

*"Draft Bill on Sovereignty"
continued from page 47.*

any significant effect on the Quebec electorate. Three consecutive polls recently have indicated a great deal of support for the Quebec government's initiative.


The federalists' great discomfort has led them to a hastily hatched plan to boycott the consultations that the government will be holding this year in February and March. For many sovereigntists, as recent polls show, this attitude is neither constructive nor wise and most probably underlies the fact that federalists in Quebec have very little to say about the political future of Quebec. As Mr. Parizeau put it in the National Assembly, their boycott is a pretext, a "faux-fuyant" for not participating and for preferring to hide their heads in the sand on this issue and promote the *status quo* as they have been doing since the rejection of the Charlottetown accord in October 1992. The Quebec Liberal party would also find itself in the embarrassing position of having to object to many components of the

draft bill on sovereignty that they have, in recent history, endorsed. For example, its leaders signed the *Bélanger-Campeau Report* and voted on the ensuing act, both of which constitute large components of the sovereigntist agenda of the new Quebec government.

Promoters of the *status quo* may sit on the sidelines and continue to question the legitimacy of the process or contemplate a parallel process to denigrate the sovereigntist option. Meanwhile, the Quebec government will be calling on the common sense of Quebeckers, confident of their capacity to debate positively the main features of a future sovereign Quebec and involving them in a truly democratic process. This process will certainly lead to a better understanding of all the dimensions of sovereignty; will shed light on the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the sovereigntist agenda; and prepare Quebeckers to make an informed choice on Quebec's accession to sovereignty. Quebeckers will participate fully and, one can predict, enthusiastically

in a very significant debate that the democratically elected government of Quebec has a clear mandate and responsibility to initiate before calling on the people to make the fundamental choice in a referendum on sovereignty.

And, moreover, Quebeckers will witness the solidarity of the sovereigntist forces, of the Parti québécois and the Bloc québécois, who have closely linked their organizations, and that together with their other partners outside the partisan political sphere will propose a clear sense of direction to Quebeckers. Together they will show that the sovereigntist option is not only legitimate and feasible, but also the best choice for Quebec's future, an option that will incorporate all the most positive aspects of modern democratic values, as we will see during the upcoming debate on the draft bill on Quebec sovereignty.

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EDITORIAL

CANADA'S POLITICS OF CATHARSIS

by Jamie Cameron

THE POLITICS OF CATHARSIS

The year 1995 finds Canada in the grip of catharsis. There has already been an international run on the Canadian dollar and momentum is building toward Quebec's separation referendum. Under the watchful eye of full diplomatic alert, Premier Parizeau sought a sympathetic hearing for Quebec independence in France. The Bloc québécois has asked to meet with President Clinton during his visit to Ottawa. Mean-

while, with the federal government maintaining a determined silence, the defence of Canada has been taken up by those who are equally determined that this nation should not "go gentle into that good night."

Quebec's separation referendum is presented to the rest of Canada as a simple exercise in democracy. It takes place against a backdrop of numerous failed exercises in democratic constitutional reform. In the circumstances, it is hardly surpris-

ing that Canadians everywhere are confused.

The referendum is Quebec's response to Canada's 1982 patriation and reform of the Constitution. With nine of ten provinces signing on, the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 might have seemed democratic enough. Except that, rightly or wrongly, the province of Quebec withheld its consent. Hence the "moral case for secession" (see Laforest's article in this issue).

The Meech Lake accord attempted to bring Quebec back into Canada's "constitutional family" through friendly amendments to the Constitution. Though all of Canada's democratically elected federal and provincial leaders supported it in 1987, by 1990 the accord would be robbed of all democratic legitimacy and would suffer a noisy and ignominious demise.

Then came the Charlottetown accord of 1992, an exercise in democracy run amok. There was something for everyone in the accord, and citizens voted on it in a nation-wide referendum. Though democratic participation was vindicated, the politics of inclusion resulted in yet another cataclysmic failure of constitutional reform.

Now Canada faces another exercise in democratic reform: this time, one part of the country claims to bind the others through the "moral force" of a vote for separation.

Such a prospect exposes deep conflicts and questions about the foundations of Canadian democracy. If Quebec votes "yes," in what circumstances, if any, does the rest of Canada have a moral obligation to respect that result? And what of the discrete pockets of Quebecers who have announced their opposition to separation? Can a majority of Quebecers claim a democratic prerogative for themselves that would then be denied to those pockets of aboriginals and anglophone/allophones? To complicate matters, the Inuit have announced their intention to conduct a referendum. Which result will have a greater moral claim on the rest of Canada, and why?

Few pretend to know the answers to any, much less all, of those questions. However, defining what we mean by democracy in the upcoming months is not an abstract exercise; it is one fraught with consequences

for the future. As the process unfolds, new questions are moving to the fore: how will the question be phrased? whose debate is this, and whose voices should be heard? should the rest of Canada participate in the debate on Quebec separation?

THE "INCIDENTAL MISCHIEFS" OF FREE DISCUSSION

In 1938, the chief justice of Canada declared, "notwithstanding its incidental mischiefs," that "free discussion of public affairs" is "the breath of life for parliamentary institutions." Though much has changed, the riddle of free public discussion remains.

