

mass media and the New Democrats:  
making sense of the election campaign

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will determine if NDP campaign tactics, as opposed to other factors in the 1991 B.C. provincial election, managed to set a campaign agenda best suited to their policy platform. To do this, two questions were asked. One, what part did our mass media have in the election of the New Democrats? Two, what part did the NDP have in its own victory?

The analysis uses a method for categorization based on the consideration of news broadcasts as a specific "discourse", the "news-discourse". Starting from these assumptions, the notions of "telling" and "treatment" are used to categorize content from the news discourse. This breakdown is expected to categorize the data in ways that discern the intertwining of media and party language, practices and events.

This analysis concludes that the place, or effect, of our mass media in an election campaign is too important to ignore. The news is not a "distorted mirror" as media practitioners argue. The production of news is as dependent upon the reality of media operating routines as the reality of "the facts." This analysis also concludes that the NDP campaign employed the "manipulation by inundation" news management strategy. It is also concluded that this strategy was very effective.

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## INTRODUCTION

On October 17, 1991, the B.C. Social Credit Party suffered the worst defeat in its 50 year history, falling to just seven of 75 seats in the Legislature and 24 percent of the vote. It was relegated to the position of third party behind the new official opposition Liberal Party. The Liberals captured 33 percent of the vote, and with it 17 seats, their first seats in the Legislature since 1975. And while the Social Credit centre-right coalition collapsed, the B.C. New Democrats won for the second time in its history, gaining 51 seats with 41 percent of the vote.

One explanation for these results ignored by media analysts was the role of B.C.'s mass media. As a former journalist and editor, my professional experience has convinced me that the activities of our mass media play an important part in winning a provincial election campaign. This conclusion is echoed in numerous academic studies of the part our mass media plays in election campaigns.<sup>1</sup>

Media analysts did not ignore the effectiveness of the campaigns in the 1991 B.C. provincial election. The NDP won a B.C. election for only the second time in its legislative history. It was suggested this was because the NDP campaign

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency, New York:Schocken Books, 1989; Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990; Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988; Weaver, D., Graber, D., Coombs, M., and Eyal, C., Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election: Issues, Images, and Interest, New York:Praeger, 1981; Swanson, D., and Nimmo, D., eds., New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book, London:Sage, 1990; and Hershey, M., "The Campaign and the Media," in The Election of 1988, Pomper, G., ed., Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1989.

tactics for interacting with the media were more effective in 1991 than in past campaigns. It also is possible, however, that changes in traditional Social Credit campaign tactics contributed to the NDP victory.

### THE QUESTIONS

The intent of this analysis is to determine if New Democrat campaign tactics, as opposed to other factors in the 1991 election, managed to establish that party's policy platform as the campaign agenda. Despite the oversight of media columnists, an analysis of a political campaign must consider the activities of both the media and the political parties. So, to analyze the effectiveness of the New Democrat's campaign, two questions must be asked. One, what part did our mass media have in the election of the New Democrats? Two, what part did the New Democrat Party have in its own victory?

### THE NEW DEMOCRATS

There is a dearth of academic studies of election campaign tactics and strategies, although considerable attention has been paid to the media coverage of election campaigns<sup>2</sup>. There also have been few studies of the specifics of B.C. political campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency, New York:Schocken Books, 1989; Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990; Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988; and Hershey, M., "The Campaign and the Media," in The Election of 1988, Pomper, G., ed., Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Cairns, A., and Wong, D., "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems, 1933-1983," in Thorburn, H., ed., Party Politics in Canada, 5th ed., Scarborough:Prentice-Hall, 1985; Smiley, D., "Canada's Poujardists: A New Look at Social Credit," Canadian Forum, III, No. 621-622 (October-November 1972); Jackson, K., Ideology of the NDP in B.C.: Manifest Socialism

David Taras argues that traditional campaigning techniques, and their related goals of having as many people as possible meet the leaders first hand and allowing the leaders to grow and be tested through this contact with the people, have disappeared with the emergence of mass media: print, radio, and finally television. As television has emerged as the dominant medium of mass communication, "Both of those original purposes [of election campaigns] have been undermined by the highly orchestrated television packaging of the modern leaders' tour".<sup>4</sup>

The basic strategy involves two complementary tactics: the production of "pre-packaged news", and avoiding situations that displace that "pre-packaged news".<sup>5</sup>

"The basic technique is a form of political jujitsu first devised by the Republicans in the United States during Richard Nixon's campaigns for the presidency and later perfected in the Reagan and Bush administrations".<sup>6</sup>

The New Democrat campaign strategy and campaign tactics employed this model, first outlined in Mark Hertsgaard's On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency.<sup>7</sup>

Hertsgaard describes this strategy as "manipulation by

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1966, 1969 and 1972 Election Campaigns, B.C. Project Working Paper, 1983; Blake, D., Two Political Worlds, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1985; Mitchell, D., W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia, Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), pp. 154-155.

<sup>5</sup> Frizzell, A., and Westell, A., "The Media and the Campaign", in The Canadian Election of 1988, Frizzell, A., Pammett, J., Westell, A., eds., Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989, pg. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), pg. 156.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with a member of the New Democrat government.

inundation."<sup>8</sup> The phrase was taken from Leslie Janka, a press officer in both Reagan administrations. Janka explains how this approach differs from the then prevalent non-election campaign media strategy of not cooperating with the media.

"As opposed to Kissinger and Haldeman and that crowd, whose view was you control the media by [a lack of cooperation], giving them bits and pieces [of current information], the Reagan White House came to the totally opposite conclusion.... You give them the line of the day, you give them press briefings, you give them facts, access to people who will speak on the record.... And you do that long enough, they're going to stop bringing their own stories, and stop being investigative reporters of any kind, even modestly so."<sup>9</sup>

Hertsgaard states that this strategy employs the following basic news management principles to help set the terms of debate:

- "\* plan ahead
- \* stay on the offensive
- \* control the flow of information
- \* limit reporters' access to the President
- \* talk about the issues you want to talk about
- \* speak in one voice
- \* repeat the same message many times."<sup>10</sup>

According to the "manipulation by inundation" model, this is accomplished by ensuring that

"at least one noteworthy item of the party's choosing is made available to the media [each day] under conditions that make it difficult for the media to resist reporting what has been presented to them...."<sup>11</sup>

Together these are the tactics of "manipulation by inundation". Two observations are crucial for implementing

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<sup>8</sup> Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency, New York:Schocken Books, 1989, pg. 52.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 52.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency, New York:Schocken Books, 1989, pg. 52.

these news management techniques. One, it is "understood" that television news is the single most important aspect of a campaign. Two, the recognition that for the television corporations that produce the news, news is a commodity used to guarantee audiences for the advertisements sold and broadcast as part of those news programs. Hertsgaard suggests these underlying observations of "manipulation by inundation" are effective because, using the analogy of jujitsu, they are based on using television's strengths to work against its own reporters and to work for political campaigners.

Television journalists are trapped into reporting the party's pre-packaged news because their own medium demands dramatic visuals, leaders in conflict, and highly charged sound bites or clips."<sup>12</sup>

For the New Democrats in B.C., the goal was to use these television standards of newsworthiness and the occupational needs of journalists to make Mike Harcourt's campaign a success. If successful, the New Democrat's message would make the evening's news. At the same time, reporters would "stop bringing their own stories, and stop being investigative reporters of any kind."

I will show that the NDP campaign employed these tenets. In doing so I also will comment upon the effectiveness of the tactics used to implement these tenets.

### THE MEDIA

This thesis starts from a theoretical perspective reliant upon the work of Raymond Williams.<sup>13</sup>

Williams attempts to re-think the base-superstructure relationship central to Marxist thought. In the process of

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<sup>12</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990, pg. 156.

<sup>13</sup> See especially, Williams, R., "Base and Superstructure," New Left Review, 82, 1973, and Williams, R., Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society, London: Fontana, 1976.

sidestepping some of the difficulties of the base-superstructure division, some Marxist positions slide from materialism to idealism, attributing some kind of primacy to language over other means of production. By relying upon the notion of production as active, experienced processes, Williams maintains some distance from such primacy.

"[Hegemony] is a whole body of practices ..., a [dominant system] of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.... [This] real social process ... depends [upon] the process [the modes] of incorporation."<sup>14</sup>

Some of these modes of production, or incorporation, include the processes of education, of family and political institutions, the organization and practices of the workplace, and the selective intellectual and theoretical "traditions." Williams emphasizes that each of these modes of production is a selective process making and remaking a society's dominant culture. Any such process always includes or emphasizes certain possible meanings and practices, and excludes other meanings and practices. In politics, for example, those practices which exist as a mode of production of, or "incorporation" into the hegemonic cultural system, are "recognizable by the fact that, whatever the degree of internal conflict or internal variations, they do not in practice go beyond the limits of the central effective and dominant definitions."<sup>15</sup>

Williams allows for the study of media and politics as socially productive, rather than socially produced, activities. He also allows for studying the selectivity of these activities through the interactions between our mass media and political parties.

However, there are many focal points for studying these

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<sup>14</sup> Williams, R., "Base and Superstructure," New Left Review, 82, 1973, pp. 38-39.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 40.

selective activities within "the" field of media and politics. This thesis will build upon two complementary focal points for analyzing the media. One, building upon the work of Dallas Smythe, emphasizes the political economy of mass communication and its effect on news production. The other, exemplified by some of the work of Lance Bennett, Todd Gitlin, John Hartley, Richard Ericson and David Taras, emphasizes the effects of media operating routines in the production of television news.

Smythe's work<sup>16</sup> focuses upon the production of audiences by mass media advertising. He suggests advertisers buy "the services of audiences with predictable specifications, who will pay attention in predictable numbers and at predictable times to particular means of communication."<sup>17</sup> I agree with Magder<sup>18</sup> Murdock<sup>19</sup> and Hackett<sup>20</sup>, however, that socially productive media activities produce guarantees of the attention of audiences in predictable numbers at predictable times to specific media. In their analyses, the audience

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<sup>16</sup> See "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall, 1977, pp. 1-27; and "Communications: Blindspot of Economics," Culture, Communication and Dependency: The Tradition of H.A. Innis, Melody, W., Salter, L., Heyer, P., eds., Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981, pp. 111-125.

<sup>17</sup> Smythe, D., "Blindspot of Economics," Culture, Communication and Dependency: The Tradition of H.A. Innis, Melody, W., Salter, L., Heyer, P., eds., Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981, pg. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Magder, T., "Taking Culture Seriously: A Political Economy of Communications," The New Canadian Political Economy, Clement, W., and Williams, G., eds., Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989, pp. 285-287.

<sup>19</sup> Murdock, G., "Blindspots about Marxism: A Reply to Dallas Smythe," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1978, pp. 109-119.

<sup>20</sup> Hackett, R., Pinet, R., and Ruggles, M., "From Audience-Commodity to Audience-Community: Mass Media in B.C.," After Bennett: A new politics for British Columbia, Magnusson, W., Walker, R.B.J., Doyle, C., and Demarco, J., eds., Vancouver: New Star, 1986, pp. 267-283.

members must be produced before they are bought or sold. As Hackett states, "the main product of the media is the audience, whose willingness to pay attention is sold to advertisers, who pay on the basis of audience size and demographics."<sup>21</sup>

This shift opens the way for studying the production of audience "willingness" through media activities other than advertising, without reducing these activities to further examples of "advertising." The media operating routines which define what is campaign news during an election now can be studied. This shift also allows for the study of how this routinization of selectivity guarantees the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values in B.C. through televised news broadcasts.

This is crucial, because the "links between the economic determinants of the media on the one hand and the contents of the media on the other must ... be sought in the professional ideologies and the work practices of media professionals, since these are the only channel through which organizational controls can be brought to bear on the output of the media. Studies of the political economy of media organizations must therefore be closely related to, and supplemented by, analyses of the professional ideologies and practices found in these organizations."<sup>22</sup>

Analyses of media practices and routines have suggested several dominant factors in how this routinization of selectivity guarantees the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values. The "news values" of our mass media set the parameters of what things will be part of the

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 272.

<sup>22</sup> Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., and Woollacott, J., "The study of the media: theoretical approaches," in Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., and Woollacott, J., eds., Culture, Society and the Media, New York: Methuen, 1982, pp. 18-19.

political news discourse.<sup>23</sup> The reliance upon "the status quo" sets the parameters of who will participate in the political news discourse.<sup>24</sup> The definition and practice of "objective" or "balanced reporting" sets out the rules of when or where the participants will be shown to take part in the political news discourse.<sup>25</sup> The "personalization, dramatization, fragmentation and normalization"<sup>26</sup> of political news indicates how this participation will be made sense of within the political news discourse.

These routines dominate the process of selectivity, or what Gitlin refers to as the "framing process" in news

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<sup>23</sup> Gitlin, T., The Whole World is Watching: mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left, Berkeley:University of California, 1980, pp. 27-28; Hartley, J., Understanding News, London: Methuen and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp. 76-81; Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990, pp. 100-111. Both Hartley and Taras rely upon the study of news values, Galtung, J., and Ruge, M., "Structuring and selecting news," in Cohen, S., and Young, J., eds., The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media, London:Constable, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pp. 94-97; Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M., Chan, J.B.L., Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989; Gitlin, T., The Whole World is Watching: mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left, Berkeley:University of California, 1980, pg. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pp. 117-139; Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M., Chan, J.B.L., Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989, pp. 248-249; Gitlin, T., The Whole World is Watching: mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left, Berkeley:University of California, 1980, pp. 249, 282; Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency (New York, Schocken Books, 1989),pp. 54-76; Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990, pp. 103-104.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pp. 21-67.

production.<sup>27</sup> Gitlin, by his own admission, uses a more "literary", or less systematic, method of analyzing this process than Hartley.<sup>28</sup> While Gitlin's methodology is persuasive, that persuasiveness depends upon a breadth and depth of research that cannot be accomplished within the research limitations of the thesis format. As a result, Hartley's more systematic, less "literary" methodology will be used in this analysis.

#### METHODOLOGY

Hartley's method begins by considering news broadcasts as a specific "discourse", the "news-discourse". He then develops a system for categorizing the data from the news discourse using the notions of "treatment" and "telling". "Treatment" refers to the presence of events and participants in the news discourse. "Telling" refers to the language used to produce the news discourse. This breakdown was designed to provide some systematic basis for analyzing the "thematic" intertwining of media and participant language and practices in the news discourse.

The tabulation of "treatment" details the presence and placement of the events and participants within the news discourse. This involves "in particular ... the priority

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<sup>27</sup> Gitlin adopts the notion of "framing" from Goffman, E., Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, New York:Harper and Row, 1974. This notion first was applied to studies of the media by Tuchman, G., Making News, New York:The Free Press, 1978, and Hall, S., "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse", mimeographed paper, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> In a footnote on pp. 13-14 of The Whole World is Watching, Gitlin refers to precedents for his "thematic analysis" of media coverage, or semiological "readings" of media programs, and contrasts these with the "more systematic interpretive scheme" found in John Fiske and John Hartley's Reading Television, London:Methuen, 1978. Hartley's Understanding Television builds upon his work with Fiske.

given to stories, and the possible elements selected for treatment or emphasis."<sup>29</sup> As Stuart Hall notes<sup>30</sup>, there are many ways for taking account of emphasis. I have used the categories of "placement" and "source" employed by the Glasgow Media Group for taking account of news "treatment".<sup>31</sup>

This categorization provides a systematic basis from which to develop a "thematic" analysis of the "process of selectivity" at work within groups of news items from the same news broadcast or concerning the same campaign "issue". Tabulations of the "placement" of an "issue" or "story" were useful in the analyses of many campaign "stories", and have been included in the thesis for that reason. However, the tabulation of "source" proved much too cumbersome to include in the presentation of my analysis.

The analysis of the "telling", or "language" of the news discourse relies upon four structural elements - framing, focusing, realizing and closing - more or less common to the content of all individual television news items.

"Framing" involves the establishment of the topic and its associated discourse by the newsreader or reporter.

"Focusing" involves explanations of what the events of the topic are 'about'.

"Realizing" 'makes real' these events by using film clips, or quotes in the case of print media, to verify the 'reality' of the published version of the story.

"Closing" constitutes the efforts to produce for a story "the discursive 'end in mind,' as it were - the closure of various possible interpretations of

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<sup>29</sup> Hartley, J., Understanding News, London: Methuen and Kegan Paul, 1982, pg.163.

<sup>30</sup> Hall, S., Introduction to Smith, A.C., Immirzi, E., Blackwell, T., Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965, London: Chatto and Windus, 1975, pg. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Glasgow Media Group, More Bad News, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.

the event and the preferring of just one 'reading' of it."<sup>32</sup>

These categories for analyzing the "telling" of the news, how the individual stories are told, produced a systematic tabulation of the "language" of the news discourse. This categorization provides a systematic basis from which to develop a thematic or "literary" analysis of the "process of selectivity" at work within individual news items.

However, "focusing" in the television news items gathered for this study was practised in two ways: as an extension of the "framing" of a news item, or as what is called a "voiceover" used for "realizing" a news item. Rather than increasing the complexity and length of this analysis by expanding "focusing" into two categories, I restricted the analysis by condensing the data and categories of "focusing" and "realizing" into the category of "body."

As a result, my categorization of the data will include only three groupings: the "frame", the "body", and the "close." As noted earlier, this categorization of "telling" is not presented in a tabular format. The tabular format was found to be less persuasive than relying upon it to structure a thematic, "literary" analysis of the media routines used to produce the news.

Each section of my thesis will study the "treatment" of a specific news "story" and the individual items broadcast by BCTV and CBC-TV that "tell" the "story". An example will help to illustrate how this methodology will be applied.

Consider an issue studied in chapter I: the issue of polling questions and results broadcast in the first week of the election.

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<sup>32</sup> Hartley, J., Understanding News, London:Methuen and Kegan Paul, 1982, pg.119.

Table 1<sup>33</sup>

Issues polled: placement/total						
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26
BCTV	-/7	n/a	n/a	1/4	-/7	1/7
BCTV1	3/11	1;3;4/7	1;5/5	1;3/5	4;5/5	1/8
CBC	-/5	-/3	-/4	-/3	-/4	-/5
T/day	1/23	3/10	2/9	3/12	2/16	2/20
T/week	1/23	4/33	6/42	9/54	11/70	13/90

The breakdown of placement of media items treating poll results is tabulated. Table 1 is organized by media outlet and date. Each cell of the table identifies the placement of items in each broadcast treating this issue, as a portion of the total campaign items in that specific broadcast. So, for example, the BCTV1 (News Hour) broadcast of September 20 had three items using poll results. These were placed as the lead, third and fourth of seven election campaign news items broadcast by BCTV that evening.

The total row tabulates the total number of items treating this issue, as a portion of the total campaign items in all broadcasts on each date. So, for example, on September 20, the two news programs used broadcast a total of 10 campaign news items, and three of those 10 concerned poll results.

The analysis of placement considers the implications of the placement and the volume of items, and the difference in the placement and volume of items between news programs. In

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<sup>33</sup> "BCTV" denotes placement in the BCTV Noon News broadcast, "BCTV1" denotes placement in the BCTV News Hour broadcast at six p.m., and "CBC" denotes placement in the CBC-TV News Final broadcast at 11 p.m. "T/day" denotes the total items concerning the identified issue as a fraction of the total campaign items broadcast on each date. "T/week" denotes a cumulative total of items concerning the identified issue as a fraction of the cumulative total campaign items broadcast that week.

this example the analysis was focused by the striking difference in the number of items on polling between CBC-TV and BCTV.

Analyses of the **sources** builds from this with commentary on the implications of the sources used in these items. In this example the questions developed by the pollster were the source of these items, and those questions had two dominant concerns. The campaign themes of the New Democrats, Social Credit and Liberal parties was one dominant topic. Popular opinion polling was the other topic. I often rely upon absent sources to analyze **sources**. In this example that involved studying the questions left unasked by polling surveys. In many cases I will also use the "frame, body, close" categories for more specific identification of news item sources. That was not done in this case.

My analyses of the "telling", or language, rely upon the "frame, body, close" categorization of the data. These categories are used to categorize what language BCTV and CBC-TV used to make sense of the B.C. provincial election campaign. This is not tabulated, but is used to structure and focus "thematic" or "literary" analyses of how BCTV and CBC-TV used that language to produce the election campaign news discourse. For example, the following transcript was taken from the third item broadcast by BCTV September 20.

**Frame:** During the election campaign we will be conducting an unprecedented day-by-day poll of what you think and then we will take those answers to the leaders. Our Voice of B.C. Poll will be phoning B.C. residents for us every day right up until election day in what we believe will be the most comprehensive tracking of your attitudes in the history of B.C. politics. Today, some more early results from what you consider to be the most important issues.

**Body:** Street interviews, asking "What's the most important issue in the election?" For some, the issues aren't yet clear. But on this first day of the election campaign, others could clearly sum up their concerns. [Tape with clips of responses]: "Honesty"; "honesty"; "honesty"; "I guess the economy"; "they're taxing us

to death"; "schools and hospitals"; "the environment." In fact, we asked 1,000 British Columbians, "If it were up to you, which one issue would dominate debate and discussion during the election campaign?" [Voiceover while presenting bar graph of results]: 14.4 percent of those polled said honesty. It's the single greatest concern now in British Columbia, followed by jobs at 12.7 percent, and health care services slightly behind at 12.6 percent. [Voiceover while presenting bar graph]: Those issues that ranked the lowest were Aboriginal issues, immigration, and the Constitution, well below issues involving integrity and the economy.

Close: [Tape of Rita Johnston, with voiceover, followed by tape of Mike Harcourt with voiceover]: Yesterday the Premier highlighted issues chosen second by the voters, but NDP leader Mike Harcourt today zeroed in on the number one concern. [Tape of Rita Johnston]: And we also gave the Premier another chance at the question. She ignored it, but it's an issue that clearly for many voters won't go away. [Tape of clips of more responses]: "Honest government"; "honesty and government"; "honesty in government"; "honesty"; "integrity and leadership, and we need some."

This categorization allows comparisons of what the sources said - the comments of politicians and voters - with the re-statement of this information by the media. In this transcript, it can be seen that despite a variety of voter comments, despite very little difference in the "importance" of the "top" three issues polled, and despite the fact the "top three issues" account for the opinion of less than 40 percent of those polled, this media item concludes "honesty and integrity" is our "single greatest concern" and uses only clips of those who voiced the same conclusion to close the item. The language of the 13 items tabulated above were studied together in a similar fashion. The language of party campaign themes and other "public" issues were compared to the language in the design and presentation of Voice of B.C. questionnaires and results. Implications from these comparisons were then put forward.

## SOURCES

The data for this study had to be limited to make the project manageable. The news broadcasts selected were the BCTV Noon News, the BCTV News Hour, CBC-TV's News Final, CHEK-TV's Noon News, and select editions of The Vancouver Sun.

For this study to have any relevance as a comment on the effect of the media on the outcome of the 1991 provincial election, it was necessary to select the news programs with the largest and widest provincial audiences. These are the BCTV News Hour and BCTV Noon News. In order to make comparisons with the news product of a different corporation that still had a wide provincial audience, I then selected CBC-TV's News Final. This program was selected instead of the CBC-TV Evening News to have one noon, one evening, and one late night news broadcast included in this study. This allowed for more specific location of changes in the campaign news discourse. CHEK-TV and The Vancouver Sun were used for supplemental data.

## STRUCTURE

This thesis is set out in four chapters, one for each succeeding week of the campaign, and a concluding chapter.

Chapter I studies the first week of the campaign, September 19 to September 26. This week was dominated by "scandals" generated from within the Social Credit campaign and constant protests surrounding Rita Johnston's campaign tour. This in part explains the absence of Social Credit campaign themes in the news. Another part of that explanation is the media practice of defining "controversy" as news, because "controversy sells." The design of the Voice of B.C. polls also began to indicate some partisanship in BCTV's efforts to "hold up a mirror" of the campaign for voters.

Chapter II studies the second week of the campaign, September 27 to October 3. The second week of the campaign was dominated a bit less by "scandals" and protests facing the

Socreds. Instead, it was dominated by Social Credit infighting. Jack Kempf's ouster from the Party typified the infighting that began to characterize the Rita Johnston campaign. This was the week that BCTV's "debate about the debate" catapulted Gordon Wilson into the first televised leaders' debate in the history of B.C. politics. It was also the week of the only marginally successful Social Credit campaign tactic of the entire campaign. However, the effectiveness of its \$15 billion costing of the New Democrats campaign platform proved to be temporary. The organization and effectiveness of the New Democrat campaign kept Mike Harcourt's daily "appearances" in the news, even though his presence in the news remained low.

Chapter III studies the third week of the campaign, October 4 to October 10. This week was dominated by the leaders' debate and its repercussions. BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll, as well as other polls published or broadcast by media corporations, seemed to prolong the effect of Wilson's performance in the debate. The initial skepticism of media analyses of Wilson's performance was displaced by surprise, even shock at the "momentary" effect of that debate on public opinion. The Social Credit campaign almost disappeared from the BCTV News Hour broadcasts after the debate. It was unfortunate for the Social Credit that the failure of its "simulated tax assessment" tactic was the backdrop for Wilson's performance in the debate. That failure only served to emphasize that the "self-destruction" of Social Credit was close at hand. As for the New Democrats, it was "business as usual" before and after the debate. Its presence in the news remained low, with most of these news items still reiterating the daily NDP campaign appearances.

Chapter IV studies the final week of campaigning, October 11 to October 16. Poll results prolonged Gordon Wilson's most effective moment in the debate. The poll results overshadowed the Liberal platform, the need for any sort of platform, or

even the need for any accurate budget for that non-existent platform. Resignation and the desertion of voters to the Liberal Party dominated the news concerning the Social Credit campaign. There was less said about the Socreds this week, perhaps because the expected Socred defeat was no longer news. Tactics designed by the New Democrats to undermine the Liberal surge were very successful in being taken up by the media. However, the sudden media focus on the shortcomings of the Liberals was not accompanied by a drop or slowing of popular support for the Liberals. This New Democrat campaign tactic did increase the presence of New Democrat campaign themes in the news, but that presence remained low.

Chapter V concludes this analysis of the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign. I will summarize my analysis of the part the media had in the election of the New Democrats. In doing so, I hope to defend the suggestion that the place, or effect, of our mass media in an election campaign is too important to ignore. This will be followed by a re-examination of the suggestion that the New Democrat campaign employed the "manipulation by inundation" strategy outlined by Hertsgaard. In doing so the effectiveness of New Democrat tactics will be summarized.



### I: THE CAMPAIGN, WEEK ONE

"To me, just to kind of sum it up, what you had was the Premier saying she wants to run on half of the government's record, which she perceives as the positive side, and Mike Harcourt saying he wants to run on the other half of the government's record, the negative side, and what we will now find out is which of those two aspects of the Social Credit's record the voters respond to as we go on to election day."<sup>1</sup>

As it turned out, the first week of the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign was dominated by that "negative" side of the Social Credit government's record. It was not dominated because of the New Democrat's efforts to keep Social Credit's record of "ethical misconduct" in the news discourse. Premier Rita Johnston was surrounded, even as she called the election, with an unceasing string of public protests. Johnston's campaign was also overshadowed in the news by more scandals and reminders of past scandals surrounding members of the Social Credit Party.

Table 2

Week I, issues, presence in daily & weekly campaign items							
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26	Total
Polls	1/23	3/10	2/9	3/12	2/16	2/20	13/90
SC scandals	6/23	3/10	5/9	6/12	10/16	9/20	39/90
SC campaign	5/23	3/10	2/9	4/12	1/16	-/20	15/90
ND campaign	5/23	3/10	4/9	4/12	3/15	8/20	27/90

There were other important aspects of the first week of this campaign. Table 1 identifies the "issues" of public

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<sup>1</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, September 19, 1991, 11:00 p.m., closing statement by political consultant Gerry Christianson.

opinion polling, the "scandals" suffered by Social Credit, and the Social Credit and New Democrat campaigns as four important aspects of the news discourse in Week 1 of the campaign.

Polls were tracked because this election was the first in the history of B.C. provincial politics to allow statistically valid public opinion polling to be published during the campaign. However, BCTV was the only television corporation to commission its own poll, which it named the Voice of B.C. The opening section of this chapter examines the use of this poll. I try to make sense of how the "Voice of B.C." affected specific campaign tactics used in the first week. The New Democrats claimed near the end of the campaign that this BCTV poll was "cheerleading" for the Liberal Party. Specific attention will be paid to whether this poll "primed" voters to support the Liberal Party. This section also will study whether these poll results made the opinion of the "audience" a participant in the news discourse.

