

CANADA

Like Australia, Canada is a “new” country superimposed on ancient foundations: for centuries it has been home to native Indian populations and its contact with Europe dates back to the Norse explorations of the eleventh century AD. In the modern period, its history was dominated by rivalry between two colonial powers – the French and the British – for control of its land and abundant natural resources. Formal resolution of this conflict came in 1763, with the expulsion of the French from continental North America at the end of the Seven Years’ War. But there was left behind in Canada a substantial French-speaking population that would continue to exert influence on national life, politics and culture.

Confederation took place earlier than in Australia: the Dominion of Canada came into existence in 1867 under the British North America Act. This remained the country’s constitutional foundation until 1931, when Britain recognised the position of its Dominions and created equality of status among them. With the Constitution Act of 1982, British North America was patriated to Canada, thereby transferring control over the Constitution and severing the legal ties between the two countries. However, the British monarch continues to serve as Canada’s symbolic executive, appointing a representative, the Governor-General, on the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister.

In formal political terms, Canada is a parliamentary democracy organised on a federal basis and comprising ten provinces and two territories. Supreme political authority rests with a bicameral parliament; the 301 members of the lower chamber, the House of Commons, are elected to five-year terms by universal adult suffrage, while the 104 members of the Senate are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister. The federal system allows for a substantial devolution of powers to the provinces, which enjoy control over such areas as education, property laws and natural resources. Responsibility for key portfolios such as health and social welfare is divided between the federal and provincial governments.

Up to the 1990s, three political parties dominated Canadian politics at the federal level: the Liberal Party; the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party; and the New Democratic Party. For much of the eighties, the Progressive Conservative administration of Brian Mulroney held sway. But in 1993, not long before scheduled elections, Mulroney retired and was replaced by Kim Campbell, a Vancouver-based woman lawyer who had served as Minister of Justice and then Minister of Defence in the Mulroney government. In June, Campbell was sworn in as Canada’s nineteenth Prime Minister, the first woman to hold the post.

In general elections held later that year, the Progressive Conservative Party was routed by its old antagonist, the Liberals, and Liberal Party leader Jean Chrétien formed a new government. There was also the strong elec-

toral performance of two new political parties at the national level with regional support: the Bloc Québécois, based in Québec, and the Reform Party, with support in Western Canada.

The General Elections of June 1997, which saw the Liberal Party hold on to office although with a reduced majority, confirmed the increasingly regionalised character of Canadian politics, with both the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois performing strongly in their traditional strongholds – but not outside them.

Women In Politics

Most Canadian women gained the right to vote in Federal Elections in 1918 and the right to stand as candidates in 1919. The first woman to hold federal legislative office was Agnes Macphail, elected to the House of Commons in 1921. Membership of the Senate was not opened to women until 1929. Cairine Wilson, representing Ontario, was appointed as Canada's first woman Senator in 1930.

Prior to the 1997 elections, 53 women (17.9 per cent of the total membership) served as Members of Parliament in Canada's House of Commons. Women's representation in the Senate stood at 24 out of 104 seats, or 22.2 per cent. In general, women have made more substantial gains at the provincial/territorial level where female representation is as high as 25.3 per cent. Currently, there are 61 women in the House of Commons out of a total of 301 – representing 20.26 per cent; and 32 women out of a total of 104 in the Senate – representing 30 per cent. There are 4 women in the Cabinet; prominent among them are Sheila Copps, Minister for Heritage, Lucienne Robillard, Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Jane Stewart, Minister for National Revenue and Diane Marleau, Minister for International Cooperation and Francophonie.

Research on women's participation in Canadian politics has identified a number of factors contributing to under-representation. These include the nature of the political and electoral system; the status of women in society; media depictions of female politicians; political party attitudes and policies; the availability of financial, human and other resources; and the constraints imposed by family responsibilities.

SHEILA FINESTONE

Member of Parliament (Liberal Party)

Former Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women

In the early 1970s, Sheila Finestone was a volunteer Vice-President of a Montreal-based housing corporation which was pioneering the building of private-sector social housing for the elderly. For the 137 units then available, the project received some 1,800 applicants. Of these, no fewer than

1,200 were women. This stark reality drove Finestone to investigate the housing needs and general impoverishment of elderly women. Helped by a team of women researchers, she learnt that the inadequate nature of women's pensions was responsible for many of the financial difficulties faced by this vulnerable section of society.

