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da's political mood. Government contracts, transfer payments, and other "perks" of Confederation have always been closely watched and coveted. The dynamics of scorecard federalism have been exacerbated in recent years by the battle every region of Canada is waging against economic adversity. At a time of still-diminishing resources, the competition for federal largesse among regions and provinces has created new pressures on national unity.

Thus, when the Chrétien government decided to cancel the EH-101 helicopter contract, Bloc leader Lucien Bouchard demanded compensation for Quebeckers. Precedent could be found in the Mulroney government's compensation package to Atlantic Canada for the loss of its fisheries. More novel was Bouchard's further demand that the Chrétien government also cancel federal contracts in other parts of the country.

With attention focused on Quebec and the west, the emergence of a new regional voice with its own set of demands has been largely overlooked thus far. Traditionally a prosperous province with a power and population base at the centre of the country, Ontario has had little to complain of in the past. Perennially "the good scout of Confederation," it was only fitting that Ontario would offer up some of its Senate seats in 1990 (albeit only prospectively) to save the Meech Lake accord.

Ontario played a major role in the multilateral negotiations leading up to the Charlottetown accord but would have gained little as a province. Ever the good scout, Ontario worked hard to achieve objectives the Rae government valued — such as aboriginal self-government — but also to secure constitutional peace.

Meanwhile, its economy was being battered by the recession and the Mulroney government's unilateral decision to roll back transfer payments to the "have" provinces — Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Ontario has now realized that it can no longer afford to bankroll Confederation. According to a study commissioned by its Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Ontario continues to subsidize the rest of Canada, at devastating cost to its economy.

There are signs that Ontario has tired of its role as good scout. Late last summer, Premier Rae responded to Quebec's discriminatory trade and labour policies, which have been in place for years, with barriers that will keep Quebec goods and workers out of Ontario. In October he announced that Ontario would challenge the constitutionality of NAFTA. More recently, he made a major speech on transfer payments and Ontario's status in Confederation, in which he vowed to fight for fair treatment in Ottawa.

The New "Arhythm" of Confederation

It is difficult to regard current regional dynamics as part of the rhythmic pattern of Confederation. At the same time, these irregularities can hardly be considered a surprise, given the political and economic stress of recent years. To regain the public's confidence in the federal government, Prime Minister Chrétien must act quickly to establish a self-assured and even-handed national presence.

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Canada's 35th Parliament

by Patrick J. Monahan

As Canadians struggle to decipher the meaning of the stunning results of last month's election, one conclusion seems difficult to avoid: the country has taken a step toward a new and uncertain political era.

On the surface, the sea of Liberal red stretching across the country conveys an impression of calm and continuity, rather than of fundamental change. Governments may come and go, but Canadian political institutions appear remarkably resilient. Notwithstanding all the talk in recent months about anger and frustration in the electorate, Canadians have once again given a strong majority mandate to one of the two "old line" political parties that have governed the country since Confederation.

The importance of this national majority government for Canadian unity cannot be underestimated. Over the next 12 to 18 months, Quebeckers will again be asked to choose between Canadian federalism and sovereignty. A strong national government with a francophone prime minister from Quebec means that the federalist option is well positioned to prevail in that struggle.

But this "business as usual" interpretation of the election results discounts the potential for significant political turbulence lurking just beneath the surface.

Opposition of the Regions

The most disturbing feature of the next Parliament is the absence of

any genuinely national opposition party. Parliament is more than a debating society. One of the principal functions of the House of Commons is the creation of governments, both present and future. The official opposition has a special role to play in this regard, since it is expected to serve as an alternative "government in waiting." Although previous elections have often produced huge majority governments and very weak opposition parties, there has always been an official opposition that aspired to represent the country as a whole.

The total collapse of the Progressive Conservative party means that, for the first time in our history, there will be no major opposition party with a national constituency and a national agenda. Neither the Bloc québécois nor Reform has a credible claim to be a truly national party, as evidenced by the fact that neither contested ridings in all regions of the country. Moreover, the BQ-Reform domination of the opposition benches will mean that debate in the 35th Parliament will be framed in strictly regional terms. The daily question period will open with Opposition Leader Lucien Bouchard reviling the government for the real and imagined injustices that have been inflicted on Quebec. Bouchard's outrageous claim for $1 billion in compensation for cancellation of the EH-101 helicopter contract, after he himself had called for cancellation during the election campaign, was a preview of what to expect in the coming months. Preston Manning and his western-based caucus will be equally vocal in asserting that it is the west, rather than Quebec, that has been the real victim of Canadian federalism.

A Fractious Parliament

The tone of the debate in the next Parliament is also likely to be highly fractious and divisive. In the weeks leading up to the election, many commentators suggested that minority parliaments were associated with heightened conflict between the government and the opposition. In fact, precisely the opposite tends to be the case. Minority parliaments tend to feature much more cooperative behaviour on the part of both the government and the opposition since both sides know that a breakdown in the relationship could force an immediate election. In majority government situations, on the other hand, the absence of any real power in the hands of the opposition encourages them to resort to procedural wrangling and obstructionist tactics. The temptation to behave irresponsibly will be made all the more irresistible by virtue of the profound sense of regional grievance that serves as the *raison d'être* of both the Bloc and Reform.

