

A gift for René Lévesque

The cartoon in *La Presse* summed up what the French newspapers and radio hot lines were saying the day after the deluge. Pierre Trudeau and three Quebec ministers — Jean Marchand, Gérard Pelletier and Jean-Luc Pepin — are depicted in a lifeboat, looking melancholy and wearing life jackets. The name of the boat is "French Power." And the tiller man is saying *Tout l'monde débarque*.

The 32-year-old executive assistant to another Quebec minister had trouble disguising his tears as the final results from the west rolled in. "The bastards," he spat out, "the bastards gave it to Lévesque on a silver platter. We sell Quebecers on the idea that French Canadians can participate in federalism and play an equal role in running the country. And just when it's starting to work, English Canada kicks us in the teeth."

"It's a victory for wealth and bigotry," added a Liberal backbencher from a Montreal working-class riding. "And never mind the Tories or the NDP. A lot of the Liberals who went down in Ontario and the West will blame their defeat on nothing but the backlash to French power. It's obviously a victory for Lévesque and what he's been saying. I almost hope Trudeau lets Stanfield form a government. I think we would be very interesting in opposition, especially since the only French cabinet minister the Tories would have would be that pig Wagner."

Quebec independentists were gleeful with the results, calling the Conservative showing a "triomphe orange," and a crushing blow for Trudeau's brand of bicultural federalism. "This shows us that Canada will never accept a strong French presence in government and the Ottawa bureaucracy," said Camille Laurin, Parti Québécois leader in the National Assembly. "The only conclusion Québécois can draw from this is simple. The only government we can ever call our own has to be



located in Quebec City and not Ottawa."

Laurin's view was reinforced as he stepped into a taxi the morning after the election. "Hey" said the driver, "they told us they don't want us in Ottawa, eh, M. Laurin. I guess we'll have to go with you guys." This attitude was shared overwhelmingly by independentists of all stripes in Quebec.

Péquistes noted that not only was over half the Liberal representation in Quebec, but that many elected outside the province were from French areas, like the five Acadian constituencies in New Brunswick, parts of Ontario and St. Boniface in Manitoba. Only one candidate in Quebec was endorsed by René Lévesque and that was Roch LaSalle, an independent who defected from the Conservatives. Lévesque even did some campaigning for LaSalle in Joliette. In 1968 the nationalist MP was

elected by a margin of 172 votes as a Conservative. This time he won by 5,000.

The feeling is that the results underscore Quebec's isolation from the rest of Canada and will provide an enormous amount of fodder for the PQ propaganda machine. "We're going to say, 'you tried Trudeau's road to Ottawa and it's a dead end'" explains one PQ strategist. "The only road left is the road to independence."

The Péquiste explained that the party is gearing for an influx of disappointed and disenchanting federalists. "This federal election has turned out to be the greatest recruitment program we could have imagined."

Left-wing unionists are somewhat fearful that an influx of disillusioned federal Liberals will further prevent the PQ from becoming a party of the left.

As for the Conservatives, they were all but demolished in Quebec, losing almost 10 percentage points of their popular vote, mostly to the Crétistes. Claude Wagner, whose popular appeal was supposed to have built a solid Conservative base in the province, barely scraped in in St. Hyacinthe, winning by some 700 votes. The rest of the Tories' Quebec caucus is composed of Heward Grafftey, who is not on speaking terms with Wagner; in fact, they loathe each other. Grafftey managed to get elected by the simple expedient of never mentioning either Stanfield or Wagner in his speeches or his campaign literature.

The Conservatives had trouble making third place in most Montreal ridings, usually losing out to Crétistes and NDPers. The Liberal vote was so all-encompassing in the 30 Montreal area seats that a grand total of only two opposition candidates managed to save their deposits.

However, voter turnout, especially in the Péquiste strongholds in the east-end working-class areas was very poor. In some areas it was not even 40 per cent.

Continued from page 15

Cabinet and a Prime Minister that will represent all Canadians." Jack Horner, re-elected with a huge majority in the Alberta riding of Crowfoot, advertised against overexpenditure of federal money in Quebec.

In most parts of the country though, anti-Quebec feeling was not expressed quite so explicitly. British Columbians regard French as a foreign language, making the Ottawa government seem all the more distant and alleviating the need for any explicit reference to the "French issue." The same is true, to a large extent, for other parts of the country.

Trudeau's most spectacular move during his time in office was undoubtedly his invocation of the War Measures Act in the absence of war or insurrection. He told a Regina audience sarcastically that the opposition would also have taken a stand against the FLQ, but "somehow the War Measures Act would have been different. It would have been gentler." Liberal minister Otto Lang told a Saskatoon rally that Trudeau had shown himself to be "strong in that he would not be bullied or blackmailed."

But one of the big surprises of the campaign was that Trudeau did not play this up any more than he did. Had he done so, he would likely have lost far less of the anti-Quebec vote.

Trudeau's Quebec policy has been two-pronged, bilingualism on the one hand and the War Measures Act on the other. He could have run on the WMA part, but he didn't; he didn't run the anti-Quebec campaign many had expected. Defending bilingualism became a bit difficult after that report was leaked, but he stuck to it.

Trudeau was supported in 1968 as a good Frenchman, a credit to his race, so to speak. Now people aren't so satisfied he's such a credit.

Of course, the racism implicit in the campaign against the "privileged position of the French" was not all. There was the cooked-up scandal over immigration: was Canada's purity being undermined by uncontrolled immigration policies? And the Canadian people were also told that they were victimized by the unemployed.

In the Toronto riding of Scarborough East, the elected Conservative was doused with champagne while he sliced into his victory cake. People are fed up with the welfare state, he told his cheering supporters. One of his chief

campaigners, an Ontario cabinet minister, gushed that "mothers were concerned about the direction youth was taking with government handouts."

Meanwhile, the defeated candidate, Labour Minister Martin O'Connell, blamed his defeat on an "irritable, grouchy" electorate. "The underlying issue," he said "may well have been that middle income people were not prepared to accept any more of the burden of the just . . . or more equal society."

The mean, miserable and reactionary campaign that the Tories waged seemed to merge with the bitchy mood

abroad in the land. But then who created the national grouch? Things really haven't been working out right in Canada for a number of years.

An honoured place in the body of Canadian political mythology is occupied by something called "traditional voting patterns." These patterns are supposed to recur, comet-like, at regular intervals, coinciding with general elections. Their one function in life is to "reassert themselves."

The problem with the concept is that there are almost no voting patterns in this country that have remained



"Everybody off"

Girard, La Presse

NOVEMBER 3, 1978

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