

WESTERN REPORT

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

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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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"hold their nose," but then seek revenge against the architects of the deal. If, however, the referendum campaign is in fact the opening shot in an election campaign that will follow hot on the heels of the referendum, the Reformers may not have the time they need.

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 Quebecers 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 vote is likely to be.

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QUEBEC REPORT

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT PIERRE

by Guy Laforest

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 skilfully 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 and *Maclean's* published in the last week of September an article by Pierre Trudeau, a sharp denunciation of the blackmail tactics supposedly imposed by Quebec and its politicians on the Canadian federation. This is only the first act in the former prime minister'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 nothing less than the obsession of his own lifetime: the miseries of Quebec nationalism. After that, his plans remain unknown for the moment. It is widely believed, however, that he

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 personality 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 recognition 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."

Report on the Constitution, was equally predictable. "Distinct society" smacks of duality, of two nations and two founding peoples. Throughout the Meech Lake saga, Mr. Trudeau and his disciples repeated that any concession made to the dualistic vision contributed to the weakening of the sense of Canadian nationhood fostered 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 emergence of criticisms like those Mr. Trudeau had lashed out at the Meech Lake Accord. The distinct society clause was defined in a way that discouraged 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 identity, strengthened by the common