelli, a Nepean Councillor and nephew of Bob Chiarelli, won the Liberal nomination 602-385.<sup>98</sup>

Cullen claimed that a "cabal" of Grits rigged the nomination to get rid of him, and began openly suggesting he would run in Ottawa West-Nepean as an independent or seek the nomination of another party.<sup>99</sup> In response, McGuinty expelled Cullen from the Liberal caucus in October 1998, partly in an effort to show decisiveness and maintain party unity in the lead-up to the 1999 election.<sup>100</sup> After sitting as an independent for a month, Cullen crossed the floor to the NDP, alleging that they had the "better message for voters unhappy with the Harris government's slash-and-burn policies" and that they had "tapped into the pulse of the public." He also announced that he would seek the Ottawa West-Nepean NDP nomination.<sup>101</sup>

The Liberals responded to Cullen's crossing nastily. He was described as the "archetypal political opportunist", a "political whore", and as being "in danger of becoming the Ben Johnson of Ontario politics... prepared to run anywhere at anytime against anybody for anybody."<sup>102</sup> Howard Hampton and the NDP welcomed Cullen, who went on to handily win the Ottawa West-Nepean NDP nomination by a landslide in January 1999. Sean Conway suggested that Cullen's

<sup>95</sup> Richard Brennan, "Cullen hailed, savaged as MPP crosses to NDP: Liberal outcast called 'whore' by seatmates," *The Ottawa Citizen* (November 24, 1998).

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Rosario Marchese, Toronto, ON (4 May 2012).

<sup>97</sup> Joel Ruimy, "Liberal party dispute leads to MPP's expulsion," *Toronto Star* (October 21, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> Ken Gray, "Cullen considers run as independent: MPP believes Calgary Declaration was his undoing," *The Ottawa Citizen* (September 19, 1998.)

<sup>99</sup> James Wallace, "Sack 'stab in the back?'," *Toronto Sun* (October 21, 1998).

<sup>100</sup> Ian Urquhart, "McGuinty shows his decisive side," *The Toronto Star* (October 22, 1998).

<sup>101</sup> Brennan, 1998.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

crossing was not opportunistic, but more a function of his independent-mindedness and his leftist leanings. Knowing that the NDP would never get elected in Ottawa West-Nepean, he saw crossing the floor as the means to an end.<sup>103</sup> Gilles Bisson defended Cullen, noting that he has been very active in the NDP since 1999 and helped several NDP Members get elected.<sup>104</sup>

Ironically, in the 1999 provincial election, neither Alex Cullen nor Rick Chiarelli came out on top. PC candidate Gary Guzzo handily won the seat, reinforcing the trend of floor crossers not getting re-elected. Cullen later returned to Ottawa municipal politics.

### **Tim Peterson: Liberal to PC, 2007**

"It's different than any old caucus member, isn't it?" – Deb Matthews, 2007.<sup>105</sup>

The most recent case of floor crossing at Queen's Park came in March 2007, when Andrew T. Peterson (known as Tim), the brother of former premier David Peterson, defected from the Liberals and joined the PCs. Tim Peterson won Mississauga South in 2003 by just 234 votes, the first Liberal to capture the riding since Confederation. He served in the McGuinty government as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Tourism and later to the Minister of Health.<sup>106</sup> Given the Peterson family's deep Liberal history, the crossing shocked Queen's Park.

Tim Peterson claimed that the Liberal government was not being responsive to caucus members and to the needs of Mississauga. He was also unhappy with Liberal energy policy, which was unclear on building new nuclear power plants and reviving the possibility of the Lakeview coal plant being converted into a gas-fired electricity generator.<sup>107</sup> Peterson's defection came amidst rising signs of trouble for the Liberals. Veteran Ottawa MPP Richard Patten had recently announced he would not be seeking re-election in October 2007, complaining about the Toronto-centric Liberals leaving him out of Cabinet. Furthermore, the Liberals had suffered two humiliating by-election defeats to the NDP and were plagued by the scandal involving fraudulent lottery ticket winnings by retailers.<sup>108</sup>

It is likely that Peterson, like other Liberals who had been elected in 2003, was upset that McGuinty had left him out of Cabinet, instead promoting rookie Michael Chan, who had just been elected in a February 2007 by-election. Peterson was also allegedly offended after McGuinty kept him waiting for a meeting and then cut the meeting short.<sup>109</sup> Peterson's 2003 election in Mississauga South was seen as a major triumph for the Liberals, and this, combined with his family's prominence, led Peterson to believe that he deserved a spot in Cabinet.

