

*"Bloc and Reform,"  
continued from page 39.*

ble. These two leaders are intelligent and articulate and have well-thought-out visions of where they want to take the country. The problem is that each man's tenaciously held vision directly contradicts the other's. Moreover, both Manning and Bouchard will come to the table as regional politicians rather than as national ones.

The history of federations around the world tells us that the domination of national political institutions by regional parties is a warning of serious potential for political disruption. A national Parliament without a majority government and dominated by Reform and BQ MPs is the equivalent of a political "sell order" for Canada.

Most recent polls indicate that the splintered nature of the vote may permit the Liberals to sneak through the middle with a majority government, even with less than 40 percent of the vote. It is also possible that you might win the Lotto 6-49 this week by buying a single ticket. But there is one thing you can count on: the stakes riding on the outcome of the vote on October 25 are very high indeed, for all Canadians.

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## WESTERN REPORT

### THE MALAISE LINGERS AS CAMPAIGN CARRIES ON

*by Roger Gibbins*

It is difficult, writing in early October, to read the entrails of an election campaign that has yet to run its course. Nonetheless, the campaign to date has exposed some interesting features of the political landscape in western Canada.

#### DIVERSITY STILL PREVAILS

The observation that "the West" has largely disappeared as an integrated or homogeneous political region is by no means new, but it is one worth repeating. It is also one that has been confirmed by the early dynamics of the 1993 election, dynamics that vary considerably across the four western provinces.

The Reform party has yet to make substantial inroads in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where the NDP remains a factor in what is shaping up to be a three-party contest among traditional players. In Alberta, the NDP has been eclipsed by even the National and Natural Law parties, and the contest is evenly matched among three contenders: the Conservatives, Liberals, and Reform. In British Columbia, the electoral scene changes again with the NDP coming back into play, at least on the margins, and with many ridings featuring four-party contests. Thus, in the context of the campaign, it is

difficult to speak very coherently about "the West."

#### THE MANY CHANNELS OF PROTEST

The second observation is that the populist, protest vote in western Canada flows through many channels, and does so in ways that sometimes defy conventional wisdom. Although the Reform party has provided the major vehicle for both regional and populist discontent in the West, a host of non-traditional parties are alive and well on the campaign trail. The Natural Law party is flaky enough to pick up

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some regional support from the ever-present radical, if not lunatic, fringe, and Mel Hurtig's one-man National party band and its song of nostalgia for the 1960s enjoys significant support, albeit not enough to elect candidates.

However, the most interesting regional development is the flow of electoral support from the NDP to Reform, a flow that has been particularly evident in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. (In the Alberta case, there is nothing to flow.) The Reform's ability to capture former NDP support suggests that this support, at least in the West, but probably not exclusively in the West, has been driven as much by protest as by a shared left-of-centre ideology. After all, the New Democrats and Reformers share a common self-perception as outsiders challenging a system that is fundamentally flawed and unfair. Their common populism provides a convenient electoral bridge for voters moving from

the far left to the far right, with no stopping at the Liberal midpoint.

### THE "NEW POLITICS"

Since the demise of the Charlottetown accord, we have heard a great deal of talk about the emergence of a new political style in Canada that features town-hall meetings, a focus on policy rather than personality, a shunning of personal attacks, and the politics of inclusion.

However, the election campaign has provided little evidence of this new politics. Certainly, there are policies galore, and even some from the Conservatives, but these are used as partisan clubs and not as points of departure for serious debate. Preston Manning and his Reformers have attracted a degree of political vitriol that would not have been out of place in the worst campaigns of the past, and Jean Chrétien has been personally attacked from all flanks except Reform.

The only party leader to have escaped serious personal attack has been the Bloc's Lucien Bouchard; Canadians outside Quebec have been remarkably polite and tolerant in the face of this newest and perhaps most serious threat yet to the survival of their country.

### LANCING THE BOIL?

Perhaps the clearest regional message from the campaign to date is that the populist anger that greeted the Charlottetown accord was not lanced by the constitutional referendum. The view of many observers of the political scene, including myself, has been that the public's anger and estrangement from the political process abated in the wake of the referendum campaign. However, the strength of protest parties in the West suggests a different interpretation. It is probably not coincidental that the Reform party is making its

strongest showing in British Columbia, the province in which the accord went down to its most crushing defeat.

Although Kim Campbell's ultimate appeal to the Canadian electorate has yet to be tested, it is already evident that her *regional* appeal is very limited. Campbell's campaign rhetoric has not tapped into chronic regional angst, nor has she been able to mobilize populist discontent. Voters in the West may end up supporting Campbell and the Conservatives for many reasons, but it will not be because they are regional champions or because they provide an outlet for populist discontent.

Whether or not the Reform party makes a major breakthrough on October 25 may be more a test of the electoral system than an indicator of the temper of the times in western Canada. There is little likelihood that the regional mood, which vacillates between sullen withdrawal and aggressive anger, will be transformed by the election outcome. Indeed, it may deteriorate if the populist vote in the West fails to find reflection in the House of Commons. If only the nationalist vote in Quebec finds reflection in the House, the mood in the West could be poisonous.

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## QUEBEC REPORT

### KIM CAMPBELL'S LOST OPPORTUNITIES

by Alain Noël

Kim Campbell was the primary loser of the October 3 French debate. The debate provided the Conservatives with a unique opportunity to regain some of the ground lost to the Bloc québécois. Campbell failed, however, to make a strong impression. Her performance did not even shore up the support that her party had managed to keep in Quebec. A Léger & Léger poll conducted the day after the debate suggested that Lucien Bouchard was considered the winner by a majority of viewers (52 percent compared with 20 percent for Jean Chrétien and 13 percent for Kim Campbell).

Of course, this assessment reflected in part the Bloc's overall popularity. But Campbell did not do as well among Conservatives as did Bouchard and Chrétien with their own partisans, and she convinced almost no undecided voters (only 5 percent of the undecided thought she offered the best performance). The debate did nothing to contain the growing popularity of Lucien Bouchard and of the Bloc québécois, who are apparently heading for a sweep of most of Quebec's francophone ridings.

The task at hand was perhaps impossible. Although the Conservatives did well in 1984 and 1988, they

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