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The question of who is free to discuss Quebec separation, and on what terms, has become a central aspect of Canada's catharsis.

In Quebec, one of the PQ's own consultants, Pierre Bourgault, was removed following remarks directed at non-francophone communities opposed to separation, which were widely described as ominous and threatening. A conception of separation as an exercise in raw majoritarian power was quickly excised from public discourse. More recently, allegations have been made that the PQ government has attempted to make Radio-Québec, a publicly-owned and independent broadcaster in the province, an instrument of separation.

Meanwhile, the rest of Canada, which quietly worried last fall during Quebec's provincial election campaign, has now entered the de-

bate, thereby dramatically raising the stakes. Prominent among its participants is Patrick Monahan (see his article in this issue), who claims that a "yes" vote would be so disassembling that the prospects of Quebec separation being successfully negotiated are virtually nil. Quebecers have described his *Cooler Heads* study as an exercise in terrorism and scare-mongering. Monahan's intervention has brought the conflict between Quebec separatists and Canadian federalists into sharp focus (see Latouche's article in this issue), and exposed divisions among commentators outside Quebec (see Hutchinson's article in this issue).

Nor is it quiet on the international front. After casual remarks about Canadian federalism caused a diplomatic stir, members of Parliament in the British House of Commons learned that they must henceforth practise a little self-restraint. Freighted with far more significance was Premier Parizeau's visit to France as head-of-state-in-waiting. Every step and word of this visit was carefully monitored by the Canadian government, as well as by the PQ and Canadian press.

The debate in upcoming months holds consequences for all of Canada. Precisely for that reason, it is important, whatever the future may bring, that debate on Quebec separation be conducted in an environment of free public discussion, incidental mischiefs and all.

COOLER HEADS

However, with the rising tensions of recent weeks, calls have been made for "cooler heads" to prevail. Unfortunately, there is little agreement as to what "cooler heads" would do in these circumstances.

Mr. Parizeau's version of cooler heads implores us to "hold our


Continued, see "Politics of Catharsis" on page 50.

"Politics of Catharsis"
continued from page 49.

horses" and remember that it is in Canada's self-interest to respect Quebec's exercise in democracy—he believes that if the rest of Canada would behave rationally, then separation could be smoothly and amicably negotiated. To Professor Monahan, creator of this curiously Canadian aspiration, "cooler heads" means something quite different. In his view, it is precisely because the costs of separation will be so great that cooler heads within Quebec will realize, as a matter of *their* rational self-interest, that the game is not worth the candle.

Surely the arctic constraints of a "cooler heads" discourse cannot be imposed on a debate that promises to be hot as hell. Canadians inside and outside Quebec are far more likely, in the words of our as yet silent prime minister, to speak "straight from the heart."

Fasten your seat belts—it could be a bumpy ride.

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THE MORAL CASE FOR SECESSION

by Guy Laforest

Why should Quebec want to secede? What are its moral reasons? Isn't Canada already the most decentralized federation in the world, and the best country in the world according to the United Nations? Isn't it clear, as David Cameron insisted recently in *Canada Watch* (November/December 1994), that Quebecers enjoy liberal individual rights and that Canada is a truly democratic state? Are we not witnessing the hijacking of the whole citizenry of Quebec by the small, only 2,000-people strong (to borrow a figure from Laurier Lapierre), nationalist elite? These are huge questions. I shall try to give at least the contours of a reply to the first two questions, those concerning the morality of sovereignty and secession.

FEDERALISM AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Donald Smiley had gained a great reputation as one of the most eminent scholars of the century on Canadian federalism. When his students and his peers decided to honour the York University professor with a collection of articles, it was not by accident that they entitled it *Federalism and Political Community*. Smiley knew all too well what was proper to do to one's fellow compatriots in a truly federal political community. To say that he considered improper what Canada did to Quebec in 1982, when the constitution was patriated, would be a remarkable understatement. As he put it,

... an exercise in constitutional review and reform [aimed at] ... more harmonious relations between Quebec and the wider Canadian community has [in-

stead] involved a betrayal of the Quebec electorate, a breach of fundamental constitutional convention, a recrudescence of Quebec nationalism, and an even more serious Quebec challenge than before to the legitimacy of the Canadian constitutional order.

Smiley's title, "A Dangerous Deed," and the title of the book in which this particular piece appears, *And No One Cheered*, are delightfully anachronistic. From Smiley we receive a crucial insight: it is plausible to argue that a major breach of federal trust occurred in 1981-1982 when the powers of Quebec were reduced without its consent. A federal community is governed by moral rules: the required consent of the constituent units when changes reduce their legislative prerogatives is one of those rules. Actually, it may be the most important one. My former mentor at McGill, James Tully, uses the following expression to refer to that rule, or convention, of federal morality: "What touches all must be approved by all." (In Latin, *quod omnes tangit*.) (See James Tully, "Diversity's Gambit Declined," in Curtis Cook, *Canada's Constitutional Predicament After 1992*.)

THE ARK AND THE COVENANT

Donald Smiley was not content to criticize the way in which patriation was achieved. A few years later he went on to argue that Canada's official language policies, enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, were "absurd." This, despite the remarkable progress in English-speaking Canada of what Peter Russell calls "Charter patriotism." Through the Charter of Rights