Furthermore he likely believed that the PCs were going to win the election and form government in October 2007, and thought that crossing the floor would land him in PC leader John Tory's Cabinet.<sup>110</sup> Although Peterson had a healthy relationship with John Tory, the PC leader professed that he neither made commitments to allay Peterson's concerns about Mississauga and energy policy, nor promised him a place in Cabinet.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Conway, 2012.

<sup>104</sup> Bisson, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Benzie and Rob Ferguson, "A Tory named Peterson?" *Toronto Star* (30 March 2007).

<sup>106</sup> Murray Campbell, "Defection of Liberal MPP muddies McGuinty's waters," *Globe and Mail* (30 March 2007).

<sup>107</sup> Benzie and Ferguson.

<sup>108</sup> April Lindgren., "Disenchanted Peterson to run for Tories," *National Post* (30 March 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Ian Urquhart, "One slight too many," *Toronto Star* (30 March 2007).

<sup>110</sup> Sorbara, 2012; Bisson, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Lindgren, 2007.

Although Peterson sat as an independent until the House disbanded for the October 2007 election, he immediately made it clear that he would seek the PC nomination in Mississauga South. John Tory said that Peterson wanted to cross the floor and sit as a PC Member immediately, but he asked him to wait, noting the need for fairness and respect to the voters and the parties involved.<sup>112</sup>

The Liberals reacted with disappointment. Although there was general sentiment that Peterson had betrayed his party and his philosophy and was acting selfishly,<sup>113</sup> the Liberal response was notably measured. After desperately trying to convince his brother to change his mind, David Peterson said that “(Tim’s) his own man and he makes his own decisions. It’s not something I agree with, but he decides these things.”<sup>114</sup> Premier McGuinty stated that he was “disappointed to learn the news about Tim, but (has) always said what (the Liberal government is) doing here is bigger than any one individual.”<sup>115</sup>

What I find interesting about Peterson’s case is the softer tone of the Liberal response. Their relatively moderate expressions of disappointment were far different than the derogatory barrage that greeted Alex Cullen when he crossed. The measured response is likely explained by Peterson’s Liberal history and family. As stated above, he was the brother of former Premier David Peterson. His other brother was former federal Liberal cabinet minister Jim Peterson. Furthermore, David Peterson’s sister-in-law, Deb Matthews, is the MPP for London North Centre and past president of the Ontario Liberal Party. She acknowledged that the crossing has caused turmoil within the family.<sup>116</sup> The case further serves to illustrate the deeply emotional and personal impacts of political betrayal.

Tim Peterson secured the PC candidacy in Mississauga South in April 2007. Tories in the riding were irritated that a prominent Liberal had become the PC candidate without a nomination process, as three other local leaders had spent months preparing their campaign, knocking on doors and selling memberships. One aspiring candidate, Effie Triantafilopoulos, who party insiders said had the PC leadership’s blessings, had even quit her job as Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children Canada.<sup>117</sup> Like so many floor crossers before him, Peterson lost his seat in the 2007 election, in a race that was largely fuelled by his defection six months earlier.<sup>118</sup> Charles Sousa soundly defeated Peterson to recapture Mississauga South for the Liberals.

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

It is difficult to draw any robust conclusions from an analysis of the seven floor crossings in Ontario political history. However, it is possible to summarize some general truths about this dramatic phenomenon in parliamentary democracy.

