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Voice of the people

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Who's influencing whom?

This election campaign has brought to the fore the important issue of contributions to political parties, and hence the influence that different constituencies may have on them. In reference to union contributions to the New Democratic Party, Premier Rodney MacDonald said, "Nova Scotia can't afford to have union bosses on both sides of the bargaining table."

The last annual disclosures by the political parties, however, tell a different story. The NDP answer to one main constituency — the people of Nova Scotia. Eighty-six per cent of its contributions come from individual Nova Scotians (11 per cent from unions, and three per cent from businesses).

How does that compare with the other parties? Only 54 per cent of contributions to the Progressive Conservatives came from individuals, and 45 per cent came from businesses (one per cent from unions); the Liberals received 68 per cent from individual donors and 32 per cent from businesses.

With PC or Liberal governments, Nova Scotians might be even more concerned that management was sitting on both sides of the bargaining table.

Democracy is supposed to be about people having power. In this regard, Darrell Dexter's challenge to the other political leaders in the June 4 televised debate, to eliminate all union and business contributions, would appear to be a very democratic proposal. We'll see if the Tories or Liberals show an equal commitment to democratic principles.

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