TWO CAMPAIGNS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE
by Roger Gibbins

The referendum campaign in the West is two interlocked battles in one. The first is between the Yes and No organizations; the second is between the Progressive Conservative and Reform parties as they position themselves for the upcoming federal election. Although neither battle is going particularly well for the Yes and Conservative campaigns, the second is in better shape than the first.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR QUEBEC IS GOOD FOR THE WEST
The Yes side has a fundamental problem because the constitutional package has little to offer the west as a region. The prime minister can argue that the package delivers 31 new powers or concessions to Quebec and that Premier Bourassa has won more for Quebec than all previous premiers combined, but no such claim can be made for the west or for western premiers. Certainly, B.C. Premier Mike Harcourt desperately wishes someone would make such a claim!

The Senate reform package offers thin gruel for the Yes side, particularly when the effectiveness of the new Senate cannot be determined until the legal text is produced. Many in the region see the reluctance to produce the legal text as evidence as to how ineffective the Senate will ultimately be. They have every reason to be suspicious.

In Quebec, then, the constitutional package can be sold on narrow regional grounds: Quebeckers can be urged to vote “yes” because the package is good for Quebec. In the west, the package must be sold on national grounds: it is good for the west because it is good for Quebec. Quebeckers can vote “yes” as Quebeckers, but westerners must vote “yes” as Canadians.

ABORIGINAL COMPLICATIONS
An added complication arises because the major treaty-based Indian organizations in the west, along with significant Aboriginal players in British Columbia, oppose the package. It is awkward for the Yes side when so many Aboriginal groups oppose a package in which they are supposedly major beneficiaries.

It is no wonder, then, that the Yes side is having some difficulty. Of course, this is not say that the No side will win in the region, or in any of the western provinces, although polls do not rule out this possibility. Both the appeal to patriotism and economic threats will have an effect, even though the message that what is good for Quebec is good for Canada and, therefore, good for the west, is wearing a bit thin.

THE BATTLE AGAINST REFORM
The Progressive Conservative campaign against the Reform Party is in somewhat better shape than the Yes campaign. The Reform party is caught in a very difficult strategic box and is being badly beaten up as the “enemy of Canada.” Although the party is not alone in the No camp, its erstwhile allies may cause long-term problems for the Reformers. It is not clear, for example, that the National Action Committee or the treaty Indians will be of any use in the party’s 1993 election campaign.

The referendum campaign is effectively marginalizing the Liberal and New Democratic parties in the west, as elsewhere. With the two opposition parties playing the role of supporting cheerleaders in the P.C.-orchestrated Yes campaign, the Conservatives should be able to settle up a straight two-party fight against the Reformers in the upcoming federal election.

The Reform Party is positioning itself to receive the anticipated backlash from the referendum campaign, to appeal to those voters who will

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WATCHING QUEBEC
In the final analysis, western Canadians should be particularly attentive to opinion polls in Quebec as the referendum approaches. If a Yes vote appears likely in Quebec, then westerners will probably hop on board the Yes bandwagon in order to forestall regional isolation in the aftermath of the referendum. However, negative polls would raise the possibility of a nightmare scenario in which a No vote in Quebec would be coupled with a Yes vote across the rest of Canada. If this happens,
and despite current protestations by
the prime minister to the contrary,
there is no question that the package
would be reopened to make it more
attractive for Quebec.

Even though it might appear that
the west has nothing left to give in
that event, it is possible with some
effort to imagine a Senate deal that
would be even worse. It would thus
be better for western Canadians to
also vote “no” if Quebeckers do so,
because a more general rejection of
the package would not be an invitation
to address Quebec’s concerns alone. If western Canadians have
their wits about them, their vote will
be driven by the Quebec vote, or at
least by perceptions of what that
department of political
vote is likely to be.

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will pronounce himself at some point
against the Charlottetown Accord.

Mr. Trudeau’s pamphlet should
not have taken anybody by surprise.
In a book released a few days after
the publication of his article, I argue that
as the founder of a new constitutional
order for Canada in 1982, Mr. Trudeau
is bound by every fibre of his person­
ality to go on the offensive every time
he considers under threat the greatest
fruit of his political efforts (see Guy
Laforest, Trudeau et la fin d’un rêve
canadien, Sillery: Les Éditions du
Septentrion, 1992, p. 19). Mr.
Trudeau’s attack against the recogni­
tion of Quebec as a distinct society, in
the Canada clause of the Consensus

"Mr. Trudeau was not satisfied
by such a victory. He did not
want merely to triumph over his
adversaries; rather, he desired
their complete annihilation.”

Try to imagine just for one moment
that the Catholic Church has given
itself a new pope a few years ago,
but that the old one has not died. The
former pope is, indeed, alive and
well, secure in the knowledge of his
own infallibility. When the ancient
pope considers that the church is
drifting away from the course he
had so skillfully steered — at least to
his own error-proof eyes — he takes
his sharpest pen to denounce the
heretics of the day.

This would certainly be a weird
situation for the church. Its leaders
could turn to contemporary Canada
for some advice and consolation.
For there is a person whose role is
akin to that of an old infallible pope
in the politics of our country. The
ancient pope is from Quebec and his
name is Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

TRUDEAU’S OPENING SALVO

L’Actualité et Maclean’s pub­lished in the last week of September
an article by Pierre Trudeau, a sharp
denunciation of the blackmail tac­
tics supposedly imposed by Que­
bec and its politicians on the Cana­
dian federation. This is only the
first act in the former prime minis­
ter’s referendum campaign of 1992.
More fire­shots are to be expected.
On October 1, Mr. Trudeau will
lecture the patrons of Cité libre at
their regular meeting in a Montreal
restaurant. His topic will be noth­
ing less than the obsession of his
own lifetime: the miseries of Que­
bec nationalism. After that, his plans
remain unknown for the moment. It
is widely believed, however, that he

Report on the Constitution, was
equally predictable. “Distinct soci­
ety” smacks of duality, of two nations
and two founding peoples. Through­
out the Meech Lake saga, Mr. Trudeau
and his disciples repeated that any
concession made to the dualistic vi­
sion contributed to the weakening of
the sense of Canadian nationhood fos­
tered by the Constitution Act, 1982,
particularly by the Charter of Rights
and Freedoms. In the September 1991
proposals of the federal government,
as well as in the Beaudoin-Dobbie
Report, one could see that every effort
had been made to prevent the emer­
gence of criticisms like those Mr.
Trudeau had lashed out at the Meech
Lake Accord. The distinct society
clause was defined in a way that dis­
couraged any attempt to affirm the
existence of a nation, or a people,
formed by all the citizens of Quebec.
Moreover, it was placed in sections of
these documents that proclaimed the
existence of a single Canadian iden­
tity, strengthened by the common