"In majority government situations ... the absence of any real power in the hands of the opposition encourages them to resort to procedural wrangling and obstructionist tactics. The temptation to behave irresponsibly will be made all the more irresistible by virtue of the profound sense of regional grievance that serves as the raison d'être *of both the Bloc and Reform."*

With the House of Commons not yet in session, it seems a veritable eternity until the next election. Yet even as the Liberals savour their overwhelming victory, it cannot be forgotten that the day will come when Jean Chrétien will be saddled with the burdens and the baggage of political incumbency. It is at this point that the absence of a genuinely national political alternative could prove telling and costly.

It may be, of course, that the Conservatives will rise from the ashes and rebuild a national base. The Tories still managed 16 percent of the popular vote nationwide. Their near-obliteration in Parliament is a product of the peculiarities of the first-past-the-post electoral system and fails to fairly reflect the existence of a continued core of Tory voters in all parts of the country.

But the prospects of the Tories rising phoenix-like in 1997 do not appear particularly bright. The Reform party has supplanted the Conservatives as the main alternative to the Liberals in Ontario and most of the west. The absence of even a single Conservative MP west of the Ontario-Quebec border and the impending resignation of Kim Campbell as leader make the task of reconstructing a national political base extremely difficult.

Chrétien's Cabinet Promising Start

October 25th may be either the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end. Which scenario turns out to be correct will depend in large measure on the actions and choices of Jean Chrétien in the months and years ahead. The key for the new prime minister will be to focus on what Canadians hold in common. He must steadfastly refuse to be drawn into regional or special interest bidding wars, and emphasize what the 1991 Spicer commission referred to as the "core values that Canadians see as essential elements of Canadian society."

Chrétien's Cabinet choices represent a good start in the right direction. Refusing to cower before the dictates of political correctness, Chrétien's slimmed-down ministry of 23 members clearly places a premium on experience and compe-

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tence. The predictable howls from various special interest groups about their lack of appropriate representation were brushed aside by the prime minister, indicating a degree of decisiveness and confidence on his part that will prove very important in the difficult months ahead. Clearly, Jean Chrétien has come a long way from his early days as Liberal leader in the summer 1990, when he suggested that the armed warriors at Oka should simply be allowed to put down their guns and walk away scot-free.

The good news out of this election is that it remains possible to construct a winning national coalition by appealing to the elements of a common Canadian citizenship. It is also noteworthy that, despite the Bloc's impressive showing in Quebec, support for the sovereignty option there remains significantly below 50 percent. It is conceivable that Quebeckers could even elect a PQ government next year and then vote "no" in a sovereignty referendum in 1995. That outcome would be messy and ambiguous, but somehow also quintessentially Canadian.

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WESTERN REPORT

Beating the Drums of National Unity and Beating Up on Reform

by Roger Gibbins

Now that the election is behind us, it is an opportune time to ask how the political landscape in western Canada has been transformed, and to what extent national political dynamics have changed as a consequence.

At one level, the transformation in western Canada has been profound. The Progressive Conservatives, which have served as the primary partisan outlet for regional discontent since John Diefenbaker's 1958 landslide, have been virtually obliterated. In their place, Preston Manning and the Reform party stand triumphant, at least in Alberta and British Columbia.

And the change, of course, is more than one of party labels. The Conservatives, even before Brian Mulroney's leadership when western Canadian MPs were the dominant force within the party, were a national organization. True, they were chronically weak in Quebec, but they had some coherent presence from sea to sea. Now, the voice of western discontent is a party that is unlikely to reach beyond Ontario by the next election, and will certainly not embrace Quebec even to the limited extent that Diefenbaker was able to do.

This is not to suggest, however, that in objective terms the Reform party should be seen first and foremost in regional terms. I would argue that despite the concentration of Reform MPs in Alberta and British Columbia, the party's appeal to populist discontent, fiscal restraint, and social conservatism has a national audience, or at least a national audience outside Quebec. Reform's parliamentary strength in the far West is in large part an artifact of the electoral system; Reform won more votes (968,602) in Ontario than it did in Alberta (629,164), British Columbia (586,549), or, for that matter, across the three prairie provinces (838,224).

Yet this does not mean that Manning will be able to build on the grassroots electoral support now in place outside Reform's Alberta/British Columbia heartland. Reform

"... we can anticipate an unrelenting campaign by the media and traditional political elites in central Canada to define the Reform party in narrow, regional terms, and thus to isolate it in the west. If it can be argued that the Reform draws primarily on regional discontent, then its much broader message of electoral discontent can be ignored. Manning faces a very difficult leadership task in warding off this dual threat of marginalization."

MPs in the House of Commons will act as a western anchor to the party, and will undoubtedly characterize, if not caricature, the party in ways that will blunt its potential appeal in Ontario. More important, we can anticipate an unrelenting campaign by the media and traditional political elites in central Canada to define the Reform party in narrow, regional terms, and thus to isolate it in the