



Practical and Authoritative Analysis of Key National Issues

THE SEPTEMBER 12, 1994 ELECTION: ANOTHER STEP TOWARD SOVEREIGNTY

by Daniel Turp

The celebrations after the election of the Parti québécois on the evening of September 12 in Quebec City were modest, but the impact of the victory of the sovereigntist forces was nonetheless significant. After a very long and strenuous campaign, and in spite of systematic attacks on the main element of its program — sovereignty — Quebeckers had given the Parti québécois a mandate to govern Quebec and had accepted that a process be set in motion to allow Quebeckers to decide on their political future. Thus, on September 12, sovereigntists won a third consecutive battle against federalist forces in less than three years, demonstrating an ongoing coherent pattern of political behaviour among

Quebeckers since the demise of the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990.

This pattern should have had some sobering effect on the federalist forces, but the triumphant attitude of the federal and Quebec Liberal parties and their leaders sheds some light on how they perceive the issue of Quebec's political future. There seems to be a strong and overwhelming belief that Quebeckers are planning to reject sovereignty in the forthcoming referendum; a conviction that they, as other Canadians, want to get the national unity issue behind them as quickly as possible. There seems to be a prevailing sentiment among

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DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER?

by Daniel Latouche

The 1994 Quebec referendum campaign is barely a month old and there is still hope for a democratic, enlightening, and civilized debate on paper, at least, but only if we get rid of a number of clichés. Clichés, it would seem, never die, they just accumulate. They also move around faster today as a result of the electronic highway.

THE MOTHER OF ALL CLICHÉS

If a prize were to be awarded to the most pernicious of all clichés, one candidate stands in a class by itself. It usually runs like this: "The only way Mr. Parizeau and his separatists can win their referendum is through

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federalists that in the final analysis, Quebecers will prefer Canada at any cost. This tranquil assurance is very misleading and brings to mind a similar attitude adopted by Brian Mulroney and Robert Bourassa, who seemed convinced at the end of the process that led the Charlottetown consensus that Quebecers would, when faced with a decision that could imperil Canada's future — that is, the rejection of the proposed accord, necessarily opt for Canada. Let us not forget that Quebecers clearly and overwhelmingly rejected the Charlottetown accord for reasons of substance rather than process or personalities, and did not choose Canada for the sake of choosing Canada.

Sovereignists do not build on the basis of such tranquil assurance. They have fought, and won their three last battles at the ground level. They have significantly strengthened their organizations and are now empowered to deal with the upcoming challenge, winning the referendum on sovereignty. Among other advantages, the sovereignists can now claim, one should not underestimate the fact that almost two-thirds (65 percent or 130 out of 200) of the elected representatives from Quebec in Canada's House of Commons and Quebec's National Assembly are now sovereignists and these representatives will exert, on an individual basis, significant influence during the referendum debate. It should also be remembered that the Bloc québécois can, with even more legitimacy since September 12, continue to speak for sovereignty and show, in its role as a defender of Quebec's interests, the deficiencies and shortcomings of the existing federal system for Quebec, as well as the detrimental effects for Quebec of the centralizing proposals of reform in the areas of social

security, health, and taxation that Jean Chrétien's Liberal government is planning to have Parliament adopt in the near future. And most of all, it can now be affirmed that sovereignists possess an even more powerful tool to meet the challenge — that is, a government in Quebec City that will provide them with important resources to achieve the primary goal of the Parti québécois — sovereignty for Quebec.

And there should be no mistake that these tools and resources will be used to engineer a winning strategy for the referendum. The policies and legislation of the PQ will be aimed at demonstrating that good government can be provided for Quebecers, but that better government could be achieved if Quebec were a sovereign country. The debate on sovereignty within Quebec will be channelled in part through a constitutional commission that will encourage all Quebecers, toutes origines confondues, to reflect on the kind of country they should give themselves and will lead to a positive and enriching effort in constitution-making, in contrast to the confrontational and fruitless constitutional negotiations held between Quebec and the rest of Canada over the past 30 years. The referendum question and the timing of the referendum will remain a prerogative of the Quebec government, with the support of other sovereignist forces, and the "win" factor will be a key element in any decision on these two important elements of the strategy. But the strategy will certainly also entail bringing together and closely linking all groups and opinion leaders that favour sovereignty for Quebec, forming a sort of "rainbow coalition." One can expect to see in this coalition sovereignists of both the Parti and Bloc québécois, as well as other groups such as trade unions, cultural groups, and organizations representing women, students, and seniors.

