

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

ODDS FAVOUR MINORITY GOVERNMENT ON OCTOBER 25TH

by Patrick J. Monahan

While federal election campaigns are always subject to unpredictable and unexpected turns in the road, in the early stages of the current campaign the odds favour the election of a minority government on October 25th.

Of the five main parties contesting the campaign, only the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals have realistic aspirations of forming a majority government. The NDP, Reform party, and Bloc québécois are all playing for third place rather than for the pennant and will consider 30 to 40 MPs a major victory.

The difficulty for the PCs and the Liberals is that neither appears to be positioned to elect the 148 MPs required to form a majority.

LIBERAL PROSPECTS

Consider first the prospects for Jean Chrétien's Liberals. If anyone is able to form a majority, it should be the Liberals. Aside from a brief surge in Tory support following Brian Mulroney's resignation, the Liberals have been leading the national opinion polls for three years. Jean Chrétien, although criticized as being "yesterday's man," appears relatively "gaffe proof" and is unlikely to make any major mistakes on the campaign trail. His party has assembled a strong slate of candidates and will offer a credible platform. Chrétien will also be able to argue that he alone has a realistic

chance of ending the nine years of Tory rule in Ottawa.

Despite these advantages, it is difficult to imagine the scenario that would produce 148 seats for the Liberals.

Their stronghold will clearly be Ontario, where they have hopes of taking 70 to 75 of the 99 available seats (up from the 43 they captured in 1988). The Atlantic provinces will also likely be coloured Liberal red — and on a best-case Liberal scenario might produce 29 Grits in the region's 32 seats.

But outside of Ontario and Atlantic Canada, the Liberal prospects fall off dramatically. Quebec is likely to be a battleground between the

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Bloc québécois and the Tories. The Liberals will be happy if they can hold the 12 Quebec ridings they won in 1988 and add perhaps 3 or 4 more. The three prairie provinces have been a Liberal wasteland for the past 20 years and, although the party has hopes of winning a few seats in and around Edmonton, no major breakthroughs can be expected. As for British Columbia, where the Liberals currently hold just one seat, the revival of Liberal fortunes following the last provincial election gives the Grits good prospects in perhaps 10 to 15 ridings.

Yet adding up the national totals, and assuming the best-case Liberal

scenario, Jean Chrétien is still left 5 to 10 seats short of the magic 148 number.

TORY PROSPECTS

Kim Campbell's successful summer tour on the barbecue circuit managed to pull her party to within striking distance of the Liberals by the time the writ was dropped on September 8. But even with the remarkable turnaround in Tory fortunes engineered by Campbell over the past six months, the prime minister still appears somewhat short of the votes that would be required to form a national majority on October 25.

A best-case scenario for the Tories sees them adding slightly to their 35 seats on the prairies (fighting off attempted Reform inroads) while adding 5 to 10 seats to the 12 they won in British Columbia in 1988. The PCs would also be fortunate if they could hold more than half of the dozen seats they won in Atlantic Canada in 1988.

But the real stumbling block for the PCs is found in central Canada. With a total of 174 seats up for grabs in Ontario and Quebec, no party can hope to form a majority government without a strong showing here. In 1988, the Conservatives took 63 seats in Quebec and 46 in Ontario, but they appear to have little realistic chance of matching those totals in 1993.

In Quebec, the Bloc québécois has been leading the polls for two years and appears able to count on a relatively solid 35 to 40 percent of the vote. If this level of support holds on October 25 — and there is no reason to suppose it won't, given the consistency of BQ support over the past 24 months — then the Bloc will be cutting very deeply into the Tory's Quebec ranks.

As for Ontario, a best-case Tory scenario sees the party retain a clear

majority of the 46 ridings won in 1988. But given the broad Liberal support in the province over the past two years, some slippage in the Conservative numbers here seems unavoidable.

Add up the Tory numbers, again on a best-case scenario, and Kim Campbell is still at least 5 to 10 seats short of the 148 MPs required to go "over the top."

POLITICS AFTER OCTOBER 25

If this analysis is correct, the next prime minister will probably be chosen on the basis of some form of "closed-door" negotiations between the party leaders and their advisers following the election, rather than by the voters directly. How this will be received by Canadians who have become highly critical of traditional forms of elite accommodation will be interesting to observe.

The outcome of these backroom negotiations will obviously depend on the relative strength of the parties and, in particular, on whether either Chrétien or Campbell is close enough to the 148 number to claim the moral right to be prime minister.

Yet it cannot be helped but be observed that, as happened in Ontario in 1985, the most natural and obvious alliance would be one involving the Liberals and the NDP. The NDP (as well as the Reform party, assuming it is a significant player based on the election results) would not want to be seen to be propping up the Conservatives and opening the door to a possible Campbell majority in a subsequent election that might follow within a year. And Audrey McLaughlin would certainly like to be able to claim responsibility for bringing an end to nine years of Conservative rule, particularly if her party's standing in Parliament is significantly

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WESTERN REPORT

THE FATE OF REFORM

by Roger Gibbins

One of the most interesting campaign questions in the west is the fate of the Reform Party of Canada (RPC). Will the RPC win at least the 12 seats needed for official recognition within the House of Commons? Or will the party turn out to be little more than a by-election blip on the regional landscape, a vehicle that western Canadians used to express their discontent between elections but when the real test came, they abandoned?