The second section uses the Scandals data referred to in Table 1 to examine how the media made sense of the scandals experienced by the Rita Johnston campaign in the first week of the campaign. I suggest the media's definition of "controversy" as news was the rationale for the overwhelming emphasis on events that kept Socred campaign themes out of the news.

Using the SC Campaign data referred to in Table 1, the third section of the chapter examines how the media made sense of party attempts to shape the dialogue in the first week of the campaign. The analysis indicates the early campaign themes used by Social Credit were not reiterated in the campaign news. This is followed with an examination of the media's surprising reiteration of the NDP theme promising "frugal" fiscal policies.

Utilizing the ND campaign data referred to in Table 1, the final section examines Mike Harcourt's campaign. There are indications this campaign did apply the "manipulation by

inundation" model. The effectiveness of this campaign organization tactic will be compared with the ineffective organization of Rita Johnston's campaign.

### I.1 THE POLLS OPEN

"The provincial election will be called today, sending voters to the polls Oct. 17.... Ironically, the election will be called the same day that Bill Vander Zalm - who led the Socreds to their last victory - makes his first court appearance here to answer a criminal charge of breach of trust.

"The Socreds hope to distance themselves as much as possible from the scandals and controversies of the Vander Zalm era and focus attention on Johnston and on what they perceive to be the New Democratic Party's chief weakness - the Ontario NDP.

"The NDP, on the other hand, says it will continue to remind voters of the Socreds' record of scandals, and stress the moderate policies of its leader, Mike Harcourt....

[T]he last five years have not been kind to the [Socred] party."<sup>2</sup>

Major political parties depend upon private polling to gauge public sentiment toward "political" parties and issues. From this polling the parties develop terms and themes expected to garner voter support on election day. The 1991 B.C. election campaign marked the first time statistically valid polling could be published during the campaign.

B.C. mass media now had an "objective" measure of what people wanted to witness, of what people were sick of witnessing, and of what people wanted from their "political" representatives. Media corporations could tailor campaign news based upon what polls suggested people wanted to hear or read. News directors and editors now had a greater ability to counter efforts by the major political parties to dominate the topics of the campaign. Unfortunately, news broadcasts from BCTV and CBC-TV did not use these polls to pursue issues voters wanted addressed by the parties. Instead, in an effort

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<sup>2</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 19, 1991, pg. A1.

to focus on the effectiveness of the campaign themes of the main parties, these polls ended up reiterating the issues and themes prepared by the parties for the campaign.

As Table 3 shows, thirteen of 90 items in the first week concerned poll results. CBC-TV did not broadcast a single item in the first week which paid attention to opinion polls. BCTV broadcast all 13 items. Six of those 13 were the lead item broadcast by BCTV. Five of 13 concerned BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll.

Table 3

Issues polled: placement/total						
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26
BCTV <sup>3</sup>	-/7	n/a	n/a	1/4	-/7	1/7
BCTV1	3/11	1;3;4/7	1;5/5	1;3/5	4;5/5	1/8
CBC	-/5	-/3	-/4	-/3	-/4	-/5
T/day	1/23	3/10*	2/9*	3/12	2/16	2/20
T/week	1/23	4/33	6/42	9/54	11/70	13/90

\* Missing BCTV Noon News data

The difference between CBC-TV and BCTV in attention paid to polls was due in part to the fact that only the BCTV corporation and the U.TV-Province-CISL group commissioned polls. If CBC-TV had done the same, no doubt they would have aired or published regular results from that poll. Another factor may have been the undoubtedly large price BCTV paid to commission its poll. The BCTV News Hour producer and news director had an obvious vested interest in treating the Voice of B.C. poll results as an important part of what voters would

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<sup>3</sup> "BCTV" denotes placement in the BCTV Noon News broadcast, "BCTV1" denotes placement in the BCTV News Hour broadcast, "CBC" denotes placement in the CBC-TV News Final broadcast. "T" or "Total" denotes total items studied for each date as a fraction of the total broadcast on each date.

need to decide who to support in the election.

BCTV stated its Voice of B.C. polls were designed to achieve the following goal.

"As the election progresses, we are going to be constantly asking you, the voting public, to tell us what real issues you care about and want addressed, and then we'll go to the politicians with those questions."<sup>4</sup>

Despite those claims, only in two of 13 items did poll questions and poll results ask voters to say what issues they thought were important in this election. One was broadcast September 19, the other was broadcast September 20. The voting public were not "constantly asked" to be the dominant source of the issues in the Voice of BC Poll.

Voice of B.C. polling the first week of the campaign instead focused on "the relative standing of the Parties and what people really think about politicians and their pre-election posturing."<sup>5</sup> Six of 13 items suggest trends in popular support, and five of 13 ask questions about the believability of party campaign themes. The Voice of B.C. poll does not make public any other possible campaign issues in the first week, such as public concern about environmental problems in B.C. There is little independence in these first BCTV polls from the campaign themes of the major parties.

The media's reliance upon popular legislative parties to set the terms of debate means keeping less popular parties from contributing to those terms. If these parties are excluded, we often end up characterizing these alternatives as "unimportant" or less credible than popular legislative parties. While the news may be shared equitably among the popular parties, it happens "within a set of structures that establishes the conditions under which dissent can (or cannot)

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<sup>4</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 19, 1992, 6:35 p.m.

<sup>5</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 19, 1991, 6:35 p.m.

be voiced."<sup>6</sup> The consequence? Not just the news discourse, but the "sphere of public discourse is diminished."<sup>7</sup>

This routine process of news selection diminishes the political spectrum. In this instance, this diminution was produced through the media operating routine that brings editors and reporters to rely upon "official sources", or the "status quo", for their sources.<sup>8</sup> The effect of this routine process is an inability to conclude that media items "report" what "really happened". This routine contributed to the repeated production of the same narrow spectrum of political alternatives for the consideration of the voters. Those items did not "report" or "mirror" the spectrum of political opinion in B.C., they produced and maintained a different spectrum, one that began and ended with the politics of legislative political parties in this province.

The Voice Of B.C. poll also primed the voting public in B.C. to consider supporting the Liberal Party.

In the September 19 Voice of B.C. item, five questions were asked, four concerning Social Credit or New Democrat party campaign themes.

The first of the five questions asked an opinion of the main Liberal campaign theme. "Voters in B.C. are tired of Socred/NDP squabbling and now want to elect a moderate third party, free enterprise alternative: agree or disagree." The "neutral expert", Les Storey, concludes "there is a tremendous opening for third parties in British Columbia. At this point

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<sup>6</sup> Hackett, B., "From Audience-Commodity to Audience-Community," in After Bennett: A New Politics for British Columbia, Magnusson, W., Doyle, C., Walker, R.B.J., and Demarco, J., eds., (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1986), pg. 277.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 275.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M., and Chan, J.B.L., Negotiating Control: A study of News Sources (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pg. 14.

the Liberals seem best poised to capture some of that vote."<sup>9</sup>

The design of the question indicates there is a tremendous opening, but not for any third party, as Storey suggests before concluding the Liberals have the best chance of capturing that vote. The design of the question "primes" the voter to consider a single, unique third party, one which can be a "moderate third party, free enterprise alternative." A "moderate" alternative does not "prime" voters to consider the B.C. Progressive Conservative Party, and moderate "free enterprise" alternative does not "prime" voters to consider the B.C. Communist Party, the Green Party, the Reform Party or any other political party in this province. There may be even greater openings for other third parties, or no openings whatsoever, but the question did not ask, "Do you intend to vote for a third party, and if so, which would it be?", nor did the question list a number of third party alternatives by name. What it did do is leave voters who were polled to indicate strong support for a specific alternative to the status quo. This alternative most readily described the Liberal Party.

Bennett's notion of "dramatization" suggests this "priming" may have occurred because

"the main principle involved with casting newsmakers in their nightly roles has more to do with their potential as dramatic actors than any ... preeminence they may have in the political scheme of things."<sup>10</sup>

Indications going into the election were that the New Democrats would win going away, and the campaign would produce little entertainment or "news" value. By dramatizing the chances of a marginal participant as the "viable third party alternative," a "dark horse" is provided to fuel speculation

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<sup>9</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 19, 1991, 6:35 p.m.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pg. 35.


and with it the entertainment value of the campaign.

The political effect of the design of this question, however, is partisan support for the Liberal Party, or "cheerleading" as the NDP called it in the dying days of the campaign. While this sort of partisanship was not typical of the media items studied, even one instance undermines claims of media outlets that they simply hold a "mirror up to reality". Given the increasing importance of poll results as the election moved past the leaders' debate, the partisan effect of the Voice of B.C. polling could turn out to be a very important element of this campaign.

The design of this question also provides evidence of a different sort to doubt claims by media practitioners that political news "mirrors reality." The evidence is found in the reliance upon official sources in the question's design. These questions, especially the question about the "third party alternative", rely upon the status quo to set the parameters of the news discourse. Traditionally well supported parties are privileged over parties with a tradition of marginal popular support. There is no reproduction of B.C.'s full political spectrum. If the analyses in this thesis show this reliance upon the status quo is typical of how the parameters of election news were established, they will indicate one important aspect of how the routinization of selectivity within the news discourse guaranteed the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values in B.C.

## I.2 ETHICAL MISCONDUCT OR FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Rita Johnston and the Social Credit Party strategists decided to run on the records of two governments: their own record of fiscal management and that of the Ontario New Democrats. The Socreds did this to shift the attention of the media from the government's record of ethical misconduct. This attempt did not succeed. Events in the first week produced so much "controversy" in the news that Social Credit



campaign themes almost disappeared.

On Thursday, September 19, former premier Bill Vander Zalm was charged with breach of trust. Three days later, September 22, the media broke the story suggesting links between John Ball and Ernst Zundel. Ball was running in place of Vander Zalm in Richmond East. Two days after that, September 24, it was broadcast that Socred campaign managers knew of Ball's situation two days before it was made public. One day later, Wednesday, September 25, Socred MLA Jack Kempf was charged with breach of trust. It was suggested the same day that the Socred ad campaign had staged its candid interviews.

The consequence was the domination of Social Credit campaign news by incidents that reinforced the government's reputation as an unethical party. This section will consider how Social Credit lost control of that news of its campaign.

As Table 4 shows, 39 of the 90 items studied in this week paid attention to public protests during Premier Johnston's campaign tour, and the "scandalous" events concerning Vander Zalm, Ball and Kempf. This "issue" of scandals and protests was the lead item in 11 of 15 broadcasts, and was placed as the lead item concerning the Socred campaign in 13 of 15 broadcasts.

Table 4

Issue: Social Credit scandal/protests: placement/total						
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26
BCTV	1/7	n/a	n/a	2/4	1;2;3;4;5/7	1;4;7/7
BCTV1	2;8;9/11	1;2/7	2;3;4/5	2;4;5/5	1;2;3;4/5	1;2;6;7/8
CBC	1;2/5	2/3	1;2/4	1;3/3	1/4	1;2/5
T/day	6/23	3/10	5/9	6/12	10/16	9/20
T/week	6/23	9/33	14/42	20/54	30/70	39/90

On the day the writ was dropped, BCTV suggested that Vander Zalm "will be the centrepiece of the NDP election campaign."<sup>11</sup> This is not evident in the data. A New Democrat campaign statement was the source of only 4 of those 39 items, all four in reference to John Ball. The source for the other 35 items were the events themselves - the court charges, the accusations against Ball, the party dissension, the charges against Kempf.

Galtang and Ruge suggest there are eight "general news values" and another four "news values" of specific influence in mass media corporations.<sup>12</sup> The first eight criteria include:

- : "frequency": the time for an event to occur: the quicker it occurs, the more it meets this value;
- : "threshold": the size of an event: there is a minimum "size" requirement for an event to be reported;
- : "unambiguity": the clarity of an event;
- : "meaningfulness": the cultural "proximity" and cultural "relevance" of an event;
- : "consonance": the "desirability" or expectation of an event;
- : "unexpectedness": the unpredictability of an event;
- : "continuity": if an event can be covered several times while still satisfying the "frequency" value; and
- : "composition": the mixture of different types of stories to "balance" the day's broadcast or edition.

The other four criteria include:

- : "reference to elite nations": especially relevant for the selection of international news;
- : "reference to elite persons";
- : "personalization": the degree to which an event can be treated as the action of people or an individual; and
- : "negativity" or "bad news".

Galtang and Ruge note that "negativity" or "bad news" is

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<sup>11</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 19, 1991, 6:48 p.m.

<sup>12</sup> This summary is borrowed from Hartley, J., Understanding News, New York:Methuen, 1982, pp. 76-79.

an especially dominant news value in the news produced for mass media corporations. It is "unexpected", "unambiguous", it "happens quickly", it is "consonant" with or "desirable" to media expectations, and so the "threshold" or "size" required to produce a "bad news" story is low. The events that dominated Social Credit campaign news in this first week of the election certainly met those criteria. They were also easily "personalized" because of their "reference to elite persons," the incidents hapened "quick" and often enough to meet both the "frequency" and "continuity" requirements, and they were especially "meaningful" for Social Credit's campaign in light of the government's record of ethical conduct under Bill Vander Zalm. These stories met 10 of the 12 news criteria.

These events were "consonant" or "desirable" because of an industry-wide media operating routine which "dramatizes" news in terms of the "controversy" of an issue or event.<sup>13</sup> Like the reliance upon the status quo, this routinization of selectivity structures the news discourse. It brings editors and reporters to rely upon the "controversial" or "bad news" for sources. As Bennett points out,

"The potential for drama [where there is "controversy", there is potential] is a virtual guarantee that an event will become a major news story. It is no secret that reporters and editors search for events with dramatic properties and then emphasize those properties in their reporting."<sup>14</sup>

"Controversy" dominates our political news even more than news is dominated by the politics of popular legislative parties. Media reliance upon "controversy" to facilitate the

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Sopow, E., Taking Charge (Victoria: MediaScope International Inc., 1992), pg. 6-7, and Hartley, J., Understanding News (New York: Methuen, 1982), pg. 76-79. See also, Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pp. 35-44.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 35.

"dramatization" of news is another routinization of selectivity that makes it difficult to conclude media items "mirror reality". This routine did not "report" or "mirror" the controversy which dominated the news discourse. As Bennett notes, controversy is sought out and then emphasized. That process of "seeking out and emphasizing" produces the dominance of controversy within the news discourse, but it does not mirror a concomitant domination of everyday politics with controversy. The consequence of this routinization of selectivity is a further diminution of the news discourse.

The necessity of dramatizing the news is made clear by Hackett. The media corporation must guarantee the willingness of its audience to pay attention to the news in order to profit from the selling of that advertising time. To accomplish this,

"The media satisfy precisely those needs that are compatible with the marketing of commodities. Needs that no one can make money from or that threaten our consumer culture are left unattended."<sup>15</sup>

We are presented with "controversy" to make sense of our political landscape, rather than discussions of policy and the structural changes facing the province and the country in this decade. "Uncontroversial" alternatives to the status quo gain little consideration from the media because they don't hold the attention of the audience, and they may threaten the ability of the media corporation to maintain that audience.

The language used to produce this dramatization of the unplanned events of the Social Credit campaign ignored both Socred and New Democrat campaign statements. Instead, these "controversies" were considered in the context of Bill Vander

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<sup>15</sup> Hackett, R., Pinet, R., and Ruggles, M., "From Audience-Commodity to Audience-Community: Mass Media in B.C.," After Bennett: A new politics for British Columbia, Magnusson, W., Walker, R.B.J., Doyle, C., and Demarco, J., eds., Vancouver: New Star, 1986, pg. 273.

Zalm's "controversial" term as premier. This context legitimized the New Democrat's campaign theme of judging the Social Credit on their record of ethical misconduct without borrowing the language of New Democrat campaign themes.

The frame of the CBC-TV lead news item on September 19 suggested,

"It has been a day of high political irony in British Columbia. The day Bill Vander Zalm makes his first court appearance on criminal charges. The day the woman who succeeded him is expected moments from now to ask for her Party's re-election."<sup>16</sup>

A BCTV item September 19 referred to the breach of trust charges resulting from Vander Zalm's sale of Fantasy Gardens as the "story of the year." He was described as the "man who will be the centrepiece of the NDP election campaign."<sup>17</sup>

John Ball's research efforts for the defense in Ernst Zundel's hate propaganda trial kept Vander Zalm in the campaign. Ball was running in Richmond East, Bill Vander Zalm's former riding. Every time Ball's situation was part of the news discourse, Vander Zalm and his government's record were part of it as well. The media made an "issue" of the Social Credit Party's knowledge of the situation days before it was made public.

The comments of Trevor Lautens were typical of the language used by the media.

"Faaaantastic! They said it couldn't be done, but once-and-no-future Socred candidate John Ball did something that made his Richmond riding predecessor look positively radiant."<sup>18</sup>

The charges against Kempf had the same effect. The news made sense of those charges as "another" in a series of scandals that began with Vander Zalm.

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<sup>16</sup>. CBC-TV Evening News, September 19, 1991, 6:00 p.m.

<sup>17</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday September 19, 1991, tenth item.

<sup>18</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 24, 1991, pg. A13.

"The piano wire of political intrigue tripped up the Socreds again and some wonder what could possibly be next. As the campaign began, Bill Vander Zalm was charged with breach of trust. Then came the on-going scandal of Richmond candidate John Ball forced to resign amid talk of pro-Nazi leanings. Then today, Socreds' man-in-the-street TV ads from Ontario were called dishonest. And tonight, the political equivalent of an 800 pound gorilla has landed in the middle of it all. Long-time Socred maverick Jack Kempf faces criminal charges - theft and breach of trust - and again the Social Credit Party is forced into damage control."<sup>19</sup>

For the next three days, Wednesday to Friday, September 25 to September 27, the lead item of every television news broadcast described these events. These events were framed as "a political bombshell", "dishonest," "a breach of trust", and "the political equivalent of an 800-lb. gorilla." While these phrases were not taken from New Democrat campaign statements, the persistent reference to Vander Zalm discredited Social Credit efforts to distance the party from its record of ethical conduct.

Social Credit campaign news in the first week of the 1991 election was dominated by this sort of language. This was the consequence of the "definition", or the routine selection, of news as "controversy". A thing or event ends up being measured by how controversial it is, and typically not by other, uncontroversial meanings or repercussions of that event. For example, the facts and arguments presented to Johnston by environmental protesters along Johnston's campaign trail were ignored, while the dramatic footage of people shouting and pushing at Johnston dominated the day's news. The oligopolistic dominance of the forest industry was ignored in favour of face to face footage of "treehuggers" and loggers. The reporters and news directors seeking out "controversial" news end up regarding the incidents selected

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<sup>19</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 25, 1991, 6:00 p.m.

only as "controversies", and seek out nothing else about those things or events. The news of the Social Credit campaign was a typical example of this. Social Credit campaign news ended up being "plagued by controversies," while reporters stopped looking for Social Credit campaign statements.

### I.3 FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The analysis turns now to an examination of how the media treated the themes that Social Credit sought to inject into the campaign. The Social Credit Party has used the same campaign strategy since its first election in 1952.<sup>20</sup> The strategy is to stand on a record of sound fiscal management, make some promises of large scale "make work" projects, like the Bennett Dam, Tumbler Ridge or the Coquihalla Highway, and sound the alarm about writing a blank check for those Socialists<sup>21</sup>. It worked for almost forty years, except for 1972. The reputation the NDP gained from their stint as government rekindled the effectiveness of Social Credit campaign themes.

The Socreds were not effective in using those themes in the months prior to the 1991 election. Perhaps the best example of this ineffectiveness was the failed attempt by Bill Vander Zalm in January, 1991, to re-establish the Social Credit government's fiscal record as the parameters of the news discourse. This was a crucial turning point for Social Credit, for in the spring of 1991 the government introduced a record deficit budget.

That budget reinforced the ineffectiveness of the traditional campaign plank of sound fiscal management. That

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<sup>20</sup> See Mitchell, D., W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), pg. 201, 292, 319, 370; 389; and 415; and Blake, D., Carty, R.K., and Erickson, L., "Federalism, Conservatism and the Social Credit Party in B.C.", BC Studies, No. 81, Spring 1989, pg. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> A common misnomer for the New Democrats.

ineffectiveness persisted into the first week of the 1991 provincial election campaign. Media items attributed this ineffectiveness to two things. One was the record deficit brought in by the Socred government the spring prior to the election. The other was the "moderate, conciliatory" personality of Mike Harcourt. In response, Rita Johnston's organizers tried to convince voters that what happened in Ontario under an NDP government would happen in B.C. This proved to be no more effective in the campaign's first week than the traditional Socred campaign themes.

### I.3.a VANDER ZALM SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE

As Taras notes, the "real election begins weeks or even months before the formal election period when elaborate and sophisticated conditioning campaigns are launched."<sup>22</sup> The Social Credit failure to make fiscal management the issue in the 1991 election can be attributed to two crucial junctures. The first was a failed initiative to launch a conditioning campaign on January 29, 1991, before the government's record deficit budget came down.

Premier Bill Vander Zalm gave a live, televised address. A live address to the voting public of B.C. would allow him to speak directly to the people about the fiscal record he had said was being ignored by reporters. The people would have the opportunity to weigh that fiscal record against the government's record of ethical conduct. If the media and general public were convinced to put aside concerns about the government's ethical conduct and focus their attention on that fiscal record, even for a short time, the Social Credit government would have gained an opportunity to call an election before that spring deficit budget. Social Credit would have been able to employ its traditional, highly

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<sup>22</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990, pg. 153.

successful campaign themes. Unfortunately for that government, the live address did not reset the parameters of the news discourse from ethical misconduct to fiscal conduct.

Vander Zalm began this address by asking voters to compare "what your government has done since 1986 - with any other province in this country. You'll be hard pressed to find any area where we haven't done much better."<sup>23</sup> After making some favourable comparisons for us, he then detailed the second element of this coherent plan.

"A freeze on salaries and benefits for members of this government and its senior public officials. Ottawa recently set a poor example when it provided hefty increases on already high salaries and benefits for senators and Members of Parliament. Now is a time for real self restraint starting at the top."<sup>24</sup>

The next element put forward by the Premier built upon the theme of fiscal management. "Some would say the government is a bottomless pit. You and I know that government has none of its own - none. Governments are simply managing your money. Some manage it well, some not so well."<sup>25</sup> This apparent reference to the record of the 1972-1975 NDP government in B.C. suggests Vander Zalm was using this address to "prime" voters for the next election.<sup>26</sup>

He closes by building even more on the issues of fiscal responsibility.

"At the next general election, you will be asked to help decide a number of very important issues:

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<sup>23</sup>. BCTV, January 29, 1991, Transcript of an Address by Premier William Vander Zalm.

<sup>24</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> "Priming" is a term used by S. Iyengar and D. Kinder in their book, News That Matters (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pg. 63. It refers to news which calls attention to some matters, while ignoring others, and in this way influences the standards by which policies and candidates are judged.

budgeting; taxation; security for seniors; fundamental constitutional issues and more.... Sometime fairly soon, there will again be a general election in this province. Come election day, you're signing a blank cheque. Only those you elect get to fill in the numbers. This government has managed your tax dollars. The record speaks for itself and we intend to continue on this course. These are troubled times - no time to risk the bank simply for the sake of change."<sup>27</sup>

This was a perfect example of the traditional Socred campaign platform: promises of large job creation programs, standing on a record of sound fiscal management, and warning us not to risk our tax dollars just for the sake of change. It is obvious this address would be much less convincing after the impending record deficit budget.

Vander Zalm tried to frame the next election around the issue of managing our tax dollars. As long as the panel of reporters free to ask questions after his address discussed his 12 point taxpayer protection plan, Vander Zalm's attempt would be successful. That success would weaken the NDP claim that ethical misconduct was the election issue.

The attempt seemed to be working, at least until Kevin Evans challenged Vander Zalm's claim that the wages of its executive staff met government imposed wage raise guidelines. Evans referred to figures which showed wage increases to B.C. executive staff far exceeding those wage increase guidelines. Vander Zalm was unable to refute these figures, and was surprised by the reporter's knowledge. His surprise showed. Once again he had been caught saying one thing and doing another.

Vander Zalm's mistake allowed an opening for the reporters to focus on other possible examples of ethical misconduct. The reporters seized this opportunity to launch a barrage of questions about other "inappropriate" behaviour

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<sup>27</sup>. BCTV, January 29, 1991, Transcript of an Address by Premier William Vander Zalm.

and actions by the Premier. By the close of the question and answer period, the issue being discussed was ethical conduct, not fiscal management, despite repeated admonishments from Vander Zalm for the reporters to focus on his address.

There was one other repercussion from this shift of the reporters' attention onto the government's record of ethical conduct. The succeeding news commentary on this event made sense of it as another example of poor judgment by our premier and the Social Credit government. Vander Zalm had failed in his attempt to begin to build new parameters of dialogue for the impending election campaign. Rita Johnston would have little more success in the opening days of the campaign.

#### I.3.b

#### ONTARIO BOOKS DON'T LOOK GOOD. B.C.'s DO - BUT THEY'RE COOKED.

The first NDP budget to come out of Ontario planned for a \$9.7 billion deficit, the largest budgeted provincial deficit in the history of Canada. This budget was the focus of Social Credit's campaign plank as the election began. The Social Credit needed to rekindle fear that the Socialist hordes would leave this province in financial ruin. However, the Rita Johnston/Social Credit campaign was ineffective in getting the media or the voting public to expect the same sort of budget from the New Democrats in B.C. Neither the traditional campaign themes nor the new tactic proved very effective in the first week of the campaign.

Table 5

Issue: Rita Johnston campaign themes: placement/total						
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26
BCTV	-/7	n/a	n/a	2/4	-/7	-/7
BCTV1	1;2;8;9/11	2;3/7	1;3/5	2/5	4/5	-/8
CBC	1/5	2/3	-/4	1;3/3	-/4	-/5
T/day	5/23	3/10	2/9	4/12	1/16	-/20
T/week	5/23	8/33	10/42	14/54	15/70	15/90

Table 5 indicates how little success Social Credit had injecting this theme or other campaign announcements into the news discourse. They were remarkable by their absence. These themes and announcements were reiterated within just 15 of 90 campaign news items during the campaign's first week. Eight of those came in the first two days of the campaign. Of the 15 placements in the news discourse, four were the lead item.

There were four events that injected Social Credit campaign themes into the news discourse: the ad campaign based on the record of the Ontario NDP, poll results from questions regarding the Socred's record of fiscal management, the \$37 million campaign promise, and the election announcement.

Only the \$37 million promise by Rita Johnston September 24 was an effective tactic for setting the Socred's fiscal management record as a campaign issue. If not for that expensive promise, the Social Credit campaign theme and campaign announcements would have been placed in just 11 of 90 items in the first full week of the campaign.

The absence of these themes and events from the news discourse does not seem so remarkable when it is recalled that reporters were provided with plenty of other newsworthy incidents from the Social Credit campaign. Those "controversies" satisfied more of Galtang and Ruge's set of general news values than any of the four campaign tactics employed by Social Credit. Those controversies met 10 of

those 12 criteria. The Social Credit themes met seven of these, but not the criteria of "meaningfulness", "unexpectedness", and because of the lack of these, "consonance" or "desirability" as well. Without these, the "bad news" designed into Social Credit's ad campaign was just that, an ad campaign, and not very newsworthy.

The limited newsworthiness of the Ontario NDP theme, and the limited effectiveness of the traditional Social Credit tactic of running on the government's fiscal record, were belied by the language used to make sense of these tactics.

In past elections it was typical for the NDP to be questioned about its aptitude for fiscal management.<sup>28</sup> In this election BCTV designed its polls to assess the public's opinion of the Social Credit government's fiscal record. The reason was the record deficit budget brought down by the Social Credit government.

These polls could have been designed to have people consider several factors that may have been responsible for this deficit, including the recession, the Free Trade Agreement, a housing slowdown in the U.S.A., the high value of our dollar, and the shortfall in federal transfer payments. However, these factors were not the source of any items studied here.

BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll instead framed the deficit in terms of the Social Credit government's ability to manage the budget. The results were broadcast September 19. Ten percent of the people polled said the government was spending taxpayers money well, 39 percent said the government's performance was fair, and 49 percent said the government had done a poor job of spending taxpayers money.

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<sup>28</sup> See Mitchell, D., W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), pg. 201, 292, 319, 370; 389; and 415; and Blake, D., Carty, R.K., and Erickson, L., "Federalism, Conservatism and the Social Credit Party in B.C.", BC Studies, No. 81, Spring 1989, pg. 5-6.

The second day of the campaign, September 20, The Vancouver Sun also focused on the Social Credit government's fiscal record. The piece in The Vancouver Sun dominated its Op/Ed page. It was placed top and centre, using half the page, and with the page's largest headline. It was written by Graham Leslie, a former deputy minister of labour in the governments of Bill Bennett and Bill Vander Zalm. He also wrote Breach of Promise, an examination of conflicts of interest and scandals in the Socred government since 1988. It refers to structural sources of the deficit, in Ontario, but lays responsibility for the B.C. deficit at the feet of the Social Credit government.

The item by Graham Leslie is indicative of the treatment the Social Credit government's fiscal record received from the media during the campaign. Leslie frames his analysis by stating, "I can only hope that others will carefully examine the record of the five past years and, before casting their votes, consider this fresh example of deceit."<sup>29</sup> "Deceit" explains the government record. There is no attempt to reference structural changes through federal legislation or cyclical economic changes. He adds that during

"six months of Rita Johnston's leadership,... it is clear nothing has changed. Of immediate concern must be the Social Credit strategy to divert attention from their own abysmal record by using their version of events in Ontario to scare us. We have been told repeatedly that NDP Premier Bob Rae's deficit budget proves an NDP government in B.C. will ruin us."<sup>30</sup>

He then analyzes the numbers and comes up with some "facts". One, based on an accounting system similar to that in Ontario, B.C.'s consolidated deficit is more than \$6 billion, not \$395 million as the Socreds projected. Two, the

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<sup>29</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 20, 1991, pg. A15.

<sup>30</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 20, 1991, pg. A15.

Ontario deficit, according to "the most widely respected of all Canadian economic analysts and forecasters, the Conference Board of Canada, . . . , was largely caused by the effects of the recession. . . ." <sup>31</sup>

These claims mentioned the recession as a factor in Ontario, but not as a factor behind B.C.'s "abysmal record". This conclusion was indicative of the language used in the first week to make sense of B.C.'s deficit as a campaign issue. The Socred's record of fiscal management was criticized by the media and by media analysts like Graham Leslie. The NDP campaign themes were consistent with this media commentary and as a result those themes were legitimized by that "impartial" commentary. This was especially so with Voice of B.C. poll results concerning the "Ontario NDP" ad campaign.

The limited newsworthiness of Social Credit's new campaign tactic was rendered almost useless by poll results aired almost as soon as the campaign began. Monday, September 23, just four days into the campaign, using the results of polls taken on just the second and third days of the campaign, the lead item on BCTV's news hour claimed

"early results show that Social Credit's attempt to use the record of Ontario's NDP government as a warning to B.C. voters is falling flat. We asked voters to respond to the statement, "The deficit budget by the NDP in Ontario proves the NDP in B.C. can not be trusted to manage the B.C. economy. 42% strongly disagree, compared to 38% in August." <sup>32</sup>

It was far too early to be concluding this tactic was "falling flat". It was too early for voters to have an opinion that could be polled. Yet, before that campaign had begun, BCTV broadcast "proof" that this Socred campaign tactic was failing. This sort of conclusion about a trend before

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<sup>31</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 20, 1991, pg. A15.

<sup>32</sup>. BCTV, September 23, 1991, 6:00 p.m.

waiting for the trend to emerge may be a consequence of what Bennett calls "fragmentation."

"The fragmentation of information is exaggerated ... by the severe space [and time] limits imposed by nearly all media for fear of boring readers and viewers with too much "information." Thus, the news comes to us in sketchy dramatic capsules that make it difficult to see the connections across issues or even to follow the development of a particular issue over time[my emphasis]." <sup>33</sup>

In this instance, the fact that nothing has happened yet is used to conclude that the ad campaign isn't working at all.

Once that conclusion was made, there was little chance of more media interest in this "non-story" of the election campaign. As Taras points out,

"the first and most essential attribute [or news value] is that news has an "instant" quality: news is what is happening now or is about to happen, not what happened last week or even yesterday." <sup>34</sup>

The Social Credit "Ontario NDP" campaign theme was not having any effect on the electorate. Even though it was much too early to begin to track the effect of that campaign, reporters and news directors had "evidence" now that this campaign theme was not changing the course of the election. The desired effect was not happening, and if nothing was happening, there was no new story coming out of the Socred campaign for the media to follow. If there was nothing new, the "story" of the first week would remain the Socred's inability to do anything right. And that is what happened.

The media conclusion also may be explained by the difference between the sources of "controversy", which stemmed from independent incidents, and the sources for items concerning that "Ontario NDP" theme, which did not stem from

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<sup>33</sup> Bennett, L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York: Longman, 1988, pg. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), pg. 102.

independent events. The "facts" behind the Social Credit speeches and ad campaign were contrived by Social Credit campaign strategists. While the "controversies" of the first week were unplanned incidents that "really happened," the veracity of campaign themes was much less certain. As a consequence, the sources used in these items were treated with much more initial professional skepticism from reporters and news director. Media reliance upon "official sources" was replaced with a more "investigative" attitude which "double-checked" the official sources with additional sources. These sources generated more questions and these were directed at the Social Credit's ad campaign. Were the people in those Socred ads actors? Did those people "accurately portray" what the people of Ontario think about their government? Did popular opinion in Ontario support the claims of these ads or undermine those claims? It was these questions which became the source of items concerning Socred ads. It was these questions which contributed to stalling that campaign by challenging its credibility. It was these questions which justified the conclusion that the Socred ad campaign would have little effect on the outcome of the election.

#### I.4 MANIPULATION BY INUNDATION

The New Democrat campaign was designed to do two things. The first was to get Mike Harcourt's daily "appearance" in the news each evening. The "manipulation by inundation" strategy strives to have one campaign "appearance" placed in the evening news broadcast each day. The visual backdrop of the appearance was selected to be hard for reporters and news directors to resist because of its visual appeal. Campaign statements were designed and presented in the context of these visual backdrops, much like the "voiceovers" that news directors combine with the visual information of television news items. As a result, if the visual portion of the "appearance" made the evening news broadcast, it is almost

guaranteed the accompanying audio portion was used along with it. In this way a party's campaign statements could not be completely paraphrased, and could not be completely edited out, in the production of the evening news.

This technique was very effective during the first week of the campaign. The news of the New Democrat's campaign talked about the things the New Democrat strategists wanted in the news, and in the language they wanted used by the media to make sense of those things. Voters heard what the New Democrats wanted to have them hear during this campaign. What they heard was a series of comments which did two things. New Democrat daily campaign statements built upon the ethical and fiscal records of the government to undermine Social Credit. At the same time, these records also were used as the context for New Democrat campaign promises of how things would be different under a New Democrat government.

The "manipulation by inundation" strategy succeeds or fails on the ability of the political party to provide only events which have been designed or planned for the use of television reporters. So, the second requirement for the effective implementation of this strategy was that the political party not make any "newsworthy" mistakes. Mistakes which could displace that designated appearance in the evening news had to be avoided.

A crucial element of eliminating mistakes was eliminating the need for reporters to seek out incidents which could be used in the evening's news instead of the planned campaign appearance. As Hertsgaard notes, one way of doing this was to make the job of following a campaign as easy as possible.<sup>35</sup> Media commentary in the first work of the provincial election makes it clear the New Democrat organizers succeeded in this

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<sup>35</sup> Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency (New York, Schocken Books, 1989), pg. 52.

respect.

Another crucial element in eliminating the need for reporters to seek out "newsworthy" incidents was making the planned incidents "newsworthy" enough to be attractive. The visual appeal was one aspect of that design. A second aspect was the recognition that the "dramatization" and "personalization" of the Social Credit government's record would be more newsworthy to reporters than dense, long, analytical criticisms of that record. It was also recognized that the level of "controversy" that had been generated by some government actions, however inconsequential that action was for the lives of voters, would be a factor in determining the things the New Democrats would talk about during the campaign. The topics and language of the New Democrat's daily election statements in the campaign's first week confirm the use of these criteria.

As Table 6 shows, New Democrat campaign themes were used in 27 of 90 items studied and four of 16 broadcasts used those New Democrat themes for the lead item. This was almost double the presence of Socred campaign themes. The New Democrats managed to have its "news event" injected into the news discourse every day but one. The first was the item Friday, September 20, reiterating the release of the "48 point plan". On Monday, September 23, the New Democrat policy on abortion was broadcast. New Democrat criticisms of government waste and how the New Democrats would maintain education funding was the "story" Tuesday, September 24. On Wednesday, September 25, the New Democrat's accusation that an actor had been used in one Socred ad displaced the party's designated "story." On Thursday, September 26, it was criticisms of government interference with the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and the plan to renew that commission's political independence.

The "manipulation by inundation" strategy was very effective at having the designated "appearance" used by

Table 6

Issue: New Democrat campaign: placement/total						
Date	9.19	9.20	9.23	9.24	9.25	9.26
BCTV	3/7	n/a	n/a	1;4/4	0/7	2;3;6/7
BCTV1	4;8;9/11	2;3/7	1;4/5	3/5	3/5	3;4/8
CBC	1/5	1/3	3;4/4	2/3	2;3/4	3;4;5/5
T/day	5/23	3/10	4/9	4/12	3/16	8/20
T/week	5/23	8/33	12/42	16/54	19/70	27/90

reporters as the source for items concerning the New Democrat campaign. These appearances were designed to meet enough of the criteria outlined by Galtang and Ruge to overcome not meeting the dominant criterion of "bad news" about the New Democrat campaign.

The New Democrat appearances overcame this shortcoming by meeting the "essential ingredient of a television news story... high impact visual material".<sup>36</sup> The appearances were designed with short, matched, repetitive audio and visual components that together met the "frequency", "unambiguity" and all important "visuals" criteria. These appearances met the criterion of "continuity" as part of the running story of the New Democrat campaign. They provided "negative" comments about Social Credit, that were "desirable" or "consonant" because of media expectations of a "dirty campaign", the record of the Vander Zalm government, and as it happened, the events which plagued the Social Credit campaign. This "consonance" added to the "meaningfulness" of the New Democrat campaign, which also relied upon the party's place in the legislative status quo and upon popular expectations for a New Democrat victory as the election began. This also in general satisfied the "threshold" criterion. The campaign was

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<sup>36</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Nelson Canada:Scarborough, 1990, pg. 109.

designed to emphasize Mike Harcourt, thereby playing to the "references to elite persons" that come with the "personalization" of political news.

Only one incident, a pro-life demonstration, was "newsworthy" enough to displace the New Democrat's designated "appearance", on September 25. The New Democrat's "appearance" concerning the ALC might have been displaced if not for a "controversial" exchange between Mike Harcourt, former Social Credit Agriculture Minister John Savage, and a local farmer. The farmer challenged Harcourt to stop running away and of having "no guts". Harcourt turned on the man before leaving the situation. They seemed about to come to blows. This personal, dramatic confrontation, rather than taking away from the appeal of Harcourt's appearance, virtually guaranteed it would make the television news.

This one instance where the strategy was unsuccessful emphasizes the preeminence of "controversy" for defining what things or events are newsworthy. But by controlling where and how Harcourt would make his "appearances", those "appearances" satisfied the other dominant news value of "visual appeal", and that satisfied the need of reporters for "a good story". On days where "controversy" was part of Harcourt's tour, his "appearances" were still planned well enough to have the "controversy" piece added to the news. These "controversies" did not displace those "appearances," with that one exception.

The "manipulation by inundation" strategy was very effective in the first week of the 1991 election. The following item commenting on the organization of the Harcourt tour indicates that the "manipulation by inundation" strategy was effective despite reporters recognizing their role in that strategy.

"He (Harcourt) talks about change and leaves nothing to chance. (With) professional advance teams, ... he stays very close to his schedule and brushes off questions if it means he'll be late for

his next appearance. It's a sharp contrast to the Skelly campaign. Skelly often kept people waiting on the side of the road for up to half an hour, and when he got there, you were never sure he could deliver his message. After all, you could ask, if he can't run a campaign, can he run a province?... The important thing for Mike Harcourt is to have his picture taken with people around the province, and say the right things."<sup>37</sup>

This reporter could have taken his comment right from Hertsgaard's description of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy. His comment suggests an awareness of how Harcourt's tour was organized, and why it was working so well, but the reporter ends up lauding the "professionalism" of this campaign. The appreciation of the organization and the sophistication of this campaign indicates almost complete satisfaction of the occupational needs of reporters. There was nothing overlooked that was cause for reporters to make an issue. There was good material available each day for the evening news. Reporters could depend upon getting their story into the newsroom before deadline.

Left with little else to say regarding the New Democrat campaign, reporters used what they were given. The following comments indicate the effectiveness of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy.

"Mike Harcourt has unveiled a 48 point election platform. Harcourt says it will stress frugal spending and fairness in government. By eliminating waste and chopping politically motivated spending, Harcourt says the NDP could balance the budget over a five year cycle."<sup>38</sup>

"Harcourt said the 48 point platform will amount to a 1.5 percent increase in government spending, an increase he promised to recoup from "cutting the waste" from government operations."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Monday September 23, 1991, third item.

<sup>38</sup>. CHEK-TV News At 5:30, September 20, 1991, second item.

<sup>39</sup>. The Vancouver Sun, September 20, 1991, pg. A9.

These comments reiterate New Democrat campaign statements almost verbatim. The news discourse also reiterated New Democrat criticisms of Social Credit, because these were used in the statements of what the New Democrats would do if elected.

The New Democrat plan for fiscal management was framed in the party's terms, but also the terms of the Social Credit Party. The BCTV reproduction of the release of this document framed it as the Socreds had framed it.

"It was Mike Harcourt's day to go on record about what he stands for. Harcourt has been accused (by Socreds) of spending most of his time on the fence and avoiding questions that try to pin him down on issues. Today, Mike Harcourt unveiled his Party's platform and as he gets ready to counter the Socred blitz that will paint him as a spend-thrift, he began a campaign aimed at convincing voters he won't break the bank."<sup>40</sup>

This was one of the two instances where the Socred tactic of painting the New Democrats as fiscally irresponsible was used to make sense of the New Democrat's platform. In this instance only the Social Credit Party's sense of the New Democrat's platform and Mike Harcourt's willingness to address the issues was used by the media to frame the release of the New Democrat's platform. However, of the 15 items concerning Harcourt's daily campaign activities, the frame of nine of 15, the body of 13 of 15, and the close of 14 of 15 items reiterated the language used by the New Democrats.

On the other hand, the New Democrat's sense of what produced the B.C. government deficit - "politically motivated spending" - was reiterated in all four items September 20 which discussed the New Democrat platform. Other popular rationales for the deficit, like the recession or the Free Trade Agreement, were not used to discount the New Democrat's position.

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<sup>40</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 19, 1991, 6:05 p.m.

After the release of the New Democrat's "48 point plan", the specific things Harcourt's campaign talked about included abortion, government waste, education funding, the use of an actor in one Sacred ad, and government interference with the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). With the exception of the "fake actor" accusation, all of these topics shared a history of controversial incidents under the Social Credit government. The "fake actor" incident was brought forward by the New Democrats because it, too, would be "controversial". These topics were guaranteed to have news value for reporters because of those past controversies.

The language used to discuss these topics confirms that their "controversial" histories, and the opportunity to dramatize and personalize these topics, determined their emphasis during the campaign. The government deficit was the result of "politically motivated spending" and "government waste". Mike Harcourt said only an "honest" government practicing "ethical" spending could balance the budget. The New Democrats were not going to "impose their moral beliefs on the women of this province," like Vander Zalm did. We were told that "school children won't go hungry, or be forced to attend classes in portables", even though there are more far-reaching, sound reasons for maintaining education funding than the kind of building they learn in, like what is taught and how it is taught. However, it was the localized problems of "hungry children" and "portables" that the New Democrats emphasized.

The use of this sort of language can be understood as an attempt to have the New Democrat campaign policy statements appeal to media values of what is or is not news. This appeal was enhanced by the "fragmented" design of the New Democrat's messages and the "normalized" content of that message, that open and honest government will make everything right again. While these tactics were effective for campaigning, they did little to expand the boundaries of the news discourse. Aside

from the policy statement on abortion, which would democratize the institutional regulation of that practice, programs were put forward instead of policies. Harcourt's personality was emphasized to take advantage of the media's "personalization" of political news. While these tactics served to make the New Democrat campaign much more effective in its relationship with the media, it also served to further eliminate from the campaign reassessments of our political institutions.

The "manipulation by inundation" strategy was designed to eliminate policy discussions from the election agenda. The consequence of the New Democrat's use of the "manipulation by inundation" media strategy, then, was a further reinforcement of the news discourse's routine maintenance of hegemonic political and cultural values in B.C.

## II. THE CAMPAIGN, WEEK TWO

The second week of the campaign was dominated by Social Credit infighting. A typical example of the infighting that plagued the second week of the Rita Johnston campaign was Jack Kempf's ouster from the Party. Premier Johnston threw Kempf out of the party, but Kempf was able to outmanoeuvre Johnston and her organizers at the nomination meeting to replace him. His campaign chairperson was able to gain the candidacy, and then did not file nomination papers before the legal deadline. Social Credit was left without a candidate in what had been a long-time Socred riding. Kempf's public struggle with the Party executive was just one of many similar incidents of public infighting, tabulated in column #8 of Table 7, that concluded Social Credit was "self-destructing."

Table 7

Week II, issues: presence in daily & weekly campaign items						
Table	#8: Kempf	#9: \$15B	#10: before	#11: after	#12: poll	#13: ND
9.25	4/15					
9.26	4/20					
9.27	6/15		1/15		3/15	4/15
9.29	2/11		4/11		1/11	3/11
9.30	7/21		3/21		4/21	5/21
10.1	6/18	2/18	4/18		2/18	3/18
10.2	2/16	7/16	3/16		2/16	2/16
10.3	5/20	5/20	3/20	5/20	2/20	6/20
10.4				0/9		
10.7				0/10		
10.8				4/6		
<b>Total</b>	<b>36/136</b>	<b>14/54</b>	<b>18/101</b>	<b>9/45</b>	<b>14/101</b>	<b>23/101</b>

This was also the week of the only successful Social Credit campaign tactic of the entire campaign. This was the "\$15B price tag" that Socred Finance Minister calculated would be necessary to pay for the New Democrats campaign promises. As the tabulation of this issue under column #9 in Table 7 indicates, the effectiveness of this tactic was short-lived. This was due in part to independent media analyses of that "price tag" which seriously questioned its accuracy.

Columns #10 and #11 tabulate the media attention paid to the Liberal Party before and after becoming a participant in the first televised leaders' debate in the history of B.C. provincial politics. [The Liberals had been almost non-existent in the news discourse during the first week of the campaign. In the second week BCTV's "debate about the debate" catapulted Gordon Wilson into the first televised leaders' debate in the history of B.C. politics.] BCTV attempted to corner the leaders of the New Democrats and Social Credit into abandoning the CBC-TV debate for a BCTV format. BCTV attempted this by suggesting a leaders' debate could only be valid if Wilson was a participant. CBC-TV finally closed the door on this debate by including Wilson in its debate format. Once Wilson had been allowed into CBC's debate, BCTV once again paid little attention to the Liberal campaign. The systematic lack of attention paid to the Liberals would only change because of its newsworthiness after the October 8 leaders' debate. That shift will be studied in the next chapter.]

The Voice of B.C. poll, tabulated under column #12 in Table 7, continued to ignore the issues its own polls had indicated that voters wanted politicians to discuss during this campaign. At the same time, BCTV continued to claim its polling was "asking the questions you wanted asked, about the issues politicians wouldn't talk about." To make that claim, the news items broadcasting those poll results had to ignore its own reports of daily New Democrat campaign statements that

addressed many of those issues of public concern.

The effectiveness of the New Democrat campaign strategy of "manipulation by inundation", tabulated under column #13 of Table 7, continued to hold the attention of reporters on the daily New Democrat "appearances." Mike Harcourt's policy statements, verbatim many times, continued to make the news. The few campaign mistakes made or unplanned incidents experienced did not capture the attention of the media and displace the New Democrat's planned events. Media praise for the "professionalism" of the Harcourt campaign once again indicated that taking the work out of the job of being a reporter was an effective campaign strategy.

## II.1 THE SOCREDS BEGIN TO SELF-DESTRUCT

"This is wrong, this is not what the party is built on, this is not how the party became strong, and if it continues, yes, the party will destroy itself. We'll see after the election."<sup>1</sup>

As Table 8 shows, of the 137 campaign items between September 25 and October 3, 36 of 137 considered public disagreements among Socred candidates and between candidates and campaign organizers. Between September 25 and October 3, 13 of 24 news broadcasts used the lead item to make sense of the situation facing Kempf and the Socreds. During this time, six of eight BCTV News Hour broadcasts and four of eight from CBC-TV's News Final began with items on this situation.

While Jack Kempf remained a participant in the news in both the first and second weeks of the campaign, the "story" changed from the first to the second week. Most of the controversy that marked the first week of the Social Credit campaign was generated by unforeseen circumstances, like the timing of Vander Zalm's court appearance, the accusations against John Ball, and the criminal charges against Kempf.

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<sup>1</sup>. Social Credit candidate after dropping out of nomination race in Richmond East, BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991.

Table 8

Issue: Socred public disagreements: placement/total								
Date	9.25	9.26	9.27	9.29	9.30	10.1	10.2	10.3
BCTV	1;3/ 6	4/7	2;3/3	n/a	3/5	1;2/4	1/5	0/3
BCTV1	1/5	2;6 /8	1;2;3 /7	1/6	1;9;10 /11	1;4;7;8 /11	0/6	1;8;9 /11
CBC	1/4	1/5	1/5	1/5	2;3;4/ 5	0/3	4/5	4;5/6
T/day	4/15	4/20	6/15	2/11	7/21	6/18	2/16	5/20
T/wk	4/15	8/35	14/50	16/61	23/82	29/100	31/ 116	36/ 136

Controversies in the second week were almost without exception generated by Social Credit Party members. Along with Jack Kempf's public struggle with Rita Johnston and the Social Credit Party provincial executive, there was Len Fox's assertion that Minister of Forests Claude Richmond was "out of touch with reality."<sup>2</sup> The Social Credit candidate for West Vancouver-Garibaldi claimed he had been offered a bribe from someone within the Social Credit party to drop out of the race.<sup>3</sup> A potential Socred nominee to replace John Ball in Richmond East claimed he had "quit in disgust" after concluding the "fix was in" by the Party's campaign manager to hand-pick a replacement.<sup>4</sup> The Party's campaign managers admitted they "had known of [John Ball's] situation since Friday night."<sup>5</sup> Finally, Johnston "admitted" the "Socred record [of ethical conduct] is a campaign issue,... especially

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<sup>2</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 26, sixth item, close.

<sup>3</sup>. First mention, BCTV Weekend News Hour, September 29, 1991, lead item, frame and body.

<sup>4</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991, ninth item.

<sup>5</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 24, 1991, fourth item.

after ... the Party 'sitting' on the information for three days."<sup>6</sup>

The New Democrats had little direct involvement in the media's focus of attention. Mike Harcourt's campaign "appearances" and the language of New Democrat campaign themes were used to make sense of Socred campaign events in just 4 of 36 Socred campaign items. In fact the media used just one source of controversial news from outside the Socred Party. It was a suit against the "Socreds" charging civil conspiracy against Premier Rita Johnston and several members of the provincial government by Powder Mountain Resort, a suit aided by Jack Kempf.<sup>7</sup> According to news items, the company tried to develop a ski resort, but claimed the government gave preferential treatment to the competitor that ended up being given the opportunity to develop that resort. One of the lawyers for Powder Mountain, when asked why the suit was launched during the election, said if the timing was as damaging to the fortunes of Social Credit as the government's actions had been for Powder Mountain, so much the better.<sup>8</sup>

Three media operating routines contributed to the dominance of these sources. One is the preeminence of the criterion of "negativity" or "bad news" as news. Another is media reliance on "official sources", or what Bennett calls "normalization." A third is the "personalization" and "dramatization" of the participation of those sources to produce "controversial" interactions. These operating routines maintained a hegemonic definition of "news" that satisfied the corporate capitalist operating requirement to

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<sup>6</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, September 24, 1991, last item.

<sup>7</sup>. BCTV News Hour, October 1, 1991, seventh item. The item uses a clip of Kempf saying he will do what he can to help the claimants win their suit against the premier.

<sup>8</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday, October 1, 1991, seventh item; BCTV Noon News, Wednesday, October 2, 1991, lead item.

produce news that would produce a profit. This systematic process of selection makes it difficult to conclude the news discourse mirrored "what really happened" during the campaign.

Our mass media regard "negativity" or "bad news" as an especially pivotal criterion for assessing a "story's" news value. It is "unexpected", "unambiguous", it "happens quickly", it is "desirable" or "consonant" with media expectations, and it has a low "threshold" or "size" requirement for it to be newsworthy. The incidents experienced by Social Credit during the second week of the campaign easily met these criteria. They also happened quick and often enough to meet both the "frequency" and "continuity" criteria, and were easily "personalized" because of their references to "elite persons."

"Negativity", or "dramatization", and "personalization", along with what Bennett refers to as "normalization," is required to meet the need of media corporations for news that appeals to its liberal, consumerist, "status quo" audience. "Normalization" is the

"tendency to filter new information through traditional values, beliefs and images of society and to deliver the information through the reassuring pronouncements of authorities charged with returning things to normal."<sup>9</sup>

For this reason reporters tend to rely upon the status quo or "official sources", in this case members of the two elected political parties, to produce the vast majority of the election news. As the election began the New Democrats and Social Credit were the only parties which might form the next government. Only what the New Democrat and Social Credit parties did and what they might do to solve B.C.'s problems was of interest to that audience. Alternatives to the status quo were ignored as daily participants in the news discourse.

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<sup>9</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman, 1988, pg. 52.

This practice diminished the political spectrum in B.C. to appeal to the political spectrum of the television audience. This systematic reduction of the political spectrum reinforces the hegemonic dominance of status quo political values in the news discourse. In so doing this systematic process also eliminates "historical, analytical and critical"<sup>10</sup> language from the news discourse.

For example, the legal charges against Kempf and the questions of legal authority were transformed into a personal "battle" between Premier Johnston and Jack Kempf. The Social Credit provincial executive tried to nominate a replacement for Kempf. The attempt was foiled when local delegates elected his former campaign manager. She waited until the electoral office deadline for nominating candidates had passed, then promptly withdrew, leaving the party without a candidate in Bulkley-Stikine. This clash between the local and provincial executives prompted a member of the local riding executive to conclude, "I'm totally frustrated and I feel our democratic process is going down the drain."<sup>11</sup>

Jack Kempf, a long-time Social Credit MLA, proud of his lifetime membership in the Social Credit Party, says "it's a sad day for someone who has been a Social Credit member for 27 years."<sup>12</sup>

After "quitting in disgust" because "there is a fix in to squeeze someone else out," another Social Credit and potential nominee concluded, "This is wrong, this is not what the party was built on, this is not how the Party became strong, and if it continues, yes, the Party will destroy itself."<sup>13</sup>

These items detailed the "backroom deals" and "fixes" to

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 25.

<sup>11</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, October 4, 1991, lead item.

<sup>12</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, September 27, 1991, lead item.

<sup>13</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991, ninth item.

oust Kempf, replace Ball and give an unnamed company preferential treatment in its competition against Powder Mountain. Twenty-seven of 36 items discussed these self-inflicted incidents.

These incidents were not discussed in terms of their (lack of) relevance to the policy differences of the parties, or with historical comparisons with the conduct of former governments, or through analyses of the lack of legislation to prevent politicians from abusing their authority. They were "personalized" and "dramatized" in terms of Social Credit's "self-destruction." It was Rita versus Jack, in a "showdown" power struggle, not a minor story buried after a series of pieces analyzing the comparative long-term consequences of Socred, New Democrat and Liberal policies. And what was so convincing about these comments were their sources. It was not just the media's independent conclusions, nor the New Democrat's. It was Social Credit Party members making the same conclusions about their own campaign tactics and activities that party critics had been making during the campaign.