- Crossing the floor must be understood in the context of the “team” nature of party politics. Politicians may think they are elected because of their appeal as individuals, but the reality is that, in modern Canadian parliamentary democracy, they are elected because of the party to which they belong. Although there is a high level of acceptance among

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<sup>112</sup> Benzie and Ferguson, 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Lindgren, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Benzie and Ferguson, 2007.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Linda Leatherdale, “Peterson’s Tory coronation leaves bitter taste,” *Toronto Sun* (18 April 2007).

<sup>118</sup> Megan Ogilvie, “Rookie tops ex-Liberal Peterson,” *Toronto Star* (11 October 2007).

parliamentarians for floor crossing as a rare but important part of parliamentary democracy,<sup>119</sup> it is largely seen as unimaginable to most Members. Most MPPs would attempt to effect change within their caucus, sit as an independent, or resign from politics altogether if they were so dissatisfied with their party. Sean Conway noted that there is a certain “tribalism” about politics, in which “you need to go to the wall for your team and they need to know you’re willing to.” Crossing the floor is a “fundamental violation of trust... that goes to the core of our political morality.”<sup>120</sup>

- Crossing the floor is a deeply personal and emotional experience that evokes profound feelings of betrayal and anger and tears apart lifelong friendships. Interviewees and secondary sources for this paper frequently used metaphors of friendship, family, or marriage to explain party unity and crossing the floor. In some cases, friendships that ended decades ago due to floor crossings have still not been patched up. For Rosario Marchese, when it comes to floor crossers, “There is no degree of acceptance. They are hated by their colleagues forever.”<sup>121</sup>
- All of the Ontario cases involved a Member either leaving or joining the Liberal Party. This can partially be explained by the fact that, by definition, the Liberals are a centrist party, able to accommodate a diversity of views on both the left and right of the political spectrum. Furthermore, the Liberal Party has tended to be either the government or the government-in-waiting during the time period covered in this paper. If floor crossers are always at least partially motivated by ambition and power, it follows that a party in power (or close to power) will be more likely to be involved in a floor crossing. This view is reaffirmed by the fact that five of the seven defectors in Ontario left opposition parties to join the governing party. The NDP takes a different view, suggesting that people who cross the floor lack ideological grounding. NDP House Leader Gilles Bisson argues that “the Liberals are political whores. It’s all about winning power for them. It doesn’t matter where on the spectrum they govern.”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, NDP MPP Rosario Marchese claims “The Liberals are a party of people without principles. They are opportunists who like power and can move left or right when it suits them. This trait makes Liberals more likely to be floor crossers... ‘Opportunism is all about me’.”<sup>123</sup> As stated by David Ramsay, the Liberal Party permits solutions to be proposed from both the left and the right, while the NDP is rigid in its ideology.<sup>124</sup> Whatever one’s perspective, the Liberal Party is involved in all of the cases of floor crossing in Ontario political history, while most individual floor-crossers left an opposition party to join the government. This suggests that crossing the floor is at least in part about lust for government and power, and maximizing the chances of retaining one’s seat.
- There are no universal reasons that drive parliamentarians’ decisions to cross the floor. In the words of Greg Sorbara, “there are as many political motivations as there are MPPs.”<sup>125</sup> Floor crossings occur due to a combination of ambition, self-interest, personal dissatisfaction, principles, and philosophical and ideological convictions. What is

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<sup>119</sup> Tardi, 431.

<sup>120</sup> Conway, 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Marchese, 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Bisson, 2012.

<sup>123</sup> Marchese, 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

<sup>125</sup> Sorbara, 2012.

common to all of them, however, is that the floor crossers themselves *believe* that they are doing the right thing. Even if a floor crosser *thinks* that he/she is defecting out of principle, they will be *perceived* as opportunistic and selfish. And “in politics, perception is more important than reality.”<sup>126</sup>