It was at this point that Finestone's commitment to pension reform for women began. In fact, the issue of pensions so motivated her that she decided to join a political party so that she could participate in policy development. Some twenty years later she would find herself at the hub of national government, developing policy for all aspects of women's well-being as Secretary of State for the Status of Women.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Finestone's life has been shaped in a fundamental way by her family's long-standing involvement in community work, of which she has memories reaching back into her early childhood. After gaining a science degree at McGill University in Montreal, she completed one year of medical school, resuming her postgraduate career later, when she took courses in retirement planning and other areas relating to the elderly. After marriage and while coping with the demands of four small children, she embarked on what she describes as a "full-time career" in the voluntary sector. Although not in paid employment, she faced many of the same challenges as women working outside the home, juggling the competing demands of her career and family.

When Finestone resolved to become politically active in order to advance the rights of elderly women, she joined the Liberal Party and simultaneously involved herself in the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* (FFQ), an umbrella organisation of, at that time, 85 women's groups in Québec. She saw the FFQ as another vehicle for progress on pension reform and issues relating to women's health. By 1977, she was president of the FFQ, a position which gave her considerable visibility both in Québec and in the wider Canadian women's movement. It also gave her valuable leadership experience.

In the late 1970s, Finestone was appointed Director of Youth Protection for the province of Québec. This enabled her to develop her contacts with ethnic minority groups and helped sensitise her to their problems and unequal treatment. In the process she became committed not just to gender equality, but also to the cause of ethno-cultural equality and justice.

As a member of the Voice of Women, a Canadian women's peace organisation, Finestone actively involved herself in the "No" campaign at the time of the 1980 referendum on whether Québec should seek to negotiate a "sovereignty association" involving a monetary and customs union from the Canadian Federation. Following this, she was approached to become political attaché to Claude Ryan, a Liberal Party politician who

was then leader of the opposition in the Québec legislature. She accepted, and was thereby in a position to help write the provincial Liberal Party's social policy platform on women's issues.

In the process she learnt much about the intricacies of drawing up public policy; she developed an awareness of how to sell policies and party platforms to the electorate; and she also gathered campaign experience by participating in a series of provincial by-elections. In addition, her post helped her build an extensive network of contacts throughout the province. Her insider's understanding of the working of the political system developed further when she became political attaché to Ryan's successor, Robert Bourassa.

Rise to the Top

In 1984, Finestone was approached by her Liberal Party constituency to seek nomination for the approaching federal elections. She declined, but party workers contacted her family and enlisted her parents, husband and children to help change her mind. Their persuasive efforts worked and she won the nomination. Her family then became her chief campaign staff, fielding phone calls, putting up posters and even helping to write her speeches. The result was an impressive victory: in an election which saw the return of the Conservatives with the largest majority in Canadian history, Finestone, the novice candidate, managed to hold the Mount Royal seat for the Liberals. She won the seat again in 1988 and in 1993.

In parliament, Finestone served as Opposition Critic for Communications and Culture and also looked after the party portfolio on youth affairs. She served on the seven-member Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights which in 1985 recommended changes in federal government practice in such areas as maternity benefits, pensions, marital status, equality within employment and gay and lesbian rights.

Following the Liberal Party election victory of 1993, she was made Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, a post she held until 1996.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Looking back on her own political career, Finestone attributes her success to the support she has received from her family and to the experience she gathered while working for many years in the voluntary sector. Her immediate family, she says, has been "the greatest source of support" in her political life, while her work in the community – with its deliberate crossing of religious, ethnic and other boundaries – has helped give her the high public profile and degree of credibility essential for successful campaigning.

She also gives credit to Liberal Party initiatives to encourage women candidates, even if mechanisms such as quotas have not yet yielded

substantial results. When Jean Chrétien, the leader of the Liberal Party, set a quota of 25 per cent women candidates in the 1993 federal elections, she set off on a journey across the country to encourage women to stand as Liberal candidates – and to persuade local party organisations to accept them. This proved quite a challenge. As she recalls, “It was not an easy job to find constituency associations prepared to open up and consider women candidates. Where you had competent women prepared to run, you didn’t have an association prepared to accept them.” Male prejudice persisted, despite the party’s formal commitment to gender equality.

Finestone identifies funding as a crucial dimension of the effort to get more women into politics. In the case of the Liberal Party, she argues that the creation of special funds to help defray the expenses of women candidates has been crucial in drawing in women who lack access to fund-raising networks.

