

CANADA/QUEBEC'S BEAU RISQUE

by Daniel Drache

With 10 months to go before Quebec's referendum, the unthinkable may come to pass. The persistent growth in support in Quebec for sovereignty could lead to Quebec's separation from Canada. The fact is that Quebec is getting used to the idea that it is a distinct country. Quebeckers voted against Charlottetown decisively. In the last election, they sent more than 50 members of the Bloc to Ottawa. Now it is Parizeau's turn to try to settle Quebec's "collective destiny" in a sovereignty referendum planned for sometime in 1995.

Yet, nothing should be taken for granted even if he won 54 percent of the Francophone vote in the election. Everywhere voters are changing their minds about who they support and who they oppose. In the last Ontario, Quebec, and federal elections, one-in-five voters changed their minds by election day. So the strategic question is this: can Parizeau find enough votes to push him over the top? Certainly, he is going to use his massive support among the francophone voters to build a powerful province-wide referendum campaign. But he needs to find 200,000 more votes than the PQ scored in the last provincial election if he hopes to win a majority in the referendum. Getting those Quebeckers into the Yes camp will not be easy.

First, as the Liberal sweep of the west island of Montreal underlines, PQ support chez les anglophones has fallen to an all-time low. Ethnic voters also voted massively for Daniel Johnson. So if Parizeau is to win the referendum, he badly needs support from both these communities in

order to gain a majority. How can he win this support?

Second, it is not clear what will happen to the "soft" nationalists — those Quebeckers who want to be more nationalist and more federalist at the same time. Will they vote against independence? Will they join the Yes camp holding their noses? Will they massively abstain? No one knows where the soft nationalist vote will land when the going gets tough in the referendum campaign.

Third, Quebec's first nations will also want to use the referendum as a bargaining lever in their own quest for self-government. They are not going to sit passively by and let their future be determined by Quebeckers. Whether Parizeau likes it or not, they, too, are major players in the referendum campaign.

Finally, and not least of all, Parizeau faces a formidable Ottawa team lead by Chrétien and Johnson. If the provincial election demonstrated one thing, it is that the federalist forces are not pushovers. Even without any constitutional offer on the table, Johnson came within a centimetre of a tie in the popular vote. What the federalist forces need is a clear constitutional position that spells out new avenues of constitutional reform. It is inconceivable that some offer will not be forthcoming. The west may not like it, but Ottawa has no choice. If it defines its notion of what "a strong Quebec in a united Canada" entails, the federalist forces, with 43 percent of the popular vote, could just defeat the referendum. Wrong.

This prognosis is far too optimistic for a principal reason. Ottawa has

not absorbed how formidable an opponent the PQ government is likely to be. This is because Ottawa is stuck on deficit reduction, and the project on social reform. Yet every public opinion poll shows that the number one issue for Canadians is job creation and getting the economy back on track. If Chrétien's government does not intend to offer Quebec a new constitutional deal, at least it will have to offer Quebeckers a new economic future. So far it is sticking with its "mean and lean" notions of government. Where is its vision of Canada in the twenty-first century? Without it, it has no winning strategy.

Compare this with the way the Parizeau government is likely to fight the referendum battle.

First, he will try to make it a non-partisan issue. The Bélanger-Campeau Commission is the model that he wants to adopt this time around. It worked to defeat the Charlottetown proposals and Parizeau is betting that he can use it again to win over both the soft nationalists and soft federalists to the sovereigntist cause.

Second, if sovereignty is to mean something more than an abstract promise to the ordinary Quebecker, its appeal has to be broadened. Already, in the way his government is organized, Parizeau has addressed that concern. The signal he is sending is that the government will give everyone a say in Quebec's future. Access to government will be broadened dramatically. Half of the inner cabinet are women, an accomplishment that no NDP government has managed. Cabinet committees have

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been abolished and instead the regions will have major impact in governance. He has made it a major plank that "lean" government does not imply "mean" government. There are to be no more "blind cutbacks in government services." Last, but not least, Parizeau is committed to restructuring Quebec's battered economy.

So, what then is Parizeau's *beau risque*?

It is that in every collision course with Ottawa running up to the referendum, on balance, the PQ will come

out ahead. The more the Chrétien government follows Paul Martin's lead in slashing government spending, the more Parizeau is reckoning that it will push another thirty thousand Quebecers into the sovereigntist fold. Each time Ottawa talks about debt and deficit, the PQ government will offer Quebecers something more important: a vision that in a world of trading blocs and interdependence, good economic management matters more than ever.

If he can demonstrate that a PQ government will tame markets, promote growth, and keep social in-

equality within strict limits in an independent Quebec, he stands a fighting chance of finding those 200,000 new supporters on referendum day. In his rendezvous with history, Parizeau is counting on Chrétien's tough-minded fiscal conservatism to point Quebecers toward their destiny.

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ELECTORAL STRATEGY AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION

by Guy Lachapelle

Since the Quebec election was announced on July 24, 12 public polls have been published by Quebec polling firms. A comparison of these polls indicates that support for the Quebec Liberal party remained relatively stable throughout the campaign, but that the Parti québécois lost a few points during the last two weeks of the campaign. Overall, public opinion polls underestimated the Liberal party's support, a phenomenon that we have observed since the '70s in Quebec elections, and overestimated the PQ support. The election of the Parti québécois was not a surprise because the level of satisfaction toward the Johnson-Bourassa government was very low. However, the outcome of the election in popular vote, the PQ getting 44.7 percent of the popular vote and the Liberal party 44.3 percent, indicates that Quebec society is highly divided along partisan lines and that the 1995 referendum is going to be highly contested.

The performance of the Parti de l'action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which received 6.5 percent,

demonstrates that an important group of Quebec voters are dissatisfied with the two main parties. The fact that both leaders of the Parti québécois and the Liberal party did extend a hand to Dumont, Jacques Parizeau being the first one in his speech during the eve of the election, demonstrates the importance of this group of voters for the 1995 referendum.

This short analysis examines the evolution of the Quebec electorate before and during the election. A number of phases can be identified: first, the long campaign that started with the election of Daniel Johnson as leader of the Liberal party; second, the pre-campaign period, or the short campaign, when rumour about the date of the election was the only issue on the public agenda; and finally, the electoral campaign itself in which political parties had six weeks to convince voters about the benefits of their electoral platform.

THE LONG CAMPAIGN

The election of Daniel Johnson as leader of the Liberal party was the beginning of the campaign. John

Parisella, who was responsible for the campaign, went to see party organizers both in Britain and the United States to see how he could revamp the strategy of the Liberal party, which had been in power for more than nine years. The task was not an easy one because the economic situation and, more importantly, the neo-conservative ideology of its leader and several ministers and its vision of the state led to great displeasure among citizens. On the constitutional issue, the Liberal party wanted to offer the status quo — an evolutive status quo as Johnson liked to say — until 1997. The heart of its vision of intergovernmental relations was to sign more administrative arrangements with Ottawa.

On the other side, the Parti québécois wanted to offer Quebecers another way of governing, closer to its citizens' needs and more accountable. The Parti québécois and its leader, Jacques Parizeau, argued that the status quo was not acceptable and, as well, since the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords