



CANADA WATCH

Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

CHOICE AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

by Jamie Cameron

THE NEW FRONTIER

Medical science is poised to liberate reproduction from the biological constraints that have governed for centuries. A few weeks ago, after a post-menopausal European woman gave birth to twins, it was announced that the fertilized eggs of a white woman had been transferred to the womb of a black woman. In addition, it appears that eggs can be harvested from aborted female fetuses, and that it may be possible, before long, to transplant fetal ovaries into the bodies of mature but infertile women.

According to *The Economist*, "an ecstasy of panic" is sweeping Europe; analogies to "the Frankenstein

syndrome" and *Brave New World* abound. Yet it is the social implications of these technologies, not the biological opportunities they offer, that threaten us the most. By permitting novel configurations that break some genetic connections and create others, biology challenges existing conceptions of family, parenthood, and reproductive roles. Directly at stake is the social control of reproduction.

To some extent we may be trapped, in responding to these technologies, by our own rhetoric. Not that long ago, after a debate that transformed our political, legal, and

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"BUSINESS AS USUAL": WILL IT DO?

by Kenneth McRoberts

The Chrétien government's strategy for dealing with Canada's myriad problems has been clear ever since the Liberals took office. As the recent throne speech confirmed, the strategy amounts to "business as usual" with a Liberal twist, providing Canadians with government that is competent, honest, and, within the limits of the possible, responsive.

THE CHRÉTIEN STYLE

As with past Liberal governments, this one is to be mildly progressive. Thus, it is prepared to see at least some value in a continued social and economic role for the state, and even professes to have compassion for

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those in economic or social distress. As such, it is relatively free from the neo-liberal drive that coloured the Tory government, especially as defined under Kim Campbell's ill-fated leadership.

At the same time, of course, the Chrétien government is to be sufficiently stable and predictable to inspire business confidence. In the end, there was no question that the Liberals would proclaim the NAFTA, however minuscule the last-minute concessions that they were able to extract from the Clinton administration. The "progressivism" of the new government is to be limited to the margins. But in contemporary Canada even that would be a distinctive stance in marked contrast to the direction that some provincial governments are taking—most notably the Alberta government of Ralph Klein, now embarked on a massive rollback of the state.

In drawing upon the Liberal past, the Chrétien style of government, in fact, harks back to earlier times than the Trudeau regime. Chrétien's readiness to delegate responsibility to his ministers and their senior civil servants evokes the managerial style of the Pearson days. And, unlike Trudeau, Chrétien takes office with the benefit of political instincts that have been finely honed over 25 years in federal politics. The quintessential career politician, Chrétien is free to approach matters in a much more pragmatic and open-ended fashion than could Trudeau with his clearly defined agenda of change.

SUITING THE PUBLIC MOOD

So far, this approach has served the Chrétien government quite well. It was able to act resolutely in clearing away some of the leftover Tory baggage, cancelling the Pearson airport deal and the helicopter con-

tract. It has been able to implement a modest infrastructure program. And its "down-to-business" manner seems even to have induced a new readiness among provincial governments to approach matters in a constructive fashion.

By the same token, the Chrétien government's stance may well suit the popular mood. Not surprisingly, survey after survey demonstrates that Canadians are first and foremost preoccupied with the economy. If some Canadians share the Tory fixation on reducing the deficit, many more

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are fearful over the dislocations being produced by Canada's economic restructuring. For them, the Chrétien government's modest plans for economic stimulation and job training offer some hope. At the same time, the Liberals can credibly offer all Canadians relief from the one topic with which most of them have lost all patience: the constitution and Canada's national unity saga.

But can "business as usual" with a Liberal twist really do it? Can the Chrétien government really stare down Canada's problems on this basis? The odds are not good.

INTRACTABLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

First, the Chrétien government's modest initiatives may not be sufficient to lead the Canadian economy out of its present slump. Global and continental forces of economic restructuring may well keep the upper hand, reinforced by continuing recession in the United States and elsewhere. Second, and partly as a re-

sult, political and economic pressures to downscale the state may be irresistible despite any lingering social progressivism of the Liberal leadership. Already the Liberals have launched a massive overhaul of social policy with a view to cut costs. Within the House, the Reform caucus will be relentless in its demand for radical spending cuts to reduce the deficit. In this, Reformers will be egged on by Ralph Klein's example on their Albertan home turf.

THE RETURN OF THE "NATIONAL UNITY" QUESTION

Finally, despite the best of Liberal efforts to ignore it, the hated constitutional question may well be back on the national agenda! The Bloc québécois leader of the Official Opposition, Lucien Bouchard, has made it clear that his party intends to make the constitutional issue a focus, although not an exclusive one, of its interventions. This will make it exceedingly difficult for the other parts of the House to ignore the question, as Preston Manning acknowledged by voicing his fear that the House would be dragged into "the constitutional swamp."

Even if the Bloc québécois federalist opponents do succeed in ignoring it, the constitutional question would be unavoidable should the Bloc's provincial ally, the Parti québécois, be elected to the provincial Quebec government. Most observers are predicting precisely this outcome for the provincial election that in effect must be held by September of this year.

If the constitutional question should be at centre stage once again, the Chrétien Liberals would be singularly ill-placed to offer any new approach to dealing with it. They will largely be bound by the Trudeau strategy for "national unity." And they would be severely handicapped by Chrétien's personal implication

in the 1982 constitutional patriation over the objections of not only the Quebec government, under PQ control, but a good many Quebec federalists. In any event, after the last two colossal failures at constitutional revision, the prospects for securing any accommodation of Quebec within the federal system seem exceedingly remote, even if the Chrétien government were prepared to try new approaches.

In effect, on the constitutional front as well, the Chrétien government can offer no more than "business as usual" or, more precisely, the status quo. In the crunch, the status quo might well prevail. Discredited as it may be, a majority of Quebecers may find the status quo preferable to the "adventure" of Quebec sovereignty. Nonetheless, this would be only after a protracted struggle over the "national" question that, like English Canada as a whole, the Chrétien government is ill-prepared to fight and fervently wishes to avoid.

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

BACK TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL BARRICADES?

by Patrick J. Monahan

With Opposition Leader Lucien Bouchard's defence of Quebec sovereignty highlighting the first week of the new Parliament, media commentators were widely predicting a return to the constitutional barricades. Even as Prime Minister Chrétien reaffirmed that he had been elected to talk about the economy rather than the constitution, pundits questioned how long Chrétien could hold off from uttering the dreaded "c" word.

Indeed, Chrétien himself seemed unable to entirely resist the temptation to begin slugging it out with Bouchard, claiming that the BQ leader's preference for the term "Quebec sovereignty" rather than the harder-edged "separation" displayed weakness and lack of courage. Even Reform party leader Preston Manning got into the act, asking the prime minister whether he was about to be drawn back into the constitutional swamp. Manning's "constitutional swamp" question earned him some media headlines, in contrast to the near silence that had greeted his earlier "constructive criticism" of the throne speech.

It was, as philosopher Yogi Berra would have said, "déjà vu all over again." Judging from the reaction to Bouchard's maiden speech as opposition leader, Canadians seemed on the verge of yet another of the seemingly endless "constitutional rounds" that had so fatigued and

frustrated the country over the past decade.

But, in this case at least, appearances were somewhat deceiving. Contrary to the impression created in the opening days of the new Parliament, there is no reason to believe that Canadians are about to be plunged back into the constitutional camp.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

In one sense, it was difficult to understand what the fuss was all about. Bouchard's defence of Quebec sovereignty was certainly well argued and calmly presented. But the presentation was so low-key that Bouchard barely even hit 5.0 in the political Richter scale. Bouchard's matter-of-fact delivery seemed almost like that of a lawyer arguing "the case for Quebec sovereignty" in front of the judges of the World Court in The Hague, rather than an opposition leader opening a throne speech debate.

"Bouchard supports Quebec Sovereignty" blared the headlines in the English-Canadian newspapers. It was hard to fathom precisely why this solemn declaration was deemed worthy of such wall-to-wall coverage. The BQ's *raison d'être* from the moment of its formation has been the promotion of a sovereign Quebec. We should be surprised that Lucien Bouchard supports Quebec sovereignty?

On the other hand, with the media having now "discovered" that Bouchard isn't totally happy with Canadian federalism, any future speeches by the BQ leader are unlikely to create such shock waves. Bouchard's support for sovereignty, having been well and duly reported, is instantly rendered yesterday's news. Bouchard will have difficulty cracking the front pages again sim-

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