

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

"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 refusing to address self-government and territorial claims in a fair or equal fashion."

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

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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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"The West,"
continued from page 11.

letters to the editor, on radio talk shows, and in other public fora over the warnings emanating from central Canada's chattering classes not to engage in "inflammatory" rhetoric. Peter White, president of the Council on Canadian Unity, recently announced that his council will "try to temper statements from English-speaking Canadians that could incite passions among separatists and earn them greater support." As one example of what the council intends, White attacked a recent *Globe and Mail* article advocating the peaceful separation of Quebec and Canada, claiming that "its defeatism and irresponsible speculation ... risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy."

It is going to be very difficult for Mr. White and others who agree with his desire to suppress opinions they are not comfortable with to convince western Canadians to shut up this time around. For many years the dominant feeling in western Canada has been that Quebec is the spoiled child of confederation, receiving many billions more in taxpayers' largesse than it gives back to the country, dominating the prime ministership, setting the nation's political agenda, and all the while

snivelling about how badly it has been treated. Right or wrong, like it or not, that is the position that most westerners have arrived at. When Quebec voters foisted the Bloc québécois on the rest of Canada as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, there was open anger and contempt expressed everywhere in the west; the election of the PQ government will add to that feeling. By berating those views and pretending that only those "reasonable" westerners whose cars sport "My Canada Includes Quebec" bumper stickers were to be engaged in debate, those central Canadians who always claim to know best brought this country to where it is now—with a dedicated secessionist as premier of Quebec and a second referendum on secession in a decade and a half looming within the next year.

One of the realities that the prime minister, the premiers, and the professional Canada-uniter 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. Those views are different from, and largely antipathetic to, the image of Canada that has been fostered by Ottawa bureaucrats and their

academic (and central Canadian business) allies since the late 1960s. But since there are now some 9 million taxpayers and citizens in western Canada, those views cannot be ignored or shoved under the rug any longer. If anything is calculated to rile the west these days, it is advice to "take a valium and just keep your crazy notions to yourselves lest you upset the sensitivities of Quebecers." That just won't wash any more.

D.J. Bercuson is a Professor of History at the University of Calgary.



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Write or fax us at:

Canada Watch
Osgoode Hall Law School
Room 454
4700 Keele Street
North York, Ontario
M3J 1P3
Tel: (416) 736-5515
Fax: (416) 736-5546

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Editors-in-Chief
Jamie Cameron
Centre for Public Law and
Public Policy

Daniel Drache
Robarts Centre for
Canadian Studies

Columnists This Issue

David Bercuson,
University of Calgary

Guy Lachapelle
Concordia University

Daniel Latouche
Institut national de la recherche
scientifique

Patrick Monahan
Osgoode Hall Law School

Daniel Turp
Université de Montréal

Mary Ellen Turpel
University of Toronto (Visiting)

Production

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Centre for Public Law and Public
Policy: Phone (416) 736-5515,
Fax (416) 736-5546 and the
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Fax (416) 736-5739.

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