Sovereignists will not be lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that their federalist opponents do not have a strategy of their own. It is well known that the federalists have plenty of resources at their disposal and that they are willing, as in 1980, to entertain fears and distort realities in the period leading up to the referendum and during the referendum campaign itself. But unlike the debate in 1980, federalists have little or nothing to offer on the substantive issue of Quebec's political future. No promise of renewed federalism will be made to Quebecers, or will be taken seriously by them. The post-1982 *status quo*, reducing Quebec's status to one player among 11, 13, or more, will be the only feasible alternative to sovereignty. Also, when compared with 1980, the federalist forces will have very few credible leaders to talk about the future of Quebec within Canada. Their governments and parties will not be able to afford to buy Quebecers' votes without putting in jeopardy the fragile economy of Canada or alienating their respective constituencies.

Many pundits have suggested that on September 12, Quebecers showed once again how strategic they can be when it comes to voting and creating delicate balances among political parties and options. If Quebecers are as wise as the commentators argue, they could show similar wisdom when the time comes to vote in the referendum on sovereignty. And wisdom might not be in this situation to opt for the post-1982 *status quo*. They might well choose "Option Quebec" and prove that the election of a Parti québécois government on September 12 was another step toward sovereignty.

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ANNOUNCING VOLUME 3 OF CANADA WATCH

This special issue on the Quebec election inaugurates Volume 3 of *Canada Watch*. We are pleased to announce that Daniel Drache has succeeded Kenneth McRoberts as Director of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, and as co-editor of *Canada Watch* (along with Jamie Cameron of Osgoode Hall Law School).

Our objectives this year are to provide focussed commentary on issues of national debate and to make *Canada Watch* more accessible to a wider range of readers. To achieve these objectives, we have instituted the following changes. In place of the regular feature reports we have published in the past, each issue will offer diverse commentaries on critical questions of political and public debate. Thus, our first issue addresses the Quebec election; future editions will focus on other questions that include social policy reform, aboriginal self-government, and criminal justice.

Canada Watch will be published this year by the Centre for Public Law and Public Policy and the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies. As part of that change in our production process, we are pleased to announce the following new subscription rates:

Institutions	\$75.00/year
Individuals	\$35.00/year
Students	\$20.00/year
Outside Canada add	\$10.00/year

Current subscribers should note that subscriptions in progress will be extended to reflect this change in pricing.

"Déjà Vu All Over?" continued from page 1.

an emotional appeal to Quebecers following some dreadful manifestations of hostility by disgruntled Canadians." Based on this in-depth analysis, the conclusion seems inescapable: "If Canadians from the other provinces can refrain from jumping on the Quebec flag, federalism is a sure winner." Consequently, the federal government should refrain from putting any set of constitutional reform proposals on the table, lest they arouse the animosity of Canadians and thus, indirectly, contribute to the separatist cause.

Such a vision seems to imply that nationalist Quebecers are exclusively motivated by some exacerbated sense of revenge, one which needs to be reactivated once in a while, lest it lose its edge. This vision of Quebec as a primitive tribe in

desperate need of an outside enemy — if it is, indeed, the prevalent vision in English Canada — tells us a great deal about the kind of country Canada has become. It only serves to increase Quebecers' suspicions about the need to belong to such a country.

It also increases the chances that Mr. Parizeau will win his referendum, and Canada could well find itself in the Czechoslovakian situation — that is, an unexpected win at a referendum with no alternative but full and complete sovereignty for Quebec. True, the chances of a sovereignty victory are not particularly high at this moment, but one should also recognize that even the most reassuring of polls put support for sovereignty at a 10 to 15 percent higher level than it was 10 months before the last referendum. True, the level of electoral support for the

Parti québécois was only 45 percent, but even this "low" level is four points higher than that of the PQ in 1976. The level of commitment of the PQ electorate to sovereignty is also light years ahead of what it was in 1976.

Furthermore, one should also remember that in 1980 sovereignty was only defeated because of a solemn promise of Mr. Trudeau to reform the federal system, and the expectation that such a reform would follow the lines of the beige book of Claude Ryan and of the Quebec Liberal party. If Canada refuses to put anything on the table before the referendum, it could well find itself overtaken by events the morning after. Imagine for a moment a PQ defeat with 46 or 47 percent of the vote. How long would it take for Mr.

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Parizeau to organize a second referendum if there is no sign of life on the constitutional front? Can Canada afford to take the chance of saying nothing? Is this in the best of Canadian tradition?

THE 1867 COMPROMISE

As required reading before taking, once more, the Referendum 101 course, all journalists, pundits, and analysts should re-read — or just plainly read — the Confederation Debates of 1865–1867. They might learn a thing or two on the principles on which this country was founded and on the dynamics that led very ordinary politicians to embark on such a grandiose plan, one for which no name had yet been invented. Eventually, they called it a "Dominion," but in 1865 the best they could come up with was a "new nationality." Fortunately, "political correctness" had yet to strike.

Colonial politicians of the day were not afraid to make new ground. They wanted to create a new kind of country, different from the dominant model of the day, the United States. With no help from a royal commission, and even less advice from any federal-provincial office, they came out with a hybrid solution that clearly made no sense anywhere else in the world and that only they could understand. It was a sort of multi-level sovereignty formula with most of the powers of what is now known as a national government residing either in London or in the provincial capitals.

