

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

interests by voting for the winning party. Again, recent polls force us to question the standard viewpoint. For more than a year, the Bloc québécois has maintained a level of support of about 40 percent, except in Canada-wide polls where the size of the Quebec sample fell below 300 (Gallup polls, for instance). If these polls prove reliable, the Bloc could win 30 or 40 of the province's 75 seats, with the Liberals and the Conservatives sharing the rest.

But how reliable are such polls? Given that the Bloc québécois cannot take power, can we not assume its popularity will deflate in a genuine election when who forms the government is at stake? Remember that magic moment in September-October 1987, when the NDP emerged as the leading federal party in Quebec with more than 40 percent support in bona fide polls with samples over 1000?

For a variety of reasons, and despite relatively stable poll results, the outcome of the 1993 federal campaign in Quebec appears particularly difficult to predict. First, in a difficult economic and political context, partisan affiliations are fragile, and a number of issues or events can prove influential. Second, the old cleavages of Quebec politics are shifting: contrary to the past, class and socio-economic characteristics no longer predict support for sovereignty and, apart from language, only age and feelings of identity still matter. Third, and most important, in many ridings the campaign will be a three-way battle that parties can win with less than an absolute majority. In such circumstances, minor gains or losses can make a big difference.

At the same time, there is a definite structure to the Quebec electorate, and a number of important dimensions can be identified. These dimensions concern language, partisan identification, and support for

sovereignty. First comes language. As the last referendum showed once again, the Quebec electorate is sharply divided along linguistic lines. In October 1992, non-Francophones voted massively for the Yes in contrast to Quebec Francophones and to Anglophones in other provinces. Quebec's non-Francophones also have distinctive party preferences. In 1988, 49 percent of English-speaking Quebecers identified themselves as Liberals, compared with 27 percent for Francophones. On the

"... the old cleavages of Quebec politics are shifting: contrary to the past, class and socio-economic characteristics no longer predict support for sovereignty"

basis of these data and of the current distribution of seats, it seems fair to assume that Jean Chrétien's Liberals can win most ridings in Montreal's West Island.

This leaves almost 85 percent of the electorate. Here, a second dimension comes into play — partisan identification. The Conservative party did well in Quebec in 1984 and 1988, but failed to grow deep roots. In 1988, the vote of Francophone Quebecers reflected more disaffection with the Liberals than attachment to the Conservative party. Among Francophones, only 27 percent classified themselves as Liberals (mostly the older, more religious part of the electorate), but no more than 22 percent saw themselves as Conservatives: 44 percent of Francophone voters did not identify any party. "The antithesis to the Liberal party," write the authors of a 1988 federal election study, "was not any specific party so much as the *refus global*, so to speak, of the entire system." In 1993, this large group of non-identifiers constitutes

the best target for the Bloc québécois. But then again, these voters cannot be taken for granted. A third dimension then comes into play: support for sovereignty.

On the basis of the two dimensions discussed so far, we can divide the total electorate into three groups: non-Francophones likely to support the Liberals, about 15 percent of the electorate; Liberal Francophones who may vote for Jean Chrétien, roughly 22 percent of voters; and non-Liberal Francophones whose vote appears available, about 63 percent of the electorate. A major question divides this group: Quebec sovereignty. If we assume these sovereigntists all belong to the non-Liberal group, we are left with a fourth group, roughly a quarter of the electorate (26 percent) who are non-Liberal federalists.

These four groups define the prospects for each party. First, it seems fair to assume a large proportion of sovereigntists will support the Bloc, especially since the new party has the full backing of the Parti québécois and of its organization. Second, we can expect non-Francophones to elect Liberal MPs. Third, among Francophones, Liberals and Conservatives are in a difficult position because, contrary to the Bloc, their support is rarely concentrated geographically; they tend to split the federalist vote. The two major parties can pursue two strategies. First, they will have to convince sovereigntists they lose a voice in the federal government and gain little by electing Bloc candidates. For the Conservatives, more threatened by the Bloc, this may well be the dominant strategy. Second, they must convince federalists they represent the best bet, since they can win ridings in Quebec and succeed in the rest of the country as well. The

Continued, see "Choosing" on page 30.

ANNUAL PREMIERS CONFERENCE

Canada's 10 premiers and 2 territorial leaders met for the annual premiers conference in Baddeck, Nova Scotia on August 26 and 27. Premier **Robert Bourassa** of Quebec attended the conference for the first time since 1990. The premiers called for a federal-provincial first ministers meeting on the economy, and also agreed to encourage the federal government to negotiate self-government agreements with aboriginal peoples.

CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION TASK FORCE REPORT

A task force, chaired by former Supreme Court Justice **Bertha Wilson**, reported on August 22, on gender barriers within the legal profession. Examining the bar from the start of legal training to the pinnacle of life on the bench, the report makes over 200 recommendations to remove constructive and systemic biases against women in the system.

ROYAL COMMISSION REPORT

On August 17, the **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples** released its report, *Partners in Confederation*. The report found that a native right to self-government has never been extinguished. This is significant because, if true, recognition of the inherent right to self-government would not have to be explicitly acknowledged by constitutional amendment.

NAFTA UPDATE

"Side deal" agreements were reached regarding the **North American Free Trade Agreement** on August 12. The Canadian government won the concession that in the event of trade disputes, tariffs would not be raised against Canadian exports, but Ottawa would pay fines instead. With the conclusion of these agreements, the package can now proceed for consideration in the U.S. Congress in the Fall, and for fast track ratification by January 1994.

MANITOBA BY-ELECTIONS

Premier **Gary Filmon** called by-elections for September 21 in five vacant seats in the Manitoba legislature. At present the Progressive Conservative government has 29 seats (including that of the speaker) in the 57-seat house. There are 18 New Democrats and 5 Liberals. Without a victory in any of the races, government representation will be on par with that of the opposition.

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*"Choosing,"
continued from page 25.*

Liberals, stronger in Ontario and in many Quebec ridings, can best use this second strategy.

Obviously, the game is a complex one. With shallow partisan roots and unprecedented choices, many arguments or events can sway voters. Apparently, the leadership of the Quebec Liberal party is already sending messages telling Liberals to support the strongest federalist candidate in their riding. For the Bloc québécois, the worst scenario would be to see this "Holy Alliance" work with the help of a perceived country-wide sweep in favour of one party (most likely Liberals). The best scenario for the Bloc would be a repetition of last fall's referendum when dissatisfied federalists joined sovereigntists in the No camp. More probable, in my opinion, is an intermediate scenario whereby the Bloc québécois would win strong representation in Ottawa, roughly in line with its current standing in the polls.

As the 1993 campaign starts, it is important to keep in mind that the electorate is not unstructured. Cleavages exist that lend some predictability to the election. At the same time, these structures and cleavages are fluid and can be transformed. This fall, in a particularly complex and volatile context, the parties' arguments and strategies are likely to play a decisive role.

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*"Electoral Agenda,"
continued from page 18.*

debate over precisely how unemployment might be reduced, they too may become much more caught up with defining and defending policies than they had originally intended — and fending off criticisms that they would repeat the economic errors of the Trudeau regime with which Chrétien is so intimately associated.

In short, as the campaign gets into full swing it may acquire a dynamic of its own, in the process becoming much more interesting than either of the old-line parties would have wanted.

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