

that accorded deficit reduction. In terms of machinery, there is a special advisory group on national unity attached to the Privy Council Office, and Liberal Lucienne Robillard, fresh from capturing a seat from the BQ in a byelection, is responsible for coordinating referendum policy. Still, these moves are modest when compared with the extensive activities of the National Unity Office in the late 1970s and Trudeau's aggressive leadership in the anti-separatist campaign.

Realistically recognizing the limitations of his own leadership and those of his party, Chrétien has wisely chosen to assume a relatively low profile, despite the provocations of the BQ and Reform to lure him into the front lines of the battle. His slogan is, in effect, that of *Mad Magazine's* Alfred E. Neuman: "What, me worry?" Leadership of the federalist cause in Quebec will be left mainly to the Quebec Liberals and the No committee when the campaign gets under way. So long as the polls indicate the likelihood of a No victory, "What, me worry?" is, indeed, a rational policy choice for an Ottawa with serious disabili-

ties when contemplating direct intervention in Quebec.

PLAN B: NEGATIVE INDUCEMENTS

If, at any point, the polls begin to shift toward the possibility of a Yes victory, however narrow, there will be panic on the federalist side. At this point, a federalist "plan B" may supplant the low-key approach. Plan B will take for granted that in the absence of credible positive inducements, *negative* inducements will have to come to the fore: threats that separation negotiations will go very badly for Quebec and that independence will be catastrophic for Quebecers' standard of living. Economic intimidation has the advantage of playing to the main weakness of the sovereigntist cause: insecurity in the face of uncertainty. Moreover, the federal Liberals will not have to take the lead; provincial premiers, the business press, banks, think tanks, and even the bond-rating agencies can be counted on for warnings, threats, dire predictions, and a belligerent contempt for the democratic legitimacy of the Quebec majority. Much of the flavour can be gathered from studies already produced for the C.D. Howe and other institutes, and from col-

umns by Andrew Coyne in *The Globe and Mail*.

The danger implicit in plan B is that once it is unleashed, it will have unhappy consequences, whatever the result of the referendum. If it does not discourage a "yes" vote, the rest of Canada will have been whipped into an intransigent mood for negotiations. If it does work, péquistes will develop a myth of the "stolen victory." Already Parizeau has been referring to the C.D. Howe and other critics as "economic terrorists." He is laying the ground for a counterattack after the tactical retreat of a referendum defeat.

The Chrétien strategy is preferable—provided that the prime minister can maintain control of the federalist agenda. By concentrating Ottawa's energies on economic management—deficit reduction, even-handed regional treatment in an era of negative redistribution, enhancing trade opportunities—while maintaining a calculatedly low profile vis-à-vis the "separatist threat," he has shown so far that he can be not only lucky but smart as well.

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO POLITICAL DEBATE: OR, HONEY I SHRUNK THE SPACE!

by Shelagh Day

There is a lot happening that should concern people in the rest of Canada. We should be engaged in a vigorous debate about the future of federalism and the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on the Canadian state. The fact is that fundamental changes to the shape of the Cana-

dian federation are being made now without a clear admission that this is occurring.

The recent federal budget significantly alters the relationship between the federal and provincial governments by shifting power to the prov-

inces, dismantling the Canada Assistance Plan, moving to block funding for Canada's social programs, and eroding the federal government's capacity to use its spending power to set and enforce national standards. It was the proposal to do this through amendments to the constitution that motivated many progressive social justice groups in the rest of Canada to oppose the Charlottetown accord, especially when the erosion of national social programs, and of the federal spending power, was combined with the

accord's failure to meet the demands of Quebec and of aboriginal women.

Now the Liberals are giving us Charlottetown II: the same combination of too much decentralizing to keep national social programs safe and too little decentralizing to satisfy the aspirations of Quebecers.

The same groups who are concerned about these neo-liberal economic policies, and the threats to national social programs, are those who have shown themselves most likely to support Quebec's aspirations for change and most willing to see negotiation. The space for their participation in political debate, the openings for exchange with governments and with each other, are very important. That this space is currently being deliberately downsized by governments and the media makes the social context for the Quebec referendum more unstable.

CONTROLLING THE POLITICAL SPACE

How is political space for debate about Quebec and the future of the Canadian federation being reduced? It is being done by defining narrowly what is on the agenda for debate, and by determining who can occupy the space for political debate that is created by government and the media.

At the moment, the Liberals limit what is on the agenda for debate by pretending that they are doing nothing themselves that affects the future of Canadian federalism and, therefore, that there is nothing for people in the rest of Canada to talk about until Quebec makes some decision. They pretend that neo-liberal economic policies do not fundamentally change the role of the state. Simultaneously, they accuse the PQ and the Bloc of wanting cataclysmic and unnecessary change.

In addition to agenda-limiting efforts, the Liberals have taken in-

struction from the consultations held during the Charlottetown round and learned to control tightly the political space that government provides. Community organizations such as the national women's groups can make a legitimate claim to have originally designed current forms of public consultation used by government. Consultations were intended to ensure that between elections, those groups that do not otherwise have easy access to government could have input into decisions that would directly affect them. The invention of consultative processes represented an effort to expand democratic practice by making some room for those who are otherwise marginalized in the political process and to ensure that significant between-election decisions were not made without public participation. The idea was to create a bigger political space. Through consultation, groups could talk to government and hear each other at the same time; they could be involved in a more dynamic political process of learning and exchange. To deal with amending the constitution, it was necessary to create some more inclusive and participatory process in order to address Meech Lake's lack of credibility.