Read the speeches of 1865. You will soon realize that in those days there was no equation between Canada and federalism. The idea that only federally elected politicians could speak for Canada because of their location in Ottawa would have been received with much

incredulity. Canada was first and foremost a number of intersecting partnerships — English–French, East–West, Catholic–Protestant — and all of the partners could speak in the name of the "firm." Canada was everywhere.

You will also learn that in 1867, the Canadian government was not simply a collection of departments and commissions located in Ottawa and under the jurisdiction of the House of Commons, but was more to be conceived as an unbroken chain of command that included officials and institutions located in London and in the provinces. In fact, in 1867,

"What has made Canada such a lasting and interesting proposition is that it has always been able to incorporate within its political fabric some of the ideas and concerns of even the most disillusioned of its members."

the "new" Canadian government had probably fewer instruments of sovereign power at its disposal than your average Canadian province in 1994. Clearly, the fathers of Confederation were not afraid of precedents and of breaking new ground.

What is so striking about the 1867 compromise? Certainly not the sophisticated way in which legislative powers were allocated between the central and provincial governments. Any political science major of 1994 could probably do better. The Supreme Court and the Charter of Rights? They never made it to the final text. No, in retrospect, what strikes us the most about this compromise is the very open-ended nature of the deal that was struck. Even the voices and the ideas of those who opposed federalism found their way into the final document. Imagine: in Quebec, George-Étienne

Cartier, the celebrated French Canadian father of Confederation, sold the *BNA Act* as the consecration of Quebec's independence from Upper Canada. What has made Canada such a lasting and interesting proposition is that it has always been able to incorporate within its political fabric some of the ideas and concerns of even the most disillusioned of its members. Americans have done the same. They have never stopped inspiring themselves from their own anti-federalist papers. Why then should Canadians insist in completely ignoring an ideological streak that is as Canadian as French on the corn flakes boxes?

Monsieur Parizeau is proposing that Canada should move into the supranational gear, the first country to do so. Why refuse to even discuss his proposal because any such discussion might bring comfort to his cause? Why insist that constitutional fatigue prevents the rest of the country from imagining a different kind of political arrangement with Quebec? Such a refusal not only pushes Mr. Parizeau to a more radical stand, but also suggests that his approach might be the correct one.

The Canada-Quebec issues will not go away, even with a referendum defeat of the Péquistes. Why? Simply because there is nowhere for this problem to go.

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CANADA/QUEBEC'S BEAU RISQUE

by Daniel Drache

With 10 months to go before Quebec's referendum, the unthinkable may come to pass. The persistent growth in support in Quebec for sovereignty could lead to Quebec's separation from Canada. The fact is that Quebec is getting used to the idea that it is a distinct country. Quebeckers voted against Charlottetown decisively. In the last election, they sent more than 50 members of the Bloc to Ottawa. Now it is Parizeau's turn to try to settle Quebec's "collective destiny" in a sovereignty referendum planned for sometime in 1995.

Yet, nothing should be taken for granted even if he won 54 percent of the Francophone vote in the election. Everywhere voters are changing their minds about who they support and who they oppose. In the last Ontario, Quebec, and federal elections, one-in-five voters changed their minds by election day. So the strategic question is this: can Parizeau find enough votes to push him over the top? Certainly, he is going to use his massive support among the francophone voters to build a powerful province-wide referendum campaign. But he needs to find 200,000 more votes than the PQ scored in the last provincial election if he hopes to win a majority in the referendum. Getting those Quebeckers into the Yes camp will not be easy.

First, as the Liberal sweep of the west island of Montreal underlines, PQ support chez les anglophones has fallen to an all-time low. Ethnic voters also voted massively for Daniel Johnson. So if Parizeau is to win the referendum, he badly needs support from both these communities in

order to gain a majority. How can he win this support?

Second, it is not clear what will happen to the "soft" nationalists — those Quebeckers who want to be more nationalist and more federalist at the same time. Will they vote against independence? Will they join the Yes camp holding their noses? Will they massively abstain? No one knows where the soft nationalist vote will land when the going gets tough in the referendum campaign.

Third, Quebec's first nations will also want to use the referendum as a bargaining lever in their own quest for self-government. They are not going to sit passively by and let their future be determined by Quebeckers. Whether Parizeau likes it or not, they, too, are major players in the referendum campaign.

Finally, and not least of all, Parizeau faces a formidable Ottawa team lead by Chrétien and Johnson. If the provincial election demonstrated one thing, it is that the federalist forces are not pushovers. Even without any constitutional offer on the table, Johnson came within a centimetre of a tie in the popular vote. What the federalist forces need is a clear constitutional position that spells out new avenues of constitutional reform. It is inconceivable that some offer will not be forthcoming. The west may not like it, but Ottawa has no choice. If it defines its notion of what "a strong Quebec in a united Canada" entails, the federalist forces, with 43 percent of the popular vote, could just defeat the referendum. Wrong.