The "personalization" and "dramatization" of the participation of "official sources" guarantees "controversial" news by producing "controversial" interactions where none may have otherwise existed. For whatever reason, producing "controversial" news has proven to be the most effective way for media corporations to guarantee the attention of an audience to advertisers, and advertisers want access to "guaranteed" audiences. Guarantees of a loyal audience allow those corporations to profit from the sale of advertising time during those news programs. The higher the audience share of the BCTV News Hour, the more valuable that time is for advertisers, and the more profitable that time is for BCTV. As a result, to maximize that profit, "controversial" news of the election was produced whenever possible. In the second week there was enough to dominate Social Credit campaign news.

The Socred campaign was dominated by sources and language which publicized this self-destructive, publicized infighting. Media operating routines structured the production of controversial, normalized Socred campaign news. However, it was the authenticity of the sources of disapproval of these "controversies" during the campaign's second week that was so damaging for Social Credit. It came from the horse's mouth, fellow Socred's, and the message was, abandon ship. This message added inescapable authenticity to the New Democrat theme that ethical conduct was the issue of this election.

## II.2 THE SOCREDS BRING THE CAMPAIGN HOME

"After a busy week of scandals and announcements coming out of the Socred camp, finally a slow news day, and that means you get your stories wherever you can."<sup>14</sup>

"Tomorrow is the halfway point of the campaign and after dealing with one disaster after another, the Social Credit Party is trying to take back the agenda."<sup>15</sup>

The Socred campaign organizers' first tactic, the Ontario NDP campaign, had marginal impact. The Social Credit's \$15B price tag for the New Democrat's 48-point platform was much more effective. It provoked an almost complete shift of media attention from ethical conduct to fiscal conduct. Unfortunately for Social Credit, this effectiveness was shortlived. The effect of this initiative was limited by skeptical "independent" media analyses that questioned the accuracy of that \$15B price tag. As a result, the "\$15B price tag" initiative did not shift the dominant theme for the remainder of the campaign from ethical conduct to fiscal conduct. What it did was add another theme to the news discourse.

September 30th, 1991, BCTV's Voice of B.C. pollster Les

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<sup>14</sup>. Reporter, BCTV News Hour, September 28, 1991.

<sup>15</sup>. Gloria Makarenko, CBC-TV News Final, October 1, 1991.

Storey had some "advice" for the two main political parties. For the Social Credit, "the economic argument could be effective but bring it home."<sup>16</sup> The Social Credit Party was in the process of doing just that. The next evening Premier Rita Johnston said it was "time to get tough" with Mike Harcourt and the NDP. October 2 Social Credit announced its \$15B price tag of the New Democrat's "48-point plan" campaign platform.

As Table 9 shows, the Social Credit initiative precipitated a dramatic shift in the news discourse. In the nine days of the campaign studied between September 19 and October 1, just six of a total of 149 campaign items reiterated Social Credit campaign themes. In the two days after this initiative, 12 of a total of 36 campaign items focused on the cost of the New Democrat's 48 point plan. Seven of these came on October 2, five on October 3.

Table 9

Issue: Socred's \$15B cost of ND platform: placement/total			
Date	October 1	October 2	October 3
BCTV Noon News	0/5	3/5	1/3
BCTV News Hour	0/11	1;2;3;4/6	8;10/11
CBC News Final	1;2/3	2;3/5	1;2/6
Total, day	2/18	7/16	5/20
Total, week	2/18	9/34	14/54

Every day prior to the Socred initiative at least five items concerned controversies facing Social Credit. The day Johnston announced her new initiative just two items paid attention to controversy in the Socred campaign, while eight focused on the Socred's \$15B price tag for New Democrat promises. The day after the initiative there were again five

<sup>16</sup>. BCTV Noon News Hour, September 30, 1991, fifth item.

items concerning Socred internal controversies. Six focused on the \$15B price tag.

A \$15 billion price tag would catch anyone's attention and it did. This tactic met many of the criteria isolated by Galtang and Ruge. It met the "frequency" criterium, the "size" of the figure certainly met the "threshold" news value, it was "unambiguous", "unexpected", and "bad news" for the New Democrats that could be easily "personalized" because of its reference to "elite persons". What distinguished this tactic from the "Ontario NDP" tactic, though, was its "meaningfulness". This stemmed from its "cultural proximity" because of the reputation earned by the 1972-1975 NDP government, and "relevance" because it referred to B.C.'s New Democrats, not Ontario's. The consequent "consonance" or "desirability" for the media that the Ontario NDP tactic lacked was fulfilled with this tactic.

The goal had been to break the media's attention on the misfortunes that had marred Social Credit's campaign. This initiative certainly met that goal. It also gave the media something more tangible to report than the dubious claims of the "Ontario NDP" theme. B.C.'s New Democrats had a platform, the Socred's had costed it, and here were the figures. There was no specific price tag attached to that platform by the New Democrats as yet, and even if there were, Social Credit's figures could be accurate. It was this tactic which "brought home" the Socred campaign from Ontario.

The sources of these items were the Socred initiative, then the New Democrat response to it and "expert" analyses of the \$15B figure. These analyses included "BCTV's own independent analysis" and the analysis of Robert Allen, a University of British Columbia economist. The New Democrat's response and the "expert" analyses blunted the effectiveness of the Social Credit initiative by providing other "costs" for the viewer to consider. The Socred figure was produced as one of several contending "true costs" of that platform. Voters

never had the opportunity to accept without question the claims made by Social Credit.

The sources for these items did not include "marginal" political parties or non-experts. Any sources of information not readily available, sources that required research or investigation by television media, were not pursued. This is a characteristic of television news often explained away by time limitations in news production. It is also symptomatic of the media operating routine of reliance upon "official" or "expert" sources.

It has already been suggested that media conservatism in part is the consequence of factors such as the reliance of reporters upon officials, experts, and other elements of what is described as the "status quo". Limited time for news production demands readily available sources of information, but these need not be the main protagonists in our parliamentary democracy. These sources could just as easily be unpopular but sound detractors of the entire legislative system. One reason these are not used is the need of the television corporation to rely upon popular sources indicative of the audience it guarantees in order to sell advertising and make profits. For these corporations to maintain that guarantee, this audience must remain characterized by the dominant values of our society: liberal, individualist consumerism. "Marginal" political critics might erode that audience and as a result must remain "marginal".

Within these parameters, though, the Social Credit \$15B price tag did not prove to be as convincing as it was shocking. While the source that placed this "issue" in the news discourse was the Socred tactic, it was not the Socred's conclusions about the New Democrat's fiscal management abilities that dominated language used to make sense of those abilities. The terms used to discuss the Social Credit initiative indicate its effect was blunted by the responses of "experts" and the New Democrats.

In the 12 items aired over the two days, the New Democrat platform was "framed" with both the Socred's claims and Harcourt's scoff at the Socred challenge. Neither of these positions dominated the "frames" of this story. However, the New Democrats' language dominated the "closes" of this story. Four times these items were "closed" with Social Credit claims, but seven times the story was "closed" with language expressing skepticism about the validity of the Socred's conclusion of the "real cost" of the New Democrat's 48 point plan.

The four items that "closed" this story with the Social Credit's sense of the cost of New Democrat promises were "closed" after analyses in the "body" of other items in the same broadcasts concluded the Social Credit's figures were not just speculative but wrong.

These four examples indicate one of two things. They may indicate partisanship in these TV newsrooms. Or, the BCTV and CBC-TV news directors produced these items to meet the media standard of "balanced reporting." Unfortunately, this involved making comments unsupported by analyses of the Social Credit "price tag" used in the "body" of items in the same broadcast.

For example, a BCTV Voice of B.C. recap of the campaign at its halfway point must have ignored the analyses skeptical of the Socred's "price tag" so that it could rely upon the veracity of Social Credit's "price tag". That item stated, "This week a new phase for the Social Credit - less talk about the NDP in Ontario and more about deficits they fear the NDP will run up in B.C."<sup>17</sup> In this example, the well-founded skepticism of the Social Credit's \$15B figure is countered with the media's ill-founded reliance upon this as "the latest Socred campaign strategy." It was the only thing "positive" and "new" the media had from the Social Credit campaign, and

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<sup>17</sup>. BCTV News Hour, October 3, 1991, eighth item.

television broadcasts used it. This was done by discussing it in terms of "the latest strategy". It required avoiding recognition of this "latest strategy" as the unfounded accusations they had been shown to be.

News directors could defend this as an example of "balanced reporting." They could say the "close" of these four items were faithful to the Social Credit themes, but the "close" of seven others were faithful to New Democrat themes. A news director could conclude from this that "we were more than fair in our treatment of this story." However, this process of "balanced reporting" has two necessary political consequences.

First, this faithfulness to the political parties was at the same time an example of the media's infidelity to its viewers. The mass media are the self-described fifth estate, non-partisan government critics necessary for any true and healthy democracy. In this case, though, the media produced "balanced, fair" news by reiterating party campaign themes instead of using their questions to voice the political concerns of voters as the election began.

Second, "balancing the news" in this way makes it impossible to conclude the media "reported" this news. This news was produced, and that production had a specific, persistent political effect. This practice did not result in a "distorted mirror" of what "really happened." It involved the routine of editing some things out and using other things as if they did happen, in order to produce "balanced" news. If this were a "distortion of reality", these items would have been limited to "the facts." The principle of "accurate reporting" would have still applied, but it did not apply in this process. It was superseded by the principle of "balanced reporting." Some "facts" were overturned, changed to meet the news discourse standard of "balance". This practice is not a distortion of the facts, it is a re-making of what "actually happened."

### II.3 THE DEBATE ABOUT THE DEBATE

BCTV began its "debate about the debate" after CBC-TV had announced it would host the first ever televised provincial leaders' debate. BCTV's "debate about the debate" produced what looked like an effective campaign by the Liberals to turn themselves into a credible participant. It appeared as though the TV networks simply followed the "big" story. Further examination suggests the Liberals were a simple and timely pawn used by BCTV in an attempt to wrest that debate from CBC-TV.

The corporation's motivation seems to have been a simple one. The debate was expected to be the big story, whether or not Gordon Wilson participated in it, because the campaign had become predictable. The size of the audience was expected to be enormous. As Hackett notes, what television corporations like BCTV and CBC-TV compete for and profit from is audience share. BCTV was fighting for this story, and so this audience, and so that profit, but in the end BCTV was outmanoeuvred.

On October 2, 1991, CBC-TV's Evening News and News Final broadcasts aired the following news item.

"The CBC debate has generated a fair amount of controversy. Today CBC met with representatives from the Social Credit Party and the NDP and all agreed that, in view of public concern, public interest is best served by inviting Gordon Wilson to participate October 8. It's now a three way debate."<sup>18</sup>

The News Final item added the change "was made after several hundred viewers voiced their disapproval of the format."<sup>19</sup> Some would suggest it was the protests of the Liberal Party that generated the controversy, and several hundred phone calls, that got Wilson in. I would suggest it was how that

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<sup>18</sup>. CBC-TV Evening News, Tuesday October 3, 1991.

<sup>19</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, October 2, 1991, lead item.

debate was made sense of by BCTV with its "debate about the debate".

BCTV's motivation for attempting to wrest the hosting of this debate from CBC is suggested by the shifts in the placement of news items that paid attention to the Liberal campaign. The first and third parts of this section will study these shifts.

The second part of this section will study this evolution in language. The frame and close of the items in BCTV's "debate about the debate" evolved from skepticism toward Wilson's complaints about being excluded, to organizing their own debate, to skepticism toward the validity of any debate which did not include Wilson, to the validity of any debate which did not include the Green Party.

#### II.3.1 WHAT WAS SAID ABOUT THE LIBERALS BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DEBATE

From September 19 to September 26, the B.C. Liberal Party's presence in the televised election campaign was almost non-existent. The Liberals had been included in just eight of the 92 news items produced. Two of those came the evening the election was called. In the following six days the Liberal Party was present just six times.

The absence of the Liberal Party from the news discourse was so persistent that on September 25 CBC broadcast an item reminding voters "there is a sizeable third party in the running."<sup>20</sup> This absence is explained by the likelihood that both CBC and BCTV considered the Liberals a "marginal" participant in the election campaign.

#### II.3.2 WHAT WAS SAID TO GET GORDON WILSON INTO THE DEBATE

Friday, September 27, 1991, CBC broadcast that

"We can tell you today that this campaign will feature the first televised leaders debate in B.C. history. The Social Credit, NDP and CBC have

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<sup>20</sup>. CBC-TV Evening News, September 25, 1991.

agreed to a debate between the two party leaders who are vying to be the next premier."<sup>21</sup>

The News Final broadcast added that "BCTV and UTV have been invited to take part in the debate."<sup>22</sup> Friday, September 27, Gordon Wilson was out of the debate; five days later, on October 2, Gordon Wilson was in.

As the shaded portion of Table 10 shows, between September 27 and October 2 the three news programs used in this study produced 71 campaign news items. Fifteen of 71 referred to a possible leaders' debate - nine on BCTV and six on CBC-TV.

Table 10

Issue: The debate about the debate: placement/total						
Date	9.27	9.29	9.30	10.1	10.2	10.3
BCTV	0/3	n/a	4/5	0/4	2/5	0/3
BCTV1	0/7	4;5/6	8/11	3;10;11/11	5/6	5;6/11
CBC	5/5	4;5/5	5/5	3/3	1/5	3/6
T/day	1/15	4/11	3/21	4/18	3/16	3/20
T/week	1/15	5/26	8/47	12/65	15/81	18/101

The placement of these items suggests BCTV's news director did not consider this story more "newsworthy" than other campaign stories that were given precedence. These stories included Social Credit infighting, the Social Credit \$15B "price tag" for the New Democrat platform, the New Democrat's daily campaign "appearances", Voice of B.C. poll results, the Liberal Party election campaign, and the Green Party campaign. Only twice was the leaders' debate considered "newsworthy" enough to be placed as the lead item. The first instance was an announcement that a leaders' debate would take

<sup>21</sup>. CBC-TV Evening News, September 27, 1991, lead item.

<sup>22</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, September 27, 1991, fifth item.

place.<sup>23</sup> The second announced the debate would now include Liberal leader Gordon Wilson.<sup>24</sup>

These two items met Galtang and Ruge's criteria of "frequency", "threshold", "unambiguity", "meaningfulness", "consonance", "unexpectedness", and easy "personalization" because of the "reference to elite persons": Johnston and Harcourt.

All of the other 13 of 15 items were in the second half or near the end of items concerning the election. This placement reflects the fact these items met very few of the criteria isolated by Galtang and Ruge. Nine of the 15 items produced some aspect of Gordon Wilson's efforts to be included in any televised leaders' debate. The sources of these nine items included the announcement of the debate, Gordon Wilson's promise September 29 this would become a major campaign issue if he wasn't included, and the dozen or so pickets in front of the CBC building in Vancouver. They also included the Liberal Party's filing of a suit claiming their exclusion infringed on the rights of freedom of speech of British Columbians, and the decision to include the Liberal leader in the debate. These items did not meet the criteria of "meaningfulness" (judging by the placement of these relative to some of the items mentioned above), "threshold", "desirability" for the media, "negativity" or "bad news", and "visual material".

BCTV's "debate about the debate" was produced through six items aired between September 30 and October 2. These items met even less of the criteria isolated by Galtang and Ruge. The "story", the type of debate format, failed to satisfy any of the criteria except for the "reference to elite persons" and its easy "personalization." The limited news value and poor placement of these items suggests they were not produced

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<sup>23</sup> BCTV News Hour, Saturday, September 28, 1991, lead item.

<sup>24</sup> CBC-TV News Hour, Wednesday, October 2, 1991, lead item.

for BCTV's regular audience, but for a specific audience - the New Democrat and Social Credit parties and CBC-TV - all of whom analyze the news for tactical and marketing purposes. In this way BCTV was able to wage its debate without seeming to "cheerlead" for the Liberal Party.

This "debate about the debate" began Monday, September 30. The frame of an item in both BCTV broadcasts concluded "B.C. Liberal leader Gordon Wilson will get his wish - a three way televised debate with Premier Rita Johnston and NDP leader Mike Harcourt, if all three agree to an invitation from BCTV for a debate October 14."<sup>25</sup>

The close of both these items produce explanations of how the BCTV format is preferable. It is because "CBC says it has no plans to ask Gordon Wilson to take part in the debate."<sup>26</sup> The implication is that Wilson's participation is crucial to any legitimate leader's debate in this campaign.

BCTV implied this because if BCTV wanted to broadcast this debate, its format would have to be attractive enough for Social Credit and the New Democrats to dump their agreement with CBC-TV. BCTV did this by insisting Wilson **must** be included in any leaders' debate, "if democracy is to be served." This despite the fact they led the only two political parties to have formed governments in B.C. since 1952 and to have held seats since 1975.

The same day BCTV began its "debate about the debate," Vancouver Sun columnist Vaughn Palmer stated that

"Gordon Wilson himself said at the beginning of this campaign the best he could hope for was a few seats and to hold the balance of power. This is not a man who aspires to be Premier. I don't understand the basis for his claim to be in a debate among potential Premiers."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>. BCTV Noon News Hour, September 30, 1991, fourth item.

<sup>26</sup>. BCTV Noon News Hour, September 30, 1991, fourth item.

<sup>27</sup>. CBC-TV News Final, September 30, 1991, fifth item.

There was some difference of opinion within the media of the necessity of Wilson's participation in this debate. While Palmer and CBC continued to regard Wilson as a "marginal" participant, BCTV was suddenly interested in him as a necessary participant in the leaders' debate.

The "debate about the debate" continued October 1, with three items on BCTV's News Hour. One item states that BCTV's bid to host a debate has failed. A voiceover in the body of the item explained this was due to Social Credit and the New Democrats declining the offer. This item closed by reinforcing the validity of Wilson's complaint and the need for any valid leaders' debate to include him.

The next item in this broadcast picked up this theme with "a clarification on BCTV's response to CBC's invitation to take part in its October 8 debate. The corporation reported that BCTV turned down that invitation."<sup>28</sup> This item closed with the comment that BCTV was in the midst of making its own offer to host a debate between the three main political parties. Once again BCTV implied, but did not explicitly state that its three way format is the only one that would produce a legitimate leaders' debate.

The next day BCTV made its interest in the debate explicit. The lone campaign item in the News Hour broadcast closed with the statement that "both BCTV and UTV have turned down CBC's invitation to take part in the leadership debate because of CBC's refusal to allow Gordon Wilson to take part in the telecast."<sup>29</sup>

BCTV's "debate about the debate" now explicitly supported Gordon Wilson's efforts. BCTV's News Director was not paying attention to Wilson in the wake of the controversy generated by the Liberal's protests, because those protests were not

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<sup>28</sup>. BCTV News Hour, October 1, 1991, last item.

<sup>29</sup>. BCTV News Hour, October 2, 1991, fifth item.

used in the items which produced this "debate." BCTV was paying attention to the Liberal Party because there was an opportunity to generate public support for a three way debate.

But by this time, on October 2, CBC-TV was broadcasting it had changed its position and Wilson would now participate in the debate. CBC said several hundred phone calls changed their mind, but this seems unlikely.

The previous evening BCTV broadcast that "tonight and tomorrow night in our polling ... we will also be asking you if you think Liberal leader Gordon Wilson should be included in any leadership debate."<sup>30</sup> It was this move by BCTV that forced the hand of whichever group was resisting the three way format.

If BCTV could have shown how much public support there was for a three way debate, the Premier and Harcourt would almost have to accept that format, especially after public statements saying they would. At that point, either CBC would lose its two way debate to BCTV's three way debate, or it would change its format. CBC, I conclude, decided to change its format before being forced to change it in the face of BCTV poll results, or even losing the debate to BCTV. Changing the format when it did allowed CBC to produce its own, more flattering reasons for the change. It had responded to its viewers rather than pressure from its rival network.

The big winner was Gordon Wilson and the Liberals. For the previous four days Wilson had been the tool in a small corporate skirmish for credibility and audience share. In the end he was carried into the CBC debate by BCTV's efforts to televise that debate. The first televised leaders' debate in the history of B.C. politics was expected to be the big story because the campaign had become predictable. The New Democrats were holding a steady lead and the Social Credit campaign was disintegrating. The campaign had become a death

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<sup>30</sup>. BCTV News Hour, October 1, 1991, third item.

watch, or a countdown to a New Democrat victory, depending upon your perspective. The excitement of this "horse race"<sup>31</sup> was dwindling, but if any event had a chance to rekindle it, it was this debate. The size of the audience watching the debate to see what happened was predicted to be a vast majority of television viewers.

As Hackett notes, what television corporations like BCTV and CBC-TV compete for is audience, because what they sell is audience share and the guarantee of providing that audience share. The loss of that audience would threaten BCTV's ability to maintain its audience share, and its ability to sell air time for its News Hour based on its reputation for being the most watched network in the province. The BCTV corporation fought for this story to maintain that reputation, and the profitability of BCTV that relies upon that reputation, but in the end BCTV was outmanoeuvred.

### II.3.3 WHAT WAS SAID ONCE WILSON WAS IN THE DEBATE

These conclusions make still more sense after considering the attention paid to the Liberal campaign between the time of CBC's announcement and the time of debate.

As Table 11 shows, between October 3 and October 8, CBC-TV continued to focus little attention to the Liberal Party campaign. On the other hand, October 3, the first evening BCTV's News Director knew the Liberals were now in the debate, there were four items that paid attention to the Liberal campaign. There were no more Liberal campaign items produced by BCTV until the day of the debate. During this time only two items focused exclusively on the Liberal campaign. The remainder sourced the campaign platforms of all three parties.

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<sup>31</sup> For an explanation of the media's depiction of election campaigns as "horse races", see Wilson, R.J., "Media Coverage of Canadian Election Campaigns: Horserace Journalism and the Meta-Campaign", Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 1980-81.

These included preparations for the debate, poll results, and two "issue" pieces comparing the economic plans of the three parties.

Table 11

Issue: Liberal campaign: placement/total				
Date	10.3	10.4	10.7	10.8
BCTV	0/3	n/a	n/a	n/a
BCTV1	5;6;7;10/11	0/6	0/6	1;2;4;6/6
CBC-TV	3/6	0/3	0/4	n/a
T/day	5/20	0/9	0/10	4/6
T/week	5/20	5/29	5/39	9/45

Not until October 3 did the BCTV News Hour produce an item paying attention to the Liberal campaign. The next similar item didn't come until October 8, an hour before the debate.

The items in the October 3 broadcast, coupled with the dearth of items until October 8, indicate an attempt by BCTV's news director to ease the network out of its position of support, or "equal treatment," for the Liberals. By easing out of that position, BCTV viewers might not realize the "equal treatment" ended when the Liberals were no longer useful for BCTV's attempt to broadcast the leaders' debate.

If BCTV's News Director had considered the Liberal campaign equal in importance, and so news value, to the Social Credit and New Democrat campaigns, as comments in its "debate about the debate" had stated, the Liberals would have remained in the news after gaining a place in the leaders' debate. This did not happen. The most plausible explanation of the disappearance of the Liberals from the news discourse is that BCTV's News Director never considered the Liberal campaign as important as the campaigns of Social Credit and the New Democrats. The Liberal campaign

was instead important only as long as it could be useful for BCTV's efforts to host the leaders' debate.

While BCTV stopped paying attention to the Liberal campaign, the corporation's attempts to organize another debate did continue, as evidenced with items aired October 4 and October 7. BCTV now said a second debate was necessary to address issues the first debate would not address. It was also necessary because BCTV's debate would include the Green Party, the champion of important environmental issues that would not be addressed in CBC's debate. It should be clear from this rationale that the necessity of Gordon Wilson's participation was no more legitimate to BCTV than the Green Party's participation had now become. His efforts, and the Green Party's, were simply tools the BCTV corporation used in its efforts to host a debate.

#### II.4 THE VOICE OF B.C. POLL

As the campaign began, BCTV promised its audience that the Voice of B.C. Poll would ask the questions voters wanted asked, about the issues politicians wouldn't talk about. The Voice of B.C. had polled voters to assess what questions voters wanted asked. Having done that, the Voice of B.C. almost never used those questions for its polling in the second week of the campaign. BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll also ignored the daily New Democrat appearances that answered the questions BCTV had suggested politicians "wouldn't talk about". As a consequence, BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll helped the Liberal Party's efforts this week and hindered the New Democrat's campaign. It also ignored the concerns of voters it promised to take to the politicians.

As Table 12 shows, BCTV produced 14 items in between September 27 and October 3 concerning poll results, 13 of these concerning its Voice of B.C. Poll. Another used results of a B.C. Business Council poll. Two of 13 items were the lead item and the remainder were well back in the broadcasts.

During the same time period, CBC-TV did not produce a single item referring to poll results. Four items tracked the party preferences of polled voters.

Table 12

Issue: Issues polled by the media: placement/total						
Date	9.27	9.29	9.30	10.1	10.2	10.3
BCTV	1/3	n/a	5/5	0/4	0/5	0/3
BCTV1	6;7/7	6/6	5;6;7/11	2;3/11	1;4/6	7;10/11
CBC-TV	0/5	0/5	0/5	0/3	0/5	0/6
T/day	3/15	1/11	4/21	2/18	2/16	2/20
T/week	3/15	4/26	8/47	10/65	12/81	14/101

The other items produced would suggest "what you consider to be the most important issues."<sup>32</sup> BCTV repeated this commitment September 30.

"Since the leaders don't seem willing to get into what the public feels are issues of substance, we've assigned several of our senior reporters to find out what they can about issues you really care about - jobs, health and education. They will have reports for you later this week."<sup>33</sup>

BCTV's "commitment" was broadcast Monday, halfway through the second week of the campaign. In the entire second week, those "issues of substance... you really care about" were addressed only once. The issue was weighing jobs against environmental protection. This was the only "issue" not worded to paraphrase some Party's campaign platform. There would have been three items if BCTV had produced polling results on health and education issues in the second week, but these were broadcast in the third week.

The interest of voters in issues "we really care about"

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<sup>32</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 20, 1991, second item.

<sup>33</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991, seventh item.

are not served by questions about party campaigns, party preferences and party weaknesses. These questions were useful for political parties in tailoring their campaigns. These questions did not serve the interests of voters, who were left without their questions asked and concerns addressed, contrary to claims by BCTV.

This is a good example of how the reliance of television media upon "official sources" sets conservative parameters for political debate. In this instance, however, even the "broader" concerns of BCTV's audience were ignored in producing its Voice of B.C. polls. Political participation was limited to those people who were direct participants in legislative politics. No anarchists, communists or even Progressive Conservatives were included. The parameters of participation and so of political debate were limited to "official" sources. Our democratic process is reduced to assessing the effect of a handful of dubious campaign slogans by these "official sources" of politics and what is political in British Columbia.

The second week of the campaign also produced instances where distinctions between the parties were not reproduced. This includes two of eight items detailing Voice of B.C. polling results. The questions used in these items were designed to group the parties together. This generalization down to "all" politicians or "any" party obliterated the differences between the parties. This produced further instances where these poll results were used to "cheerlead" for the Liberals, and worked against the New Democrat campaign.

The questions and conclusions in these items came on the 11th day of the campaign. They were the only polling results that could have distinguished the efforts of the three parties to address what most voters, most reporters, and most politicians considered "the issues." Each of those 11 days

the New Democrats made a policy statement, elaborating parts of the 48 point campaign platform the Party released the first day of the campaign. The Social Credit Party did not release a campaign platform, and made few policy statements. The Liberal Party campaign platform was released, but the party made no daily policy statements.

Two Voice of B.C. polling items asked the following questions. One, "So far in this campaign, voters have heard very little of substance from the candidates from any party." Two, "The negative TV advertising in which the Socreds and the New Democrats are attacking each other is just another example of B.C. politicians avoiding the issues."<sup>34</sup>

Seventy-two percent and 82 percent, respectively, agreed with these statements. The next item broadcast by BCTV used the results of these questions to suggest that "the leaders don't seem willing to get into what the public feels are issues of substance."<sup>35</sup>

The data produced by this question obfuscated an important difference between the New Democrat campaign and the campaigns of the other parties. The Liberal and Social Credit parties did not make daily policy statements in the first 11 days of this campaign, but the New Democrats made a specific policy statement every day. This obfuscation is produced through the design of the questions. The design cannot produce data tracking the individual performances of the three main political parties in B.C. As a result it is almost useless for people trying to realize which party or leader they will support.

