

He made a good point

Well Mississauga's only full-time freelance politician did his thing again this weekend at the provincial Liberal nominating convention. Michael Houlton collected a grand total of four votes or .2 per cent of the delegates for his efforts. Because he was an alternate and not a delegate to the convention at the Four Seasons Sheraton, he didn't even get to vote for himself.

Houlton's assessment of his performance Monday from the Mississauga home where he is staying was an assertion that he had done "really well." He has no idea who the four people are who voted for him or, in fact, who the 11 were who voted for him in 1973.

But Houlton did actually establish some credibility for the main point he scored Saturday during his speech. He went to the podium and immediately challenged the chairman on a point of order. He wanted to know why he had arbitrarily been placed last in the order of speakers.

Although the party's constitution says one needs only 25 signatures to be a candidate, a rider was introduced after the campaign began requiring that 100 signatures by delegates and five from MPPs be required before a candidate got his name put in the hat to decide the order of speeches. That was obviously an arbitrary measure aimed at Houlton and other less than fringe candidates.

When the chairman ruled Houlton out of order, he appealed for those who agreed with his criticism to stand up and support him. He claims he got 65-70 percent of the audience to stand.

CBLT, the only station covering the speeches live, cut away from Houlton's speech at this point. They received 120 calls of protest in the next five minutes.

Producer Arnold Amber explains that the station had decided beforehand not to show all of Houlton's speech because he did not get in the draw and because of potential "injudicious remarks." They followed the same procedure with "extremely fringe" candidate and fellow Mississaugan Douglas Campbell at the NDP federal convention in Winnipeg. Mississauga is obviously carving out a position of honor for its madcap political comic relief, if nothing else.

Producer Amber says he wanted to give viewers a taste of what Houlton was like before cutting away. He also points out that the TV station was merely reflecting the wishes of the Liberal party itself. If Houlton was running for public office, he would likely have received full coverage.

For Houlton, the party "was trying to cut out democracy and I didn't let them."

The Liberals could have diffused the whole issue of equal rights for fringe candidates by amending their constitution to make entry tougher after Houlton's performance of 1973, but they failed to do so. A little arbitrary rule making at the start would have saved them the embarrassment of changing rules in mid-stream to hurt one specific candidate.

Buoyed by his blow for democracy, Houlton is considering starting his own Canadian Alternative Party—"a trinity of right, left and centre." Trinity is Michael's newest catch-phrase.

And, oh yes, he feels the Toronto Globe and Mail will have difficulty "getting its reputation back" after treating him so unfairly in the campaign.