This prognosis is far too optimistic for a principal reason. Ottawa has

not absorbed how formidable an opponent the PQ government is likely to be. This is because Ottawa is stuck on deficit reduction, and the project on social reform. Yet every public opinion poll shows that the number one issue for Canadians is job creation and getting the economy back on track. If Chrétien's government does not intend to offer Quebec a new constitutional deal, at least it will have to offer Quebeckers a new economic future. So far it is sticking with its "mean and lean" notions of government. Where is its vision of Canada in the twenty-first century? Without it, it has no winning strategy.

Compare this with the way the Parizeau government is likely to fight the referendum battle.

First, he will try to make it a non-partisan issue. The Bélanger-Campeau Commission is the model that he wants to adopt this time around. It worked to defeat the Charlottetown proposals and Parizeau is betting that he can use it again to win over both the soft nationalists and soft federalists to the sovereigntist cause.

Second, if sovereignty is to mean something more than an abstract promise to the ordinary Quebecker, its appeal has to be broadened. Already, in the way his government is organized, Parizeau has addressed that concern. The signal he is sending is that the government will give everyone a say in Quebec's future. Access to government will be broadened dramatically. Half of the inner cabinet are women, an accomplishment that no NDP government has managed. Cabinet committees have

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been abolished and instead the regions will have major impact in governance. He has made it a major plank that "lean" government does not imply "mean" government. There are to be no more "blind cutbacks in government services." Last, but not least, Parizeau is committed to restructuring Quebec's battered economy.

So, what then is Parizeau's *beau risque*?

It is that in every collision course with Ottawa running up to the referendum, on balance, the PQ will come

out ahead. The more the Chrétien government follows Paul Martin's lead in slashing government spending, the more Parizeau is reckoning that it will push another thirty thousand Quebecers into the sovereigntist fold. Each time Ottawa talks about debt and deficit, the PQ government will offer Quebecers something more important: a vision that in a world of trading blocs and interdependence, good economic management matters more than ever.

If he can demonstrate that a PQ government will tame markets, promote growth, and keep social in-

equality within strict limits in an independent Quebec, he stands a fighting chance of finding those 200,000 new supporters on referendum day. In his rendezvous with history, Parizeau is counting on Chrétien's tough-minded fiscal conservatism to point Quebecers toward their destiny.

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ELECTORAL STRATEGY AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION

by Guy Lachapelle

Since the Quebec election was announced on July 24, 12 public polls have been published by Quebec polling firms. A comparison of these polls indicates that support for the Quebec Liberal party remained relatively stable throughout the campaign, but that the Parti québécois lost a few points during the last two weeks of the campaign. Overall, public opinion polls underestimated the Liberal party's support, a phenomenon that we have observed since the '70s in Quebec elections, and overestimated the PQ support. The election of the Parti québécois was not a surprise because the level of satisfaction toward the Johnson-Bourassa government was very low. However, the outcome of the election in popular vote, the PQ getting 44.7 percent of the popular vote and the Liberal party 44.3 percent, indicates that Quebec society is highly divided along partisan lines and that the 1995 referendum is going to be highly contested.

The performance of the Parti de l'action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which received 6.5 percent,

demonstrates that an important group of Quebec voters are dissatisfied with the two main parties. The fact that both leaders of the Parti québécois and the Liberal party did extend a hand to Dumont, Jacques Parizeau being the first one in his speech during the eve of the election, demonstrates the importance of this group of voters for the 1995 referendum.

This short analysis examines the evolution of the Quebec electorate before and during the election. A number of phases can be identified: first, the long campaign that started with the election of Daniel Johnson as leader of the Liberal party; second, the pre-campaign period, or the short campaign, when rumour about the date of the election was the only issue on the public agenda; and finally, the electoral campaign itself in which political parties had six weeks to convince voters about the benefits of their electoral platform.

THE LONG CAMPAIGN

The election of Daniel Johnson as leader of the Liberal party was the beginning of the campaign. John

Parisella, who was responsible for the campaign, went to see party organizers both in Britain and the United States to see how he could revamp the strategy of the Liberal party, which had been in power for more than nine years. The task was not an easy one because the economic situation and, more importantly, the neo-conservative ideology of its leader and several ministers and its vision of the state led to great displeasure among citizens. On the constitutional issue, the Liberal party wanted to offer the status quo — an evolutive status quo as Johnson liked to say — until 1997. The heart of its vision of intergovernmental relations was to sign more administrative arrangements with Ottawa.