This design implies either incompetence, partisanship or "balanced reporting" on the part of Storey and BCTV. Incompetence is possible, but less plausible than the other

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<sup>34</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991, sixth item.

<sup>35</sup>. BCTV News Hour, September 30, 1991, seventh item.

possibilities.

There is an element of partisanship. Storey was convinced there was an opportunity for a "third party, free enterprise alternative." He knew the New Democrats could do well by emphasizing it was a party people could trust. By obfuscating the differences between the parties, the New Democrat's daily efforts to be "a party people can trust" are not evident in the poll results. It is obvious if any campaign was hindered by this obfuscation it was the New Democrats. If it helped any campaign, it was the Liberal Party's campaign to "stop the bickering." Whether or not this was the intent, it was the effect of the question's design.

BCTV might defend the design of this question as an instance where the principle of "treating all parties equally" was applied. BCTV promises to address the issues because "none of the parties are answering your questions", "none of the leaders is addressing the issues you want to hear about", and "all politicians and political parties are the same."

If so, it would be another instance where "balanced reporting" overturned the "facts" of this campaign. The news, a "mirror of reality", seems once again to be more appropriately understood as a "product", this time designed to market BCTV's Voice of B.C. Poll. News items like these reduce the political spectrum to a single, generic, non-existent party of "all politicians". The effect of this media operating routine of "balanced reporting" is a systematic process of selection which reinforces our hegemonic political values. Even the "challenge" to those hegemonic values embodied by the New Democrats was marginalized by this process. The persistent absence of political alternatives in the news dissipates the recognition and pursuit of political alternatives. The political status quo - liberal consumerism and corporate capitalism - was reinforced.

## II.5 MEDIA GENERALIZATIONS AND MANIPULATION BY INUNDATION

The New Democrat's "manipulation by inundation" campaign strategy continued to be effective in the second week of the campaign. Mike Harcourt's campaign "appearances" continued to make the "news", and the few campaign mistakes made failed to capture the media's attention. Praise for the well-run New Democrat campaign suggests why mistakes became "unexpected" and "minor" for reporters on the Harcourt tour.

As shown in Table 13, 23 of 101 campaign items between September 27 and October 3 paid attention to the New Democrat campaign. Four of these were a lead item, two on Monday, September 30 and two on Thursday, October 3.

Eleven of those 23 items used Mike Harcourt's daily campaign "appearance". Friday, September 27 it was the promise of \$48 million to the tree fruit industry. Sunday, September 29, it was his promise of more funding for AIDS research. Monday, September 30, he promised half of all lottery funds would go to funding health care. Tuesday, October 1, Harcourt announced the management of the forest industry would be overhauled. Thursday, October 3, his criticism of the sale of the Expo lands also made the news.

Table 13

Issue: New Democrat campaign: placement/totals						
Date	9.27	9.29	9.30	10.1	10.2	10.3
BCTV	3/3	n/a	1;2/5	0/4	0/5	1/3
BCTV1	4;5/7	3/6	3;4/11	6;9/11	3/6	4;10/11
CBC	3/5	2;3/5	1/5	2/3	3/5	1;2;6/6
T/day	4/15	3/11	5/21	3/18	2/16	6/20
T/week	4/15	7/26	12/47	15/65	17/81	23/101

Wednesday, October 2, these NDP "appearances" were displaced by Social Credit's \$15B price tag of the NDP

platform. Three of these 23 items in the next two days paid attention to this Sacred theme. Just four of 23 items paid attention to "controversy" generated by the NDP campaign. Three of these concerned pro-life demonstrations.

The New Democrat campaign items were produced by BCTV and CBC-TV despite not being "bad news" about the New Democrats, "unexpected", and not being "desirable" because they were "good news" announcements. These appearances were designed to meet other criteria, though, that would implement the "manipulation by inundation" strategy. Strong visual backdrops satisfied the essential need for "high impact visual material". The use of short, repetitive statements matched with the visual backdrops satisfied the "frequency" and "unambiguity" criteria. The repetition of the "ethical misconduct" theme of the New Democrat campaign met the criterion for "continuity" as part of the running story. These appearances provided "negative" comments about Social Credit. The "meaningfulness" of the New Democrat campaign continued to be reinforced by the disintegration of the Social Credit campaign. The party's place in the legislative status quo and popular expectations for a New Democrat victory as the election began added to this "meaningfulness" and also satisfied the "threshold" requirement. The campaign was designed to emphasize Mike Harcourt, thereby playing to the "references to elite persons" that come with the "personalization" of political news.

The implementation of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy was very successful. Of the 11 items which used New Democrat campaign "appearances", the frame of 10, the body of 10, and the close of 11 reiterated unchallenged the language of those daily "appearances".

There was one comment on the precision and professionalism of the Harcourt tour. This item suggests how the organization of the NDP campaign was effective in keeping "controversy" from making the evening news.

"This is not a man beleaguered by rumours of wild spending and big-brotherism. He talks of moderate, reasonable policies, and presbyterian economics....

Harcourt's campaign is one of bare essentials. One policy statement per day, scheduled to make the evening news broadcast. When a leader appears to be well out in front, there appears no reason to try harder."<sup>36</sup>

While BCTV's Tony Parsons doesn't seem to like it, he uses it in the day's news anyway. Harcourt's organizers had succeeded in using the needs of the television networks to serve the interests of the New Democrat campaign. Mike Harcourt's statements were designed to fit into sound bites that could accompany visual clips. There were no long explanations of policy, or even long-winded criticisms of the Social Credit government's record. His "speeches" were reduced to sentences, or sometimes paragraphs, each written with the visual "text" of the background in mind.

There also was a "different" statement every day, so reporters had something "new" to report every day. As Taras notes, "news has an instant quality: news is what is happening now or is about to happen, not what happened last week or even yesterday."<sup>37</sup> The New Democrats guaranteed something "new" by being at a different location, discussing a different aspect of its platform and the reasons why that policy was needed, each day of the campaign.

The New Democrats also wanted to maintain a constant focus on the government's record of ethical conduct. To accomplish this, Harcourt's daily appearances used that record of ethical misconduct as the context for the need for New Democrat policy changes. The result was a tightly scripted daily statement, using one of many examples of criticized

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<sup>36</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 1, 1991, ninth item.

<sup>37</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990, pg. 100.

ethical conduct as a springboard for the day's "policy" announcement, designed to accomplish two things. One, accompany a visual backdrop appealing enough for television news directors to use the clip in the evening news. Two, be scripted concise and brief enough to require little or no editing, and so be used verbatim with the visual backdrop. As the campaign news makes clear, the New Democrats were highly successful in achieving this goal.

The hard work organizing the campaign behind the scenes, to organize that clip with the good visuals - the mountains around Revelstoke, the beauty of False Creek, scheduled "to make the evening news broadcast", left not just Harcourt but the reporters not having "to try harder". The New Democrat campaign did try to provide just "the bare essentials," but Harcourt and his people knew their daily "appearances" had what was essential for making the news. The hard organizational work to provide what was essential was effective because of the acknowledgment of certain media operating routines and definitions of "news".

The most important of these was the absolute necessity for the television corporations to have news of the New Democrat campaign each and every day. CBC-TV and BCTV had to have something new to produce for each day's news broadcast and it had to have high visual quality. The visual quality of the New Democrat appearances provided something with "news value" that BCTV and CBC-TV could justify as "newsworthy" for their news production.

As Hertsgaard notes, central to the success of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy was the recognition that the "news was, to the corporations that produced it, primarily a commodity to be bought and sold."<sup>38</sup> The quality of this commodity is directly related by media corporations to their

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<sup>38</sup> Hertsgaard, M., On Bended Knee: The Press and The Reagan Presidency, New York: Schocken Books, 1989, pg. 52.

ability to guarantee an audience for their advertisers. The medium of television is distinct in its ability to transmit images, and this distinct ability is what television corporations use to distinguish their commodity, news included, from the commodities produced in the mediums of print and radio. As a result, the quality and appeal of visual imagery produced in news broadcasts have become an "essential ingredient of a television news story"<sup>39</sup> and of a quality television news product.

"Visuals account for some 14 to 17 minutes of The National's on-air time of 22 minutes and the CTV National News' 24 minutes.... Story angles are often wrapped around the available visual material; in fact, reporters invariably view the camera footage before writing their texts and then speak to the pictures."<sup>40</sup>

New Democrat organizers knew the networks had to have something from that tour with high visual appeal to broadcast each day. Reporters found few if any of their own stories - in other words, mistakes that could be presented as "controversy" - to use in place of the NDP's "line of the day." As the close of another BCTV item noted, "[on] a slow news day,... that means you get your stories wherever you can."<sup>41</sup> Every day was designed to be a slow news day on the Harcourt campaign, expect for the "bare, essential" daily campaign appearances with their well considered visual appeal. The television media corporations used those appearances, because on most days their reporters and camera technicians had nothing else to show from the day's activities.

The media routine Bennett calls personalization was also considered in the design of the New Democrat campaign.

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<sup>39</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), pg. 109.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 109.

<sup>41</sup> BCTV News Hour, Saturday September 28, 1991, third item.

Bennett states that

"[p]ersonalized news can be defined as the journalistic bias that gives preference to the individual actors and human interest angles in events while downplaying institutional and political considerations that establish the social contexts for those events."<sup>42</sup>

In the 1975 campaign, the New Democrat campaign was personalized with very negative consequences for that campaign. Keith Baldrey personalized the 1975 New Democrat campaign as a "disastrous" championing of Dave Barrett, perhaps the last NDP leader with as much or more public recognition as his party.

In following elections there were, as Baldrey notes, unsuccessful emphases on policy. In the 1991 campaign, rather than trying to combat this systematic personalization of politics, and its focus on the leaders of political parties and not party policies, the New Democrats tried to use this media routine to its advantage. The emphasis on "moderate Mike" was designed to use that routine to highlight the contrast between the New Democrats that were elected in 1972 and defeated in 1975, and the New Democrats campaigning in 1991.

"... what is a twist for the NDP this time around is its plans to focus intense attention on its leader rather than emphasizing the party as much - an approach they haven't used since their disastrous 1975 campaign that championed Dave Barrett.... Harcourt's personality will be emphasized as much as anything else.... [Ron Johnson, New Democrat communications director, then adds] People like him and we want to show that. He's mainstream, he's moderate, he's innovative and he's energetic. That's what you'll be seeing."<sup>43</sup>

Ron Johnson might have added, Mike Harcourt is not Dave

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<sup>42</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York: Longman, 1988, pg. 26.

<sup>43</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Saturday, September 7, 1991, pg. B1, "Get Ready."

Barrett. Acknowledging the practice of personalization, the New Democrat campaign was designed to emphasize the personalization of the New Democrats into Mike Harcourt. He provided voters an antithesis to Dave Barrett that the media would emphasize again and again through adherence to the routine of personalization.

The importance of having the media and voters personalize the New Democrats into "moderate" Mike Harcourt was the similarity in the unity of the centre-right coalitions of 1972 and 1991. The centre-right coalition had fragmented in 1972 and opened the way for the New Democrats to form the provincial government that year.<sup>44</sup> A similar fragmentation or evacuation of the centre-right coalition had developed as the 1991 election began.<sup>45</sup>

In 1972, "the NDP played down the socialist issue. This low-profile strategy, which might be called a reverse band-wagon campaign, was used to deny the incumbent party an election issue upon which to mobilize support,...."<sup>46</sup>

The news discourse that produced much of our public experience of that 1972-1975 government provoked a refurbished coalescence of the centre-right coalition.<sup>47</sup> If anybody was

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<sup>44</sup> Blake, D., Two Political Worlds, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1985, chapter 3, especially pp. 24-27, 30-37.

<sup>45</sup> The Province, Friday, September 13, 1991, pp. 1,4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Cairns, A., and Wong, D., "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems, 1933-1983," in Hugh Thorburn, ed., Party Politics in Canada, 5th ed., Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1985, pg. 293.

<sup>47</sup> Blake, D., Two Political Worlds, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1985, chapter 3, especially pp. 24-27, 30-37; Kavic., L.J., and Nixon, G.B., The 1200 Days, A Shattered Dream: Dave Barrett and the NDP in B.C. 1972-1975, Coquitlam: Kaen Publishers, 1978; Cairns, A., and Wong, D., "Socialism, Federalism and the B.C. Party Systems, 1933-1983," in Hugh Thorburn, ed., Party Politics in Canada, 5th ed., Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1985, pp. 293-297; Gamey, C., "Government - Media Relations, Bennett-Barrett-Bennett", B.C. Project Working Paper, November 1980, pp. 5-29.

aware of this connection between the existence of centre-right fragmentation or coalescence, and New Democrat chances for being elected in the 1991 election, it was New Democrat campaign strategists. An emphasis on "moderate Mike", coupled with the media routine of personalization, provided little opportunity in the 1991 campaign news discourse for the production of lightning rods that might coalesce the centre-right coalition. It also created whatever distance possible from the performance of the Dave Barrett (New Democrat) government.

A by-product of this emphasis of Harcourt's personality in the campaign's first week was the elimination of policy statements in favour of program announcements. In the second week there were promises of \$48 million to the tree fruit industry but no policy for farm workers, \$100,000 more funding for AIDS research, a promise that half of all lottery funds would go to funding health care, a promise that the management of the forest industry would be overhauled, and the criticism of the sale of the Expo lands. As in the first week, there was one policy statement, on forestry, and the others were program announcements or criticisms of the Social Credit government.

It is clear the emphasis on Harcourt's personality sharpened the effect of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy. The effectiveness of this emphasis was sharpened with the "fragmented", "audio-visual bites" design of New Democrat campaign appearances and the "normalized" message that the only thing wrong with the way the state of politics in B.C. is the "dishonest Sacred government". As in the first week, these tactics required a concomitant decision to add little to the discussion of policy during the 1991 campaign. These tactics reinforced the lack of critical policy discussion being systematically produced by the news discourse. The consequence of the New Democrat's use of the "manipulation by inundation" media strategy, then, was still

further reinforcement of the routine maintenance of hegemonic political values in B.C. by our system of news production.

### III. The Campaign, Week Three

The third week of the campaign was dominated by the televised leaders' debate and its repercussions. As the row of Table 14 titled **Lib campaign** shows, after the debate on October 8 reporters began paying a great deal more attention to the Liberal campaign. Media analyses of Gordon Wilson's performance in the debate generally concluded he had been the "most direct" of the three leaders. However, an analysis of the questions asked and answers given indicates Wilson's answers may have been the most indirect but **least unambiguous** of the three leaders. At the same time, it may have been the ambiguity of Harcourt's responses that allowed analysts to conclude he had not answered many questions directly, when his responses can be seen to have been the most direct of the three leaders.

Table 14

Week 3, issues: presence in daily & weekly campaign items						
Date	10.4	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.10	Total
SC scandals	6/9	5/10	2/10	1/14	7/15	21/58
SC campaign	1/9	2/10	2/10	3/14	0/15	8/58
Lib campaign	1/9	1/10	7/10	7/14	9/15	25/58
ND campaign	2/9	2/10	5/10	4/14	6/15	19/58

As for the Social Credit Party, the news discourse did little to rebuild Socred support among the centre-right voters of B.C. As the row of Table 14 titled **SC campaign** shows, between October 4 and October 10 Social Credit campaign themes were making the news. However, as the row of Table 14 titled **SC scandals** shows, Social Credit campaign themes were rare in comparison to the protests, criticisms and mistakes dominating Social Credit campaign news between October 4 and October 10.

Mike Harcourt and the New Democrats, having escaped the debate with little effect upon their standing in the polls, were once again hindered by media generalizations. As the row of Table 14 titled ND campaign shows, the New Democrat's "manipulation by inundation" strategy continued to be effective, but the effectiveness of the New Democrat's campaign declined after the debate. After the debate, the presence of the New Democrat campaign was also lessened as BCTV shifted its full attention onto the Liberal campaign.

### III.1 SOCRED NUMBERS, BLUNDERS AND PROTESTS PERSIST

Before the debate there were two dominant senses of the Social Credit campaign. First, the Social Credit campaign themes were now being used in media items. These were the Socred price tag of New Democrat promises, and the suggested lack of integrity and honesty of the New Democrat about that cost. How these were used changed from the second to the third week, however, as the principle of "accurate reporting" gave way to the principle of "balanced reporting."

Second, while the Social Credit campaign was more effective, it continued to be reduced to the protests and controversy surrounding the Rita Johnston campaign. This emphasis persisted through the third week of the campaign, and can be attributed to media routines defining what is news and how the news is presented.

The media's reiteration of the Socred's "price tag" theme remained sparse. There was no shift in the continuing dominance of Rita Johnston's campaign with controversies and protests in the day's leading up to the debate.

Nine of 12 Social Credit campaign news items produced by BCTV paid attention to mistakes and protests. BCTV's News Hour used the first four items Friday, October 4, the first three Monday, October 7, and the second and fourth Tuesday, October 8, to focus on these controversies. Only three of

those 12 BCTV items paid attention to Social Credit campaign themes during the same period of time.

CBC's News Final produced four Social Credit campaign news items between October 4 and October 8. All four, its first two items Friday and the first two on Monday, paid attention to mistakes and protests. The lead item Monday was the only item that also reiterated a Social Credit campaign theme.

Table 15

Socred "blunders", before/after* debate: placement/total					
Date	10.4	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.10
CHEK-TV	n/a	n/a	n/a	0/4	n/a
BCTV	1;2;3;4/6	1;2;3/6	2;4/6	6/8	3;4/8
CBC-TV	1;2/3	1;2/4	0/4	0/2	1;2;3;4;7/7
T/day	6/9	5/10	2/10	1/14	7/15
T/week	6/9	11/19	13/29	14/43	21/58

\* Broadcasts after the debate are shaded.

Table 16

Socred campaign themes, before/ after* debate: placement/total					
Date	10.4	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.10
CHEK-TV	n/a	n/a	n/a	1 of 4	n/a
BCTV	5/6	5/6	6/6	0/8	0/8
CBC-TV	0/3	1/4	1/4	1;2/2	0/8
T/day	1/9	2/10	2/10	3/14	0/16
T/week	1/9	3/19	5/29	8/43	8/58

\*Broadcasts after the debate are shaded.

Nine of the 12 items broadcast after the debate paid specific attention to Johnston's performance, as opposed to her campaign. Eight used sources and language that reinforced New Democrat campaign themes. The one exception was an interview with Social Credit Party members the day after the

debate.

Johnston's performance in the debate was newsworthy in large part because of the event itself: the first televised leaders' debate in B.C. provincial legislative politics.

According to Galtang and Ruge's list of 12 "general news values"<sup>1</sup>, this event met at least eight criteria for a news story. The time span, or "frequency" of this event was very short, having been designed for television. The "threshold" of this event, its "size" relative to other events in the campaign, was very "large". The clarity of the meaning of this event was very "unambiguous". Its "meaningfulness", indicated by its "cultural proximity" and its "relevance" for the television audience, was very high. The "consonance", or predictability that the debate - conflict - would occur was very high. The "unexpectedness", or in this case the rarity of the event was very high, and in the wake of the debate, the results of the debate were also very "unexpected." The debate referred to "elite persons". It also was readily "personalized."

Nine of 12 Social Credit campaign news items after the debate, between October 8 and October 10, paid attention to Premier Johnston's campaign. CBC paid attention to the Social Credit campaign, often in the context of the debate, with eight news items, BCTV with four items. Both CBC items the day after the debate built upon Socred campaign themes, but all five the next day built upon New Democrat campaign themes to make sense of events involving Rita Johnston and the Social Credit. In the two days following the debate, BCTV did not reiterate a single Socred campaign theme to make sense of that party's campaign.

There was nothing unexpected about Social Credit's continuing disintegration. What was newsworthy about the

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<sup>1</sup> Hartley, J., Understanding News, New York: Methuen, 1982, pp. 76-77.

Social Credit campaign was the continuing protests, mistakes and now the "poor" debate performance of Johnston, that could be easily produced as instances of conflict, controversy, and "bad news" for an "elite person", Rita Johnston, because of the "personalization" of the Socred campaign.

Typical of the language of items reiterating Social Credit campaign themes was the following comment by BCTV's News Hour.

"On the campaign trail last night Premier Rita Johnston again hammered away at the cost of the NDP campaign promises. You will recall that earlier this week the Socreds charged that the NDP campaign platform would cause a staggering \$15B deficit. The NDP says that is a ridiculous distortion, but as it turns out, neither party can really say what the bottom line will be.... [The body of the item adds] From vague NDP statements John Janssen comes up with his figures."<sup>2</sup>

The Socred "price tag" is very effective in this instance. The news item not only reiterates the Socred theme, but defends it. The effectiveness of this tactic seems to be accomplished through adherence to the media routine of "balanced reporting".

This item ignored the BCTV corporation's own detailed analysis and costing of the New Democrat platform broadcast two days previous. That BCTV analysis produced little difference between the Social Credit and New Democrat planned budgets.<sup>3</sup> That conclusion was repeated on BCTV's Noon News Hour the next day. It stated, "In fact, the NDP is committed to a plan very close to the Social Credit forecast.... [The BCTV expert interviewed, Michael Campbell, adds] the plan is too vague to cost accurately, for the NDP or the Socred's."<sup>4</sup> This comment, which **does not** imply the Social Credit's figures

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<sup>2</sup> BCTV News Hour, Friday October 4, 1991, fourth item.

<sup>3</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday October 2, 1991, fourth item.

<sup>4</sup> BCTV Noon News Hour, Thursday October 3, 1991, first item.

may be accurate, is used to justify the news "frame" quoted above, which does imply those figures may be accurate. The New Democrats cannot show that the Socreds are wrong, so the Socreds may be right; no one really knows. This allows BCTV and CBC-TV to continue to reiterate the Socred campaign theme, despite its "astonishing numbers... [and] mathematics [that] seemed as shaky as the easel."<sup>5</sup>

The items broadcast by BCTV and CBC-TV the day after the debate continue to rely upon the Social Credit costing to make the cost of those promises an issue. The reporters and news directors involved might have relied upon their own independent costing broadcast just a week earlier. If they had, they might have come to the same conclusion the voters did in a BCTV Voice of B.C. Poll. It stated that "only 21% believed Rita Johnston ... [and her party's claims that] NDP promises will cost \$15B."<sup>6</sup>

But they did not come to that conclusion. Here can be seen a shift from the principle of "accurate reporting" to the more rigidly adhered to principle of "balanced reporting. As Taras notes,

"the problem with the "pro-con" model is that many issues ... may have only a single defensible position.... Odd or extreme positions can be legitimized.... Since journalists are there merely to present the two sides of any issue, there is no pressure on them to analyze further or discover the truth, or ... even familiarize themselves with the basic facts."<sup>7</sup>

However, the research and the familiarity with the facts existed within BCTV's campaign news team. In this instance, there must have a conscious decision to ignore that information in order to achieve "balanced" news about the cost

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<sup>5</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday October 2, 1991, first item.

<sup>6</sup> BCTV News Hour, Monday October 7, 1991, first item.

<sup>7</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990), pg. 104.

of the New Democrats campaign. This extreme example of "balanced reporting" might suggest an attempt by BCTV and CBC-TV to create drama where none existed, by ignoring the facts that would have and should have limited the reiteration and so the effect of this Sacred campaign theme. The drama is necessary, as noted already, to hold the attention of the audience, so that the guarantee of a liberal, consumerist audience can be sold to advertisers by the television corporations.

The treatment of this issue once again indicates that the processes of news production were not some sort of "mirroring of reality". Facts and opinions were systematically edited out of the campaign news discourse, so that otherwise unfounded opinions could be formed, in order to produce situations that did not exist in the campaign. The news discourse did not differ in degree from the campaign events themselves, it differed in kind. It did not differ by accident, or in this isolated instance, but as a consequence of the routinization of selectivity in news production that guarantees the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values in B.C.

The effectiveness of this campaign theme nevertheless continued to be overshadowed by the misfortunes and blunders that befell the Sacred. There was the apology to parents angry at seeing their children "recruited" into wearing Sacred sweatshirts for the evening news. There was the lack of agreement between Stan Hagen and Rita Johnston about the fate of the ferries running between Comox and Powell River. "Experts" criticized the North East coal project. A Sacred candidate on the Sunshine Coast was accused of conflict of interest. Minister of Forests Claude Richmond was the focal point of vocal public protests. And there also was the series of events that led to Johnston's apology for the "fake tax assessment".

Even Johnston's performance in the debate was placed in a critical light. She tried to make voters realize two things during the debate. One, that "honesty and integrity" was as much an issue for fiscal conduct as for ethical conduct. By doing this she could bend this NDP campaign theme to the benefit of her campaign. Two, that Mike Harcourt and his Party had been dishonest about the cost of the NDP platform during the campaign. The device used to attempt this was her repeated demands to "give us the numbers, Mike".

The most persistent conclusion about her effort was not that Harcourt had been dishonest, or that his lack of integrity in fiscal matters was more important than integrity in ethical matters. It was that Mrs. Johnston had done too much "name calling" - "you're gutless". She also conducted herself poorly. She was "scolding", "sniping", "scrappy", "malicious", and "strident." Of the nine items that made sense of her performance in the debate, eight used one or more of these terms. It is not surprising that a male press gallery would stereotype a woman's determination and frustration in this way. It happened to Sheila Copps before it happened to Johnston. These stereotypes dominated the analyses of her performance, and undermined it.

Together with her Party's misfortunes, these stereotypes overshadowed the presence of Sacred campaign themes in the news discourse. They contributed to Johnston's agenda being dropped from the news discourse immediately after the debate. The erosion of public support for the Social Credit had produced and maintained a vacuum for centre-right voters necessary to foster the legitimacy of the Liberal option. If anything, the Social Credit Party campaign fueled public reaction to the Liberal Party in the wake of the debate.

### III.2      October 8: The Debate

I have broken down the study of the debate into two parts: the debate itself and the media items which used clips

of it in news broadcasts. In the first part, **Questions and answers**, a breakdown of the questions asked is followed with a study of how the questions were answered. The breakdown and study are used to analyze how our media made sense of this debate. This analysis suggests there is reason to be skeptical of the media's overwhelming conclusion that "Gordon Wilson ... came closest to directly answering the questions."<sup>8</sup> Instead, it can be understood that Wilson may have been the least ambiguous, but least direct, while Harcourt was the most direct, but also most ambiguous.

The second of this section, **Shifts in how the media made sense of the debate**, juxtaposes the voting public's reaction to the debate - suggested with poll results - with media reactions to the debate and to those poll results. This juxtaposition indicates the television media was at first skeptical of the impact of Gordon Wilson's performance, with the exception of BCTV's exuberance. This was tempered and then disappeared as poll results began suggesting the debate might end up changing the map of electoral politics in B.C.

### III.2.1 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"The format is the result of negotiations between the three parties and the CBC. The format is on the conservative side, but if the leaders choose to debate tonight, there is room to debate."<sup>9</sup>

"None of them were up to facing their inquisitors. The questions asked were extremely good, extremely hard questions, and it made all three of them squirm at times, but Gordon Wilson came closest to

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<sup>8</sup> CHEK-TV Noon News, Wednesday October 9, 1991, second item, comment by Norman Ruff, a professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria.

<sup>9</sup> CBC-TV, Debate '91, October 8, 1991, opening statements from Kevin Evans, moderator.

meeting them head on."<sup>10</sup>

Mike Harcourt said he succeeded in sticking to the issues during the debate, but most analyses suggested he did not answer the questions as "head on" as Gordon Wilson. The reason for this difference of opinion was not an NDP gloss on how Harcourt performed, but a lack of attention to the details.

The structure of the debate allowed as many as 18 responses to be asked of each leader. While each leader would have at least three questions directed to him or her, in theory from none to all nine follow-up questions could be asked of any one leader. Table 16 indicates that the distribution of questions is not pointed enough to conclude it was partisan. However, only Vaughn Palmer asked a question of the Liberal leader designed to put him on the spot as he would do to the other leaders.

