



CANADA WATCH

Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

A PARLIAMENT LIKE NO OTHER: DEBATING THE NATURE OF CANADA

by *Kenneth McRoberts*

From one perspective — namely, that of the government benches — the recent federal election constitutes a renewal of the past. After a two-term Conservative hiatus, Canada's "government party," the Liberals, are once again back in power led by a Cabinet in which veteran Liberal MPs assume prominent positions. The longest serving of these figures is, of course, the prime minister himself, who traces his presence in federal politics back to the early 1960s.

From another perspective, though, that of the opposition benches, Canada's Parliament has been fundamentally transformed.

Reduced to only two seats, Canada's other national party may well be on the way to oblivion. Dividing the opposition seats almost equally between them, Reform and the Bloc québécois each represent fundamental critiques of the existing political order, especially as it has been incarnated by the Liberals.

This contrast between continuity in government and fundamental change in the opposition guarantees that the upcoming Parliament will be like no other. The conditions are

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THE RHYTHM OF CONFEDERATION

by *Jamie Cameron*

THE GORE-PEROT DEBATE

It has been little more than a year since Canadians rejected a comprehensive package of constitutional reforms, the Charlottetown accord, in a referendum vote held across the nation. South of the border, the U.S. House of Representatives faces a crucial vote on NAFTA in mid-November. For any number of reasons, it would be mistaken to press an analogy between the Charlottetown

accord and the impending vote on NAFTA too far.

But analogies there are. Much was at stake on October 26, 1992 when Canadians voted to reject the accord. Likewise, the U.S. vote on NAFTA is crucial, for its trade implications to be sure but, more important, for its impact on the president's credibility and the choice America will make between protectionism and globalization.

Just as it did throughout Canada's referendum campaign, the rhetoric of fear has played a role in

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now in place for a debate on the most fundamental of questions, including the very nature of Canada.

A "NATIONAL" GOVERNMENT?

The Liberals can find some grounds for vindication in the election results. After all, until the final days of the campaign, many observers, including this one, thought that the Liberals were probably heading for minority government status. Yet, while their popular vote was 41 percent, the lowest in the last four elections, the Liberals won no fewer than 177 seats. Moreover, these seats are spread among all 10 provinces. And the Liberals were spared the humiliation of seeing their leader lose in his own riding.

However, Liberal support varied enormously across the provinces, and the new Cabinet clearly reflects this. In these terms the new Liberal administration is very different from past ones. With only four Cabinet portfolios (plus the prime minister), Quebec has singularly low representation for a Liberal Cabinet. This reflects, of course, the fact that the Liberals had singularly limited electoral success in the province.

Conversely, Ontario's presence in the new Cabinet is remarkably large: no fewer than 10 of 22 positions, reflecting the Liberals' astonishing electoral success in the province (98 of 99 seats). All the other provinces have been limited to a single Cabinet member (with the exception of P.E.I., which has none).

In short, the Liberals can claim to have formed a "national" government—but its credentials are shaky.

"BUSINESS AS USUAL"

Nonetheless, the Chrétien government's style clearly will be "business as usual." The primary emphasis will

be on stimulating the economy through a modest job creation program. And public confidence in government is to be regained through the managerial competence of the professionals of the Liberal party and their preferred civil servants.

Beyond that, the new government apparently has no intention of tackling directly Canada's national unity crisis. The constitutional question will be put "in the refrigerator," if not in the deep freeze. Apparently, the hope is that the crisis can be abated through a combination of economic stimulation and continued pursuit of the policies that the Liberals themselves, under the Trudeau leadership, devised to hold the country together.

Yet the prospects for such an approach are dim indeed. The very presence of the Bloc québécois and the Reform party demonstrates the failure of these policies to secure "national unity." And once Parliament convenes, the Bloc and Reform can be counted on to launch a frontal attack on them, and the conception of Canada that underlies them. For the first time, the battle over the nature of Canada will be joined within Parliament itself, and the Liberals will find that "business as usual" will be no easy task.

CHALLENGING THE "NATIONAL UNITY" STRATEGY

For 30 years, the federal Liberals, with the active support of the PCs and the NDP, have presumed that the key to "national unity" lay in a set of policies that would incorporate Quebec within Canada. Foremost among these was official bilingualism: reinforcing the presence of French throughout the country would lead Québécois to see all of Canada as their country. Another was multiculturalism: it offered a conception of Canada that would incorporate on the same basis Cana-

dians of all origins while denying the claim of Québécois to any distinct status as a "founding people," let alone a nation. A third element was a constitutionally entrenched bill of rights: through it, not only would French language rights be guaranteed throughout the country, thus reassuring Québécois, but all Canadians would share a basic set of rights. The aggressive pursuit of these policies, so the argument went, would lead Québécois to identify more strongly with Canada and forgo their demands for expansion in the powers and status of the Quebec government.