On the other side, the Parti québécois wanted to offer Quebecers another way of governing, closer to its citizens' needs and more accountable. The Parti québécois and its leader, Jacques Parizeau, argued that the status quo was not acceptable and, as well, since the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords

failed, that Quebeckers would have to decide their future by 1995. Therefore, they wanted to make the sovereignty issue the central theme of the upcoming election.

On March 12, before the beginning of the electoral campaign, the Liberal party held an orientation congress in Montreal. Its key objective was to prepare the new electoral platform of the Liberal party. The central themes were employment, social issues, and the constitutional position of the party. Concerning the language issue, the more militant anglophone members were not pleased that the Liberal party was in favour of maintaining the status quo reached with Bill 86. But because the electoral campaign was approaching, it was important for Liberal party members to demonstrate their unity.

The week after, as the National Assembly met again, the Liberal party put more emphasis on job creation, economic development, family support, and environmental pro-

tection. More important, the finance minister, Mr. Bourbeau, presented a new budget without tax increases.

THE PRE-CAMPAIGN

The Liberal party strategists were looking for an election in June, but the Parti québécois was still high in the polls and, in mid-June, they decided to launch an important pre-campaign publicity blitz. For the first time in Quebec electoral history, a political party spent money to stress the importance of the election and the future constitutional status of Quebec; this blitz claimed that the election of the Parti québécois would bring more instability. The Parti québécois also launched a publicity campaign that focussed on the economic record of the Liberal government. Each party was, therefore, ready for the election.

During the pre-campaign, as Quebeckers waited for Premier Johnson to call the election, the pollsters evaluated the mood of citizens. Four public opinion polls were

conducted by four leading Quebec firms: Léger et Léger, CROP, SONDAGEM, and SOM. These four polls indicated that the Parti québécois was up front by a margin of between 4 and 12.6 percent; SOM found the smallest gap and Léger et Léger the largest.

Concerning voters' intentions, the Parti québécois led in average by 10.1 percent (see the adjoining table). Both SONDAGEM and Léger et Léger gave 44.7 percent for the Parti québécois; CROP and SOM indicated the support the PQ had at around 37 percent. For the Quebec Liberal party, the voting intentions were closer. SONDAGEM gave the highest score with 36 percent and CROP the lowest at 31 percent. Overall, the average voting intention for the Parti québécois was 40.9 percent and for the Liberal party, 33 percent, a gap of 7.9 percent. In the case of the support for Action démocratique, public opinion polls established that

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The Evolution of Public Opinion During the Electoral Campaign

Period	Pre-Campaign	I July 25 to Aug. 9	II Aug. 22 to 23	III Aug. 30 to Sept. 4	IV Sept. 1 to 8	Election Results
No. of Surveys	4	3	4	2	3	
Parti libéral du Québec	33.0 (42.1)	35.0 (43.4)	36.5 (44.3)	32.7 (39.7)	34.6 (42.7)	44.3
Parti québécois	40.9 (52.2)	40.4 (50.1)	40.0 (48.6)	40.8 (49.5)	37.7	44.7
Action démocratique du Québec	2.5 (3.2)	2.7 (3.4)	4.0 (4.8)	6.4 (7.8)	6.4 (7.9)	6.5
Others	1.9 (2.5)	2.5 (3.1)	1.9 (2.3)	2.5 (3.0)	2.4 (2.9)	2.8
Abstention/ Spoiled	3.9	3.6	4.5	4.6	1.9	1.7
DK/LA	21.7	15.8	13.1	13.0	17.0	—

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between 2 and 3 percent of the electorate was ready to give their vote to this party. Finally, in the case of the Equality party, polls were clearly indicating, with only 1 percent support, that this single-issue party was going to disappear from the National Assembly. However, at 17.8 percent, the number of undecided voters remained relatively high. CROP and SOM have the highest proportion of undecided voters, 23 and 22 percent, where SONDA GEM had 14.9 percent and Léger et Léger only 11.2 percent.

Several factors can explain these variations between the estimates of the various polling firms. With the exception of the SONDA GEM, all surveys were typical omnibus polls — that is, studies in which respondents answer questions related to different themes, the election being one of them. In the case of the Léger et Léger polls, a shorter questionnaire might explain the fact that it had the lowest number of undecided respondents.

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

During the electoral campaign, 12 surveys were published by four Quebec polling firms: six by Léger et Léger, three by CROP, two by SONDA GEM, and only one by SOM, the last one of the campaign. Four periods can be identified during the campaign. Each period covers roughly two weeks of the campaign, except for the third period, which measured the state of the mind of Quebec voters just after the televised debate.

The first period covers the first two weeks of the campaign. Leading by 6.7 points, the Parti québécois had a relatively large majority. However, if we compare before and after the election call, the gap between the PQ and the Liberal party, which

was at 10.1 percent before the campaign, was then reduced by 3.4 percent. During the second period, its lead was again reduced to 4.3 percent. The short-term impact of the debate gave an obvious advantage of 9.8 percent to the Parti québécois, but this lead shrunk to 3.8 points during the last week of the campaign. As the leader of the Parti québécois mentioned in the days after the debate, this campaign lasted one week too long. It helped the Liberal party to regain some momentum at the end of the campaign.