A WANING PROTEST?

Public opinion polls conducted since the constitutional referendum indicate that electoral support for the RPC has slipped significantly. Although some recent polls suggest that the RPC may still command 20 to 25 percent of the vote in Alberta and British Columbia (and a much smaller proportion in Saskatchewan and Manitoba), the RPC is no longer the dominant political force in the region.

The decline in support can be attributed to a variety of factors. The constitutional referendum may have given western Canadians an opportunity to vent their discontent, to lance the boil of populist outrage, and the end of the constitutional debate has made the RPC's emphasis on institutional reform largely irrelevant. Many planks from the RPC platform have been lifted shamelessly by their opponents. Everyone, for example, talks incessantly about the need to control the

deficit and reduce the debt. The Tories in particular have carried off the RPC platform plank by plank, and have reconstructed it as a Conservative platform for *westerner* Kim Campbell.

In short, the RPC policy arsenal has been looted by its competitors, and the party has been left with little that is distinctive. Preston Manning, however, needs a campaign based on public policy rather than personality if he is to shine. In a campaign in which the Tories run only on Kim Campbell, and the Liberals run only on Brian Mulroney, it will be difficult for Manning to find a voice.

DEATH BY ELECTORAL SYSTEM FAILURE?

The slippage in popular support is only part of the problem that the RPC faces; the other and potentially more troublesome part is that their remaining support is fairly evenly spread across the two western-most provinces. The party does not have concentrated pockets of support,

"Third parties always face the accusation that to vote for them is to waste one's vote In theory, both the RPC and the Bloc face this dilemma, but in fact a vote for Reform is a much riskier strategy than is a vote for the Bloc."

such as the Bloc enjoys outside metropolitan Montreal, in which it enjoys a commanding edge. (The one possible exception may be in Lethbridge where Ray Speaker is running for Reform after having been elected as a provincial MLA under three different party labels. Unfortunately for the party, even Manning faces a tough race in Calgary Southwest where incumbent Tory MP Bobby Sparrow won by more than 30,000 votes in 1988. Sparrow, the new minister of energy and natu-

SUPREME COURT WATCH

A digest of recent significant decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada

by Jonathan Batty

Ramsden v. Peterborough (City) [1993] September 2

Ramsden was fined \$125 in 1988 for violating a municipal bylaw in Peterborough that banned postering on trees, poles, and public property. Ramsden's lawyer argued that the bylaw infringed the freedom of expression guaranteed by section 2(b) of the Charter, and was not a justified limit in a free and democratic society. The Supreme Court unanimously agreed that preventing the musician from posting advertisements for his band was a violation of his constitutional rights. The judgment was critical of the total ban on postering, but conceded that some governmental restrictions on the freedom of expression could be justified.

Haig v. Canada (Chief Electoral Officer) [1993] September 2

In the six months prior to the 1992 constitutional referendum, Haig moved from Ontario to Quebec. As a result, he did not meet the residence requirements contained in the federal *Referendum Act* or its Quebec counterpart. Haig sought a declaration in the Federal Court that he was eligible to vote, or in the alternative, that the legislation violated his Charter rights. Specifically, he argued his rights under sections 2(b), 3, and 15(1) were violated. The appeal was dismissed. The majority held that the Act was constitutional, with Chief Justice Lamer and Justice Iacobucci dissenting.

*"Minority Government,"
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reduced. As for Jean Chrétien, he could presumably be persuaded to come to some kind of accommodation with the New Democrats if it meant moving into the corner office at the Langevin Block.

Of course, a Liberal-NDP alliance would only be viable if the NDP were to win enough seats to give it the

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PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE

The House of Commons recessed on June 16th until September 20. On September 8th, Parliament was dissolved and an election called for October 25, 1993.

CANADA WATCH CALENDAR

- Aug. 12 "Side deals" reached with the United States and Mexico on NAFTA.
- Aug. 26, 27 Annual Premiers Conference.
- Sept. 93 to Jan. 94 Fast tracking of NAFTA through U.S. Congress.
- Sept. 8 Parliament dissolved, federal general election called by Prime Minister Campbell.
- Sept. 21 Manitoba by-elections.
- Oct. 4 to 8 Leadership debates in French and English.
- Oct. 25 General election.

Canada Watch welcomes submissions on issues of current national interest. Submissions should be a maximum of 1,000 words. The deadline for consideration in our next issue is Monday, October 4, 1993. Write or fax us at:

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balance of power. It is still too early to tell whether the NDP under Audrey McLaughlin will be able to achieve that objective.

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