



Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

IN THE ARTS WE TRUST?: POLITICS AND THE FUNDING OF CULTURE

by Jamie Cameron

THE PUBLIC TRUST

While the CBC's mandate has been under public discussion, there has been no dearth of advice to that hallowed institution. Some recommend that the CBC keep radio, but not TV; others oppose commercialized programming, sports broadcasting, or both; and, while some say the CBC should be privatized, still others would like it to be exclusively dedicated to public programming.

The CBC is, after all, a national institution; as such, it holds our culture and identity in trust for all of us. Any decision about its future will feel like a decision about ours. What's more, the CBC is substantially funded by taxpayers' money; as far as we are concerned, that

makes it accountable to the public.

Other segments of our culture that hold a share of that public trust also have been in the news recently. A decision by the Writers Union to sponsor an event open only to members of certain races has been nothing short of incendiary. Some say that if the Writers Union wants to have race-based policies and events, it should not be funded by the public.

Now the province of Alberta has announced that funding may be denied to arts productions that "offend the sensibilities and the community standard." That response was pro-

Continued, see "In the Arts We Trust" on page 118.

THE "NEW" NATIONAL UNITY DEBATE: ITCHING TO FIGHT THE SEPARATISTS

by Kenneth McRoberts

It is hard to believe that Canada has been plunged once again into a debate over national unity. After all, the last debate ended in a most ignominious fashion. In voting against the Charlottetown Accord, many citizens, at least in English Canada, seemed to be not only rejecting the

Accord, but protesting the very fact that the nation's leaders had invested so much time and energy into devising it.

Nonetheless, less than two years

Continued, see "The New National Unity Debate" on page 119.

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 8
MAY/JUNE 1994

ARTICLES

In the Arts We Trust? Politics and the Funding of Culture
by Jamie Cameron 117

The "New" National Unity Debate: Itching To Fight the Separatists
by Kenneth McRoberts 117

REGULAR FEATURES

National Affairs
by Patrick J. Monahan 121

Quebec Report
by Alain Noël 122

Western Report
by Roger Gibbins 124

Economic Report
by Fred Lazar 125

Legal Report
by Bruce Ryder 127

CW Update
The Month in Review 129

Supreme Court Watch 131

Parliamentary Update 132

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.

"The New National Unity Debate," continued, from page 117.

since that event, the Quebec question is once again at the forefront as English-Canadian politicians, such as Premiers Roy Romanow, Ralph Klein, and Michael Harcourt, feel compelled to denounce the plans of Quebec separatists. The conditions hardly seem propitious for English-Canadian leaders to launch a new attack on Quebec separatism.

JUMPING THE GUN ON THE REFERENDUM

First, the pretext for a renewed attack on Quebec separatism, the upcoming Quebec election, seems a bit odd. Apparently, English-Canadian leaders are hoping to dissuade Québécois from voting for the Parti Québécois. Politicians rarely seek to influence an election in another province. There is every reason to believe that if they should do so, such "outsiders" would meet with stiff resistance. Yet, the argument goes, this provincial election is different: with the PQ in the running, the very survival of the country is at stake. Nonetheless, there is ample reason to believe that Quebec voters would be especially likely to resent "outside" involvement.

Second, even though the PQ is committed to sovereignty, the immediate stake is selecting a govern-

ment party, not deciding the sovereignty question. Jacques Parizeau and other PQ leaders have regularly insisted that the declaration of Quebec sovereignty would only come after a majority vote in a referendum; the PQ program stipulates this. For that matter, it is difficult to see how any declaration of sovereignty would be taken seriously by other states if it were not based upon a popular referendum. Nonetheless, English-Canadian politicians (and some Quebec federalists) have insisted that such a referendum would be a mere formality, in effect predetermined by the election of a PQ government. This amounts to contending that the PQ cannot be trusted to stage a proper referendum, a charge that doesn't seem to wash in Quebec if only because of the experience of the Lévesque government which felt clearly bound by the failure of its 1980 referendum. Alternatively, since opinion surveys continue to show that the majority of Québécois squarely oppose sovereignty, leaders in this new anti-separatist crusade are implying that Quebec voters can be easily duped or tricked into voting "Yes" in a referendum. Either way, the message is not likely to be well received in Quebec. Québécois are bound to be not only perplexed, but offended by the debate currently raging in English Canada as to whether and on

what terms Quebec can become sovereign.

Third, it is striking that so far the federalist torch is being carried not by federal leaders, but by provincial premiers, and western Canadian premiers at that. So far, Ontario's Bob Rae seems to have been sufficiently burned by the Charlottetown debacle to avoid wading again into the national unity question. For his part, Prime Minister Chrétien has been loathe to join the battle, although he cannot avoid being drawn in by the need to explicate or defend declarations of his ministers. He may have decided to bide his time, in part, for the kinds of tactical concerns that we have just outlined. (Of course, it may well be that Chrétien has no other approach to the sovereignty question than to dismiss it as hypothetical and unworthy of serious discussion and comment.)

EMPHASIZING THE NEGATIVE

Finally, it is amply clear that this time around the response to Quebec separatism can only be a negative one. After the twin debacles of Meech and Charlottetown, separatism can no longer be countered with the promise of a "renewed" federalism. All that is left, it seems, is to focus on the presumed costs of

Continued, see "The New National Unity Debate" on page 120.