As one who has been active in the Canadian women’s movement over many years, she emphasises the importance of non-governmental organisations in the struggle for women’s equality. “As the organised voice of the women’s movement has become stronger and more effective,” she says, “there is far more pressure being put on all legislators.” Lobbying by a wide array of women’s groups, together with research generated by governmental bodies such as Status of Women in Canada, has forced all legislators to consider women in their policy decisions.

Throughout her political life, Finestone has made it a point to maintain alliances across party lines – a strategy she sees as potentially very useful for other women entering the political arena. She remembers that during the 1980 referendum campaign in Québec, some of her closest colleagues within the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* taught her that it was possible to maintain relationships with people despite profound ideological differences. This lesson, she says, “served me well in subsequent campaigns.” She would always eschew extreme partisan behaviour.

During her years in parliamentary opposition, for example, she found herself spending “more time in the offices of government members than with my own caucus colleagues.” Developing links with members of other parties enhanced her effectiveness in parliamentary committees. Her ability to negotiate with government members in ways that “allowed the government to save face” meant that she could achieve changes to government bills despite her opposition status. During those years she sought to develop the strongest arguments possible to support her policy positions. “If I had a good, sound argument, I found that most ministers were quite reasonable.”

When she herself became a minister, she found high office intrinsically isolating, and sought to overcome this by going out of her way to keep in touch with party colleagues and fellow parliamentarians. She also ensured

that she was not going to be the only member working on issues of women's equality within the government ranks. As she puts it, "I did not want to be the only voice. My job was to intervene in twenty-four ministries, soliciting the support, energy and creative vitality of the other women. Having them raise the issues in caucus was a very effective tool for change and ensured that gender analysis was done."

The emphasis placed by Finestone on co-operation, conciliation and partnership has brought with it a positive attitude to male involvement in women's issues. In fact, she sees the involvement of men as pivotal to the process of change and has designed strategies to ensure that male colleagues form an integral part of her equality agenda. Her goal has been to avoid being the only spokesperson on "women's issues".

For women contemplating a political career, Finestone has some very clear advice. The first point is the need for women politicians to surround themselves with competent staff: "I'm committed to hiring the strongest people I can find who are prepared to argue with me. It's absolutely necessary to have good, strong, competent staff who may even be smarter than you, and to be open to what they have to say."

Secondly, she emphasises the need to acknowledge party discipline and function as part of a team. Advising women to eschew the path of "rugged individualism", she urges them to defend their party's platform and philosophy, and to press for change firmly within party ranks.

Her final word of advice hinges on the word "honesty". In dealing with her constituents and public, Finestone argues, the woman politician must at all times strive to be open and straightforward. Only then can voters gain the measure of the kind of politician they are electing.

ETHEL BLONDIN-ANDREW

Member of Parliament (Liberal Party)

Secretary of State for Training and Youth

First Aboriginal Woman MP in the House of Commons

In 1988, Ethel Blondin-Andrew, an Aboriginal woman from Canada's Northwest Territories, approached her local Liberal Party to offer herself as a candidate for the approaching federal elections. When asked whether she "knew any Liberals" she shot back, "I know people who could be Liberals." With little help from the party, she won the nomination and went on to take the seat, becoming the first Aboriginal woman in Canada to enter the lower house of parliament. Five years later, following the Liberal victory in the 1993 federal elections, she scored another first by entering the Cabinet: again, the first Canadian Aboriginal woman to do so. Today, she is Canada's Secretary of State for Training and Youth.

Early Life

Like Lois O'Donoghue in Australia, Blondin-Andrew has had to battle prejudice, discrimination and institutionalised disadvantage in her journey to political eminence. Unlike O'Donoghue, however, she was not separated at an early age from her Aboriginal culture and roots. Her formative years were spent in a traditional Aboriginal family setting and she learned her native language and cultural traditions. Her ties with her community were therefore robust; in later life such ties would become a potent, political resource.

As in Australia, the Church sought to influence, and Westernise, Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Blondin-Andrew attended a residential school in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, part of a system of church-controlled educational institutions into which Aboriginal children were channelled. She remembers the school curriculum as being strongly oriented towards Europe and the United States, with little focus on Canada and none at all on her Aboriginal heritage.

During this period, she fell ill with tuberculosis and was confined to a sanatorium for fourteen months, where she continued her education through a tutor. She must have done well in her studies, because a local priest, realising her potential, suggested that she try for entry to Grandon College, a special leadership school. She duly won a place.

