

da's national programs. With Ottawa spending less money than ever on social policy, health care, and education, Quebecers have less than ever at stake in being part of Canada. The glue that once kept the country together no longer does.

Under the new rules of the game, Quebec has little hope of influencing Ottawa to adopt its priorities, other than those that are narrowly economic. So, what is clear to many Quebecers is that the constitutional status quo is not evolving in the way Daniel Johnson asserts. Instead, Canada's state system is being transformed against Quebec's social and cultural interests in the short run and likely to remain so. This is Bouchard's most effective economic argument in a province crippled by high unemployment, a declining industrial sector and grinding poverty. Quebec gets transfer payments, but the jobs and research funds go to Ontario.

Finally, any government that expects to win a referendum has to build a broad coalition capable of obtaining a majority. In rejecting unilateral secession from Canada without some form of political and economic ties, the sovereigntists have accomplished what few thought possible. Parizeau has been catapulted into Quebec's political centre. This is the real importance of the June 12 agreement with Bouchard and Dumont. Their agreement creates a highly innovative institutional framework to win over the undecided voter. It worked to defeat Charlottetown; it could be the winning strategy in 1995 and it makes the Yes team a far tougher adversary this time around.

THE STRATEGIC VOTER

There are other dimensions to the 1995 referendum that no pollster is able to answer. No poll can predict whether the so-

called average Quebec voter will vote strategically on October 30. Quebecers have always used the ballot to advance Quebec's interest in a system where it is always a minority—one province out of 10. Quebecers have found the most effective way to maximize their bargaining leverage with Ottawa: vote massively for the Liberal party and use that position as a power base. This is why Quebec has had the muscle to win concessions from Ottawa every time the Liberals formed the government party. Quebecers voted strategically for Mulroney in 1984 and again in the 1988 Free Trade Election.

In the coming referendum, if a lot of Quebecers see the value in strategic voting, nothing can be taken for granted. Quebecers will weigh not only the pros and cons of a "no" vote versus a "yes" vote, but will follow their past instincts. They will have to decide whether the referendum can be used as a means to a larger end. This is the soft side to the hard question that Quebecers face on October 30.

Quebecers want a new relationship with Canada post-patriation of the Constitution, post-Meech, post-Charlottetown, and post-NAFTA. Constitutional negotiations have hit the wall and every Quebecer understands that English Canada will make no more concessions unless its feet are held to the fire. If the referendum is interpreted as an exercise in strategic voting, it will turn out to be a different kind of exercise than current federalist strategy anticipates. For the undecided Quebecer who does not want to make an irrevocable choice on October 30 Parizeau's pitch to the centre is the best bet. ♦

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ONTARIO'S "COMMON SENSE REVOLUTION" AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

BY A. BRIAN TANGUAY

On June 8, Mike Harris confounded his many doubters by leading the Progressive Conservatives to a convincing victory in the Ontario election, taking 82 seats with 45 percent of the popular vote. Drawing their political inspiration from Newt Gingrich, Ralph Klein, and Preston Manning, the provincial Tories promised to usher in a "common sense revolution" that would neutralize the special interests they claim have held previous governments in thrall, would slash state spending, would trim the fat (and much of the underlying muscle) from a bloated bureaucracy and would relieve some of the fiscal burden on Ontario's harried middle class.

The centrepiece of this proposed revolution was a northern version of Ronald Reagan's voodoo economics: a 20 percent reduction in government spending combined with a 30 percent tax cut—along with a promise to balance the budget in four years (later amended to read "within our first mandate"). Additional elements of the Tory platform, such as the elimination of employment equity, boot camps for young offenders and workfare for those lazy welfare recipients, were consciously designed to appeal to a broad swath of angry, suburban middle-class voters who had seen their real incomes decline dramatically since the late 1980s and wanted to find some convenient scapegoats.

LOW-BALLING THE REFERENDUM

Despite the looming referendum on Quebec's future, constitutional matters mattered hardly at all in the election

campaign. Mike Harris has never shown much interest in these larger national issues; as if to underscore the low priority that he assigns to the Quebec question, he gave the inter-governmental affairs portfolio to Dianne Cunningham, whom he had defeated in the leadership race in 1990. Cunningham has been virtually invisible since her elevation to cabinet, while Harris himself, at venues such as this past summer's First Ministers' conference, has been uncharacteristically guarded in his comments on the impending vote on Quebec's future.

Does the Ontario election result make any difference to the country's constitutional riddle? The most obvious change is in the style of leadership that Harris brings to the national stage. Ontarians are accustomed to seeing their political leaders play an active and visible role in constitutional negotiations. Frequently, this role has transcended the bounds of narrow partisan politics. Bill Davis allied himself with Pierre Trudeau, for instance, and both David Peterson and Bob Rae worked with Brian Mulroney in an attempt to bring about constitutional change. Moreover, Peterson and Rae were both willing to sacrifice some of Ontario's clout, in terms of its weight in the Senate, for example, in an effort to bring Quebec into the constitutional fold.