If we compare the survey's results during each period, we observe important discrepancies

"The fact that both leaders of the Parti québécois and the Liberal party did extend a hand to Dumont, Jacques Parizeau being the first one in his speech during the eve of the election, demonstrates the importance of this group of voters for the 1995 referendum."

among polling firms. CROP came in always with the smallest differences between the Parti québécois and the Liberal party. In their first poll of the campaign, CROP established the gap between the PQ and the PLQ at only 1 percent before redistribution of the undecided voters; in the second poll it was 2 percent in favour of the PQ; in their last poll, the gap was 2 percent, but in favour of the Liberal party. This last public opinion poll was the only one to put the Liberals ahead among all published polls. The key factor explaining why the gap between the two major parties was so close is that CROP always gave the highest scores to the Liberal party. After redistribution of the undecided respondents, CROP overestimated the Liberal vote by 1.6 percent and un-

derestimated the PQ support by 1.2 percent.

Léger et Léger, SONDA GEM, and SOM had lower scores for the Liberal party. In the last poll of the campaign, SOM gave the lowest score to the PLQ with 31.0 percent before redistribution of the undecided. But the vote for the Parti québécois was clearly overestimated by Léger et Léger and SONDA GEM, both polling firms giving more than 49 percent of the vote to the Parti québécois after redistribution of the undecided voters.

CONCLUSION

Public opinion evolved during the electoral campaign. The popular support for the Parti québécois was lower than the polls indicated. Several hypotheses have been suggested. First, the Parti québécois organization was not very successful in demonstrating to its supporters the importance of voting during this election. The difference between francophone and non-francophone voter turnout indicates that the Liberal party succeeded in its publicity campaign to polarize the debate and raise some fear among its supporters. Second, the vote for the Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) contributed to a reduction of the popular support of both parties. Finally, as public opinion polls indicate, there is no doubt that the electoral campaign was an important stimuli. The coming Quebec referendum campaign will spark the same debate again.

Guy Lachapelle is a Professor of Political Science at Concordia University.



THE REFERENDUM WILL BE CLOSER THAN MANY FEDERALISTS EXPECT

by Patrick Monahan

We are telling Quebecers to vote "no" and telling you in the other provinces that we will not agree to your interpreting a "no" vote as an indication that everything is fine and can remain as it was before.

— Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, May 1980

In the days immediately following the Quebec election, defenders of Canadian federalism seemed to assume that they already have the sovereignty referendum in the bag. The fact that the Parti québécois polled less than 45 percent of the vote — and just 13,500 votes more than Daniel Johnson's Liberals — was seen as proof positive that Quebecers would reject sovereignty in a referendum expected in 1995. The Canadian dollar jumped by more than a cent overnight, and within a week was trading in the mid-74 cents US range, on the theory that Canada's political uncertainty "has now been resolved."

Some Quebec sovereigntists attempted to downplay the unexpectedly close election outcome by pointing out that the combined vote totals for the PQ and the fledgling Parti action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) were over 50 percent. But this argument was advanced almost in a half-hearted way, since the PQ could not necessarily count on all of its own supporters to vote "yes" in a referendum, much less those of the ADQ.

Still, while the election results were obviously encouraging for Canadian federalists, it seems a bit premature to be breaking out the champagne. The election outcome indicates that, had Quebecers been asked to vote in a referendum on sovereignty this past month, they would have decisively voted "no." But the referendum was not held last

month, nor is it likely to be held anytime soon — perhaps as late as spring 1996.

SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS "STATUS QUO"

It has been over 30 years since any politician won a Québec election by advocating the constitutional "status quo." Indeed, the status quo is thought to be so massively unpopular in Quebec that no major party since 1960 has even dared to campaign on this basis — that is, until Daniel Johnson in 1994. (This makes it all the more remarkable that Johnson was able to poll close to 45 percent of the popular vote, and it will certainly force a re-evaluation of the conventional wisdom that Quebec voters oppose the status quo.)

Even Pierre Trudeau found it necessary to renounce the constitutional status quo in his famous "solemn declaration" of May 1980 quoted above. Trudeau was later to seek the lawyer's refuge of pointing out that he never specified exactly what kind of change he had in mind. But his listeners in the Paul Sauvé Arena that evening evidently interpreted his words as a commitment to grant more powers to Quebec, and that is why they jumped to their feet with tears in their eyes and gave him a standing ovation.

Jean Chrétien is not in a position to make that kind of speech this time around. The reason is simple. After the Meech Lake and Charlottetown

accords, it has become obvious that the Canadian constitution is, for all intents and purposes, virtually unamendable. It is, therefore, pointless to suggest reopening constitutional negotiations since any such negotiations are certain to end in failure.