Canada Watch

**Practical and Authoritative
Analysis of Key National Issues**

**Volume 2, Number 8
May/June 1994**

Publisher
D. Paul Emond

Editors-in-Chief
Jamie Cameron, York Univ.
Kenneth McRoberts, York Univ.

Senior Editor
Michael Rutherford, B.A.

National Affairs Editor
Patrick Monahan, York Univ.

Quebec Editor
Alain Noël, Université de
Montréal

Western Editor
Roger Gibbins,
University of Calgary

Economic Editor
Fred Lazar, York University

Legal Editor
Bruce Ryder, York University

Editorial Assistants
Denise Boissoneau
Krystyna Tarkowski

Production
WordsWorth Communications
ISSN 1191-7733

Canada Watch is produced jointly by the York University Centre for Public Law and Public Policy and the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies of York University and published by:

Emond Montgomery
Publications Limited
58 Shaftesbury Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1A3
Phone (416) 975-3925
Fax (416) 975-3924.

Subscription Information
Canada Watch is published eight times per year. Institutional subscriptions cost \$165.00 plus GST and include an annual cumulative index. Individual subscriptions are entitled to a 40% discount. Please contact Terry Hamilton at Emond Montgomery Publications for more information or a subscription.

© Copyright 1994 Emond
Montgomery Publications Limited

Printed in Canada

separation. Yet, this can only produce an exceedingly sterile debate. Federalists can insist quite correctly that separatist leaders have an interest in minimizing the difficulties of Quebec's transition, and thus, that their statements should not be taken at face value. But they cannot deny that they have an interest in *exaggerating* the difficulties; their statements cannot be taken at face value either. The fact of the matter is that no one can be absolutely certain what the transition to sovereignty would be like for Quebec or for English Canada — although prophecies can be self-fulfilling, especially negative ones.

In recent days, English-Canadian leaders seem to have been engaged in a game of one-upmanship seeking to outdo each other with the most apocalyptic vision. Nonetheless, Michael Harcourt probably earned extra marks with his contention that under separation Quebec and English Canada would become not just antagonists but the "worst of enemies." What could that mean? Would they become like Bosnia and Serbia? Why would that necessarily be the case? How can he, or anyone else, be certain as to what would happen?

We should not be surprised if Québécois either dismiss such statements as lacking face value or, even worse, take them seriously and are insulted as a consequence. In effect, these statements could have precisely the opposite effect of the one intended: increasing the probability of a PQ victory in the upcoming election. Beyond that, they could come back to haunt their authors. If the federalist leaders should keep insisting that the election is really a referendum on sovereignty and the PQ is successful, for whatever reasons, how can they then dispute the

pretension of a PQ government that the Quebec population has in fact a mandate for sovereignty?

Why in light of all this is there such a sudden urge on the part of English-Canadian leaders to come out swinging against Quebec separatism? In part, the explanation may lie with Lucien Bouchard's western Canadian tour, ostensibly designed to prepare English-Canadian minds for Quebec's accession to sovereignty. Clearly, his pronouncements about the feasibility, and even inevitability of Quebec sovereignty, have unsettled and enraged a good many English Canadians; the fact that they came from the ostensible leader of the official opposition certainly has not helped. In effect, in launching their crusade against Quebec independence these leaders may be as concerned with scoring points among their own constituents as with changing the minds of Québécois.

YET ANOTHER MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Yet, in focusing so ferociously on Quebec separation and its presumed consequences, these erstwhile defenders of Canadian federalism have served to further entrench the notion that the only way Quebec and English Canada can bring their continuing conflict to an end is through sovereignty. Once again, an opportunity has been missed to address directly and openly the respective needs and demands of the different parts of the country and to see whether there might be a new approach to "national unity" than the one that has so lamentably failed. After all, survey after survey has demonstrated that the majority of Québécois want Quebec to remain within the Canadian federal system and the majority of English Canadians want it to do so. Yet, their leaders have been singularly unable to devise measures through which this

popular desire might be respected.

The last federal election had in fact created the conditions for such a serious rethinking of Canada. The old assumptions about national unity that had been shared by all three established federal parties were thoroughly discredited through the success both of the Bloc Québécois and the Reform party.

Yet, within the new Parliament, the Bloc and Reform have been unwilling and unable to recognize and act upon their commonalities, as spokesmen for different regions that might have gone about devising new political formulas that would respond directly to the concerns of their respective parts of the country. Instead, the Bloc has remained firm in its commitment to the disengagement of Quebec, through sovereignty, and Reform ferocious in its rejection of even the slightest recognition of Quebec's specificity. As for the Liberals, instead of being spurred by their relative weakness in Quebec to develop new approaches to national unity they have become even more intransigent in their adherence to the old approach.

In short, rather than launching a "new" national unity debate that might actually produce new approaches to keeping the country together, Canada's saviours are only too anxious to bring back the old one — but in its shrillest of forms. Quebec will be told that it must remain within Canada because, to put it as brutally as possible, Quebec simply has no other choice. Is this really the best argument that can be made for Canada? Doesn't Canada, and Canadians, deserve better?

Kenneth McRoberts is Director of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and Professor of Political Science at York University.