Table 17

The Number of questions asked of each leader by each reporter				
	Harcourt	Johnston	Wilson	Totals
Froese	3	1	1	5
Evans	2	2	1	5
Palmer	2	2	2	6
<b>Totals</b>	7	5	4	16

Palmer's question was, which party would Wilson support if he held the balance of power? Evans asked for comments on "something not much talked about during this campaign", the constitution and specifically the distinct society clause in constitutional proposals at the time. Froese asked Wilson a question "for all leaders" on how to go about restoring public

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<sup>10</sup> CHEK-TV Noon News, Wednesday October 9, 1991, third item, comment by Norman Ruff, a professor of political science at the University of Victoria.

confidence in politics in this province. As a result, while Harcourt had seven "extremely hard" questions, and Johnston five, Wilson had one.

This breakdown makes the questions less "balanced". It seems Mr. Froese had a bit more interest in exploring the positions and promises of Mike Harcourt and the New Democrats than the other leaders' positions. The character of the questions indicates neither Evans nor Froese treated Wilson's policy statements and the Liberal Party's record with the same skepticism shown the other two leaders.

Whatever we conclude was the reasoning, or lack thereof behind such little attention paid to Wilson, only being asked one "tough" question made it easier for Wilson to answer his questions more directly and "squirm" less than Harcourt and Johnston. As well, with little hope or fear of being made government, he could use a traditional opposition party technique of speaking with the knowledge his words would not come back to him in media interviews after the election.

Mike Harcourt drew the lot which allowed his opening statement to begin the debate. He said in that opening statement, and three more times in response to comments from both Johnston and Wilson, "I hope we can stick to the issues and stay away from the distortions and name calling." The next day, Harcourt said he set out to do two things in the debate. The first he had achieved -sticking to the issues - but not the second, avoiding the name calling and distortions.<sup>11</sup> Most media reports of the debate and published comments from on-the-street interviews<sup>12</sup> did not

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<sup>11</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Tuesday October 8, 1991, first item.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 14 media items studied here which reproduced aspects of the debate - 6 from CBC-TV News Final, 3 from CHEK-TV Noon News, and 5 from BCTV News Hour - two reproduced Mr. Harcourt's self-assessment. Three reproduced conclusions that "there was too much mudslinging" without distinguishing who did it and who didn't, or that all three were guilty. The other nine items made no sense of

reiterate Harcourt's claimed success in "sticking to the issues".

Harcourt was not glossing over a shoddy performance in the debate. Harcourt had tried to do both things. He had made direct responses to questions asked, while "sticking to the issues." The "issues", defined by the reporters' questions, were often focussed by Party campaign issues: "honesty and integrity", "fiscal management," and "there's a viable third option." However, the questions asked did not always coincide with party campaign themes.

Table 17 shows that in 12 of 17 replies Harcourt gave a direct response to the question, but then put this in the context of an NDP campaign theme. In doing so, Harcourt left those 12 replies open for voters, reporters and the other leader's to conclude whether or not he had been direct in his responses.

Table 18

The responses produced by the Party leaders				
	<u>D</u> irect <sup>13</sup>	<u>A</u> voided <sup>14</sup>	<u>D</u> /C <sup>15</sup>	Totals
Johnston	5/15	4/15	6/15	15
Harcourt	3/17	2/17	12/17	17
Wilson	4/15	8/15	3/15	15

those parts of the debate.

<sup>13</sup> "Direct" indicates the number of direct responses.

<sup>14</sup> "Avoided" indicates those responses which avoided a direct response, and those which both avoided a direct response and produced a Party campaign theme.

<sup>15</sup> "D/C" indicates responses which produced both a direct response to the question asked and a Party campaign theme, and as such were ambiguous, ie., the viewer was left to conclude whether what was said was the direct response s/he wanted to hear - a "direct" response - or just another empty, packaged campaign speech - an "avoided" response, or both.

Table 18 shows that eight of the 15 comments made by Wilson during the debate avoided or ignored the question. Wilson was no more direct than Johnston or Harcourt, and by the measure used here avoided direct responses more than either of the other leaders. However, Wilson was the least ambiguous. Eleven of 15 comments from Wilson involved campaigning to some extent, but only three of 15 attempted to combine a direct response with campaigning. Either he made a specific campaign speech, a specific direct response, or avoided the question and campaigned, without having to deflect the question onto one of the other leaders. In contrast, Harcourt was the most direct - 15 of 17 comments produced a direct response - but most ambiguous of the three leaders, as 12 of 17 comments combined a direct response with campaigning. It may be that Wilson's specific, unambiguous, if often indirect comments, left less room for skepticism. Consequently, his comments were treated with less immediate skepticism by voters who watched the debate.

This may explain how "most observers had Gordon Wilson coming out on top of the leaders' debate...."<sup>16</sup> This conclusion by the media and its chosen experts was broadcast in every reference to Wilson's performance, 16 times between Tuesday, October 8, and Thursday, October 10. The following comment was indicative of those conclusions. "None of the three were really spectacular, but ... Gordon Wilson ... [was the] most well prepared and came closest to directly answering the questions."<sup>17</sup> Wilson was only asked one question designed to garner a public statement on some policy of the Liberal Party. Coupled with his unambiguous, unchallenged statements about the policies of the other parties, Wilson was

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<sup>16</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 10, 1991, first item.

<sup>17</sup> CHEK-TV Noon News, Wednesday October 9, 1991, second item, comment by Norman Ruff, a professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria.

allowed a chance to make a good impression.

For Harcourt, the only persistent conclusion in the frames and closes of media items in the days immediately after the debate was that he, like Johnston, avoided the issues but not the mudslinging. It was not said he had given direct answers to the questions, and then started campaigning, and then started mudslinging. His answers were simplified by reporters, and voters interviewed, to one thing: mudslinging. Harcourt and the NDP might have been more effective by eliminating even more chances for ambiguities than was done. He could have done one thing or the other, but not both.

### III.2.2 SHIFTS IN HOW THE MEDIA MADE SENSE OF THE DEBATE

"There is considerable disagreement among scholars about what effects the debates have.... [Some] argue that views about and images of the candidates [are] largely determined before the debate; the debate serve[s] to reinforce rather than alter these preferences. Yet scholars also contend that there are circumstances when performances in a debate can be decisive: when one or more of the party leaders is not well known and in a sense is being introduced to large numbers of voters for the first time...."<sup>18</sup>

In this section the immediate media analyses of the debate are set alongside the swift, differing realization reached by many voters. The media analyses concluded there would be little to no impact from Gordon Wilson's performance on the electoral success of the Liberal Party. The reasoning was that a debate "confirms for [voters] what they were thinking of doing anyway."<sup>19</sup> However, enough voters came to a such a different conclusion about Wilson's performance that it could not have confirmed what people were going to do

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<sup>18</sup> David Taras, The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), pg. 167-168.

<sup>19</sup> CHEK-TV Noon News, Wednesday October 9, 1991, lead item, interview with Norman Ruff, a professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria.

anyway. It appears that the debate instead "introduced" Gordon Wilson to many of us, and it was a very effective introduction. BCTV's Voice of B.C. Poll and other polls extended and compounded the effect of Wilson's performance by allowing each of us to witness the Liberals' surge in the polls. It provided the evidence for disaffected Socreds and hopeful Liberals to realize their votes wouldn't be wasted by voting Liberal in this election.

The absence of Socred campaign news after the debate was accompanied by an increase in the attention paid to Gordon Wilson's debate performance. The day after the debate BCTV News Hour shifted its focus of the campaign to include the Liberal campaign. The next day BCTV ignored the campaigning of both Rita Johnston and Mike Harcourt, while paying attention to the Liberal campaign or Liberal policies in seven of eight election items in that broadcast.

BCTV ended up increasing its production of items concerning the Liberal campaign from four of 18 election items in the three broadcasts before the debate, to 12 of 16 election items in the two broadcasts after the debate. Three of four BCTV broadcasts after the debate placed Wilson's performance or its effect as the lead item. This was a dramatic shift in BCTV's news production.

There was no noticeable shift in the CBC's production of news of the Liberal campaign. In the days immediately before the debate, Friday, October 4 and Monday, October 7, CBC paid no attention to the Liberal campaign. After the debate CBC produced two of nine items that paid attention to the Liberal campaign. These items were placed after other items concerning the election.

Table 19

Liberal campaign before/after* debate: placement/total					
Date	10.4	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.10
CHEK	n/a	n/a	n/a	1;2;3/4	no data
BCTV	6/6	4/6	1;2;4;6/6	1;2;4;8/8	1;4;5;6;7;8/8
CBC	-/3	-/4	1;2;3/4	-/2	6;7/7
T/day	1/9	1/10	7/10	7/14	9/15
T/week	1/9	2/19	9/29	16/43	25/58

\* Broadcasts after debate are shaded.

A CBC-TV item discussing the surge in Liberal popularity closes by noting that "[t]he Liberals have not been able to elect an MLA since 1975."<sup>20</sup> Given how long it had been, one could have looked at the Liberal surge and concluded at least two things. One, ignore it because it wouldn't last, and so nothing was "really" happening. The traditional voting patterns had existed too long for people to actually risk wasting votes on election day. If the surge lasts, then maybe start taking it seriously. Two, look out because the polls don't lie: traditional voting patterns have been shattered.

CBC-TV quite clearly accepted the first position, that it was too early to proclaim the traditional political demographics of B.C. had experienced a radical change overnight.

The BCTV news director would likely rely upon the second possibility to explain BCTV's increased emphasis of the Liberal campaign. BCTV was simply reflecting the magnitude of the story of the Liberal's resurgence. After all, according to Galtang and Ruge's set of "general news values", Gordon Wilson's performance and the accompanying surge in the popularity of his party could be considered "large enough" relative to other events to be emphasized, "meaningful" to the

<sup>20</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Thursday October 10, 1991, sixth item.

audience, "unexpected", a story involving an "elite person", and a story easily "personalized".

This second position could have been used by BCTV to defend the shift in its news of the Liberal campaign, if at the time anyone had taken that second position. None of the analyses of the debate used in media items took that second position, though, even after the initial poll results. As a consequence, there was still too little in the way of facts or expert opinions for BCTV to explain its shift in news production. A better explanation of that shift is provided with an analysis of items that "cheered on" the Liberal Party.

Two items were used to broadcast the results of a "high school election" at Carson Graham Secondary in North Vancouver.

"Some more good news for the Liberal Party,... [although] the results are tempered by a relatively low 25% voter turnout among the students."<sup>21</sup>

The same BCTV broadcasts produced nothing concerning either Mike Harcourt's or Rita Johnston's campaign tour, but two items concerning this high school election in a upper middle class riding with a tradition of voting Liberal. This "good news" is comparable to taking a poll in the same Liberal riding and suggesting it is indicative of the province-wide support for all three parties. It also goes directly against routine adherence to the news value of "negativity", or "bad news". Another News Hour item broadcast the previous night, producing the "highlights" of the debate, differed markedly from other "highlight" items produced by CBC-TV and CHEK-TV. BCTV edited out the performances of both Rita Johnston and Mike Harcourt, except when used to lead into a selection of Gordon Wilson's comments.

"Here's a classic example.... [We have to] get the taxman off the back of the people.... [Interrupting Harcourt's comment about the

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<sup>21</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 10, 1991, seventh item.

constitution] don't duck this issue, Michael....  
 You had a chance to show leadership...."<sup>22</sup>

The other summaries of the debate reproduced all three leaders both taking someone to task and being taken to task. This highlight package and the high school items were added to the timely third instalment of the opinions of swing voters from Delta, a traditional Sacred community. This all seemed too exuberant, almost like a shout of "Eureka!"

If BCTV had not "jumped on the Liberal bandwagon", its news production may have been similar to CBC's. CBC-TV's News Final broadcasts downplayed the "big story." These broadcasts seemed to accept the conclusion that the debate would have little effect on traditional voting patterns in B.C. provincial politics. Other than items "highlighting" or analyzing the debate, the campaign of Gordon Wilson and the Liberal Party did not make the CBC News Final the day after the debate. The following day, poll results showing the surge in popular support for the Liberals came after every other item concerning the election.

While the effect of the shift in BCTV's coverage was partisan, "good news" for the Liberal Party, the source of this shift seems readily explained by routine adherence to what Bennett calls the "dramatization" of news. Bennett suggests that

"[t]he main principle involved with casting newsmakers in their nightly roles has more to do with their potential as dramatic actors than with any ... preeminence they may have in the political scheme of things."<sup>23</sup>

The poll results suggested there was a chance the traditional voting patterns had shifted in B.C. The chance of this was enough to focus on the possibility of something

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<sup>22</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday October 9, 1991, second item.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, W.L., News: The Politics of Illusion, New York: Longman, 1988, pg. 35.

completely unexpected: a Liberal resurgence. This possibility provided an opportunity for drama, to create a horse race where none existed or could have been suggested up to this point in the campaign. The drama of this possibility, of the dark horse coming out of nowhere to make a race of it with the New Democrats, is produced for a very specific reason. It is designed to appeal to its liberal, consumerist audience and to entice that audience to follow the development or unfolding of the drama. The value of this for the media corporation is the opportunity to use the expected audience to maximize the profit made for the advertising time sold during the news broadcasts. The greater the audience size and predictability, the greater the value of the advertising time. Making the guarantee of the media corporation's audience predictable demands that liberal, consumerist values be systematically emphasized in the dramatization of political news. This routinization of news production guarantees the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values in B.C.

Of the three analyses of the debate broadcast - one each by CHEK-TV Noon News, CBC-TV News Final, and BCTV News Hour - and the two printed by The Vancouver Sun, four said Wilson likely gained "some" support from his performance. These also concurred with the conclusion that "at best, he [Wilson] improved his party's chances of winning its first representation in the legislature since the 1970s."<sup>24</sup> The debate was not likely to have "a huge impact on the final [election] results."<sup>25</sup> Then, the evening of October 10, BCTV aired some surprising results from its Voice of B.C. poll.

"When this election campaign began three weeks ago, Liberal leader Gordon Wilson predicted this time

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<sup>24</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Thursday October 10, 1991, pg. A18, Vaughn Palmer column.

<sup>25</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Thursday October 10, 1991, pg. A16, "Liberal leader Wilson posts paltry win in mediocre battle of words," analysis by Keith Baldrey.

his party would surprise everyone. At the time not many took his prediction seriously, but tonight that may have changed. And all as the result of one TV appearance.... Our latest Voice of B.C. poll indicates many voters thought so, too, and the Liberals are suddenly a force to be reckoned with.... Since our last poll the NDP is down three points [to 38%], the Social Credit four points [to 26%], and the Liberals have jumped from 14 to 23 points, and there is no question why this happened."<sup>26</sup>

This was followed by the clip of "why this happened". Wilson, watching Johnston berate Harcourt, who finally took the bait and berated her in return, was struck by the same realization that struck the reporters watching and many of those polled voters. "Here's a classic example of why nothing ever gets done in the province of British Columbia, right here, you saw it."<sup>27</sup> With that one comment, in one moment of realization, he seemed to manage to burden both Johnston and Harcourt with five years of voter discontent with the current government, and politics in general, for doing nothing more for the country and taxpayers than bickering at one another. People didn't know much about "that Wilson fellow," but they were impressed by "how he handled himself" in the debate.

Les Storey, BCTV's pollster, concludes "a significant number of them [voters] were moved to switch their support." His reasoning is that "when you have a debate like this, and one of three candidates scores well as Wilson did, then we have the possibility of a positive vote for the first time in this campaign."<sup>28</sup>

This conclusion makes little sense to me. Most studies of voting patterns of British Columbia provincial politics

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<sup>26</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 10, 1991, first item.

<sup>27</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Tuesday October 8, 1991, first clip in the introduction of this broadcast, which ends with introduction of the anchor.

<sup>28</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 10, 1991, first item.

indicate that voter support for the New Democrats is what Storey would call "positive". Most of the New Democrat's support comes from people who support that Party's platform, not from people who consider the New Democrats the lesser of two or more evils.<sup>29</sup> A great deal of Social Credit support, these same studies conclude, is what Storey seems to consider a "negative" vote: people who have voted Socred because they just couldn't bring themselves to vote New Democrat.<sup>30</sup>

Storey's conclusion makes little sense in the face of this significant difference between the New Democrat and the Social Credit vote. This difference does not lead to the conclusion that "we have the possibility of a positive vote for the first time in this campaign." The traditional New Democrat vote is very much a "positive" vote. The following theory about the effects of a debate is more persuasive.

"Scholars contend there are circumstances when performances in a debate can be decisive when one or more of the party leaders is not well known and is in a sense being introduced to large numbers of voters for the first time ...."<sup>31</sup>

This would seem a perfect description of the situation Gordon Wilson found himself in as the debate began. He was almost unknown and was being introduced to a large portion of the electorate. His performance had that much more effect on the immediate response of voters as a result. It was a "positive" response to Wilson, but it did not create an opportunity for the first "positive" vote in the election.

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<sup>29</sup> See Donald E. Blake, Two Political Worlds, Vancouver:UBC Press, 1985, chapter three, especially pp. 34-35.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, especially pg. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Marjorie Hershey, "The Campaign and the Media", in The Election of 1988, Gerald Pomper, ed., Chatham, New Jersey:Chatham House Publishers, 1989, pg. 89.

### III.3 MEDIA GENERALIZATIONS AND MANIPULATION BY INUNDATION

The New Democrat campaign continued to make the daily news broadcasts leading up to the debate, but the effectiveness of the New Democrat's campaign declined after the debate. Nevertheless, NDP policy statements dominated the news production of that campaign. Media generalizations continued to hinder the effectiveness of New Democrat campaign tactics. After the debate, the presence of the New Democrat campaign was also lessened as BCTV shifted its full attention onto the Liberal campaign.

As Table 20 shows, between October 4 and October 10, 19 of 58 campaign news items made sense of the New Democrat campaign. Mike Harcourt's daily campaign "appearances" made the news of five of 58 news items in the campaign's third week. New Democrat policy positions were used in the production of another eight of those 58 items. Another six items concerned two unplanned "issues". One, the Socred's "\$15B price tag" for the New Democrat's "48 point plan" campaign platform, made news before the debate. The other, the New Democrat's "negative ad campaign", made news after the debate.

Table 20

ND campaign, before/after* debate: placement/total					
Date	10.4	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.10
CHEK-TV	n/a	n/a	n/a	1/4	n/a
BCTV	2/6	3/6	3;5;6/6	1;7/8	2;4;8/8
CBC-TV	3/3	2/4	1;4/4	2/2	1;5;7/7
T/day	2/9	2/10	5/10	4/14	6/15
T/week	2/9	4/19	9/29	13/43	19/58

\*Broadcasts the days after the debate are shaded.

Friday, October 4, BCTV reiterated Harcourt's criticism of how Johnston handled the Kempf affair. CBC-TV focussed on

"the series of photo opportunities like this one" of Harcourt playing tennis. Monday, October 7, both BCTV and CBC-TV reiterated Harcourt's conclusion that the Socred's are "desperate," and having been "running a campaign based on distortion" because "they will do anything to hang onto power." Tuesday, October 8, both BCTV and then CBC-TV ignored the New Democrat's daily appearance. Instead, they paid attention to the New Democrat ad campaign and the similarities with an American ad campaign. Wednesday, October 9, both networks had one item asking Harcourt about his performance in the debate. BCTV also produced an item concerning the "battle of negative campaign ads." CBC-TV used its item to ask Harcourt about his performance in the debate, and to pay attention to a new "major thrust of the NDP campaign", the "care card ad campaign". Thursday, October 10, neither BCTV nor CBC-TV devoted a news item to the New Democrat's campaign.

The "manipulation by inundation" strategy was not as effective in the third week of the campaign as it had been in the first two weeks. Unplanned sources of news of the New Democrat campaign were used more frequently than the New Democrat's planned sources. The anticipation and repercussions of the debate contributed to the displacement of the lesser events planned for the New Democrat campaign.

The unplanned news - Social Credit's "price tag" and BCTV's "battle of negative ads" - satisfied many of the general news criteria set out by Galtang and Ruge. They were easily "personalized" because of their reference to "elite persons," and they were "negative". As Hartley notes about Galtang and Ruge's criterion of "negativity",

"Bad news is good news [for mass media]. It is generally "unexpected", "unambiguous", it "happens quickly", it is "consonant" with general [media] expectations about the state of the world, and hence its "threshold" is lower than that for

positive news."<sup>32</sup>

As noted earlier, items concerning the debate - anticipation of the event, analyses of and reactions to the event - also met eight of Galtung and Ruge's list of 12 criteria: time span or "frequency", "threshold", "lack of ambiguity", "meaningfulness" indicated by its "cultural proximity" and its "relevance" for the television audience, "consonance", "unexpectedness" or in this case rarity, references to "elite persons", and ready "personalization."

It was these events unplanned by New Democrat strategists that limited the effectiveness of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy. As a result, the New Democrats found themselves by and large outside the broadcast news discourse in the days immediately after the debate.

The displacement of the Mike Harcourt/New Democrat campaign appearances with items producing the Party's "negative ad campaign" was in part the consequence of the media routine of "balanced reporting." This "balanced treatment" is accomplished by confusing what can be understood as three distinct meanings of the term "negative" used within these news items. One, "critical of another party's actual performance". Two, "contrived attacks, often personal, which can't be substantiated". This technique is popular in the U.S.A. Three, "focusing on what your opponent did wrong instead of what you can do right". The New Democrat ad causing the "trouble" is "negative" in the first sense, Social Credit ads are "negative" in the second sense. The news discourse persistently eliminates the differences in these ad campaigns, instead characterizing the New Democrat ads with the sense of "negative" that typifies Socred ads.

This specific shift in media attention begins the day of the debate. BCTV frames an item with the statement,

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<sup>32</sup> Hartley, J., Understanding News, Methuen:New York, 1982, pg. 79.

"As part of their campaign to win the hearts and minds of B.C. voters, the NDP has been running a series of ads calling into question the record of the Socred government, but the NDP have run into trouble themselves with their ads.... Now there is a new problem."<sup>33</sup>

The "trouble" was the language in one New Democrat ad was taken from an American campaign ad. CBC-TV's News Final produced an item also focussing on this "trouble." CBC did not broadcast more items concerning this "trouble", but BCTV produced a second item the following day.

"The battle of negative campaign ads is building. Last night we showed you that Mike Harcourt is saying the same thing at the end of one of his campaign ads as the Governor of Rhode Island was during his campaign. Tonight Mike Harcourt is hopping mad about what he calls a "phony tax assessment" being mailed out by the Socreds. It is the latest in a constant barrage of negative advertising with both the New Democrats and Socreds accusing each other of being the worst offenders. Not only are they using American style techniques; in some cases they have imported American ad experts."<sup>34</sup>

The use of the word negative here is confusing at best, manipulated at worst. The phrase in the New Democrat ad which BCTV stated was "building" this "battle" of "negative" ads was: "The people of this province deserve a government as honest and hardworking as the people who pay for it."<sup>35</sup> This framing of the item produced a "battle" with only one participant. The phrase from the New Democrat ad cannot be understood as "negative", and cannot be a contributor to some mythical "battle of negative advertising".

On the other hand, the Social Credit's "No Surprises, No Disguises" ad series criticized B.C.'s New Democrats through the actions of another province's political party, the Ontario

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<sup>33</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 8, 1991, third item.

<sup>34</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday October 9, 1991, seventh item.

<sup>35</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 8, 1991, third item.

New Democrats. The ads placed the responsibility for that province's deficit on the New Democrats alone. These Social Credit ads ignored the impact of Free Trade, the GST, and the recession in Europe and North America on Ontario's economy, and the New Democrat's inheritance of an already large deficit. These ads asked us to expect the same from B.C.'s New Democrats, ignoring the inescapable differences in the economies of B.C. and Ontario. In other words, these ads contrived a poor record for B.C.'s NDP which doesn't exist; and they did not produce claims of what the Social Credit would do in the future. These ads were "negative" in the second, "American" sense of the word.

The New Democrat "scandals" ad focuses on aspects of the published, public record of the Social Credit Party. Nothing is contrived. They are "negative" in the first sense noted above, being "critical of actual performance". The other New Democrat ads, like many of Harcourt's statements in the televised leaders' debate, were both "positive," in the sense of saying what the New Democrat would do if elected, and "negative" in the sense of criticizing the government's record. While the New Democrat "scandals" ad, taken alone, is "negative" in the third sense, "focusing on what your opponent did wrong, rather than what you will do," the New Democrats ad campaign cannot be defined as "negative" in the sense used to define the Social Credit "No Surprises, No Disguises" campaign. The former is critical, but also puts forward New Democrat plans. The latter was contrived, and made no mention of Social Credit plans.

BCTV's production of a "battle of negative advertising" can be understood as an example of "balanced reporting". If BCTV is going to criticize the Socred's ad campaign, the news director would argue, it has to criticize the New Democrat's, too. This generalization by obfuscation ignores differences or ambiguities crucial for distinguishing between the Social Credit and New Democrat ad campaigns. The New Democrats were

painted with the same sense of "negative" the media produced about Socred ads, when the New Democrat's advertisement was not "negative" in the sense implied by BCTV.

This "battle's" next engagement is the "phony tax assessment", a Socred ad. It is the only "negative" ad used by BCTV in the framing of this item. This item is used to justify comments about just how "negative" the **New Democrat** advertisements are getting. Both this item and the previous one conclude the New Democrat ads are negative simply because of the use of American style techniques and American ad experts. American style techniques and American ad experts are not of necessity "negative". BCTV's clip of the phrase causing the "trouble" makes that clear.<sup>36</sup> The American ad in question also is not "negative" in the sense BCTV used to characterize the Socred ad campaign.

Twice this item reduces the New Democrat's ad campaign to the meaning of "negative" used to make sense of the Socred's "phony tax assessment". In the campaign's third week all five instances of this practice of "balanced reporting" eliminated differences between the activities of the Social Credit and the New Democrats, differences which would have been useful for the New Democrat campaign. It was these sort of generalizations that hindered the effect of the New Democrat campaign. In order to be seen as a "change from the past five years" of corrupt government, the New Democrat's had to avoid being lumped in with Social Credit. BCTV's production of a "battle of negative advertising" was one instance where the New Democrat "manipulation by inundation" strategy failed to avoid this treatment. At the same time, media generalizations that achieved "balanced reporting" spread the burden of the government's record to the challengers. This hindered the New Democrat campaign. The Liberal Party lacked a history for most B.C. voters, and had no claim to or responsibility for

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<sup>36</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 8, 1991, third item.

that history. For this reason, if any party escaped the attribution of that record by B.C. voters, it was Gordon Wilson's Liberals.

There was another consequence of this routine of "balanced reporting": the inherent conservatism of news produced with adherence to the principles of "balanced reporting" and the use of "official" sources. The political "balance" produced relies upon the systematic reduction of the political spectrum to two or sometimes three perspectives. The elimination of those sources is necessary to allow for the "tit for tat", "pro/con" story structure that can be defended by news directors as "balanced" and "well sourced". However, it is those unused sources which allow us to place those two or three positions into their status quo position on the political map. If they are systematically ignored, the news discourse cannot be representative of the public discourse, but is different in kind. The center of that political map, the status quo, becomes the entire map. The effect of this practice was and is a routine diminishment of the public discourse to the hegemonic interests of elected legislative political parties, and in this case the centre-right parties in B.C.

This conservatism also continued to be reinforced by the New Democrat's "manipulation by inundation" strategy. In the third week of the campaign there was not a single New Democrat policy statement made, and the only new initiative was the "care card" campaign attacking Social Credit's management of the health care system. Harcourt's personality continued to be emphasized with the New Democrat's fragmented, normalized campaign announcements. In this way, the "manipulation by inundation" strategy systematically reinforced the diminution of policy analyses produced by the news discourse to the "issues" of the ethical conduct of Rita Johnston's (Social Credit) government and Mike Harcourt's personality. This served the hegemonic political interests of the centre-left

elected legislative political party, the New Democrats, and in so doing the broader hegemonic political values of B.C.

#### IV. The Campaign, Week Four

The Socred's tax assessment tactic proved to be the last gasp for their campaign and the Social Credit Party. In Table 21, the row titled **SC campaign** shows the media paid less attention to the Social Credit campaign than at any other point in the campaign. It seems this shift occurred as "the story" of the Social Credit campaign shifted from speculation about that party's collapse to speculation of how bad that collapse would be for Social Credit.