This means that the upcoming referendum will probably feature a showdown between the status quo and sovereignty sides. Defenders of federalism will no doubt point out that the "status quo" is not static, and that Quebec can be granted additional powers through administrative agreements as opposed to formal constitutional change. The problem with this argument is that the premier of Quebec is now Jacques Parizeau rather than Daniel Johnson. Premier Parizeau will almost certainly refuse to enter into any such administrative agreements — even agreements that might grant Quebec additional jurisdiction or powers — precisely to deprive federalists of this possible defence of the status quo.

CONFUSION WITHIN FEDERAL RANKS

Already, many prominent Quebec federalists are expressing dismay at the prospect of having to defend the constitutional status quo. Interim Conservative leader, Jean Charest — who remains the most popular defender of federalism in

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Quebec — is already on record as stating that Quebeckers will have to be offered at least the possibility of "renewed federalism" in return for a "no" vote in the referendum. And the Quebec Liberal party is divided on this question, with some former cabinet ministers favouring the development of a new "constitutional vision" as the platform for the No forces in the referendum.

This confusion within federalist ranks over the precise meaning of a "no" vote seems unimportant as long as support for sovereignty hovers in the 40 to 42 percent range. But with the PQ now controlling the levers of government, support for sovereignty is likely to move slightly upward in the next three to six months. (This will be due to the combined effect of the PQ's "honeymoon" with Que-

bec voters, along with unpopular cuts in federal spending that will be forced on the federal government in an effort to control the deficit.)

If and when the support for Quebec sovereignty comes to within striking distance of a majority (that is, more than 45 percent), the confu-

"... while the election results were obviously encouraging for Canadian federalists, it seems a bit premature to be breaking out the champagne."

sion in the federalist camp could prove very damaging. Within the Quebec Liberal party the pressure to develop some credible offer of "renewed federalism" may well prove overwhelming. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, however, is likely to maintain his strategy of offering "good

judgment" and avoiding all talk of constitutional revision.

If Quebeckers are asked to choose between the status quo and sovereignty, the outcome is far from certain. But one thing that is clear is that federalists will be in big trouble if they appear divided. Jacques Parizeau can be expected to exploit even the hint of divisions within the federalist ranks, arguing that his opponents cannot even agree among themselves about the meaning of a "no" vote. That's why it is essential that federalists settle this question now, rather than trying to resolve their differences in the hothouse atmosphere of a referendum campaign.

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WAIT-AND-SEE STRATEGY NOT NEW FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

by Mary Ellen Turpel

The election of a PQ majority government with the promise of a referendum on secession is a loud political alarm bell for the 14 First Nations and Inuit whose territories are caught within the boundaries of Quebec. While the national press and federal government downplay the consequences of the September 12 vote, such a strategy could prove disastrous for aboriginal peoples. Can First Nations and Inuit silently gamble on a federalist response to a referendum question?

Clearly not — especially when they consider who proposes to defend their interests — namely, the federal government, the very same government that has been as much if

not more of an obstacle in self-government and land claims negotiations.

Although federal Minister of Indian Affairs Ron Irwin gave First Nations in Quebec his assurances that the federal government will fulfill its political and legal obligations to them in any secession scenario, how real is this promise and what does it mean?

The current federal strategy is to downplay the secession situation, to politically reinforce that the federation works, and to enlist provinces in an effort to eliminate inter-provincial trade barriers so that the spectre of duplication and bureaucratization can be jettisoned. Although this strategy may be per-

fectly tailored to the pre-referendum period, it leaves First Nations and Inuit without any certain support or protection.

Outside the national aboriginal community, aboriginal peoples in Quebec have become a convenient rallying force for politically reactionary sentiment. The issue is used by those hostile to Quebec (and to aboriginal peoples also) to frustrate the debate. This only serves to further isolate aboriginal issues and prevent their discussion any sustained or serious way.

The PQ platform contemplates that aboriginal peoples will be treated as "minorities." The secession plan of the PQ tells us "Aboriginal peo-

ples will have a special place in a sovereign Quebec ..." (p. 40). That special place is not one defined by aboriginal peoples, but decided by the PQ. Already the Crees have forcefully opposed this "plan" and are organizing their own referendum. While the self-determination double-standard is painfully obvious to all observers (including many advisers to the PQ and BQ), Quebec is only doing what the federal government has always done — it is

"While the self-determination double-standard is painfully obvious to all observers (including many advisers to the PQ and BQ), Quebec is only doing what the federal government has always done — it is refusing to address self-government and territorial claims in a fair or equal fashion."

refusing to address self-government and territorial claims in a fair or equal fashion. It is ignoring the aboriginal issues and "managing" them by avoidance.