Looking back on her life at Grandon College, Blondin-Andrew describes it as "the beginning of shaping what I do and where and what I am today." The school's goals included spiritual and physical development, academic achievement and leadership training. It equipped her with skills, confidence and motivation that would prove invaluable in her political career.

She went on to obtain a Bachelor's degree in education from the University of Alberta, specialising in linguistics and literacy training. This she achieved under difficult personal circumstances. As the unmarried mother of two small children, she soon realised that there were no support mechanisms for someone in her situation. She recalls that apart from the encouragement she received from her mother, "it was all discouragement," with strong pressure applied to her to put her children up for adoption. This she refused to do. Nor would she give up on her education, despite having to juggle part-time jobs in order to support herself and her children.

In 1982 her educational training led her into the area of curriculum development. Two years later, she applied for an Executive Director position in the field of training and development in the Indigenous Development Participation Programme, run by Canada's Public Service. She was unsuccessful, but did manage to get the post of National Manager of the programme. Within two years she had risen to executive director level. Here, she deepened her knowledge of the workings of government, the bureaucracy and the corporate sector, developed a broad network of contacts, and travelled widely within the country.

Entry into Politics

In 1986, Blondin-Andrew became the Assistant Deputy Minister of Culture for the Northwest Territories. Her interest in language training led to her involvement in the Assembly of First Nations Aboriginal Language Foundation and the North American Language Institute. During her career in government service, she experienced constraints as a civil servant operating in a context where there were very strict injunctions against participating in partisan politics. But the experience also allowed her to cultivate close ties with a variety of Aboriginal organisations.

She also found herself being repeatedly approached to run for election to the Territorial Council of the Northwest Territories. She resisted the calls, believing the territorial level represented too narrow a forum. Instead, by the mid-1980s she began to feel the time was right to try for a seat in federal government. This led to her difficult – but ultimately successful – bid for the Northwest Territories of the Western Arctic in the 1988 elections.

Rise to the Top

Once arrived at the House of Commons, Blondin-Andrew was soon convinced that the Liberals were likely to win the next elections. She determined to use her term in opposition to focus her goals clearly, develop expertise in particular areas and generally “produce something tangible.”

One area to which she devoted much effort was constitutional reform. She participated in the constitutional negotiations that dominated the Canadian political agenda in the late 1980s and early 1990s, serving on a number of high-profile committees. Later, she involved herself in the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, working particularly closely with the sub-committee dealing with electoral reform in relation to Aboriginal peoples.

She also became the Opposition Critic (or spokesperson) on Aboriginal Affairs, and through her work on parliamentary committees produced a number of reports in this area. So impressive was her parliamentary record that when the Liberals became the governing party in 1993 she was appointed to the Cabinet.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Blondin-Andrew looks back with gratitude to the support she received from her mother, especially in the difficult period when she was raising a young family. But perhaps the most powerful and sustained supportive factor in her political career has been her ethnic community and the “magical” links built over the years with tribal elders and other Aboriginal leaders. For her, it remains a priority to return regularly to what she calls her “real life” – the world of her family, community, land and culture.

Although not a direct recipient of electoral affirmative action, she supports such initiatives as a means to bring more women into politics. She believes that the decision of the Liberal leader (and current Canadian Prime Minister), Jean Chrétien, to have women candidates constitute at least 25 per cent of the total party ticket in 1993 has had very positive consequences for the Liberal Party as far as the recruitment of women is concerned. She identifies this type of commitment as a potentially useful means of increasing the political participation of various minority populations.

Looking back at her own political career, Blondin-Andrew identifies a series of strategies that helped her overcome obstacles. First, as a self-declared “outsider” to party politics, she projected herself as a “low maintenance” candidate who was able to function with low levels of party caretaking. Women, she believes, stand a greater chance of political selection if they show themselves to be resourceful, no-fuss candidates. Secondly, she put to good use her considerable experience in the civil service and her insider’s knowledge of the workings of government. A third strategy was to immerse herself in parliamentary committee work, thereby building up readiness for ministerial office.

For women entering politics, she concedes, funding continues to pose a major challenge. In her own case, she financed her electoral campaign and subsequent move to Ottawa by liquidating a personal pension. Although she has no regrets about using her own funds to establish herself in political office, she notes that, financially speaking, “every campaign continues to be a struggle.”

While she describes herself as “absolutely committed” to greater participation by women in politics, Blondin-Andrew stresses the difficulties women are likely to encounter. Where conflict and competition are such entrenched features of public life, women need to be very cautious in the game of building alliances within their own party caucus, she suggests. In her own case, she has not found help particularly forthcoming from the Liberal government’s Women’s Caucus. Instead, she has worked to protect her independence and autonomy.

