



CANADA WATCH

Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

THE ATLANTIC FISHERIES CRISIS: TROUBLED WATERS, ANXIOUS THOUGHTS, CONTROVERSIAL INITIATIVES

by David Johnson

It is said that the prospect of being hanged concentrates the mind. Likewise, the prospect of the waters of Canada's continental shelf being rendered still and barren, devoid of an abundance of fish, has had the effect of concentrating the minds of Atlantic Canadians, federal and provincial government leaders, and now even the representatives of an international fishing regulatory body.

As those Canadians interested in the Atlantic fishery have come to realize that systematic overfishing has resulted in Canada's offshore becoming, in Farley Mowat's brutal words, a "sea of slaughter," we are

finally witnessing a number of initiatives being taken by the federal government to halt the pillage and bring the offshore under a strict, protective regulatory regime.

Both the prime minister and Brian Tobin, the minister of fisheries and oceans, have publicly announced that over this spring the federal government will be seeking parliamentary approval of legislation giving Canadian authorities the power to enforce "custodial management" rules respecting the offshore fisher-

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REFUSING TO RETHINK CANADA

by Kenneth McRoberts

With the results of the last election, the writing was on the wall: the "national unity" strategy that all three federal parties have so faithfully supported for 30 years has not worked. The rise of the Bloc québécois clearly signalled that French Quebec remains committed as ever to Quebec as its primary allegiance. The surge in support for Reform demonstrated that major elements of the strategy, such as the promotion of official language minorities and multiculturalism, have

produced resentment in parts of English Canada.

PQ RETURN A POSSIBILITY

Now, there is a widespread speculation that the Parti québécois soon will be back in power in Quebec. A new PQ government promises to be quite different from the first one, which was so hesitant in defining and pursuing its options. This time

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THE FUTURE: POSSIBILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

And so we await the proposed federal legislation and whether the NAFO moratorium will be obeyed, rendering so much of the foregoing moot. Regardless of these current initiatives, a cold, hard reality remains, one disquieting to most Atlantic Canadians. And this is that the tragedy of the fishery cannot be blamed solely on European overfishing. Canadian mismanagement and abusive fishing practices themselves must bear a substantial burden of responsibility. The meaning is clear.

The reform and revitalization of the fishery will also be a Canadian responsibility. But as the Cashin task force report has indicated, an environmentally sustainable fishery for the 21st century will call for a significantly smaller, much more professionalized system of fleets and fish plants than there was in the boom times of the early 1980s. That the fishery can recover if properly protected and managed is not in question. What is in question is the future face of the Atlantic Canadian economy. This is an economy that now must struggle, more than ever before, to redefine itself, to diversify itself, to restructure itself. As the broader country confronts these challenges generally, so must Atlantic Canada confront these demands specifically.

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*"Refusing To Rethink,"
continued from page 101.*

around, the objective will clearly be defined as sovereignty, and vigorously pursued.

To be sure, much may happen between now and whenever the Quebec election is called. The PQ leadership has already committed errors born of overconfidence; Daniel Johnson has given the Liberals a new sense of direction.

However, it is striking that neither the last election result nor the prospect of a new PQ government has spurred the serious rethinking that one might have expected elsewhere in the country. Both in federal government circles and among major English-Canadian opinion leaders, the dominant stance seems to alternate between fastening on to "the real questions," such as the debt and the need to cut expenditures, and resolutely asserting the continued effectiveness of the old "national unity" strategy.

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL: MISSING THE POINT

With respect to the Chrétien government, its decision to close the Collège militaire royal (CMR) does not speak well for its ability to understand the stakes in any upcoming "national unity" struggle. By all appearances, the government simply did not anticipate how nationalist leaders would be able to use the closure to demonstrate their thesis that the federal government, and the Canadian political system in general, is indifferent to the particular interest of Québécois. Unlike most aspects of the federal government's promotion of French and of francophones, this one has a direct bearing upon Quebec: the CMR is based within Quebec and was created to further the advancement of Quebec francophones in the military. Yet, the Chrétien government acted as if the only issue these days

is showing responsiveness to business pressures for debt reduction.

