



Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

# THE SEPTEMBER 12, 1994 ELECTION: ANOTHER STEP TOWARD SOVEREIGNTY

by Daniel Turp

The celebrations after the election of the Parti québécois on the evening of September 12 in Quebec City were modest, but the impact of the victory of the sovereigntist forces was nonetheless significant. After a very long and strenuous campaign, and in spite of systematic attacks on the main element of its program — sovereignty — Quebecers had given the Parti québécois a mandate to govern Quebec and had accepted that a process be set in motion to allow Quebecers to decide on their political future. Thus, on September 12, sovereigntists won a third consecutive battle against federalist forces in less than three years, demonstrating an ongoing coherent pattern of political behaviour among

Quebeckers since the demise of the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990.

This pattern should have had some sobering effect on the federalist forces, but the triumphant attitude of the federal and Quebec Liberal parties and their leaders sheds some light on how they perceive the issue of Quebec's political future. There seems to be a strong and overwhelming belief that Quebecers are planning to reject sovereignty in the forthcoming referendum; a conviction that they, as other Canadians, want to get the national unity issue behind them as quickly as possible. There seems to be a prevailing sentiment among

*Continued, see "Toward Sovereignty" on page 2.*

# DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER?

by Daniel Latouche

The 1994 Quebec referendum campaign is barely a month old and there is still hope for a democratic, enlightening, and civilized debate on paper, at least, but only if we get rid of a number of clichés. Clichés, it would seem, never die, they just accumulate. They also move around faster today as a result of the electronic highway.

## THE MOTHER OF ALL CLICHÉS

If a prize were to be awarded to the most pernicious of all clichés, one candidate stands in a class by itself. It usually runs like this: "The only way Mr. Parizeau and his separatists can win their referendum is through

*Continued, see "Déjà Vu All Over?" on page 3.*

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1  
SEPTEMBER 1994

Single Copy \$5.00

### ARTICLES

The September 12, 1994 Election: Another Step Toward Sovereignty by Daniel Turp .....	1
Déjà Vu All Over? by Daniel Latouche .....	1

### EDITORIAL

Canada/Quebec's Beau Risque .....	5
-----------------------------------	---

### ARTICLES

Electoral Strategy and Trends in Public Opinion by Guy Lachapelle .....	6
The Referendum Will Be Closer Than Many Federalists Expect by Patrick Monahan .....	9
Wait-and-See Strategy Not New for Aboriginal Peoples by Mary Ellen Turpel .....	10
The West and the Quebec Election by D.J. Bercuson .....	11

*Canada Watch* is a publication of the York University Centre for Public Law and Public Policy and the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies of York University.

*"Toward Sovereignty,"  
continued from page 1.*

federalists that in the final analysis, Quebecers will prefer Canada at any cost. This tranquil assurance is very misleading and brings to mind a similar attitude adopted by Brian Mulroney and Robert Bourassa, who seemed convinced at the end of the process that led the Charlottetown consensus that Quebecers would, when faced with a decision that could imperil Canada's future — that is, the rejection of the proposed accord, necessarily opt for Canada. Let us not forget that Quebecers clearly and overwhelmingly rejected the Charlottetown accord for reasons of substance rather than process or personalities, and did not choose Canada for the sake of choosing Canada.

Sovereignists do not build on the basis of such tranquil assurance. They have fought, and won their three last battles at the ground level. They have significantly strengthened their organizations and are now empowered to deal with the upcoming challenge, winning the referendum on sovereignty. Among other advantages, the sovereignists can now claim, one should not underestimate the fact that almost two-thirds (65 percent or 130 out of 200) of the elected representatives from Quebec in Canada's House of Commons and Quebec's National Assembly are now sovereignists and these representatives will exert, on an individual basis, significant influence during the referendum debate. It should also be remembered that the Bloc québécois can, with even more legitimacy since September 12, continue to speak for sovereignty and show, in its role as a defender of Quebec's interests, the deficiencies and shortcomings of the existing federal system for Quebec, as well as the detrimental effects for Quebec of the centralizing proposals of reform in the areas of social

security, health, and taxation that Jean Chrétien's Liberal government is planning to have Parliament adopt in the near future. And most of all, it can now be affirmed that sovereignists possess an even more powerful tool to meet the challenge — that is, a government in Quebec City that will provide them with important resources to achieve the primary goal of the Parti québécois — sovereignty for Quebec.

And there should be no mistake that these tools and resources will be used to engineer a winning strategy for the referendum. The policies and legislation of the PQ will be aimed at demonstrating that good government can be provided for Quebecers, but that better government could be achieved if Quebec were a sovereign country. The debate on sovereignty within Quebec will be channelled in part through a constitutional commission that will encourage all Quebecers, toutes origines confondues, to reflect on the kind of country they should give themselves and will lead to a positive and enriching effort in constitution-making, in contrast to the confrontational and fruitless constitutional negotiations held between Quebec and the rest of Canada over the past 30 years. The referendum question and the timing of the referendum will remain a prerogative of the Quebec government, with the support of other sovereignist forces, and the "win" factor will be a key element in any decision on these two important elements of the strategy. But the strategy will certainly also entail bringing together and closely linking all groups and opinion leaders that favour sovereignty for Quebec, forming a sort of "rainbow coalition." One can expect to see in this coalition sovereignists of both the Parti and Bloc québécois, as well as other groups such as trade unions, cultural groups, and organizations representing women, students, and seniors.

Sovereignists will not be lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that their federalist opponents do not have a strategy of their own. It is well known that the federalists have plenty of resources at their disposal and that they are willing, as in 1980, to entertain fears and distort realities in the period leading up to the referendum and during the referendum campaign itself. But unlike the debate in 1980, federalists have little or nothing to offer on the substantive issue of Quebec's political future. No promise of renewed federalism will be made to Quebecers, or will be taken seriously by them. The post-1982 *status quo*, reducing Quebec's status to one player among 11, 13, or more, will be the only feasible alternative to sovereignty. Also, when compared with 1980, the federalist forces will have very few credible leaders to talk about the future of Quebec within Canada. Their governments and parties will not be able to afford to buy Quebecers' votes without putting in jeopardy the fragile economy of Canada or alienating their respective constituencies.

Many pundits have suggested that on September 12, Quebecers showed once again how strategic they can be when it comes to voting and creating delicate balances among political parties and options. If Quebecers are as wise as the commentators argue, they could show similar wisdom when the time comes to vote in the referendum on sovereignty. And wisdom might not be in this situation to opt for the post-1982 *status quo*. They might well choose "Option Quebec" and prove that the election of a Parti québécois government on September 12 was another step toward sovereignty.

*Daniel Turp is a Professor of Law at the Université de Montréal and President of the Bloc Québécois Policy Committee.*