SENATOR THERESE LAVOIE-ROUX

Member of the Canadian Senate (Progressive Conservative Party)

Former Member of the Québec Legislative Assembly

Former Cabinet Minister in Québec

Thérèse Lavoie-Roux never planned to have a political career. She was part of the generation where women were virtually excluded from the political process and were barely visible in paid employment. But what she did do – and it proved a turning point in her life – was to get involved in a Montreal school board.

Until 1969, women were ineligible to sit as members of Montreal's Roman Catholic School Board. Its members were appointed by the government and the Catholic Church. Then the law changed, and the Archbishop of Montreal selected Lavoie-Roux to serve as the board's first woman member. She was immediately elected Vice-Chair, and the following year became Chairperson, a post she would hold for the next seven years.

In 1976, the social worker without political ambition was elected to Québec's legislative assembly as a Liberal Party member. She served there until 1989, spending the years 1985-1989 as a member of the provincial cabinet. Then, in 1990, she was appointed to the national Senate by the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney of the Progressive Conservatives. A long journey, indeed, from the Montreal school board.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Lavoie-Roux graduated from the University of Montreal in 1949 and went on to complete a Master's degree in social work from the same institution. Following her graduation, she practised as a social worker, tackling a broad range of areas; her work brought her into contact with adults suffering from psychiatric disorders and with emotionally disturbed children. She also served in a voluntary capacity on a number of bodies, including the Home Care Services for the Mentally Disabled.

Then came her membership of the Montreal Roman Catholic School Board and her speedy elevation to the chair. At this time, the youngest of her four children was only five years old, and it was while arranging child-care and nursery school instruction for her young daughter that Lavoie-Roux began to consider how school boards could better meet the needs of working parents. It was at her initiative that a meals programme was introduced into the Montreal Catholic schools system, aimed at reducing the burden on working parents.

Entry into Politics

Until the mid-1970s, women by and large remained excluded from Québec provincial politics. In fact, only two women, Claire Kirkland Casgrain and Lise Bacon, had ever sat in the legislative assembly. In 1976, the provincial Premier, Robert Bourassa of the Liberal Party, personally invited Lavoie-Roux to run for provincial election and promised her a cabinet post. Although the Liberal government fell in the election, Lavoie-Roux won her seat. In 1976, she was the only woman on the opposition benches and one of only five women in the whole assembly. She was appointed Opposition Critic on the Status of Women.

With the return of the Liberals to power in Québec in 1985, Lavoie-Roux assumed charge of the Health and Social Services portfolio, taking on the additional responsibility of Family Policy in 1988. Two years later came her elevation to the Federal Senate at the initiative of Prime

Minister Brian Mulroney. In the Senate, she has served as chairperson of the Internal Economy Committee.

Enabling Factors

Lavoie-Roux identifies the “tremendous” support offered by her husband as the most important source of support to her political career. Early on, she acknowledges, her husband assumed the roles of both mother and father to their young family. For her part, she devoted all her free time outside politics to being with her family; as she puts it, “family and work, work and family” was all that her busy schedule would allow. By keeping a clear focus on these two priorities, she believes she was able to balance her public and private responsibilities.

A further important supportive factor was the commitment of the Québec Liberal Party to increasing the participation of women in politics. At a practical level, the party gave her financial support that enabled her to defray campaign expenses. Without such intervention, she argues, it would be virtually impossible for women from other than affluent backgrounds to undertake election campaigning.

Strategies for Aspiring Women Politicians

Lavoie-Roux believes passionately that education is central to women acquiring the skills and the confidence to assume public office. What is also needed, she suggests, is a perfectionist outlook that drives a woman on to “work as hard as possible.” In her own career, she has found that the best way to win respect is to demonstrate her capabilities. “You need to beat the men in the game not by taking them on, but by being as good as them, or better.”

This perspective also shapes her view of the way women should interact with men in the political arena. Reflecting on her own career, she argues that adopting an aggressive or militant approach to her male counterparts would have proved counterproductive. Instead she made a point of staying calm, drawing on the negotiating skills she had acquired during her years in educational administration.

She identifies patience and a willingness to “work behind the scenes” as the strong points of her own years in politics. She also stresses the need for women politicians to be visible at every level of party and government, including caucuses and committees. Women, she says, need to get themselves noticed.