

"Preston Manning's Receipts,"
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some politician for living high off the hog, he will only succeed in reviving memories of his own ill-conceived attempt to preach one standard while acting according to another.

COMPOUNDING THE ERROR

Preston Manning's expense allowance wasn't just a problem for the leader. How were the other Reform MPs going to respond when they found out that their leader was accepting party money, *without having to provide receipts*? Sure, Manning says he needs the money to cover expenses. But \$31,000 for dry cleaning and parking? How do we know that Manning isn't wearing his shirts an extra day and pocketing some spare change?

Into the breach stepped Calgary Reform MP Stephen Harper, champion bean counter. The problem with the expense allowance, according to Mr. Harper, was that Manning wasn't required to provide receipts. We need *written proof*, Harper insisted, that Preston's shirts really have been laundered before we fork over any party dough.

The party executive circulated a memo rapping Harper on the knuckles, but implicitly acknowledged the validity of his point by announcing that Manning would henceforth begin providing receipts. Harper eventually emerged as the apparent hero of the piece. Other Reform MPs rallied to his defence. Even Manning was reduced to the lame observation that Harper's only mistake had been to air his grievances in the press, rather than behind closed doors.

Mr. Manning better make sure he's got a big shoe box for all those receipts. Pick up a magazine to read in the airport while waiting for the plane? No problem, Mr. Manning. Just make sure the receipt for \$2.50 finds its way into your trusty shoe

box and is filed with party headquarters so you get your cheque for \$31,000 at the end of the year.

Sometime next year, some enterprising reporter may ask how much it is costing the Reform party to keep track of Mr. Manning's receipts. And the reporter will be surprised to find out that the cost of the tracking system far exceeds the total amount of the expense allowance itself. Chalk it up as another victory for economy in government.

This brings us back to the real lesson of this episode, which threatens to be lost amid the mountain of receipts for shoe shines and haircuts that will soon be accumulating at Reform party headquarters. Contrary to received Reform party wisdom, the vast majority of the nation's politicians are not in the business to make a fast buck. They're just Canadians who are willing to make a contribution to the public life of this country, often at tremendous personal and financial cost.

If anyone ever doubted that fact, they need look no further than the compelling evidence supplied by Preston Manning himself. Despite a salary as party leader in addition to his normal MP salary, he still needs a special expense allowance to cover his dry cleaning bills.

So, please, let us hear no more from Preston Manning or the Reform party about the alleged sumptuous lifestyle and personal fortunes of the country's MPs. Instead we should turn our undivided attention to the real and pressing problems facing this country.

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QUEBEC REPORT

BIG BROTHER

by Alain Noël

"A SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY IN GESTATION"

Early last year, Quebec was nominated for the "Big Brother Award" by a new and relatively unknown international organization called Privacy International. Quebec did not "win," but was nonetheless singled out as the "prototype of a surveillance society in gestation."

What struck Privacy International was the extent to which the government could stock and use personal information. Quebec's extensive computer files, medicare cards with a picture, and welfare controls were mentioned as indicative of a state that could monitor citizens closely and with impunity.

The Quebec government and most editorial writers rejected the attack as overblown, explaining that a welfare state that provides generous services, including free health care, must necessarily have major computer resources. Senior civil servants added that the law prevents the Quebec government from matching or combining files maintained by various departments or agencies, even though this restriction poses major costs in terms of duplications. Institutional protections are also provided by the Access to Information Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the ombudsman, and the auditor general.

However exaggerated, Privacy International's critique struck a sensitive chord. A poll conducted by Ekos Research in late 1992 suggested that Canadians worried almost as much

about the protection of privacy as they did about unemployment, both concerns being much more important than national unity. As for Quebecers, they appeared more concerned about privacy than the rest of Canadians, who themselves were more preoccupied with it than Americans are.

THE UNFRIENDLY FACE OF THE WELFARE STATE

The events of the last year did nothing to reassure Quebecers. Revenue Quebec, for instance, was criticized for its excessively zealous procedures. In recent years, the department was taken to court as much as 70 times more often than its Ontario counterpart, usually for cases related to sales taxes and fiscal procedures. Most of the time, according to tax lawyers, Revenue Quebec won, and when it did not, the law was changed! After the press made public a series of embarrassing cases, the deputy minister resigned and the minister promised things would change. Early this April, a full reform based on the "new" idea that taxpayers should be presumed innocent until found guilty was announced.

Before this reform, Revenue Quebec considered all taxpayers as potential defrauders ("*fraudeurs en puissance*"). The presumption was not unique to this department. The same attitude prevailed in the Department of Manpower, Training, and Income Security, responsible for the "*boubou-macoutes*," special agents who every year randomly visit almost a third of all welfare households. Likewise, early this year, when more than 60,000 persons failed to comply with the new procedures necessary to obtain a medicare card, the Quebec Health Insurance Board was quick to conclude it had uncovered a new group of defrauders. At about the same time, the Quebec Automobile Insurance Corporation became notorious for

its cavalier treatment of claims by injured drivers, all potential cheaters according to the corporation.

The cases vary, but not the discourse. Quebecers, be they taxpayers, insured drivers, users of medical services, or welfare recipients, are all "*fraudeurs en puissance*." The role of their government is to prevent them from cheating by keeping a close watch and by creating as many disincentives as possible.