- Riding redistributions, and the nomination battles that they subsequently produce, may be linked to crossing the floor. Only two of the seven cases in this study occurred in the context of a riding redistribution, so it is difficult to conclude that they directly *cause* Members to cross the floor. But they do force Members to compete with caucus mates for something they feel they have already earned, and highlight the conflict between loyalty to party, loyalty to one’s constituents, and personal ambitions. The effect of riding redistributions on party defections, at both the provincial and federal level, warrants further study.
- The popular belief in the media and amongst parliamentarians is that floor-crossers lose when they try to get re-elected. This belief proved to be true for five of the seven cases in this study, with David Ramsay and Tony Lupusella countering the trend. Both of their re-elections, however, are at least partially explained by the popularity of the David Peterson government in the 1987 election. In Ramsay’s case, Northern Ontario’s traditional detachment from the partisan politics of southern Ontario and attachment to strong local candidates may partially explain his continued popularity after crossing the floor. In the 1985 election, Ramsay captured nearly 11,000 votes running for the NDP, while the Liberal candidate received just over 2,000. In 1987, running as a Liberal, Ramsay still captured over 10,000 votes. These numbers suggest the voters of Timiskaming cast their ballots for David Ramsay, not the Liberals or NDP.

## CROSSING THE FLOOR IN THE 40<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO?

My original inspiration for researching this topic came when the October 2011 election in Ontario left the Liberals one seat shy of a majority government. The rewards of attracting a single member from the opposition parties to cross the floor are significant. The Liberals would have sufficient votes in the House to unilaterally implement their political and legislative agenda. Although a floor crosser would face particularly harsh scrutiny for fundamentally altering the balance of power in the Legislature, I suspected that a floor crossing would be more likely than in previous seat-count scenarios. Why has a floor crossing not occurred in the 40<sup>th</sup> LAO?

The Liberals have definitely made overtures to NDP and PC MPPs. A January *Toronto Star* article reported that at least two NDP MPPs and two PC MPPs had been approached.<sup>127</sup> Rosario Marchese informed me that the Liberals had offered him a Cabinet position to cross.<sup>128</sup> Gilles Bisson explicitly told me that, not only had the Liberals offered him a Cabinet position, but had made overtures to the entire NDP caucus, and many PC MPPs.<sup>129</sup>

The Liberals denied these reports, although they would welcome a floor crosser. Greg Sorbara stated that the Liberals are not interested in floor crossing, as the message from voters in October was that none of the three parties should be allowed to govern the province unimpeded. The Liberals are better off governing in a minority situation than as a razor-thin majority. Unlike

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<sup>126</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

<sup>127</sup> Benzie, 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Marchese, 2012.

<sup>129</sup> Bisson, 2012.

the Peterson Liberals in 1986, they are a mature and experienced government that knows how to manage a minority. In fact, there are some “far-right, tea-party, libertarian” PC Members that they would refuse even if they wanted to cross the floor.<sup>130</sup> Instead of enticing a floor crosser, the Liberal government has negotiated and compromised with the opposition parties to make the minority Parliament work. There is recognition among Liberals, especially left-of-centre ones, that they are able to work with the NDP

Furthermore, both of the opposition parties see themselves on the upswing and do not want to betray their caucus mates. The threat of an election is constantly on the horizon, and given the electoral record of floor crossers, switching sides is not in an individual MPP’s interest.<sup>131</sup> They are better off waiting for the next election and trying to win power.

There are other potential explanations for why Queen’s Park has not seen a floor crossing since the October 2011 election. Firstly, the public’s tolerance for political gamesmanship today is much lower than forty, or even twenty, years ago.<sup>132</sup> A floor crosser would be absolutely lampooned in the press. Similarly, the Liberals need to be careful with wooing defectors or triggering by-elections, as doing so risks making the public see them as willing to do anything to get a majority.<sup>133</sup> This problem is exacerbated by the modern media. The sensational and instantaneous nature of the media makes it easier for voters to be informed and mobilized around clever political messaging.<sup>134</sup>

Secondly, after high-profile and particularly controversial floor crossers at the federal level in recent years, such as David Emerson<sup>135</sup> and Belinda Stronach<sup>136</sup>, the public better understands the phenomenon. This, in part, has contributed to the public’s disillusionment with politicians. If a parliamentarian is going to cross the floor, he/she “better have a damn good reason.”<sup>137</sup> In the context of the Ontario Legislature, after such a divisive election and during such difficult economic times for Ontarians, a floor crosser would be labelled as particularly opportunistic and untrustworthy.

