

*"Can Sovereignists Regroup?"
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mentary and electoral systems are not in the offing. The strategy may be too unsettling to people. However, while it promotes security, this strategy tends to bring little passion into the political arena and may be counterproductive.

A NATIONAL PROJECT

Excitement for a national project will develop if the government is willing to take the high road into politics and elaborate on an innovative project. Such a project ought to be constructed around a Quebec constitution, an entrenched charter of human rights and freedoms and, to name a few elements, a house of regions in which aboriginal nations, cultural communities and regions would be represented. However, it would prove difficult to go beyond a formal recognition of the overall ob-

jectives of such reforms, without risking an eruption of conflict among the various sectors of Quebec society.

Quebec is experiencing challenging times once again and it is crucial to take advantage of the situation to build bridges between all communities. At the end of this process, whether Quebec is in or out of Canada, it is fundamental for the government to add depth and meaning to relations between all members of Quebec's constituent communities. Therefore, to achieve its foremost objective, the PQ government will need to find a way to reach out to Quebec's various political communities. The PQ government will also need to ensure that party activists are invited to contribute to the mobilization process. If it wants to stand a chance of creating momentum for the project, it is essential for the PQ to renew its social movement tradition. This strategy

may, in fact, bring back the élan the PQ government needs to invigorate its position.

The deliberations under way since the tabling of Meech Lake in 1987 offer Quebec a great opportunity to explore new avenues and assess alternatives to current political arrangements. One thing is certain: the status quo is no longer acceptable for most Quebecers—and if federalist forces intend to counter nationalist and autonomist demands with the "politics as usual" credo, the game will be far from over.

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EDITORIAL

FEDERALISM AND THE CHRÉTIEN AGENDA

by Jamie Cameron

A CANADA-US COMPARISON

The last year has seen elections both in Canada and the United States register a strong anti-establishment vote. Similar dynamics have nonetheless yielded vastly different results.

The 1993 federal election returned a Liberal majority to Canada's Parliament. Not only were its two other traditional parties, the Conservatives and the New Democratic Party, effectively eliminated from the national landscape, the Bloc québécois, a party committed to a sovereign Quebec, formed Her Majesty's loyal opposition. One year later, the Reform party, which vaulted to prominence in Parliament on an anti-es-

tablishment platform, remains incapable of defining its "reform" agenda.

Although Canada's Parliament has been an interesting place since the 1993 election, the prime minister's ability to govern has not been compromised. One of the cornerstones of parliamentary democracy is party discipline, a principle that in most cases guarantees the safe passage of the governing party's initiatives.

Meanwhile, the American presidency is headed for trouble. In the United States, where the executive and legislative branches of government are separate, leadership skills are enormously important. The separation of powers is a two-way street:

Congress is as independent of the president as he or she is of Congress. Even with party control of the Senate and House of Representatives, the president cannot count on his policies being rubber stamped by Congress.

In that setting, Clinton had stumbled long before last week's midterm elections. Although he achieved unexpected results, as, for instance, on NAFTA, other initiatives, like health care reform, have foundered badly. As Whitewater and the sexual harassment action against him attest, the president's personal shortcomings have undermined confidence in his leadership.

Last week, Clinton and the Democratic party bore the brunt of voter hostility toward incumbents, Washington, and "government" in general. As control of the Senate and House of Representatives passed to the Republican party, Clinton had little choice but to sing the praises of bi-partisanship. More policies will be sacrificed than saved by bi-partisanship, and Clinton's prospects are not bright.

One year into his mandate, Prime Minister Chrétien of Canada still claims the public's confidence. His popularity continues to climb, and he has most recently emerged triumphant from a much-touted federal-provincial trade convoy to the East. After facilitating agreements that may create as much as \$8.6 million in business and trade with China, Chrétien was dubbed "Chairman of the Board of Canada." According to some, a new era has dawned on federal-provincial relations. This despite the conspicuous absence from the entourage of Quebec's premier.

Without the power to control Congress, Clinton's policy agenda will collapse; however, if Chrétien's founders, it will be for quite different reasons.

CHRÉTIEN'S AGENDA

A partial list of the prime minister's agenda for the upcoming year includes comprehensive social policy reform, aggressive steps to combat the intractable problems of deficit and debt, reconfiguration of the GST, an overhaul of immigration policy, the national health forum, and a range of significant, though incremental, reforms on criminal justice issues. Items that may force their way onto the agenda, albeit less voluntarily, include the Quebec referendum, the ever uncertain future of Canada, and the unwelcome prospect of yet another round of renewed federalism.

Virtually every item on the agenda above has enormous implications for the provinces. Despite the strength of his majority in Parliament, the prime minister cannot go forward on these initiatives without the provinces. Unilateral federal reform of university education, unemployment insurance, job training and welfare is quite simply a non-starter. Nor can the GST be reconfigured to achieve harmonization with other taxes without coordination and collaboration with the provinces. Thus far, however, the province's reaction to federal initiatives has been, at best, lukewarm. For example, they have snubbed the federal government's national health forum, which now must proceed without their participation.

Now add Quebec into the equation and the dawning of that new era appears yet more distant.

FEDERALISM

During the Asian trade junket, Ontario Premier Rae bubbled, "We're 28 million people in a great wide world, and we've got to work together." Jeffrey Simpson of *The Globe and Mail* declared that "this trip gives lie to notions that the federation cannot work and that getting the two levels of government to cooperate is as hopeless as herding cats."

Can the institutional history of federal-provincial relations in recent years be so easily forgiven and forgotten? Lest we forget, the demands of federalism have subverted virtually all attempts to reform our constitution. Without Quebec's consent, it is difficult to accept the legitimacy of the patriation package of 1982. The Meech Lake accord ended in fiasco largely because the distinct society clause defied a conception of federalism that featured the ten provinces as formal equals. The Charlottetown Accord was rejected

for any number of reasons, including the conflicting perceptions of federalism that it represented: while some decried the accord's devolution of powers to the provinces, others saw nothing but insidious centralization in its reform of institutions like the Senate.

Although the constitution has been set aside for now, federalism continues to place constraints on governance. The much-ballyhooed interprovincial trade agreement (ITA) is a case in point.

When announced early last summer, after some 14 months of negotiation, the ITA was pilloried for institutionalizing exemptions and loopholes that, it was alleged, would actually increase, rather than decrease, protectionist conduct. In a play on Joe Clark's community of communities, a *Globe and Mail* editorial pronounced Canada a "community of constraints."

Like the separation of powers in the United States, federalism in Canada is our genius but also our burden.

CONCLUSION

It is questionable whether Chrétien's Asian trade junket has broken Canada's cycle of failure in federal-provincial relations. Surely there is a difference between consensus and cooperation on a trade deal with China — which effectively is a win-win situation for all — and the overhaul of fiscal and social policy — which has enormous implications for the provinces — that Chrétien is contemplating at home. Realism suggests that the demons of recent history cannot be so easily exorcised.

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