Table 21

Week 4, issues: presence in daily & weekly campaign items					
Date	10.11	10.14	10.15	10.16	Total
SC campaign	6/17	3/14	3/15	4/22	16/68
Lib campaign	5/17	6/14	4/15	10/22	25/68
Issues polled	5/17	-/14	2/15	4/22	11/68
ND campaign	4/17	2/14	6/15	10/24	22/68

Another explanation for the lack of media attention paid to Social Credit was the increased attention paid to the Liberal campaign. In Table 21, the row titled **Lib campaign** shows that we now saw and heard as much or more about the Liberal Party as the Social Credit and New Democrats. This came about as the media began to treat the Liberal Party as the only legitimate centre-right challenger to the New Democrats in the 1991 election.

This shift was in large part justified with the design and results of poll results in the dying days of the campaign. The row of Table 21 titled **Issues polled** shows that the "story" of poll results continued to be produced in the campaign's last week. BCTV polls tracking the Liberal Party's surge after the leaders' debate bordered on exuberance, but

were tempered with media skepticism in the last week of the campaign. This skepticism seemed to affect voters less than the continuous presence of Liberal support indicated by poll results.

Much of this skepticism was driven by a shift in the New Democrat's campaign tactics. As the row of Table 21 titled ND campaign shows, the New Democrat campaign gained as great a share of media attention as it had in the first two weeks of the campaign. That shift was aimed at discrediting Gordon Wilson and the Liberal platform, but judging from the election results, it was rather ineffective.

#### IV.1 THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF SOCIAL CREDIT

"We reset the agenda in the middle of the campaign, and got it to our agenda, and got the issues being talked about to economic issues, but with the Liberal factor it ended up being our issues being debated between the NDP and Liberals instead of the NDP and ourselves."<sup>1</sup>

The Socreds ended up being displaced from the news discourse just as the Liberals had been in the campaign's first week. Craig Aspinall's explanation of how this came about, quoted above, makes sense to a point. It can be added that he neglected to emphasize the failure of his party's last campaign initiative: the simulated tax assessment.

As Table 22 shows, in the election campaign's last week 16 of 68 items focused on the Johnston campaign. Friday, October 11, was the last day the Social Credit campaign was prominent in the news discourse. Six of the day's 17 campaign news items paid attention to the Socreds. In the last three days of the campaign just another 10 of 51 items focused on Rita Johnston's campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> BCTV, live election results coverage, October 17, 1991, interview with Craig Aspinall after the Social Credit Party had conceded defeat.

October 11 was also the last day the Socred campaign was placed as a lead item. It was lead or second item in every broadcast on that date. After that the Socred campaign was placed as the second item twice and near the end of eight of the other 10 broadcasts or editions studied.

The Social Credit campaign had added the cost of the New Democrat platform to the daily news discourse before the debate.

Table 22

Issue: Socred campaign: placement/total				
Date	10.11	10.14	10.15	10.16
CHEK	1/3	n/a	3/3	6/8 <sup>2</sup>
BCTV	2;3;8/9	n/a	7/7	6;7/10
CBC	2;3/5	n/a	4/5	2/4
SUN <sup>3</sup>	n/a	2;7;14/14	n/a	n/a
T/day	6/18	3/14	3/15	4/22
T/week	6/18	9/32	12/46	16/68

This addition nevertheless failed to displace the media's persistent focus on protests and controversy within and around the Social Credit Party. Thirteen of 16 Social Credit campaign news items sourced protests, disorganization, disagreements among candidates, failed campaign tactics, or the candidates speculating on the "self-destruction of the Social Credit Party". Just one of 16 items cited public criticism of the New Democrat's fiscal record.

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<sup>2</sup> Data for this date comes from the BCTV Noon News, not CHEK-TV Noon News, which was used for the other dates attributed to CHEK.

<sup>3</sup> "SUN" denotes The Vancouver Sun newspaper. Its Tuesday October 15, 1991, edition was used as the source of data for Monday October 14. The difference in dates is due to The Vancouver Sun editorial deadlines, which results in the publishing of a day's events the day after they have occurred.

As noted several times already, our mass media regard "negativity" or "bad news" as an especially pivotal criterion for assessing a "story's" news value. It is "unexpected", "unambiguous", it "happens quickly", it is "consonant" with "expectations" of the state of politics, and it has a low "threshold" or "size" requirement for it to be newsworthy. The incidents outlined above easily met these criteria, as well as being easily "personalized" because of their references to "elite persons."

The continuing misfortunes of that campaign were newsworthy, but the commentary about Social Credit's election hopes was not newsworthy. The hopes of a Social Credit election victory were almost gone. By this point in the election, even members of Social Credit were admitting defeat. There was no longer any question of whether they would lose, the question now was by how much and whether they would hold enough seats to be the Official Opposition. No longer in the race, their statements about what they would do if elected government became hollow. These comments no longer met the news criteria of "meaningfulness" and "relevance", and "unexpectedness". This was a crucial turning point for Social Credit's hopes of remaining in the news in order to set the campaign agenda. As Taras notes, perhaps the oldest and most fundamental criterion for what makes something newsworthy is "an instant quality: news is what is happening now or is about to happen, not what has happened last week or even yesterday."<sup>4</sup> Faced with these admissions, reporters and news directors quickly came to consider Social Credit's predicament "old news" and began looking for tomorrow's story.

The more interesting story, the story with large elements of the "unexpected", "meaningfulness", "consonance", "unambiguity", the necessary "size" to satisfy the "threshold"

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<sup>4</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990, pg. 100.

requirement, "continuity" as a result of the poll results, and references to "elite persons" that made the story easily "personalized" was the Liberals surge and their emerging race with the New Democrats. It was adherence to these criteria of what is "news" that pushed Rita Johnston's campaign out of the news.

Typical of the media treatment of Social Credit's "self-destruction" during the 1991 campaign was the publicized rebuking of that party's simulated tax assessment.

"The latest plan to backfire is the fake tax notice delivered door to door on behalf of the Socreds.... Premier Rita Johnston says the notice has been effective but so far the effect seems to have been to aggravate and outrage many voters. Some Socred candidates are trying to distance themselves from the phony notice and the head of the BC Assessment Authority wants people to check the notices very carefully, to make sure they are not real, before throwing them out."<sup>5</sup>

Later that day she apologized to anyone who had been harmed in any way by the simulated assessment. Close to 600,000 notices were delivered to B.C. homes, but on the weight of only 300 phone calls from "confused" taxpayers, this news item concludes the effect on many of the 600,000 was "aggravation and outrage."

The tactic began with promise. On October 9, BCTV framed this tactic as one "simulated" to "warn voters taxes could rise substantially under an NDP government. October 10 the body of another item was used to reiterate that taxes could go up "\$314 a month if voters don't stop the NDP". The latter item did close, however, with the New Democrats conclusions about this tactic.

CBC-TV also had an item each day reproducing this campaign tactic. The News Final's characterization of the tactic used critical conclusions from the beginning. It was termed a "fake" or "phony" assessment in the body of the first

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<sup>5</sup> CHEK-TV News at Noon, Friday October 11, 1991, first item.

item, though it closed with the Socreds' concerns about the cost of the New Democrat's platform. The frame, body and close of the second item used the New Democrat's conclusion that "people in B.C. know that figure is a hoax."

This theme began to self-destruct when BCTV, CHEK-TV and CBC-TV reiterated criticisms of the tactic from two of Johnston's own candidates. Johnston and the voting public now had much more than the media's conclusions to consider. Seeing no way of carrying through with this theme, Johnston used her apology to silence further news of dissension within her party.

Unfortunately, the apology left the Socred campaign with no choice but to shelve this last tactical gasp. This decision in turn left the Socred campaign without anything to distract the attention of reporters from the controversies, protests, and mistakes that continued to plague that campaign. There were also poll results fuelling speculation that this was the end of the Social Credit Party.

As suggested, these "stories" met many of the "general news values" outlined by Galtung and Ruge. They were especially desirable for meeting the criteria of "bad news" or "negativity". What Galtung and Ruge do not dwell upon is possible explanations for the dominance of these values as opposed to other possibilities. As Bennett puts it, why "personalized", "dramatized", "fragmented", and "normalized", instead of "institutional, analytical, historical and critical"?

Hackett, drawing upon the work of Smythe, suggests the willingness of the audience to pay attention (in this case, to the news programs) is sold by media corporations like BCTV and CBC-TV to advertisers, "who pay on the basis of size and

audience demographics."<sup>6</sup> Advertisers will run their message at a certain time, over time, if that audience is guaranteed. Consequently, key among the measurements to determine audience size and demographics is audience loyalty. To achieve and maintain this loyalty,

"commercial media do not simply "give people what they want". They give some of the people part of what they want. The media satisfy precisely those needs that are compatible with the marketing of commodities. Needs that no one can make money at or that threaten our consumer culture are left unattended."<sup>7</sup>

The production of political news is not designed to help people participate in the political process, but to leave people satisfied as observers of that process. This is why the news discourse is not institutional, analytical, historical and critical. And this is how, as Williams suggests, the routinization of "general news values", the process of selectivity, guarantees the systematic reproduction of hegemonic political values in B.C.

## V.2 THE LIBERAL PLATFORM COMES UNDER ATTACK

"It's been another day full of good news for B.C. Liberal leader Gordon Wilson. As the election campaign enters its final week, the Liberal campaign continues to gain steam. Just one day after our poll showing the Liberals gaining on the Socreds, a new Angus Reid poll has them running neck and neck with the incumbents. And as more attention focuses on the Liberals, it also focuses on their platform. While how much the Liberals'

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<sup>6</sup> Hackett, R., Pinet, R., and Ruggles, M., "From Audience-Commodity to Audience-Community: Mass Media in B.C.," After Bennett: A new politics for British Columbia, Magnusson, W., Walker, R.B.J., Doyle, C., and Demarco, J., eds., Vancouver: New Star, 1986, pg. 272.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 273.

campaign promises will cost is one of the more hotly debated topics, the Liberals appear to be just as short on specifics as their opponents."<sup>8</sup>

This news item includes two important elements in the success of the Liberal Party's campaign. One is the poll results reiterating the surge of Liberal support. It is suggested that these results managed to maintain the experience and the potential of the debate for the Liberal Party until election day. The other is the shift in attention paid to the Liberal campaign platform by the other popular political parties. The media reiterated not just the questions but also the conclusions used by the New Democrats and Social Credit to make sense of the Liberal platform. However, it would seem the poll results proved more effective in having people realize who they would support October 17.

As Table 23 shows, 25 of 68 items were concerned with the Liberal Party between October 11 and October 16. The Liberal campaign was the lead item, or the headline story on page 1, in eight of 10 news broadcasts or newspapers studied.

The placement of the Liberal campaign indicates how much attention was being paid to the Liberal campaign. Whether critical or supportive, that attention placed Gordon Wilson and the Liberals at the centre of the election campaign. This placement emphasizes to what extent the media had replaced Social Credit with the Liberals as the challenger to the NDP.

This "story", as noted in the previous section, met many of Galtang and Ruge's list of "general news values." The "story" of the Liberals surge and their emerging race with the New Democrats had large elements of the "meaningfulness", "unexpectedness", "consonance", "unambiguity", the necessary "size" to satisfy the "threshold" requirement, "continuity" as a result of the poll results, and references to "elite

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<sup>8</sup> BCTV News Hour, Friday October 11, 1991, first item.

persons" that made the story easily "personalized". It was media adherence to these criteria of what is "news" that pushed the campaigns of Gordon Wilson and the Liberal Party to the "centre" of the news discourse.

Table 23

Issue: Liberal campaign: placement/total				
Date	10.11	10.14	10.15	10.16
CHEK	2/3	n/a	1/3	2;4;7/8 <sup>9</sup>
BCTV	1;6;7/9	n/a	1;3/7	1;3;4;5;9/10
CBC	1/5	n/a	1/5	1;3/4
SUN <sup>10</sup>	n/a	1;3;4;5;6;9/14	n/a	n/a
T/day	5/17	6/14	4/15	10/22
T/week	5/17	11/31	15/46	25/68

The news production of the Liberal campaign was unusual because of the homogeneity of the sources for these items. The body of these items focused on either poll results, or the little known about Liberal candidates and policies.

Ten items paid attention to the polls. Another three reproduced segments of a meeting between B.C. business people and Gordon Wilson as signs of increasing support, for a total of 13 concerning "support" for the Liberal Party. Six of the eight lead items centred upon the poll results and the Liberals' increasing popularity.

Fourteen television news items and five items published by The Vancouver Sun commented on the Liberal platform.

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<sup>9</sup> Data for this date comes from the BCTV Noon News, not CHEK-TV Noon News, which was used for the other dates attributed to CHEK.

<sup>10</sup> "SUN" denotes The Vancouver Sun newspaper. Its Tuesday October 15, 1991, edition was used as the source of data for Monday October 14. The difference in dates is due to The Vancouver Sun editorial deadlines, which results in the publishing of a day's events the day after they have occurred.

Seven of eight lead items also asked questions about Liberal policies and candidates.

As the last week of campaigning progressed, there seemed to be a slight shift in Liberal campaign news from concerns with the platform to the dominance of the news by poll results. The New Democrat's "taxes favour rich" claim Monday was followed by three items broadcast Tuesday focusing on the cost of the Liberal platform and Gordon Wilson's press conference to outline that cost. However, only two of the eight items on the last day of campaigning reiterated these concerns about the Liberal platform.

Gordon Wilson and the Liberal Party must have been very ambivalent about the sudden attention being paid to their platform. The Liberals had become the centre of attention, but the television media were persistent in broadcasting New Democrat Party criticisms of the Liberal platform. The following excerpts are typical of the media's reiteration of New Democrat campaign tactics.

"As more attention focuses on the Liberals, it also focuses on their platform. While how much the Liberal's campaign promises will cost is one of the most hotly debated topics, the Liberals appear to be just as short on specifics as their opponents."<sup>11</sup>

This item, through its reiteration of this New Democrat tactic, went on to conclude the Liberals "were short on specifics," that Wilson "skirted around the issues," and that "no one, not even Wilson, knows what the cost of his promises will be."<sup>12</sup>

The New Democrats' "tax policies favour rich" tactic was especially effective in having New Democrat comments make the news concerning the Liberal platform.

"Businesses and wealthy individuals will benefit

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<sup>11</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 11, 1991, lead item.

<sup>12</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 11, 1991, lead item.

most from Liberal party tax policies, New Democratic Party finance critic Glen Clark charged Monday."<sup>13</sup>

This conclusion was the lead item in every broadcast October 14. It kept Wilson and his Liberal Party in the news discourse, responding to the New Democrats' concerns about his party.

"Show us the numbers! That was the premier's rallying cry,..., and now NDP leader Mike Harcourt has picked up the theme. As the Liberals grow in popularity, the NDP is calling upon the Liberal leader, Gordon Wilson, to show the numbers, the cost of his platform if the Liberals form the next government."<sup>14</sup>

Harcourt picked up the theme, as Aspinall suggested, and the media picked it up from Harcourt. Wilson responded to this media attention the next day with a press conference where he would outline the cost of his campaign platform. The hope was to put the issue into his terms, for it was clear the media was making this theme the news of his platform. The same item ran a clip of Wilson promising to "limit expenditure increases to no more than four percent a year." This figure was more "specific" than the figures Social Credit had used in their own campaign promises, and not much less specific than the New Democrat platform. Yet Wilson's tactic was ineffective. The piece produced by CHEK concluded that Gordon Wilson "was long on generalities and short on specifics."

BCTV's version of Wilson's tactic was framed with the comment that "Gordon Wilson did not do what the Liberals have been promising since August, that is to attach cost figures to campaign promises."<sup>15</sup> The body states that "Wilson offers vague statements about priorities, but will not apply price

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<sup>13</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Tuesday October 15, 1991, pg.A1, headline story.

<sup>14</sup> CHEK-TV News at Noon, Tuesday October 15, 1991, lead item.

<sup>15</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, third item.

tags."<sup>16</sup> It closes by saying

"Wilson leaves without using any numbers that would embarrass him in the final days of the campaign, with one possible exception. He admits he has only met about half of his own Liberal team."<sup>17</sup>

Both the CHEK and BCTV items echoed a New Democrat ad campaign designed to undermine the surge of Liberal support. That New Democrat advertisement suggests people should be concerned about the cost of the Liberal platform.

The close of the BCTV item and the body of a CBC item concerning the New Democrat campaign also reiterate a second New Democrat ad. CBC uses a clip of the ad to ask the question the New Democrats wanted in the news: "The Liberals: Who are they? What will they do?"<sup>18</sup> The Vancouver Sun published a piece which used ethics experts to question the wisdom of voting for a party we knew so little about.<sup>19</sup> Friday, October 11, BCTV's Voice of B.C. poll tells us the Liberal vote is soft. It suggests that "Not many voters know much about Wilson and his Liberals, and their support for him is at this point tentative."<sup>20</sup>

This sort of critical language dominated the frame, body and close of all but one item concerning Liberal policies and candidates. Only once was Wilson's opinion used to frame or close an item concerning his platform. The body of every item concerning Liberal policies and candidates maintained this skepticism.

It can be seen from this that the media were heavily reliant upon party campaign themes and tactics to direct the

<sup>16</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, third item.

<sup>17</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, third item.

<sup>18</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Tuesday October 15, 1991, second item.

<sup>19</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Tuesday October 15, 1991, pg. B1.

<sup>20</sup> BCTV News Hour, Friday October 11, 1991, seventh item.

focus of their attention. Two media routines, the reliance upon official sources, and the personalization and dramatization of political news, in conjunction with the definition of "bad news" as good news, made this reliance predictable.

Galtang and Ruge's study of general news values identifies "negativity", or "bad news", as especially dominant in the news produced by mass media corporations. Given the "good news" of poll results being enjoyed by the Liberals, reporters also may have been anxious to produce some "bad news."

As Ericson's study of news sources<sup>21</sup> makes clear, reporters don't uncover news, but have it provided to them by sources. This reliance upon official sources allowed the New Democrats the opportunity to script the language that suggested how Liberal policies and candidates were "bad news". Reporters used that language because they desired "bad news" about the Liberal campaign.

The desire for "bad news", and the dominance of this news value, is required to satisfy the need of media corporations to "personalize" and "dramatize" news production. Hackett concludes this is needed to guarantee the willingness and loyalty of the audience to pay attention, a willingness and loyalty that is sold by media corporations like BCTV and CBC-TV to advertisers. To achieve and maintain this loyalty,

"The media satisfy precisely those needs that are compatible with the marketing of commodities. Needs that no one can make money at or that threaten our consumer culture are left unattended."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M., Chan, J.B.L., Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources, Toronto:University of Toronto, 1989, pp. 12-16, 25-27, 248-249.

<sup>22</sup> Hackett, R., Pinet, R., and Ruggles, M., "From Audience-Commodity to Audience-Community: Mass Media in B.C.," After Bennett: A new politics for British Columbia, Magnusson, W.,

This process made the reduction of the political news discourse to the election campaign tactics of popular political parties almost inescapable. Analyses of structural determinants of environmental degradation, structural consequences of the Free Trade Agreement, or even analytical comparisons of party policies, were some of many crucial issues that had to be marginalized or absent from the news discourse as a consequence of this routine process of news selection and treatment. Once again we were left with a systematically impoverished news discourse that maintained the hegemonic political values of liberal consumerism in B.C.

#### IV.3 BCTV VOICE OF B.C. POLL PUTS LIBERALS ON TOP

As effective as the New Democrat ad campaign and "tax policies favour rich" tactic were with the media, the effect on the voters seems to have been negligible. The only news disaffected Socredits were paying attention to were the polls, and the polls were "full of good news for B.C. Liberal leader Gordon Wilson."<sup>23</sup> Those poll results seemed to maintain the otherwise isolated impact of the leaders' debate on the fortunes of the Liberal Party.

"Some have argued that the reporting of polls creates a 'bandwagon' effect: the party that is ahead in the polls receives a shot in the arm, stronger candidates come forward, there are more campaign workers, major financial contributors climb on board...."<sup>24</sup>

In the case of the 1991 B.C. provincial election, the candidates were already in place. The debate was the shot in the arm for the Liberal Party and the polls were like an

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Walker, R.B.J., Doyle, C., and Demarco, J., eds., Vancouver: New Star, 1986, pg. 273.

<sup>23</sup> BCTV News Hour, Thursday October 11, 1991, lead item.

<sup>24</sup> David Taras, The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics (Nelson Canada: 1990), pg. 192.

intravenous providing daily doses of reinforcement of the debate's effect.

As Table 24 shows, 11 of 68 items used poll results between October 11 and October 16, and 10 of these items were produced by BCTV. Four of 11 broadcasts used poll results as the source of the lead item, and in another four broadcasts poll results were placed second.

Table 24

Issue: Poll results, CHEK/BCTV/CBC: placement/total				
Date	10.11	10.14	10.15	10.16
CHEK	2/3	n/a	-/3	2;3/8
BCTV	1;6;7/9	n/a	1;2/7	1;2/10
CBC	1/5	n/a	-/5	-/4
SUN	n/a	-/14	n/a	n/a
T/day	5/17	-/14	2/15	4/22
T/week	5/17	5/31	7/46	11/68

Three items October 16 told us of B.C. business leaders "jumping on board" the Liberal bandwagon. Two of these told of almost \$200,000 in contributions raised at that meeting. Ten items spread over the last week of the campaign produced constant new revelations about this growing Liberal support.

The "story" of the Liberals' surge in the polls and their emerging race with the New Democrats had large elements of the "unexpected", "meaningfulness", "consonance", "unambiguity", the necessary "size" to satisfy the "threshold" requirement, "continuity" as a result of the poll results, and references to "elite persons" that made the story easily "personalized".

Witnessing this growth in support for the Liberals allowed many individuals to realize they were not alone in their desire to vote Liberal. Those individuals were in a position to know, plus or minus 4.5 percent, 19 times out of 20, whether voting for the Liberals would be a wasted vote, or

whether it might help elect the local Liberal MLA.

As Taras notes, "Voters with access to poll results are likely to be [more] "strategic" voters."<sup>25</sup> What Taras does not account for in his work is regional exceptions to this rule. In B.C., New Democrat voters have been identified as largely non-strategic votes.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, a large portion of the Socred vote and an even larger portion of the Liberal vote has voted "strategically" since the 1940s when the CCF became a contender to form the government in B.C.<sup>27</sup> That tradition was kept alive by the Social Credit Party, and rejuvenated in 1975 with the collapse of the Liberal Party into the Socred caucus.<sup>28</sup> These same blocks of voters were better prepared to vote "strategically" in 1991 than ever before. By moving to the Liberal banner, these individuals could satisfy their common dissatisfaction with the Social Credit Party, and at the same time not necessarily electing the NDP. In a way, the polls tracking popular opinion left many people well prepared to make this "strategic vote of conscience". Election day results indicate this may have been what many B.C. voters decided to do.

The polls, BCTV's included, tended to "speak for themselves" throughout the campaign. However, the October 15 and October 16 BCTV News Hour broadcasts provided viewers with good reason to take all those polls with a grain of salt.

"Our polling has produced the most surprising and perhaps controversial numbers of the campaign.... Last night we told you Gordon Wilson's Liberals had closed the gap on the leading New Democrats. Tonight our pollster says the party that seemed

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<sup>25</sup> Taras, D., The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, Scarborough:Nelson Canada, 1990, pg. 193.

<sup>26</sup> Blake, D., Two Political Worlds, Vancouver:University of British Columbia Press, 1985, pp. 24-48.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

destined to once again be an also-ran is now in front.... Liberal support is now 35%, NDP 33%, Social Credit 19%, uncommitted 1%."<sup>29</sup>

Shocking numbers to say the least, but, as we are told in the next item, numbers which were hotly disputed by the New Democrat pollsters. The pollster interviewed states,

"Another network is releasing a poll which shows NDP support at 41%, Liberal support at 32%, and Social Credit support at 22%, a poll to be in The Province newspaper tomorrow, using a much larger sample than the one you used. Our concern is not just with who is leading, but more importantly, with the spread between parties and even the trends occurring. We have been unable to get information on the methodology you [BCTV] are using, like distribution of the sample in Greater Vancouver."<sup>30</sup>

Les Storey, BCTV's Voice of B.C. pollster, responds that "I'm not about to sit here and say the methodology of a competing poll is wrong. The trends we have polled have been consistent and smooth."<sup>31</sup> Tony Parsons, BCTV News Hour anchor, asks, "Then is this simply a dispute between two scientists?" "No," says the New Democrat pollster, "the problem here seems to be methodology.... We believe The Province has done it right and BCTV has done it wrong."<sup>32</sup>

BCTV's poll results were inconsistent with other polls. In light of its unique poll results, and the New Democrat's challenge that "BCTV has done it wrong," BCTV produced another item the next evening to help "clarify" the situation.

"One thing confusing voters may be other polls, like [the] one in The Province. BCTV's poll was conducted over four nights, October 12-15, 600 people polled each night. The Province poll sample was 500, conducted over three nights, October 11-

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<sup>29</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, lead item.

<sup>30</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, second item.

<sup>31</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, second item.

<sup>32</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, second item.

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"If you take the Voice of B.C. poll - NDP 36%, Liberal 34%, Social Credit 19%, others 2%, uncommitted 9% - take out undecided voters, as The Province did, this is what we got over three days: NDP 39%, Liberals 37%, Social Credit 21%, others 2%, with a sample of 1800, October 12-14.

"This is what The Province poll got: 42% NDP, Liberal 33%, Social Credit 22%, others 4, with a sample of 500, conducted October 11-13.

"Our polling at that time [the previous night, October 15] did show the NDP ahead, although not by as much as The Province poll. But the difference between the two polls are within their margins of error, and since then Storey has conducted two more polls, showing the Liberal trend continuing."<sup>33</sup>

After studying this passage several times, I still find it confusing, not "clarifying". The main source of this confusion is a reversal of figures of popular support for the Liberals and New Democrats.

The above quote was preceded by the "latest Voice of B.C. results". The Liberals were at 37 percent, the New Democrats at 34 percent, Social Credit at 17 percent, and nine percent undecided, as of October 15. The previous evening, October 15, the Voice of B.C. poll put the Liberals at 35 percent, the New Democrats at 33 percent, Social Credit at 19 percent, and 11 percent undecided, as of October 14.

BCTV begins its "clarification" by saying that after taking out the undecided voters, as The Province/UTV poll did, the October 15 Voice of B.C. showed that the NDP had 36 percent, not 33, and the Liberals were at 34 percent, not 35. This reversal of priority may have been possible by factoring in undecided voters. This result is impossible by eliminating the undecided voters.

BCTV nevertheless concludes, "Our polling showed the NDP ahead at that time." Their polling did not show this, but assume for the moment it was possible, and those results did show a New Democrat lead. That wasn't the conclusion

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<sup>33</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday October 16, 1991, lead item.

broadcast by BCTV the night before. It wasn't the conclusion of the results broadcast immediately before this "clarification". BCTV's polling could have shown the New Democrats ahead only if summaries of those results broadcast by BCTV were false. Those summaries put the Liberals three percent ahead of the New Democrats, then explained that these results "are within [the] margins of error" of the two polls. The results are not within the margin of error. This would mean the New Democrats were up two percent and down three percent on the same date.

The effect of these examples of BCTV's Voice of B.C. Poll can only be understood as Liberal boosterism. The question remains as to whether these also were examples of the intended partisanship of that polling, or the consequence of routine efforts to "dramatize" the results of this poll. The Liberal fortunes in the polls were in fact dramatized as a "horse race" with the New Democrats. The results tended to "speak for themselves", however, and as a consequence the framing and closes of BCTV items concerning poll results tended to be more muted in their "dramatization" than the treatment of other stories. Given that treatment, and the unconvincing explanation of the discrepancy between the Voice of B.C. poll and other polls, it seems reasonable to conclude this boosterism was intended, as much as it was the consequence of the media routine of "dramatization".

#### IV.4            MANIPULATION BY INUNDATION

The New Democrat's "manipulation by inundation" campaign strategy continued to be effective in the final week of the campaign. Sacred economic "issues" were raised by the New Democrat's regarding the cost and content of the Liberal platform. News items continued to praise the organization of the Harcourt tour. Media generalizations which might have hindered the New Democrat campaign tactics were not present in the final week of the campaign news discourse. This party

finished the campaign as it began it, leading, with the media reiterating the language and "issues" New Democrat organizers wanted in the news.

From October 11 to October 16, 22 of 68 items included something to do with Mike Harcourt or the New Democrats. Four times items concerning the New Democrats were placed in the lead item.

