

*"The Threat," continued  
from page 93.*

government's legislative majority was slim, and where a significant number of government members had slim pluralities, the recall could be a potent weapon in the hands of opponents.

Governments could not count on a four- or five-year term of office, but only on the length of time that it took for the recall mechanism to kick in. Governments would be as vulnerable as their weakest members. Here it should also be noted that the members most likely to be targeted by orchestrated recall campaigns would not be those who were least responsive to their constituents, but simply those with the smallest pluralities.

The existence of recall would have made it impossible for the Klein government to have embarked on its three-year plan of deficit reduction, for it would not have had three years to put its program into place. Whether or not one agrees with what the Alberta government is doing, I would argue that we would be poorly served if the planning and policy implementation horizons of governments were sharply reduced. But this is precisely what the introduction of recall would do for it, would put governments on a permanent electoral footing. The result may be more responsive government, but it would not be better government.

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## QUEBEC REPORT

### SPRING ELECTION?

by Alain Noël

Elections, declared Daniel Johnson on March 8, the day the National Assembly resumed sitting, are coming "very soon." Quebec's premier was thus giving credence to the growing impression that he will call an election this spring, probably for the middle of June. The Liberals would thus avoid a series of by-elections that would be required should they wait until the end of the summer, and would not have to go through the barbecue politics that did so little for Kim Campbell.

Various signs could encourage Quebec Liberals to risk an early election. First, they won a by-election in Shefford, a PQ stronghold, just a week after a discouraging defeat in another by-election, this time in Bonaventure, a traditionally Liberal riding. Second, Daniel Johnson has reduced the high level of dissatisfaction toward the government that he inherited from Robert Bourassa. Third, and most important, polls show improvements for the PLQ, and place the two main parties on a roughly equal footing in terms of voting intentions, with a large block of undecided voters (about 20 percent). The Liberals need more than this equality to win, since much of their support is concentrated in anglophone areas, but at least these three numbers indicate the party can win, if it convinces part of the uncommitted electorate.

The high number of voters who remain undecided or discrete may seem odd given the sharp differences between the PQ and PLQ. Never, a *Globe and Mail* journalist recently wrote, have the lines been

drawn so clearly in Quebec politics. Daniel Johnson has adopted an unambiguously federalist stance; Jacques Parizeau insists on his sovereigntist orientation, and even speaks of separation.

Why do so many voters hesitate when faced with such clear and contrasted options? In part, because a good number of Quebecers still have not made up their minds on Quebec sovereignty. Public opinion studies indicate that in recent years a significant proportion of the electorate has changed opinion, one way or another, according to circumstances. Even more important, in my opinion, is the fact that the constitutional question is not the primary preoccupation of voters at this time. The economy, and unemployment in particular, was the central issue of the last federal election. It remains at the top of the public agenda and will most likely be central in the coming Quebec elections. Voters know Jacques Parizeau and the Parti québécois cannot pursue sovereignty before a referendum. They are thus fairly free to assess the two Quebec parties for their programs and competence on other issues, on economic matters in particular.

#### SEPARATISM — THE "S" WORD

This brings us to the "S" word — separation. The PQ can draw an important lesson from the 1989 Quebec election and the 1993 federal campaign. Before the 1989 election, observers wondered how the party would fare given Jacques Parizeau's clear affirmation of the PQ's sovereigntist stance, at a time when this option appeared hopelessly unpopular. The campaign turned out to raise a number of issues, but not sovereignty, and the party lost honourably. Since the PQ would not move rapidly toward sovereignty and, in fact, appeared unlikely to win, sovereignty posed no problem for voters. The same was true, of course, of Lucien Bouchard and the Bloc

québécois last fall. Recall how clearly Bouchard stated his sovereigntist commitment in the French and English debates. These statements did not prevent him from winning with the support of many federalist voters. These two campaigns, and perhaps the 1992 referendum campaign as well, suggest that sovereigntists can announce, and even promote, their option at little cost, at least until the final decision comes in sight. The next Quebec election should provide a further instance of the same pattern: a battle between sovereigntists and federalists over plain economic and good government issues.

But where do such strategies leave sovereigntists in the event of a referendum? At this time, in Quebec, separation is obviously harder to sell than sovereignty, a more positive concept that also suggests that ties with Canada would be maintained. Two interpretations of the new sovereigntist discourse seem possible. Either both Lucien Bouchard and Jacques Parizeau were careless and made a mistake, or they took a risk and acted strategically. Given the consistency with which Quebec sovereigntists have avoided, and even denounced, the separatist term in the past, the second interpretation appears more convincing. Bouchard and Parizeau may have had something like the following reasoning: first, in the short run, there are low electoral costs associated with the promotion of sovereignty, even in separatist terms; second, in a referendum on sovereignty, separatism will come out in any case, as a denunciation; third, in the meantime, it may be best to seize the bull by the horns and de-dramatize the idea of separation. This gamble carries some risks, but may well be rewarded. Because sovereignty and separation describe essentially the same thing, differences in perception could disappear once sovereigntists start using the terms indifferently.

As debates surrounding political correctness suggest, naming and renaming is central to contemporary politics. In Quebec, support for sovereignty is broadly diffused, and associated mostly with perceptions of identity. With such symbolic foundations, sovereigntists may be wise to try to take the lead and define the linguistic battleground while doing so entails little costs.

#### THE ECONOMICS OF ELECTIONS

Meanwhile, Daniel Johnson and the Quebec Liberals are working hard on their conversion from fiscal conservatives to a version of Jean Chrétien's Liberals, for whom jobs have become a priority. Last week, Quebec's new finance minister, André Bourbeau, explained that the budget deficit, which a year ago Daniel Johnson himself deemed intolerable, could now be tolerated. "Savage deficit reductions," explained the minister, would "handicap the economic recovery."

While economic studies give no support for the idea of stimulating the economy *after* a recovery has started, electoral studies indicate that good economic conditions and, in particular, improvements in the unemployment rate help a government get re-elected. The author of the pioneering work on the question, however, added a cautionary advice. In his book *The Political Control of the Economy*, Edward Tufte concluded, with Nixon in mind, I believe, that "sleazier efforts at manipulating economic policy for short run advantage cannot survive public scrutiny." Five days after his "savage deficit reductions" declaration, and in the wake of outraged editorials that only stopped short of calling for his resignation, Bourbeau explained that he did not mean to say, after all, that the deficit was tolerable.

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## LEGAL REPORT

### JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE PRESS

by Jamie Cameron

#### CENSORS AND SENSIBILITIES

Last summer a court order issued in Ontario barred publication of virtually all details surrounding the sex murders of two Ontario women. The ban was imposed during proceedings to consider the plea and sentence of Karla Homolka, one of two individuals charged with the offences. Following a joint submission by prosecution and defence lawyers, she was convicted of manslaughter and received a 12-year sentence.

She is expected to testify against the other accused, Paul Bernardo/Teale, her estranged husband. At her hearing, his lawyer opposed the ban, claiming that it would prejudice Teale's right to a fair trial.

For months, an order that was unenforceable in the United States was observed. However, once "A Current Affair" broke the silence, the print and broadcast media climbed on the bandwagon. Cars and trucks carrying "illegal" newspapers were stopped at the Canada-U.S. border. So that freedom could "ring out for all our brothers and sisters to the north," a Buffalo disc jockey used a loudspeaker to blast details of the slayings across the Peace Bridge at Niagara Falls.

A new trade war had erupted between Canada and the United

*Continued, see "Justice" on page 96.*