

The Liberals should play to this credibility gap, though whether they in turn will be believed will take a leap of faith by many voters. Even now, there is bound to be some Conservative researcher compiling a file of Liberal profligacy from long-gone Trudeau regimes.

FATE

Finally, we typically discount the importance of chance in history. Who can foresee the events that might temper the character of the new PM? Will she fashion or be able to seize defining moments such as Trudeau and the October crisis or Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands war? Campbell will probably go into the campaign without a clear leadership image and she will undoubtedly have to deal with the attacks and misstatements all campaigns throw up, in addition to the chance hearing of things said over unexpectedly open microphones or things casually said in the aisles of planes after a punishing day of campaigning. How she deals with these chance events will largely determine the Conservative fate and although that may seem unfair, politics has a way of eating its children.

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WESTERN REPORT

THE SUMMER OF OUR CONTENT

by Roger Gibbins

As western Canadians relax in the short (and wet) summer before the fall election, it is interesting to examine the region's political landscape in the light of the recent Alberta election, Kim Campbell's accession as prime minister, and the latest public outrage over the Senate.

THE ALBERTA ELECTION

Ralph Klein's victory (and it was Klein's victory, not his party's) suggests a number of portents for the

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federal election to come. It shows that a new leader can shed the burdens of incumbency. There was no incumbent party in the Alberta election because Klein disavowed any responsibility for the financial mismanagement of his predecessors. Instead, the Alberta voters were offered a choice among three opposition parties and they chose the Conservatives.

Incredibly, the leader of a party that had been in power for 22 years ran as the voice of change! If the Alberta Tory snake can successfully shed its skin after such a long time in office, Campbell may have less difficulty than we might suspect in

shedding nine years of Mulroney incumbency.

The Alberta election suggests, in this respect, that public discontent with incumbents, with "the system" and the status quo, is all but negligible. Financial mismanagement and a ballooning provincial debt were greeted with yawns of indifference. The West is awash in complacency, not anger.

KIM CAMPBELL AND THE REFORM PARTY

There is no question that the Alberta election provides hope for federal Conservatives in the West and that Campbell's leadership victory further complicates a deteriorating situation for the Reform party. Manning and Reform are running on a platform constructed from four basic planks: populist anger at the institutional and partisan status quo, the quest for better regional representation ("The West wants in"), public concern with the debt and deficits, and social conservatism echoed in more specific concerns with such matters as law and order, immigration, and abortion. The first three of these planks have now been weakened to the point of collapse.

The Alberta election results suggest that there is no tide of populist discontent waiting to sweep Reform candidates into the House. Moreover, Campbell can certainly make the argument that she, and not Manning, provides the best chance for a stronger regional voice in Ottawa. Although I suggested in a past *Canada Watch* contribution that Campbell is unlikely to be a strong regional advocate in the long run, she can be packaged in just such terms for the fall election. Finally, the Alberta results suggest that voters are not particularly concerned about the debt and deficits. To the extent that they do care, the political parties, including Reform, now offer

virtually indistinguishable and equally unbelievable policies. Thus, Manning is left to run on the much more treacherous terrain of social conservatism, terrain that leaves him and his party open to damaging ideological attacks from partisan opponents, the media, and interest groups.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SENATE?

How, then, does the recent flap over the Senate's decision to increase tax-free allowances by \$6,000 figure into all of this? It does two things: it puts Senate reform back onto the national agenda, and it complicates the terms of the debate in western Canada.

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Senate reform has been kept on the constitutional table by western Canadians arguing for more effective regional representation. However, public support for Senate reform has been driven more by *democratic* discontent with an appointed body that has been starting to exercise some real influence on Canadian public affairs. This democratic discontent is more likely to support abolition than to support the reformed Senate favoured by western Canadian political elites.

It may be the case that democratic discontent with the Senate will reach such a level that abolition emerges as a realistic option. If it does, western Canadian political leaders will

find themselves in an awkward position. Could they carry the argument for reform in the face of growing public support for abolition? Would they appear to be resisting a democratic surge? At the very least, a renewed national debate on the Senate will be very different in character from what we have witnessed in constitutional circles over the past few years.

One final note. The potential for a renewed national debate on the future of the Senate depends on the outcome of the next federal election. If the Conservatives win, then a Conservative majority in the House will coexist quite happily with a huge and docile Conservative majority in the Senate, and such a situation will stifle any democratic impulse for reform or abolition. However, a Liberal majority or minority in the elected House facing a hostile Conservative majority in the appointed Senate would be a much more contentious and problematic situation.

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QUEBEC REPORT

1982 AND BORODINO

by Guy Laforest

Intellectuals and scholars live and die with a few fundamental intuitions and no more than a few. As I am about to depart for a sabbatical year in Paris (poor me ...), I will share with the readers of *Canada Watch* one of my own fundamental intuitions.

In the latter part of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, after a passage where the author describes the agony of Prince André remembering the arms of Natasha Rostov as he fixes the sky from the ground of the battlefield at Borodino, Tolstoy discourses on the meaning of this particular battle for Napoléon and the French Army, as well as for the Russians. In a nutshell, Tolstoy believes that at Borodino, the French have won the battle but lost the war. They prevailed on the battlefield, but also realized that they would never break the resolve of their opponents. They caught a glimpse of the moral superiority of the Russians. After Borodino, the French Army still won a number of battles. And then, suddenly, irresistibly, it retreated. Nothing could halt the retreat, once it began.

If I am correct, 1982 was our Borodino. Through the workings of Trudeau's constitutional bonapartism, as Philip Resnick coined the term in those bygone days, Canadian nationalism carried the day in 1982. René Lévesque and Quebec were clear losers. It took me some years to develop my own understanding of the patriation events. My eyes should have been opened earlier, for in 1982, I was studying at McGill with James Tully, an eminent Locke scholar. I should