The Quebec state, seen as an instrument for collective promotion during the Quiet Revolution, has become a suspicious provider of services to a population that cannot be trusted. How can this evolution be explained?

In part, the new, unfriendly face of the welfare state can be associated with the conservatism of the 1980s. Elected to "take government off the backs of citizens," conservatives in anglo-saxon democracies proved to be less concerned by "excessive" government than by certain types of interventions. They often ended up promoting a stronger state designed to regulate free markets, reduce expenditures, and maintain law and order.

"A HIGH VALUE-ADDED SOCIETY"

For Quebec, however, this ideological explanation is not fully convincing. After a brief flirtation with privatization in the mid-1980s (some may recall "*l'État-provigo*"), Quebec Liberals basically abandoned the idea of a clear right-wing orientation in favour of a more ambivalent, middle-of-the-road course of action. Moreover, the notion that citizens are all potential defrauders is more a product of the 1990s than a creation of the conservative 1980s.

In an as yet unpublished study of the discourse of the Bourassa government, Gilles Bourque and Jacques Beauchemin, both sociologists at the

Université du Québec à Montréal, point to a deeper and more fascinating explanation of this recent evolution. When they submitted a series of government documents to content analysis, Bourque and Beauchemin found little reference to core liberal values such as progress, rationality, freedom, equality, or democracy. Even social actors tended to disappear in favour of governmental institutions and programs. What remained were problems of various types—a high school drop-out rate, unemployment, violence, drugs, HIV, pollution—and categories of the population to be managed by a government committed to create a "high value-added society" that could compete in world markets. Members of a national community defined by its identity have been replaced by sub-groups with problems; citizens of a state defined by core democratic values have given way to clients of a state that manages services in the name of competitiveness; individuals with entitlements and rights have become potential free-riders and cheaters.

Daniel Johnson's platform is in keeping with this version of post-modernity in which the very idea of a collective project becomes an object of derision. Entitled "*Agir*" (to act), the Liberal program promises action, but never explains clearly the fundamental purpose of all this action. By contrast, of course, the Parti québécois offers a full project. To Daniel Johnson, such broad ambitions appear nothing short of irrational. The sovereigntist option, he stressed in a recent interview, is imbued with "magical thinking."

The governments of Ontario and British Columbia announced this year that they would reinforce efforts to uncover welfare cheaters. While the proposals stopped short

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of focusing on visiting agents, they gave rise to discourses similar to that promoted by the Quebec government in recent years, and indicated how disoriented New Democrats have become. Citizens in these two provinces should be attentive. If the parallel is genuine, these governments' new emphasis on controls will not be confined to people receiving social assistance.

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WESTERN REPORT

ONCE MORE FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

by Roger Gibbins

Much as Canadians might wish to ignore the fact, the national unity debate is again coming to a simmer as the Quebec provincial election approaches. Should the pollsters be right and the PQ win, the debate will quickly come to a boil. Given this unwelcome but probable scenario, what is the western Canadian reaction likely to be?

While this question is still hypothetical, it is important nonetheless. In a recent article on the future of Quebec (*Calgary Herald*, April 7, 1994), Edmonton journalist Allan Chambers argued convincingly that in a sovereignty referendum, Quebecers will vote to stay in Canada "if the national context is somewhat welcoming." Stated more emphatically, the outcome of the referendum could hinge as much upon opinion outside Quebec as inside.

If this line of argument is correct, and I suspect it is, the west could play a critically important role given the fact that unsympathetic noises toward Quebec are most likely to come from the west, and from the region's Reform MPs in the House of Commons. If history and recent voting patterns provide a reliable guide, the part of the country most likely to bid Quebec "adieu" will be the west.

THE KNEE-JERK REACTION

What, then, should we expect of the immediate regional reaction to a renewed national unity debate? Certainly, there will be unease with the

inevitable attempts by the federal government to provide financial incentives for a no vote in the Quebec sovereignty referendum, and, indeed, for a Liberal vote in the provincial election. Those incentives, generously financed from a shrinking public purse, will come as surely as night follows day. There will also be unease with the second inevitable response by the federal government, which will be to provide informal ways to meet Quebec's constitutional agenda.

It is unlikely, however, that this immediate response will be crippling to the federalist cause in Quebec. It will be written off as little more than conventional regional carping, the presumed inability of westerners to appreciate the larger interests of national unity. Nor is it certain that the Reform party will be a major source of negative cues for the Quebec electorate. This will depend on whether Preston Manning remains in firm control of his party. If he does, then it is likely that Reform will adopt a conciliatory posture. Manning, after all, has already committed the party to expansion in Quebec.

If anything, it is likely to be the Reform party itself, rather than the federalist cause in Quebec, that could be most damaged in the forthcoming national unity scramble. In an environment where the "maturity" of national parties will be measured by their willingness to pay tribute to the nationalist impulse in Quebec, Reform runs a risk of being a casualty in the national unity debate. It will be the target of unrelenting attacks by the federal Liberals as the latter mobilize the traditional forces of Canadian nationalism in the defence of God, country, and the Liberal party.

DEEPER SOURCES OF UNEASE

The most problematic western Canadian response to a renewed national unity debate is likely to be indifference. Both the free trade

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