Mike Harris, it is safe to say, will never find himself in the role of constitutional linchpin. A small town, "aw shucks" kind of politician, Harris perfectly reflects Ontario's growing self-

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of the country) than the federal government has collected in revenues from Quebec. In contrast, Alberta has contributed \$165 billion more than it has received. Alistair Taylor, an Emeritus Professor from Queen's University, has made similar calculations regarding the net economic benefits Quebec has received from more prosperous and more productive regions and individuals.

IS A "NO" VOTE REALLY BETTER THAN A "YES" VOTE?

Possibly the most astonishing development, as far as westerners are concerned, was the response from the secessionists to the self-evident remarks of Premier Romanow of Saskatchewan. Quebec, he said, could not expect to keep existing trade links if it became independent—presumably by constitutional means. Accord-

ing to Lucien Bouchard, such remarks were "arrogant, threatening, and disrespectful." Romanow, he went on, was "an enemy of change in Quebec, a devoted enemy. I would say a commando."

The conclusion to which many westerners are compelled is this: if the No side wins, Canada will be in for more constitutional chaos—after all, Mr. Bouchard, like Mr. Lévesque,

has long maintained that "no" really means *à la prochaine fois*; if the Yes side wins, we can look forward to some acute, but short-term economic chaos.

Given the current state of the Canadian economy, the second option looks relatively benign. ❀

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ONTARIO'S "COMMON SENSE REVOLUTION" *from page 7*

absorption, its preoccupation with reviving the devastated provincial economy. The referendum debate is far from the minds of most of Ontario's voters, who are more concerned with discovering where the jobs have gone and how to bring them back.

Harris can be expected to adopt a low-key attitude on the constitutional question, avoiding any inflammatory remarks that might fuel nationalist anger in Quebec, but making no promises about a renewed economic and political partnership with a sovereign Quebec, if it decides to make a break with Canada in the referendum (a result that looks increasingly unlikely). Probably, then, Harris will simply follow the cues of higher-profile colleagues—Ralph Klein, Roy Romanow, and Clyde Wells, most notably.

A VERY MODEST ROLE FOR ONTARIO

Although there might be a temptation to contrast the Harris government's parochialism with the broader national perspective of its predecessors, it was clear from the moment that the Charlottetown accord was defeated, that Ontario's political leaders, no matter what their partisan stripe, would no longer be willing to

make major concessions to Quebec in order to try to heal the constitutional wounds opened in 1982. Bob Rae, for instance, underwent a particularly rapid metamorphosis and quickly discovered the political virtues in Quebec bashing. On more than one occasion after 1992, Rae petulantly complained that Ontario was getting shafted by the existing set of federal-provincial fiscal arrangements and that he was tired of seeing Quebec get a disproportionate share of Ottawa's transfers.

Harris will likely continue with this posture: though his

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government will be happy to collaborate with Quebec and the other provinces in decentralizing power from Ottawa, Quebec should not expect to receive any special treatment. And Harris would warn sover-

eignitist leaders like Lucien Bouchard that they ought not to delude themselves into thinking that Ontario will make any effort to reforge a new economic partnership in the wake of a successful referendum outcome.

CONSTITUTION LOGJAM — STILL A CRISIS

So where does all of this leave us? Precisely where we have been mired since the process of constitutional reform was set in motion by the Mulroney and Bourassa governments in the mid-1980s. Some variation of Antonio Gramsci's epigrammatic remarks seems an appropriate description of Canada's current dilemma: the present crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old (constitutional) order is dying and the new cannot be born. It is patently obvious that the status quo is unacceptable to a solid majority of Québécois. At the same time, English Canadians are completely hostile to any attempt to constitutionalize political reform and thus reject out of hand any talk of amending formulae or distinct society clauses.

The sovereigntist alliance in Quebec—Parti québécois, Bloc québécois, and "Super" Mario's Parti de l'action démocra-

tique—is now committed to a referendum question that hinges on the offer of an economic and political partnership to the rest of Canada after a "yes" vote. As always, the premiers in English Canada reject outright this notion of a new European Union-style partnership and Mike Harris will not deviate from this common front despite Lucien Bouchard's desperate attempts to portray the neophyte Ontario premier as more sympathetic than any of his colleagues to the sovereigntist cause. As a result, Quebec voters are likely to see the offer of partnership for what it really is: a symbolic gesture that carries absolutely no guarantees. This could well presage a close defeat for the referendum, plunging Canada and Quebec yet again into the constitutional morass from which they have not been able to extricate themselves for the past 15 years. No one should look to the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris for any innovative ideas on how to break this constitutional logjam. ❀

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