Thirdly, the absence of a floor-crossing in Ontario’s 40<sup>th</sup> Assembly may be explained by the increasing polarization of Canadian politics and the fierce rallying of voters along party lines. The ideological divide between each party is perhaps too great to reconcile. The PCs have become the party of rural Ontario, outraged by years of the Toronto-based McGuinty government, resolutely opposed to its big-spending record, and committed to austerity measures reminiscent of Mike Harris’ government. The NDP, meanwhile, significantly increased its seat count in October and is enjoying a surge of support from the growing popularity of the federal NDP. They have presented themselves as the only progressive, leftist alternative to a Liberal Party that now has to practice harsh fiscal restraint to eliminate the deficit. For the two opposition parties, their supporters’ ideological connection is strong, and they are impatient after nearly ten years of Liberal government. In such polarized times, betraying one’s party is

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<sup>130</sup> Sorbara, 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Conway, 2012.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Bisson, 2012.

<sup>135</sup> Unsigned, “Former Liberal David Emerson defects to Tories,” *CTV News* (6 February 2006). [http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20060206/emerson\\_defection\\_060206/](http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20060206/emerson_defection_060206/).

<sup>136</sup> Unsigned., “Conservative Stronach joins Liberals,” *CBC News* (18 February 2005). <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2005/05/17/stronach-liberals050517.html>.

<sup>137</sup> Ramsay, 2012.

unimaginable. In the words of Rosario Marchese, an opposition MPP has not joined the Liberals simply because “Tories are Tories” and “the NDP is the NDP.”<sup>138</sup>

Finally, the Liberals may be positioning themselves to capture a majority without enticing a floor crosser. On April 27<sup>th</sup>, 22-year Tory veteran MPP Elizabeth Witmer resigned her Kitchener-Waterloo seat. McGuinty offered her a public appointment at Ontario’s Workplace Safety Insurance Board and she accepted,<sup>139</sup> meaning a by-election must be called within six months. A Liberal victory in Kitchener-Waterloo would give the Liberals a de facto majority. Although a by-election has not yet been called, a recent poll projected a seven-point Liberal lead in the riding.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, the Liberals are actively courting other MPPs to accept public service appointments. They have identified discontented opposition MPPs that represent ridings considered winnable and offered them cushy public service jobs if they resign their seat.<sup>141</sup> It would not be surprising if a second seat in the Ontario Legislature becomes vacant in the coming months.

The exceptional circumstances of Queen’s Park’s 40<sup>th</sup> Legislature initially led me to believe that the conditions were ripe for the eighth floor crossing in Ontario political history. However, an analysis of the history, theory and legality of floor crossing and the seven cases of party defections in Ontario suggests that this dramatic phenomenon in parliamentary democracy is not in the cards. However, Queen’s Park observers should bear in mind that the floor crossings of the past few decades, from Marvin Shore in 1976 to Tim Peterson in 2007, also came unexpectedly and will inevitably happen again. As long as the conflicts between an MPP’s loyalty to his/her party, constituents, and conscience exist in parliamentary democracy, so will the phenomenon of floor crossing.

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<sup>138</sup> Marchese, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Babbage, “Elizabeth Witmer: Tory Resignation Opens Door to Liberal Majority in Ontario,” *Huffington Post* (27 April 2012). [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/04/27/elizabeth-witmer-quits-resigns-liberal-majority-ontario\\_n\\_1459697.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/04/27/elizabeth-witmer-quits-resigns-liberal-majority-ontario_n_1459697.html).

<sup>140</sup> Robert Benzie, “Poll: Liberals have shot at long-held Tory seat in byelection,” *Toronto Star* (3 May 2012). <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/1172087--poll-liberals-have-shot-at-long-held-tory-seat-in-byelection>.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Benzie, “Liberals courting Tory and NDP MPPs to resign to force more by-elections,” *Toronto Star* (4 May 2012). <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1173415--liberals-courting-tory-and-ndp-mpps-to-resign-to-force-more-by-elections>.

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