By refusing to reverse its decision, the Chrétien government has compromised the position of Premier Daniel Johnson, who had no choice but to endorse public pressures to save the college. If the Chrétien government had rescinded its decision in the light of Johnson's request, it might have been able to salvage the situation, giving Johnson badly needed credibility as a defender of Quebec's interests. Instead, he, and the federalist cause in Quebec, was left hanging.

To be sure, Ottawa has with great fanfare announced some major grants and spending programs for the province. But they do not have the symbolic impact of closing the Collège militaire royal, which could come back to haunt the federalist cause in any referendum campaign on sovereignty.

As to any strategic planning for a referendum on sovereignty, there is no way of knowing for sure what is occurring within the Chrétien government. Thus, it is difficult to know how much stock to place in a recent press report that planners are, in fact, looking to Jean Charest to lead the federalist cause. If the report is valid, it would suggest that the government is only too acutely aware of the vulnerability Prime Minister Chrétien, as Trudeau's key lieutenant in orchestrating the 1982 constitutional revision from which Quebec was isolated. But this would be all the more reason to do everything possible to ensure the re-election of the Johnson Liberals.

If the Chrétien government is having difficulty gearing up for the possibility of another struggle over "national unity," opinion makers in English Canada are remarkably loath to recognize that the old strategy has not worked and a new one may be necessary.

DEFENDING OFFICIAL BILINGUALISM

A central element of the "national unity" strategy was to strengthen the presence of French, and of francophones, throughout the country so that Quebec could not claim to be the essential defender of francophone interests in Canada. Thus, Ottawa has poured great amounts of energy and resources into reinforcing the francophone minorities.

Recently, an enterprising *Globe and Mail* journalist secured some data that had not been widely discussed—even in academic circles. The data demonstrated that in all provinces where there are substantial numbers of both francophones and anglophones, the inferiority of francophone incomes was greater in 1992 than it had been in 1977. This was presented as evidence that the federal government's official bilingualism had failed (*The Globe and Mail*, March 23, 1994).

Opinion leaders, including writers in the same newspaper, could not ignore such an attack on one of the pillars of the national unity strategy and rushed to its defence. Claiming that "the numbers have to be taken with a dose of realism," *Globe and Mail* columnist Robert Sheppard noted that even if franco-Ontarians

are now twice as far behind Ontario anglophones than they were in 1977, they are making more than Quebec francophones and almost as much as Alberta anglophones. (Of course, this has no bearing on why francophones have lost ground in Ontario). Then, for good measure, a *Globe and Mail* editorial came to the rescue. It turns out that rather than proving the failure of Ottawa's official bilingualism, the data proved the failure of Quebec's policies. After all, both anglophones and francophones in Quebec had slipped relative to their counterparts in the other provinces. This general decline in Quebec's position was clearly the fault of Bill 101 and the Quebec government's "ethno-statism." (This glossed over the fact that, relative to Ontario, most other provinces had also slipped without the benefit of Bill 101).

Yet, in a sense, the whole debate was beside the point. The real test of the policies is whether, in fact, they have increased the presence throughout Canada of people who live their lives in French, whatever their incomes may be. By this measure, the policies have failed. The 1991 census revealed that in all provinces but Quebec, the proportion of the population using French at home had declined. (In fact, in most provinces the actual number of francophones

had declined.) As a result, in all provinces but Quebec, New Brunswick, and Ontario, francophones represent less than 3 percent of the population.

Like it or not, Quebec is the home of most of Canada's francophones: 89.5 percent in 1991. The range of opportunities and experiences in French that is available to Quebec's 5.6 million francophones can never be equalled in other provinces. Inevitably, Québécois will see their province as fundamentally distinct from the rest of the country, and will look first to the government of Quebec to defend their interests.

Here and elsewhere, the time is long overdue for a major rethinking of the nature of Canada. This becomes all the more acute given the prospect of a PQ victory. The last time the PQ was elected, most of English Canada's opinion leaders were caught by surprise, as was the federal government itself. After all, the prime minister had said that "separatism is dead." This time, a PQ election would not be a surprise. We will be unprepared anyway.

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