

**"Referendum Will Be Closer,"
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Quebec — is already on record as stating that Quebeckers will have to be offered at least the possibility of "renewed federalism" in return for a "no" vote in the referendum. And the Quebec Liberal party is divided on this question, with some former cabinet ministers favouring the development of a new "constitutional vision" as the platform for the No forces in the referendum.

This confusion within federalist ranks over the precise meaning of a "no" vote seems unimportant as long as support for sovereignty hovers in the 40 to 42 percent range. But with the PQ now controlling the levers of government, support for sovereignty is likely to move slightly upward in the next three to six months. (This will be due to the combined effect of the PQ's "honeymoon" with Que-

bec voters, along with unpopular cuts in federal spending that will be forced on the federal government in an effort to control the deficit.)

If and when the support for Quebec sovereignty comes to within striking distance of a majority (that is, more than 45 percent), the confu-

"... while the election results were obviously encouraging for Canadian federalists, it seems a bit premature to be breaking out the champagne."

sion in the federalist camp could prove very damaging. Within the Quebec Liberal party the pressure to develop some credible offer of "renewed federalism" may well prove overwhelming. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, however, is likely to maintain his strategy of offering "good

judgment" and avoiding all talk of constitutional revision.

If Quebeckers are asked to choose between the status quo and sovereignty, the outcome is far from certain. But one thing that is clear is that federalists will be in big trouble if they appear divided. Jacques Parizeau can be expected to exploit even the hint of divisions within the federalist ranks, arguing that his opponents cannot even agree among themselves about the meaning of a "no" vote. That's why it is essential that federalists settle this question now, rather than trying to resolve their differences in the hothouse atmosphere of a referendum campaign.

Patrick Monahan is an Associate Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University.



WAIT-AND-SEE STRATEGY NOT NEW FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

by Mary Ellen Turpel

The election of a PQ majority government with the promise of a referendum on secession is a loud political alarm bell for the 14 First Nations and Inuit whose territories are caught within the boundaries of Quebec. While the national press and federal government downplay the consequences of the September 12 vote, such a strategy could prove disastrous for aboriginal peoples. Can First Nations and Inuit silently gamble on a federalist response to a referendum question?

Clearly not — especially when they consider who proposes to defend their interests — namely, the federal government, the very same government that has been as much if

not more of an obstacle in self-government and land claims negotiations.

Although federal Minister of Indian Affairs Ron Irwin gave First Nations in Quebec his assurances that the federal government will fulfill its political and legal obligations to them in any secession scenario, how real is this promise and what does it mean?

The current federal strategy is to downplay the secession situation, to politically reinforce that the federation works, and to enlist provinces in an effort to eliminate inter-provincial trade barriers so that the spectre of duplication and bureaucratization can be jettisoned. Although this strategy may be per-

fectly tailored to the pre-referendum period, it leaves First Nations and Inuit without any certain support or protection.

Outside the national aboriginal community, aboriginal peoples in Quebec have become a convenient rallying force for politically reactionary sentiment. The issue is used by those hostile to Quebec (and to aboriginal peoples also) to frustrate the debate. This only serves to further isolate aboriginal issues and prevent their discussion any sustained or serious way.

The PQ platform contemplates that aboriginal peoples will be treated as "minorities." The secession plan of the PQ tells us "Aboriginal peo-

ples will have a special place in a sovereign Quebec ..." (p. 40). That special place is not one defined by aboriginal peoples, but decided by the PQ. Already the Crees have forcefully opposed this "plan" and are organizing their own referendum. While the self-determination double-standard is painfully obvious to all observers (including many advisers to the PQ and BQ), Quebec is only doing what the federal government has always done — it is

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refusing to address self-government and territorial claims in a fair or equal fashion. It is ignoring the aboriginal issues and "managing" them by avoidance.

The impression one forms from studying the federal (and provincial) responses to the September 12 vote is that the ideal "solution" would be a substantial reworking of federal arrangements (trade, jurisdiction, etc.) by administrative and intergovernmental agreements leading to a "no" vote in a referendum. In other words, change the federation in the direction of greater decentralization without formal constitutional amendment. While novel, and of questionable constitutionality, this approach leaves aboriginal peoples in the same place as in the PQ platform — as something to be addressed later. Ironic, isn't it?

Professor Mary Ellen Turpel is an Associate Professor visiting at the University of Toronto.

THE WEST AND THE QUEBEC ELECTION

by D.J. Bercuson

Most of western Canada has reacted to the Quebec election with an attitude of watchful waiting. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein has appointed a small committee of academic advisers, headed by University of Alberta political scientist Alan Tupper, to help guide him through the trying times to come. Their advice is to "cool it." The Canada West Foundation, based in Calgary, is working on a new set of constitutional proposals that they are labelling "Option C," an answer to Gordon Gibson's new book on how Canada will break up in the event that Quebec separates. His book has become hot new reading among some members of the Calgary business community. Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon, weeks away from calling a provincial election, has been keeping a low profile while Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow is rumoured to be giving confidential advice to his one-time comrade-in-arms, Jean Chrétien. BC Premier Mike Harcourt has said little, but several BC radio talk show hosts have been claiming that many of their callers are taking the attitude that if Quebec goes, British Columbia will follow.

The one thing that is completely missing from public discourse is panic. Indeed, there seems to be a general feeling that the election result was no bad thing since the ultimate question—will Quebec stay or go—is now on the table for resolution. There is virtually no desire for another round of constitutional wrangling. The attention of most westerners is firmly fixed on the efforts of the four western provincial governments to cut public expenditures and get the deficit/GPP into some

sort of reasonable balance. This is nowhere more true than in Alberta, where stage 2 of the Klein government's radical budget cuts is going into effect. But there have been continuing cuts in the other provinces and the public is already feeling their impact in dramatic changes, especially to the health care delivery system and education.

This does not mean that western Canadians have no views on the future of Quebec and Canada. The views of most westerners are little changed from those they held in October 1992 when the Charlottetown accord was rejected overwhelmingly by 60 percent of the

"One of the realities that the prime minister, the premiers, and the professional Canada-univers will have to take into account, if anything beneficial is to come of this mess, is that western Canadians have views on Quebec and Canada that have been formed by their own historical experience."

voters in all four western provinces; they believe in a nation of 10 equal provinces with individual rights guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There is little sympathy for the view that Canada is a country composed primarily of "two founding peoples," while antipathy toward official multiculturalism has never been higher than it is at the moment.

There has been much chagrin expressed in newspaper editorials,

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