The impression one forms from studying the federal (and provincial) responses to the September 12 vote is that the ideal "solution" would be a substantial reworking of federal arrangements (trade, jurisdiction, etc.) by administrative and intergovernmental agreements leading to a "no" vote in a referendum. In other words, change the federation in the direction of greater decentralization without formal constitutional amendment. While novel, and of questionable constitutionality, this approach leaves aboriginal peoples in the same place as in the PQ platform — as something to be addressed later. Ironic, isn't it?

Professor Mary Ellen Turpel is an Associate Professor visiting at the University of Toronto.

THE WEST AND THE QUEBEC ELECTION

by D.J. Bercuson

Most of western Canada has reacted to the Quebec election with an attitude of watchful waiting. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein has appointed a small committee of academic advisers, headed by University of Alberta political scientist Alan Tupper, to help guide him through the trying times to come. Their advice is to "cool it." The Canada West Foundation, based in Calgary, is working on a new set of constitutional proposals that they are labelling "Option C," an answer to Gordon Gibson's new book on how Canada will break up in the event that Quebec separates. His book has become hot new reading among some members of the Calgary business community. Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon, weeks away from calling a provincial election, has been keeping a low profile while Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow is rumoured to be giving confidential advice to his one-time comrade-in-arms, Jean Chrétien. BC Premier Mike Harcourt has said little, but several BC radio talk show hosts have been claiming that many of their callers are taking the attitude that if Quebec goes, British Columbia will follow.

The one thing that is completely missing from public discourse is panic. Indeed, there seems to be a general feeling that the election result was no bad thing since the ultimate question—will Quebec stay or go—is now on the table for resolution. There is virtually no desire for another round of constitutional wrangling. The attention of most westerners is firmly fixed on the efforts of the four western provincial governments to cut public expenditures and get the deficit/GPP into some

sort of reasonable balance. This is nowhere more true than in Alberta, where stage 2 of the Klein government's radical budget cuts is going into effect. But there have been continuing cuts in the other provinces and the public is already feeling their impact in dramatic changes, especially to the health care delivery system and education.

This does not mean that western Canadians have no views on the future of Quebec and Canada. The views of most westerners are little changed from those they held in October 1992 when the Charlottetown accord was rejected overwhelmingly by 60 percent of the

"One of the realities that the prime minister, the premiers, and the professional Canada-univers will have to take into account, if anything beneficial is to come of this mess, is that western Canadians have views on Quebec and Canada that have been formed by their own historical experience."

voters in all four western provinces; they believe in a nation of 10 equal provinces with individual rights guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There is little sympathy for the view that Canada is a country composed primarily of "two founding peoples," while antipathy toward official multiculturalism has never been higher than it is at the moment.

There has been much chagrin expressed in newspaper editorials,

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letters to the editor, on radio talk shows, and in other public fora over the warnings emanating from central Canada's chattering classes not to engage in "inflammatory" rhetoric. Peter White, president of the Council on Canadian Unity, recently announced that his council will "try to temper statements from English-speaking Canadians that could incite passions among separatists and earn them greater support." As one example of what the council intends, White attacked a recent *Globe and Mail* article advocating the peaceful separation of Quebec and Canada, claiming that "its defeatism and irresponsible speculation ... risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy."

It is going to be very difficult for Mr. White and others who agree with his desire to suppress opinions they are not comfortable with to convince western Canadians to shut up this time around. For many years the dominant feeling in western Canada has been that Quebec is the spoiled child of confederation, receiving many billions more in taxpayers' largesse than it gives back to the country, dominating the prime ministership, setting the nation's political agenda, and all the while

snivelling about how badly it has been treated. Right or wrong, like it or not, that is the position that most westerners have arrived at. When Quebec voters foisted the Bloc québécois on the rest of Canada as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, there was open anger and contempt expressed everywhere in the west; the election of the PQ government will add to that feeling. By berating those views and pretending that only those "reasonable" westerners whose cars sport "My Canada Includes Quebec" bumper stickers were to be engaged in debate, those central Canadians who always claim to know best brought this country to where it is now—with a dedicated secessionist as premier of Quebec and a second referendum on secession in a decade and a half looming within the next year.

One of the realities that the prime minister, the premiers, and the professional Canada-uniter will have to take into account, if anything beneficial is to come of this mess, is that western Canadians have views on Quebec and Canada that have been formed by their own historical experience. Those views are different from, and largely antipathetic to, the image of Canada that has been fostered by Ottawa bureaucrats and their

academic (and central Canadian business) allies since the late 1960s. But since there are now some 9 million taxpayers and citizens in western Canada, those views cannot be ignored or shoved under the rug any longer. If anything is calculated to rile the west these days, it is advice to "take a valium and just keep your crazy notions to yourselves lest you upset the sensitivities of Quebecers." That just won't wash any more.

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Canada Watch welcomes submissions on issues of current national interest. Submissions should be a maximum of 1,000 words.

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