This logic underlay the Charlottetown accord: there might be adjustments in Quebec's representation within Parliament, with a guarantee of no less than 25 percent of seats in the House, but the powers and status of the Quebec government must remain essentially like those of the other provinces.

In their "no" vote in the referendum, the majority of Quebec francophones made it clear that this strategy had not worked. Now, with their massive support of the Bloc, they have ensured that their voice will be heard in Parliament itself.

THE BLOC AND REFORM

Not only will the Bloc argue that the objective of Quebec francophones remains expansion in the status and powers of the Quebec government, but it will be claiming that many of the policies designed to sway Québécois from this objective, especially official bilingualism and multiculturalism, are themselves problematic: the former undermines the nationalist objective of making French predominant in Quebec, and the latter reduces Quebec's culture to one of a myriad of official cultures.

In this attack on official bilingualism and multiculturalism, the

Bloc will be joined by Reform. Its critique of federal language policy mirrors the Bloc's complaint: English should be predominant outside Quebec, just as French should be predominant within Quebec. Multiculturalism is attacked because it continues the notion that cultural differences among Canadians should be publicly recognized and celebrated.

If by somewhat different routes the Bloc and Reform can agree in their rejection of these federal policies, they clearly cannot agree on how Canadian federalism should be revised. In its insistence on the absolute equality of the provinces, Reform categorically rejects any expansion of Quebec's powers alone. To that extent it confirms the Bloc's contention that the federal system cannot be satisfactorily renewed — at least not to the satisfaction of Quebec nationalists.

Herein lies the challenge to Canada's new opposition parties: to change their common opposition to the existing political order into common support of something new. Whether or not the Bloc and Reform can accomplish this, they will succeed in radically extending the terms of debate in Parliament. Policies that were once regarded as beyond criticism, because they were essential to national unity, will now be the focus of debate precisely because they have not produced national unity. Yet it is difficult to see how the Chrétien government, so deeply tied to the Trudeau administration that framed this "national unity" strategy, can do anything but defend it.

Canadians could be treated to a spectacular debate over the next few months. In the end, the country may be better for it.

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THE CANADIAN ELECTIONS VIEWED FROM SOUTH OF THE 49TH PARALLEL

by Earl H. Fry

As they awakened on October 26, most U.S. observers of the Canadian political scene were not surprised that the Liberal party had garnered a majority of the seats in the House of Commons and that the NDP had fared very poorly, but they were stunned at the virtual annihilation of the Progressive Conservative party.

The U.S. investment community will now watch the Chrétien government very closely to determine whether job stimulation will take priority over deficit restraint. Chrétien's proposed \$6 billion infrastructure project is viewed as largely ineffective, and if even more money is added for public works projects at the expense of deficit reduction, the Canadian dollar is likely to decline in value and interest rates may go up in order to attract foreign buyers for the federal and provincial governments' massive IOUs. The Conservatives' poor performance in deficit reduction over the past year just adds to the growing concern outside Canada about Ottawa's ability to control government spending.

The Clinton administration hopes that Chrétien will cool the rhetoric about renegotiating the NAFTA until after the package is voted on in mid-November in the House of Representatives. Anti-NAFTA opponents in the United States trumpeted Chrétien's victory immediately, claiming that his threat to renegotiate rendered meaningless the planned vote in Congress. Clinton already faces an uphill battle in the House among his own group of

Democratic party skeptics, but if he wins this battle, he will probably sit down with Chrétien in Seattle at the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and begin to develop a cordial relationship with Canada's new prime minister. Nevertheless, he is unlikely to show any sympathy for reopening either the FTA or NAFTA texts, but may listen to suggestions for finally reaching workable definitions of subsidies and dumping.

Clinton has an ambitious job creation package for the United States and much of the program is based on increased exports linked to the approval of both NAFTA and the Uruguay round. With 30 percent of Canada's GDP linked to the exporting of goods and services, with 75 percent of all exports destined exclusively for the U.S. marketplace, and with a sizeable increase registered in Canadian exports to the United States since the FTA went into effect, Chrétien would also be wise to push for open markets, based on the premise that if the U.S. economy grows, so will the Canadian economy and Canadian jobs. Conversely, a strident campaign by Chrétien to renegotiate both the NAFTA and the FTA might backfire, giving ammunition to the growing number of protectionists in the U.S. Congress who would like to limit Canadian access to the U.S. market, especially in the agricultural and other natural resource sectors.

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