Table 25

Issue: New Democrat campaign: placement/total				
Date	10.11	10.14	10.15	10.16
CHEK	1/3	n/a	2/3	3;5;8/8
BCTV	4;5/9	n/a	2;4;5/7	1;2;3;7;10/10
CBC	4/5	n/a	2;3/5	1;2/6
SUN	n/a	1;9/14	n/a	n/a
T/day	4/17	2/14	6/15	10/24
T/week	4/17	6/31	12/46	22/68

Thirteen of those 22 items made use of some aspect of Mike Harcourt's campaign, and seven focused exclusively on that campaign. Friday, October 11, Harcourt made the news with his comments about Social Credit waste and the Cabinet's use of the air ambulance for private use. Monday, October 14 it was the "tax policies favour rich" statement. Tuesday, October 15, Harcourt made the news with his speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade outlining a minimum corporate tax. Wednesday, October 16, "he held a reflective press conference and then went mainstreeting."<sup>34</sup>

None of the other nine items sourced "themes" from other parties to make sense of the New Democrat campaign. None of them sourced mistakes or misfortunes suffered by that party.

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<sup>34</sup> BCTV News Hour, Wednesday, October 16, 1991, third item.

None of these items produced an instance of the media generalizations that had hindered the New Democrat campaign in the first three weeks of the campaign.

This is remarkable in light of Galtang and Ruge's list of general news values. The New Democrat campaign items were produced despite not meeting the dominant criterion of "bad news" about the New Democrats. They were not "unexpected". They lacked "desirability", or "consonance" because they were understood by reporters to be staged campaign appearances.

These appearances were designed to meet other criteria, though, that would implement the "manipulation by inundation" strategy. These appearances provided "negative" comments about the other parties. The preceding section on the Liberal campaign makes it clear that the language designed by the New Democrats also dominated news of the Liberal campaign. As noted, only one media item relied upon Wilson's opinion and detailing of his party's platform. The remainder maintained the skepticism and employed the language of the New Democrats to make sense of the Liberal platform and its cost.

They met the criterion of "continuity" as part of the running story of the New Democrat campaign. They were designed with short, matched, repetitive audio and visual components that met the "frequency" and "unambiguity" criteria. The "meaningfulness" of the New Democrat campaign was taken for granted given the party's place in the legislative status quo and popular expectations for a New Democrat victory as the election began. This also in general satisfied the "threshold" criterion. The campaign was designed to emphasize Mike Harcourt, thereby playing to the "references to elite persons" that come with the "personalization" of political news.

It should be clear that the value of the organization of Harcourt's tour, how it was tailored to the needs of the media rather than their demands, cannot be underestimated. It was the "manipulation by inundation" strategy that drew the media

into using the "issues" or language provided each day to make sense of the campaign of Mike Harcourt and the New Democrats.

Compare its published characterization with that of Rita Johnston's tour.

"One can argue the Socreds lost this election the moment they won the last one.... The current Socred campaign has been poorly run, but it is doubtful whether anything the Socreds did would have mattered in the end."<sup>35</sup>

Baldrey and the "packs" of reporters assigned to produce news about the election made persistent comments about the organization of Johnston's tour campaign. Baldrey provides a typical example.

"On Monday, Johnston's tour - dubbed the 'Magical Mystery Tour' by reporters who have been unable to get advance notice of the premier's schedule - turned up at the Fraser dockyards ...."<sup>36</sup>

This information is not very useful for deciding how to vote. It became newsworthy, though, for the angry reporter who missed a deadline on a live report for the noon news because of that unreliable schedule. This lack of consideration for the working routine of reporters was used by the media "pack" with the Rita Johnston's campaign to indicate Johnston's abilities to "run" the province. Socred tacticians could have avoided at least this criticism of its campaign by accepting that for mass media reporters, the needs of their jobs can be as newsworthy as the political future of B.C.

The New Democrats, on the other hand, avoided these sorts of conclusions.

"Harcourt is often on the attack and repeating the same message. It's part of a well orchestrated campaign by a leader surrounded by advisors who keep him on track, a reversal of fortune of the troubles on the NDP campaign five years ago. And

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<sup>35</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Tuesday October 15, 1991, pg. B1, analysis by Keith Baldrey.

<sup>36</sup> The Vancouver Sun, October 15, 1991, pg. A1, "Beleaguered Johnston combats 'negative' coverage by media".

there is always time for the local media because the main goal of this campaign is to get the message out."<sup>37</sup>

This was the body and close of one of two items broadcast in the last week about how the New Democrat campaign was run. The other item stated it was a "campaign [that] looked as though the NDP could do no wrong."<sup>38</sup>

This sort of unsolicited praise characterized news of the organization of Harcourt tour throughout the election. There were no missed deadlines, no lack of good visuals for the camera crews, no doubt about what the story of the day would be and when it would happen. More important than the praise, however, was the faithful reiteration of the New Democrat's daily campaign "appearances". Seven news items in the last week of the campaign detailed the Mike Harcourt tour. All seven used the New Democrat's designed "story of the day" in the frame, the body and the close of these items. When something unplanned happened, such as the New Democrat candidate who tried to squeeze a Liberal competitor by calling that person's boss, this was not used to frame the Harcourt tour.

The language used to make sense of this incident was the New Democrat's. It was a temporary, insignificant incident. BCTV's frame of the matter suggested "Harcourt was forced to deal with a spot of trouble today."<sup>39</sup> The frame of another item used Harcourt's stated "unhappiness" to explain his opinion of the matter. Two of the three used Harcourt's conclusion that the action was "inappropriate." There was no speculation on why the New Democrat candidate did it, no clips of opposition candidates demanding the candidate withdraw, and no demands from the media that Harcourt explain how this could

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<sup>37</sup> BCTV News Hour, Friday October 11, 1991, fourth item.

<sup>38</sup> CBC-TV News Final, Tuesday October 15, 1991, second item.

<sup>39</sup> BCTV News Hour, Tuesday October 15, 1991, fifth item.

have happened or what this might say about other New Democrat candidates.

The strength of this strategy can also be understood as its shortcoming. There is only so much that can be said in eight to 10 seconds, and when the "dramatized" message is "It's time for a change," what has been said does very little to bring analytical discussions of policy into the election campaign.

Keith Baldrey noted before the election began that "... what is a twist for the NDP this time around is its plans to focus intense attention on its leader rather than emphasizing the party as much .... Harcourt's personality will be emphasized as much as anything else...."<sup>40</sup>

This was done to take advantage of the media's "personalization" of political news, and to control how that personalization was accomplished. But to do this required at least a lack of emphasis of the party and its policies. While this served to make the New Democrat campaign much more effective in its relationship with the media, it also contributed to the lack of policy discussion during one of the very few institutionalized opportunities for the general populace to be involved in our political process.

This was further exacerbated by the "fragmented" design of the New Democrat's messages and the "normalized" content of that message that all we needed to make everything alright in B.C. is a new government. Nowhere in this strategy was there any attempt made to broaden the terms of the election agenda. The consequence of the New Democrat's use of the "manipulation by inundation" media strategy, then, was a further reinforcement of the hegemonic political values in B.C.

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<sup>40</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Saturday, September 7, 1991, pg. B1, "Get Ready."

## V: CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this thesis was to determine if NDP campaign tactics, as opposed to other factors in the 1991 election, managed to set a campaign agenda best suited to their policy platform. To do this, I asked two questions. One, what part did our television media have in the election of the New Democrats? Two, what part did the New Democrat campaign strategy have in that victory?

After analyzing a sample of the television news of the 1991 provincial election campaign, two things can be concluded. One, the New Democrat campaign did employ the "manipulation by inundation" strategy, and "manipulation by inundation" used media operating routines against themselves to make the New Democrat campaign effective. However, these media operating routines were much more effective in undermining the campaigns of the other two parties than the New Democrat campaign strategy. Two, employing this strategy furthered the systematic diminution of the democratic value of election campaigns produced through media adherence to these operating routines.

I have organized the conclusions of my analysis into three sections. These are **Manipulation by Inundation**, **Media Operating Routines** and **The Next Election**. The first section will summarize the effect of the New Democrat's "manipulation by inundation" campaign strategy. This strategy was expected to use those media routines, specifically television news values and the occupational needs of journalists, to make the New Democrat campaign effective. The "manipulation by inundation" strategy achieved this goal, but in doing so reinforced the elimination of analytical policy discussion from the campaign. This decision by New Democrat strategists reinforced the effect of media operating routines, which was a systematic diminution of the democratic value of the 1991

B.C. provincial election campaign.

The second section will focus on that routinization of the process of selection in news production and how it reiterated the hegemonic political values in B.C. Four specific media operating routines in television news production were studied. These four routines are adherence to the "general news values" that set the parameters of what things are newsworthy, the reliance upon "the status quo" or "official sources" to set the parameters of who participates in the news discourse, "balanced reporting", and the "personalization, dramatization, fragmentation and normalization" of news production. The final section will suggest possible repercussions from these findings for the next B.C. provincial election.

#### MANIPULATION BY INUNDATION

The New Democrat campaign did employ the "manipulation by inundation" strategy, and "manipulation by inundation" used media operating routines against themselves to make the New Democrat campaign effective. The unfortunate, but predictable consequence of the media's ready acceptance of the New Democrat campaign was a further reinforcement of the hegemonic political values in B.C., and a concomitant systematic diminution of the democratic value of this election campaign.

During the first week of the campaign Harcourt's daily "appearances" made the news each day, and each appearance used an example of questionable Sacred conduct as the context for a New Democrat policy statement. The media commented on the effective, organized provision of information coming out of the Harcourt campaign. The media commentary recognized this campaign was limiting reporter access to Harcourt, but it also provided "newsworthy" visual material in a "personalized", "dramatized", "fragmented", pre-packaged format that satisfied the reporters' daily occupational needs for campaign news. As a result, rather than question this manipulative practice,

reporters accepted the tactic as an indication of New Democrat competence, and used the issues Harcourt and the New Democrats wanted to talk about. In the second week of the election, the organization and effectiveness of the New Democrat campaign continued to keep Mike Harcourt's daily "appearances" in the news, except for a few minor mistakes and one day of responding to the Social Credit \$15B costing of the New Democrat platform. In the first two weeks of the campaign those appearances included just two policy statements. One was on abortion and the other was a vague promise to "overhaul" management of the forest industry. These appearances continued to provide "newsworthy" visual material in a "personalized", "dramatized", "fragmented", pre-packaged format that met the reporters' requirements for campaign news.

Up to this point in the election the New Democrat campaign had not experienced any "newsworthy" unplanned incidents. This had left reporters in a position of having to find less obvious incidents of "bad news", and because of the thorough organization of this campaign very little was found. New Democrat campaign strategists, to their credit, had left themselves in a position of "manipulating" the media by "inundating" reporters with Mike Harcourt's daily appearances.

However, the "manipulation by inundation" strategy was not as effective in the third week of the campaign as it had been in the first two weeks. Unplanned sources of news of the New Democrat campaign were used more often than the planned daily appearances. Social Credit's "price tag" and BCTV's "battle of negative ads" were easily "personalized" because of their reference to "elite persons," and they satisfied the media's routine desire for "bad news". These were the first and only "newsworthy" unplanned events suffered by the New Democrat campaign. The desirability of unplanned "bad news" for BCTV and CBC-TV as a news product overshadowed the desirability for planned, quality visual material as a news

product. It is difficult to be certain that "bad news" would have had preeminence over quality visual material if both were either planned or unplanned, but it would appear that in this case "bad news" was the preeminent news value.

The "unplanned incident" that dominated the third week, however, was the leaders' debate and its repercussions. Harcourt was the most direct but most ambiguous of the three leaders. This well scripted approach reversed the structure of his daily campaign appearances - saying something about Social Credit, after saying how the New Democrat would address the question if elected government - and with little success. Harcourt and the New Democrats would have been more effective by eliminating even more chances for ambiguities than was done. This could have been accomplished by criticizing Social Credit or sticking to New Democrat promises, but not doing both. Wilson's specific, unambiguous, if often indirect comments left less room for skepticism. Consequently, his comments were treated with less immediate skepticism.

In the absence of more unplanned "bad news" about the New Democrats in the last days of the campaign, the "manipulation by inundation" strategy regained its effectiveness at maintaining the presence of New Democrat campaign themes in the news. It is evident this was a direct result of the fact the organization of Harcourt's tour was tailored to the needs of the media rather than their demands. The result of this "manipulation by inundation" strategy was to entice the reporters and news directors of CBC-TV and BCTV into using the "issues" or language provided each day to make sense of the campaign of Mike Harcourt and the New Democrats.

This strategy was even more effective in the last week than as the election began. The difference was the message, which was no longer about Social Credit or the New Democrats. The message offered "bad news" or "negative" language for the media to use to make sense of the Liberal campaign. This language did not analyze and call into question Liberal

policies, but criticized the lack of a platform and the wisdom of supporting the Liberal's "unknown" leader and candidates. This was an attempt to undermine the Liberal surge in the polls. These themes dominated the media's treatment of the New Democrat and Liberal campaigns in the last days of the election, but the sudden media focus on the shortcomings of the Liberal Party was not accompanied by a drop or slowing in growth of popular support for the Liberals.

The consequence of this ready acceptance of the New Democrat campaign, though, was a further reinforcement of the hegemonic political values in B.C., and a concomitant systematic diminishment of the democratic value of this election campaign.

The format of these appearances was desirable for reporters because it satisfied the dominant news values employed by the BCTV and CBC-TV media corporations. The expectation that reporters would use the appearances before using anything else to make sense of the New Democrat campaign, because of the prevalence of the media operating routine of relying upon "official sources" for the news, was proven correct. The "personalization and dramatization" of the New Democrat format also allowed it to satisfy the "pro/con", "tit for tat" notion of "balanced reporting". But by appealing to and satisfying the media desire for "personalized, dramatized" news, the New Democrats had to eliminate analytical policy discussions from their campaign strategy. It has been shown that media corporations, in order to make a profit, produce news that can guarantee the attention of a loyal audience of liberal consumers for the corporation's advertisers. News that might weaken that loyalty, or bore the audience, and so threaten that profitability, is not produced as a result. Policy discussions that attempted to analyze those hegemonic values are not produced and were not produced during this election campaign for that reason. Recognizing this, and I would

conclude to maximize the appeal of those appearances, New Democrat strategists decided to eliminate policy discussions and statements from their campaign strategy.

The elimination of policy statements in favour of program statements to facilitate the New Democrat's "visual", "personalized and dramatized", pre-packaged format diminished the value of these campaign appearances for fostering critical, analytical commentary within the news discourse. For this reason, it cannot be said the media tactics developed by the New Democrat campaign strategists used these media routines against themselves in a way that weakened their hegemonic effect. The New Democrat media tactics used to implement the "manipulation by inundation" strategy instead reinforced that hegemonic effect.

#### MEDIA OPERATING ROUTINES

The first week of the campaign was dominated by "scandals" generated from within the Social Credit campaign and constant protests surrounding Rita Johnston's campaign tour. The second week of Rita Johnston's campaign was dominated by criticisms and disagreements of the Social Credit by Social Credit members. Incidents in the first week satisfied the news values of "bad news" and "references to elite persons". Incidents in the second week satisfied the news value of "negativity", and this was reinforced by media reliance on "official sources". What was so convincing about these comments were their "official" sources. It was Social Credit Party members making the same conclusions about their own campaign tactics and activities that party critics had been making during the campaign. It was this self-inflicted character of the damage that made it so devastating.

The "size" and "continuity" of those scandals provided a context that made the New Democrats' few misfortunes "insignificant" and "infrequent". This comparative lack of "newsworthiness" was effective in keeping the few New Democrat

misfortunes that did occur from making news of the New Democrat campaign.

These incidents also added considerable authenticity to the New Democrat theme that ethical conduct was the issue of this election, but that New Democrat theme was not nearly effective as those unplanned incidents for being used by the media in the production of those controversies. It is difficult to conclude if this was due to the ineffectiveness of the New Democrat's campaign strategy, or to the frequency of unplanned incidents suffered by Social Credit which made the New Democrat's theme superfluous.

Social Credit campaign news continued to limit the effect of that campaign in setting the agenda as the election entered its third week. However, the leaders' debate shifted the effect of this disintegration. Up to that point in the campaign it had maintained a vacuum on the political right that almost guaranteed a New Democrat government would be elected. After the debate it was the Liberal campaign that appeared to absorb the loss of popular support for Social Credit.

The Social Credit campaign added the cost of the New Democrat platform to the daily news discourse before the debate, but this failed to displace the media's persistent focus on the misfortunes of the Social Credit Party. The "controversy" produced from Social Credit's abortive "simulated tax assessment" tactic was followed by sexist media characterizations that undermined Johnston's performance in the debate. Her "failure" in the debate became another indication that the "self-destruction" of Social Credit was close at hand. The production of controversial news from these stereotypes and misfortunes overshadowed the presence of Social Credit campaign themes in the news discourse.

In the election's last days, resignation to defeat and the desertion of voters to the Liberal Party dominated news of the Social Credit campaign. There was less said about the

Socreds this week because the "expected" Socred defeat was no longer "the news", the "unexpected" Liberal surge was the "news of the day". This shift was produced because the "unexpectedness" of his performance was sufficient to make the event newsworthy.

It can be concluded from the news of the Social Credit and Liberal campaigns that these news values were adhered to because they generated material that was desirable for the media corporations of BCTV and CBC-TV. That material was desirable because it could be readily "personalized" and "dramatized" into "controversies". These "controversies" were produced because they are a media corporation's best guarantee to advertisers of a loyal, attentive target audience. In this way, producing "controversial" news from the Social Credit and then Liberal campaigns involved a concomitant diminishment of the campaign news discourse that systematically eliminated structural and policy analyses of our political situation.

This conclusion is reinforced by the limited participation of the Liberal Party and other "marginal" parties in the news discourse throughout the campaign. This was a product of the media operating routine of relying upon "official sources" or "the status quo" for the day's news. The "status quo" dominated sources of news because the news is designed and produced to hold the attention of a liberal consumerist audience. As a result of adherence to this routine, news of the campaign was systematically limited to the two elected legislative parties. This is why the news discourse does not in any way "mirror" the day's events. If it did, many other things and participants would have been regular sources for producing the day's election news. However, only those things and people that are "saleable" to the television audience made the news. Marginal participants were not used because of the need of the television corporation to rely upon popular sources indicative of the audience it guarantees in order to sell advertising and make

profits. "Marginal" political critics might erode that audience and as a result must remain "marginal". It can be concluded that the consequence of this adherence to the routine of using "official sources" was a systematic diminution by the news discourse to a hegemonic, "saleable" alternative to the public discourse.

The campaign did not mirror the breadth of political opinion, of political alternatives, and "issues" among the electorate during the 1991 campaign. At first no alternatives to the status quo were placed in the news on a persistent basis. The Liberal Party and Green Party could have been used as participants from the outset of this campaign, but were not used. The sources for "expert" analyses of the cost of the New Democrat's budget, and the price attached to it by Social Credit, did not include "marginal" political parties or "non-experts". Limited time to produce news demands readily available sources of information, but these need not be the main protagonists in our parliamentary democracy. These sources could just as easily be unpopular but sound detractors of the entire legislative system.

In the second week of the campaign BCTV focused its attention on the Liberal Party and then the Green Party before and after CBC-TV's hosting of the leaders' debate, but not because of the validity of these parties being included in that debate. This attention was motivated by an attempt to steal that hosting from CBC, and when that attempt failed, news of the Liberal and Green Party campaigns disappeared from BCTV's campaign news. The media once again relied upon the campaign themes and tactics of elected legislative parties to direct the focus of their attention. Concerns about environmental degradation and the Free Trade Agreement were some of many crucial issues that reporters failed to have politicians discuss during this campaign.

The systematic diminution of the democratic value of the election campaign was made still more complete through the

questions designed and results produced by BCTV's Voice of B.C. Poll. These questions relied upon "official sources", what the main parties wanted the voters to witness, despite claims that these polls would ask the questions voters wanted asked and then take them to the politicians. The Voice of B.C. poll repeatedly produced the same narrow, "status quo" spectrum of political alternatives for the consideration of the voters. The media's reliance upon elected legislative parties to set the terms of debate once again kept less widely supported parties from contributing to those terms.

Only after the debate, when poll results indicated that Gordon Wilson and his party had caught the attention of swing voters and disaffected Social Credit voters, did the "marginal" Liberal Party become a regular part of the news discourse. BCTV's News Hour produced some items that "cheerled" for the Liberal Party, but most other media commentary was initially skeptical of the possible effect of Wilson's performance. This was displaced by surprise and even shock at the "momentary" effect of that debate on public opinion. Rather than confirming how people were going to vote, the debate served as Wilson's introduction to the electorate. He was almost unknown and was being introduced to a large portion of the electorate for the first time. His performance had that much more effect on the immediate response of voters as a result.

It was at this point, in the wake of the leaders' debate, that the New Democrat campaign began to be affected by BCTV's Voice of B.C. Poll. New Democrat campaign statements dominated the language used in media items to make sense of the Liberal campaign, but with apparently negligible effect on the voters. Poll results were prolonging Gordon Wilson's most effective moment in the debate. This could be attributed to the popular belief that opinion polls represent an "independent, objective" source of information, whereas criticisms of the Liberals were clearly not independent or

objective. As a consequence, the Voice of B.C. Poll results were something "objective" and so had greater credibility as a source of information than the "official sources".

"As other polls confirmed the trend, the numbers fed on themselves. They knocked the stuffing out of Social Credit's claim as the party of choice for those who wanted to beat the New Democratic Party. All of a sudden, the Liberals looked like a much better bet to keep the hordes from the gate."<sup>1</sup>

If those polls had not been broadcast, it is very unlikely the Liberals would have elected even a single member to the legislature. By making poll results public, individual voters were able to realize that voting for the Liberals would not be a wasted vote. Many voters were able to conclude their "strategic" vote would be best spent on the Liberals. Judging from the election results, many centre-right voters realized they could continue to vote "strategically" without having to vote Social Credit.

Nevertheless, the almost complete reliance upon "official sources" in television news production throughout the campaign cannot be considered to have "reported" or "mirrored" the breadth of B.C.'s political spectrum. It is only possible to conclude it produced a diminished, status quo alternative to it, and this alternative was a systematically impoverished news discourse that provided little democratic value to the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign.

The media routine of "balanced reporting" was the only part of the news discourse that isolated and worked against only the New Democrats. This was not, however, an instance of partisan intent. It was the result of the "pro/con", "tit for tat" structure of media stories that produces "personalized" and/or "dramatized" "bad news" where none would have otherwise

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<sup>1</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Saturday, October 19, 1991, pg. A5, analysis by Vaughn Palmer.

existed.

In one telling example, after 11 straight days of the NDP releasing a policy position every day, Voice of B.C. polling questions and results were designed to produce "the fact" that none of the parties were talking about the issues. This language obfuscated the differences in campaign tactics and long standing policy positions between the New Democrats, and the politics of Rita Johnston and Gordon Wilson. This allowed BCTV to justify the credibility of its poll as the only source of information on "the issues". As a consequence, if voters wanted that information, they would have to watch BCTV.

Another example of "balanced reporting" was produced the day after the debate. CBC-TV but more specifically BCTV relied upon the Social Credit \$15B price tag to maintain the cost of the New Democrat platform as an election issue. This required that the reporters and news directors involved ignore their own independent analyses of the cost of the New Democrat platform. These analyses pointed out the inaccuracy of Social Credit's \$15B figure. Ignoring these analyses reduced the effectiveness of the New Democrat's efforts to communicate a sense of fiscal responsibility.

Another New Democrat campaign tactic was criticizing the Social Credit government's record, but through the practice of "balanced reporting" BCTV and CBC-TV made sense of this campaign advertising as a "negative ad war" being waged by both parties. My study indicates only one party - the Social Credit - was producing the kind of "negative" ads the media said were typical of both parties, and so this "war" had only one participant: Social Credit. Every instance of these generalizations during this campaign was made in a way that reduced only the effectiveness of the New Democrat campaign. The media operating routine of "balanced reporting" hindered the only campaign which in this instance tried to escape from the systematic parameters of "bad news". In all three cases - the "issues" no party wanted to talk about, the "threat of a

\$15B New Democrat government deficit, the "negative ad war" - the "bad news" was produced by editing out facts or adding fictions where none existed. The media's desire, or requirement for "bad news" is such that it systematically, without intent, tends to discredit any suggestion of "good news" by considering how such initiatives could be "bad news" and then producing them as "bad news". This practice allows media corporations a more consistent ability to produce the "personalized", "dramatized" "controversies" used to maintain the attention of a loyal, liberal consumerist audience. The effect of this practice was an obvious systematic reinforcement of the conclusion that "all politicians are the same", and so "nothing will ever change". In other words, a systematic reinforcement of hegemonic political values in B.C.

Lydia Myjan of the National Media Archives noted that "news is a produced product,... [and while the media has] no control over events, ... it does have control over questions, balance of topics, and placement of issues."<sup>2</sup>

These media operating routines played a large part in the election of the New Democrats. These routines also make it impossible to conclude that news of the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign was "objective", or that it "portrayed what was really going on out there." The news wasn't reported, it was produced, through operating routines and principles used by every person in that process. That "system" of routines was organized by the need of the media corporation to guarantee an audience for the advertisers which pay for the news production. Even the routine of "balancing" the news worked to meet this need. These routines produced a persistently narrow, hegemonic alternative to the political spectrum in B.C. It can be concluded that the political interests of that hegemonic position were necessarily,

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<sup>2</sup>. BCTV Weekend News Hour, September 28, 1991, fifth item.

inescapably maintained through this "system" of news production. And with that maintenance, unfortunately, came a systematic diminishment of the democratic value of the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign.

#### THE NEXT ELECTION

In the next provincial election campaign, the New Democrats will be the incumbents. Given their effective use of the "manipulation by inundation" strategy in the 1991 B.C. provincial election campaign, it is reasonable to expect them to use that strategy again. The question is, will it be as effective, and would the New Democrats make any effort to script policy positions back into their campaign statements?

Answering the second question relies heavily upon the answer to a third question, of whether the New Democrats have the desire to script policy back into their campaign statements. If the desire exists, there are opportunities for an effective change in New Democrat campaign messages. Perhaps the most fruitful is provided by the "fragmentation" of news. While this fragmentation has eliminated "history" or structural context from political news, the lack of historical or structural context provides the opportunity for the relatively unchallenged insertion of that context. Cultural histories or traditions could be used in place of criticisms of the government to set the context for daily platform statements. These "traditional" values or ideals would be used for the message, the context, that is repeated in as many campaign statements as possible. New Democrat policies become traditional goals that the people of British Columbia have always strived to achieve, and will achieve with a New Democrat government. New Democrat statements about "universal medicare" and user fees in the 1991 election would be an example of the possibilities for introducing policy back into the campaign news discourse.

As to whether this strategy will be as effective in the

next provincial election, it was seen from the Social Credit campaign that if "newsworthy" mistakes occur, they will dominate a campaign because "bad news" is good news for BCTV and CBC-TV. Crucial to the success of the New Democrat campaign was not providing similar opportunities for "bad news". It was very well organized, with almost everything going as planned for the New Democrat campaign. It is doubtful whether any amount of organization would have been effective if Mike Harcourt's campaign tour had experienced the number and type of unplanned incidents faced by Social Credit.

One would assume the New Democrats, as the incumbents, will experience many more "unplanned incidents" in the next campaign. I do not expect this to be the case. The campaign appearance venues chosen by New Democrat strategists were selected for their visual appeal. They were not selected to provide public interaction with Harcourt - that has been replaced by polling - but to be seen by voters in the evening's news. The location of these venues would have been remarkably successful in keeping Mike Harcourt and the New Democrat's 1991 campaign from the confrontations that were so damaging to Social Credit's campaign. A boat in False Creek, a sewage outfall in Victoria, a school ground, in front of a highrise in downtown Vancouver, a parking lot with Vernon's hospital in the background, all of these very effective appearances made no attempt whatsoever to provide public interaction. Backdrops with similar visual appeal and similar opportunity for public access will guarantee the next New Democrat campaign many less confrontations than Social Credit suffered in the 1991 campaign. The consequent relative lack of controversy will result in at least some success setting the campaign agenda.

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None

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Title of Thesis: mass media and the New Democrats: making sense of the election campaign.

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