



THE PEP

GAZETTE

JANUARY 2023

FOREWORD

Thank you for reading our first monthly issue of 2023! It is the start of a new year and a new semester, and we are looking forward to making the most of it.

On February 9th we will be hosting a hangout in Seton 504 at 5pm to celebrate getting through the first month of the semester. Feel free to pop in for some pizza and conversation before heading down to the Rook's Feblentines Day Party at 9pm. Details on our social media.

Be sure to make it your New Year's resolution to send in your work to be published in an issue of the PEP Gazette, we are always looking to read what students and alumni have to say on many of the most important issues in the world.

Scott Ripley

President of the MSVU PEPS

HEALING FROM THE WOUNDS OF CHARLOTTETOWN: THE NEED TO RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL AMBITION

Scott Ripley

While doing research for a history paper, I came across a panel discussion on the Charlottetown Accord and the legacy of that failed reform effort. At around the [3:30](#) mark, Director of the Centre for Constitutional Studies (2022) Dr. Richard Mailey noted that “we generally don’t now, because of Charlottetown, think of the Constitution as something that can be changed through collective action or through high level negotiation”. For a long time, I have bemoaned the popular sentiment that constitutional reform was essentially impossible, however until listening to that panel, I had never stopped to consider why exactly this fatalistic attitude is so deeply entrenched in the public discourse. A brief look through the literature discussing the impact of the Accord provides sufficient answers to this question, but those reasons grow less relevant as three decades of political lethargy take their toll.

News stories on significant anniversaries speak of the Accord as an ordeal, as a collective political trauma that we have yet to fully come to terms with. This is because Charlottetown represented an anticlimactic end to a quarter century of what Peter Russell (1993) refers to as “Mega constitutional politics”. Since Canada’s centennial there has been near-constant political effort put into changing, or attempting to change, aspects of the Constitution. Progress had been made in that time, the Constitution was patriated, a domestic amending formula was decided, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was added. What had not been achieved however was unanimity among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. However, when the various governments of the federation came to the voting-age Canadian population, their proposals were rejected soundly. Susan Delacourt (2012) attributes this to “a torrent of voter antipathy toward politicians of all stripes”. Dejected, the political sphere had broadly resigned itself to no longer reach for reform, lest they rock the new-found calm in the wake of the 1995 Quebec referendum (Leydet, 2004, p. 257).

Is this complacency sustainable? Challenges to Canadian federalism are developing, especially the undermining of unifying political institutions, like the Constitution, by governments in the Prairies (Ripley, 2022). If politicians have any hope in addressing future crises, they need to summon the political will to not only return to constitutional talks, but to face what it is that seems to scare them most: the people. The Accord was rejected because people did not think their elected officials had their best interests at heart, and by cowering from the ghosts of Meech Lake and Charlottetown, politicians proved them right.

It may be time, as John Whyte (2012) wrote, to rekindle the energy, the confidence, and the commitment present in politicians during the previous era of constitutional engagement. If those in power cannot muster the courage to show constitutional ambition, those of us not afraid of their ghost stories will.

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WHO ARE POLITICAL ACTORS?

Natalie Locke

I am taking a course this semester about government administration in Canada. While discussing whistle-blowers, their role, their risk, I had a small epiphany. Public administrators are political actors. I believe the regulations limiting their political activity is the government's attempt to suppress the notion they are political actors. This got me thinking, who else can be considered actors?

Last month, I wrote about family gatherings and how I'm convinced everything is politics. Perhaps we are all political actors too.

To state the obvious, voting makes someone a political actor. But what about in everyday life? How do the choices we make turn us into actors? A decision as small as which grocery store to shop from can be political. For example, Sobeys can be a bit expensive but Giant Tiger is also nearby. Giant Tiger has cheaper vegetables this week, as advertised in the flyer. We can shift our routines as a result of external forces, like inflation, wages, and the cost of living. Take work, for instance. Workplaces have political cultures. They monitor what we can and cannot discuss, who we report to, and how we report. We complain to our co-workers about having to work through lunch and about the pressure to perform. Talking about issues in the workplace is political. It is a political act because you are questioning norms, the givens, structures, and procedures around you. Activism can be in the form of resistance i.e., complaining about your boss.

I guess what I am thinking is we are all political actors. It is not something we might be one day become or engage with once every four years. By participating in society (or not) we interact with political systems and make choices based on our knowledge of those systems.

Consider your power as a political actor in all areas of life. Your voice and decisions matter at home, in the grocery store, and beyond.

JANUARY ELECTIONS REVIEW

Scott Ripley

United States – Speaker of the House of Representatives

Anyone who thinks C-SPAN is boring was clearly not watching between January 3rd and 6th this year. Kevin McCarthy and the Republican party made history this month, just not in the way they wanted to. For the first time in nearly a century, the House of Representatives failed to elect a Speaker on the first round of voting. From the first Congress to the Civil War, thirteen Speaker elections went to multiple ballots. This was not too uncommon as this occurred in about one third of Congresses over that time period. Since then, the only instance of this happening was in December 1923. This election was not only exceptional in its time in history but also in the number of ballots it took to elect a Speaker. Only four elections exceeded the fifteen rounds of voting that happened in 2023. While it would have truly been a spectacle to see this Congress break the record of 133 ballots set in 1856, the fifteen ballots it did take are indicative of a fractured Republican party.

In the House of Representatives, 218 members is a majority. In the 2022 midterm elections the Republicans won 222 seats to the Democrats' 213. This puts the majority party in a position where four of their members can vote against the party and still be able to pass bills and do small procedural things like elect a Speaker. The first ballot had nineteen Republican party members vote for someone other than McCarthy. This continued for three days and ten more ballots with between nineteen and twenty-one voting against the party. On the highly symbolic date of January 6th things began to improve for McCarthy. Eleven swapped their votes to support the party, still short of even a plurality. Three ballots later and enough Republicans chose to vote “present” to lower the required threshold of a majority to 214. McCarthy got 215.

There is plenty of editorializing out there about the consequences of this split in the Republican party, but I think the most important one comes from the deals McCarthy had to make with dissenting members of his own party to get them out of the way. One such measure is allowing for only a single member to trigger a “motion to vacate the Chair”. McCarthy had originally agreed to have that number be five, but he was pressured into reducing it further. This rule gives any member of the House the ability to call for another Speaker election, possibly allowing for all this to happen again. It has been described as having a gun to the head of the Speakership, because if McCarthy does enough to make any member mad enough, his position can be over. He will now have to move very carefully, perhaps too carefully to claim to actually be in charge of the House of Representatives.

JANUARY RECAP

The society has not had any events this month, but we have been active on our TikTok page @msvuptalk. We'll be posting more videos soon!