

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

*Continued, see "Minority Government" on page 31.*

## 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,

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*"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."*

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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-

ral resources and a woman running in an election where gender is likely to be an important factor, will be a very formidable opponent.

The relatively even distribution of RPC support means that the party could be victimized by the electoral system. It could pick up 20 percent of the BC and Alberta vote without winning a seat, whereas a similar level of electoral support would generate a significant number of seats for the more territorially concentrated Bloc. There is a real danger, then, that Reform support may fall below the threshold needed for seats and that even a significant show of support among voters may not lead to any effective voice in the new House.

### A WASTED VOTE?

Third parties always face the accusation that to vote for them is to waste one's vote, that the "real" choice is between those parties capable of forming a national government. This accusation takes on additional weight if third-party support may isolate the region, as Social Credit MPs isolated Alberta in the past. The Conservatives and Liberals will argue that it is better to be represented within cabinet and the governing caucus than it is to be represented on the opposition benches.

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. To appreciate this difference, imagine a scenario in which the RPC elects 15 to 20 MPs in Alberta and British Columbia — an unlikely scenario — and the Bloc elected 25 to 30 MPs in Quebec — a more likely scenario.

In this outcome, the Reform vote could indeed diminish regional influence within the national government. Reform MPs and their sup-

porters would be dismissed as regional freaks with little to contribute to the national debate. However, the Bloc contingent would not be so readily dismissed. Editorialists and pundits would argue that the Bloc vote demonstrates how important it is to address Quebec's political and constitutional concerns, and thus blunt the nationalist threat. The better the Bloc does, the more Quebec's concerns are likely to be elevated on the national agenda.

Quebec voters, therefore, cannot lose by voting for the Bloc; they can only lose by voting overwhelmingly for the Conservatives or the Liberals, and having that party fail to win across the country. A strong protest vote through the Bloc will reverberate throughout the national political system as Canadians rush to thrust their collective thumbs in the dykes of national unity. A strong western protest vote for the Reform is likely to be written off as an irritant more than anything else and could therefore indeed be a wasted vote.

Or perhaps I've become too cynical after a summer of unrelenting rain.

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## QUEBEC REPORT

### CHOOSING BETWEEN THE BLOC AND TWO FEDERALIST PARTIES

by Alain Noël

The 1993 federal election is likely to challenge the conventional wisdom on Quebec politics. Quebeckers, it has often been said, vote for a French Canadian party leader, or at least for a Quebecker. Yet, the Liberals' main handicap is Jean Chrétien. In an August CROP-LaPress-TVA poll, only 11 percent of Quebeckers expressed confidence in "le p'tit gars de Shawinigan" (against 36 percent for Kim Campbell).

The conventional wisdom also holds that Quebeckers vote for the man, for strong leaders with charismatic appeal, and are thus likely to be seduced by Lucien Bouchard. The same poll, however, indicates Bouchard is significantly less popular than his own party. While the Bloc québécois leads the polls with 40 percent (as opposed to 31 percent for the Conservatives, 24 percent for the Liberals, and 4 percent for the NDP), Bouchard was named as the most trusted federal leader by no more than 23 percent of the electorate, far below Campbell's score (she at that time probably benefited from her recent selection as leader).

In the end, some of the conventional wisdom could still be salvaged if Quebeckers turned to the party that forms the government. Quebeckers, it is often presumed, almost instinctively defend their