Now, however, groups find that consultation has become a tool that governments use not to open space for their participation but to control and confine it. The wide-ranging, nationally televised consultations of the kind that occurred during the Charlottetown round are happening now in Quebec, but not in the rest of Canada. Although some participants would say that even the constitutional conferences were carefully controlled, they allowed far more scope for debate and exchange than we have seen since then.

Through more recent consultations on social program review, the

Liberal government has manipulated the public by producing overwhelming numbers of papers and proposals, providing little time for discussion and response, issuing workbooks that allow only predictable answers to comfortable questions, selecting who can speak, and dismissing genuine concerns as being merely self-interested and economically naive. Given the fact that the budget provides the answer to the questions posed by Axworthy about the future of Canada's social programs, the most recent round of consultations was simply a tactic to divert our attention while the axe was falling. Ironically, then, consultation is being transformed from a process for hearing from less-powerful groups to a government technique for silencing the citizenry.

THE MEDIA'S BIAS

The media, too, are currently stifling political debate through a number of techniques. Prominent among these is the decision to discredit or ignore those groups that they call "special interest groups." The use of the term itself is discrediting, implying as it does that the concerns of these groups are unrepresentative and not in the general interest. It is an indication of the mindset of both government and the media that this term, coined in the United States to refer to powerful business lobbies, is now being used to refer to groups that represent people who are marginalized in the political process. Susan Delacourt writes in *The Globe and Mail* that the media have "lost interest" in these groups because they are "too predictable and too extreme."

The charge of being "too predictable" is problematic because this media attitude makes it difficult to engage in political debate about

Continued, see "Whatever Happened to Political Debate" on page 72.

"Whatever Happened to Political Debate" continued from page 71.

longstanding and deeply rooted problems such as the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada, or the situation of disadvantaged people. The demand that news always be new effectively precludes debate over the central problems inherent in our structural relationships. From this perspective, historic inequalities and discontents are old news and, hence, boring. The media's bias is also hypocritical because it is clear from reading or watching daily coverage of these events that the media are happy to provide a platform for those very predictable voices from the right that advocate dismantling Canada's social programs and the aspirations of Quebec. The media's commitment to the ostensibly new is actually a commitment to the old and powerful.

As a result of these combined behaviours on the part of the government and the media, the space for inclusive political debate by progressive political forces is diminished. That this shrinking of democratic space is dangerous, given the enormity of the issues facing us, is obvious. It is essential now that progressive groups in the rest of Canada invent new ways to take political space in order to ensure that we can participate in decisions regarding our relationship with Quebec and the shape of the future.

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THE QUEBEC REFERENDUM: THE LONG VIEW

Part Two of a Two-Part Series

by Alan Cairns

ALL QUIET ON THE REST OF CANADA FRONT?

Rest of Canada (ROC) is a residual category. ROC is headless. No government speaks to it or for it. Yet, it clearly has a potential existence as a successor state, or several, should the referendum pass and Quebec secede. The Quebec referendum, therefore, is a forcing ground for ROC self-consciousness. Given the inhibitions that prevent the federal and provincial governments outside Quebec from fostering and defining ROC, these tasks will be undertaken by academics, journalists, editorialists, publicists, participants in "Whither Canada?" conferences, writers of letters to the editor, and other uncoordinated activists imagining alternative futures for Canadians outside of Quebec.

What once was unthinkable and unthought—Canada without Quebec—begins to enjoy a furtive existence as a future that might happen and this future begins to be fleshed out by those who live by the pen. At the level of everyday consciousness, a dim recognition grows that Canada may turn out to be a transient experience on the road to smaller futures. Thus, the Quebec referendum, in which ROC is cast in the role of an audience, is nevertheless a powerful socializing experience for non-Québécois. The brutally simple distinction between who is in the audience and who is casting votes is, in itself, an inevitable stimulant for non-Québécois to think of future patterns of statehood in which Québécois are foreigners. As the "nation that dares not speak its name"

(Phil Resnick) struggles to the surface, it is aided in its search for an identity by volumes such as *English Canada Speaks Out* (Jack Granatstein and Kenneth McNaught, eds.), *Plan B: The Future of the Rest of Canada* (Gordon Gibson), and *Thinking English Canada* (Phil Resnick).

The Reform party's role in the politics leading up to the referendum deserves special attention for it is positioned, in terms of its geographic support and hardline constitutional philosophy, to play a vanguard role for ROC if the polls indicate a possible "yes" victory. Furthermore, it is not constrained as other parties are, from saying what some of its supporters think, by the possession of office.

The natural tendency to concentrate attention on the referendum's unfolding in Quebec should be supplemented by recognizing and monitoring the less visible evolution of ROC self-consciousness outside Quebec. Even if the referendum is decisively defeated, the renewed togetherness in one country of Canadians will be understood as a fragile relationship, not as an unquestioned component of a stable order. A mutual wariness will survive and a sense of conditionality and contingency will not easily fade from memory following the second attempt of Quebec governments in 15 years to take their people out of Canada.

If a victory of the "no" is only marginal, if a francophone majority has voted "yes," if the "yes" support is considerably higher than it was in