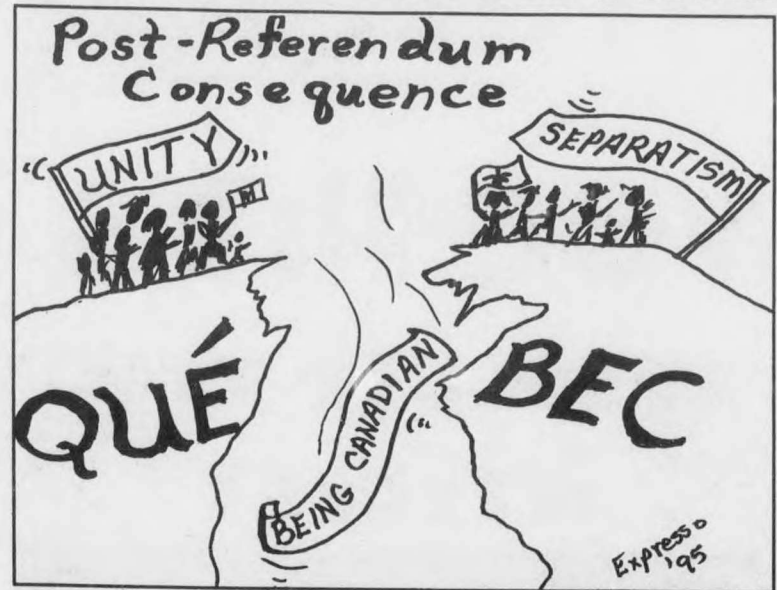


Opinion of the Week

The Referendum: no time for celebration



by Damian Penny

"We have been beaten...but by what? Money and the ethnic vote!"

- Jacques Parizeau, following the Oct. 30 referendum.

At first glance, it may seem as though the results of Monday's referendum on Quebec sovereignty gave Canadians reason to feel relieved, even thrilled. After a long, increasingly bitter campaign, the federalists held off a surging sovereigntist campaign to eke out the barest of majorities. No matter how you slice it, Monday's 50.5-49.5 percent margin was dangerously close. To put it in perspective, Quebecers rejected independence 60-40 in 1980; in 1992, Canadians rejected the Charlottetown Accord 54-46; and in 1948, Newfoundland voted by a mere 52-48 to become a province of Canada. Still, for those who love Canada, a "Non" win was still one that merited celebration, regardless of the details.

If only it were that easy. If Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau's comments following the federalists' win are any indication, Monday's results could be no better for Canada than a "Yes" vote. Indeed, when one considers the bitterness that may be sown among hardline nationalists in Quebec, it may have been even worse.

With his outrageous comment that the so-called "ethnic vote" had kept Quebec from becoming a sovereign country, Parizeau was only repeating what many of his followers had been saying for quite some time; last year, he was forced to fire a key adviser for saying that a "dangerous situation" would result if a majority of francophones voted for sovereignty but were thwarted by anglophone, aboriginal, and immigrant voters. That is what happened Monday, with most non-francophone Quebecers voting to remain in Canada. Sadly, this may have opened them to the vengeance of Parizeau's more militant supporters, for whom only French-speakers have a right to call themselves Quebecois.

In his book *Ob Canada! Ob Quebec! Requiem for a Divided Country*, Mordechai Richler showed that bigotry and intolerance, mostly of the anti-Semitic variety, has rarely been uncommon among Quebec nationalists.

Parizeau, I'm afraid, now follows in this dubious tradition, and must be ranked with the likes of Roseanne Skoke as an intolerant bigot, further desecrating the already-soiled reputation of politicians in this country. As far as Parizeau is concerned, the real Quebecers have voted to become a sovereign country; only these "foreigners" prevented it. One wonders what sort of action his Parti Quebecois government will take to punish these residents of the province who are not among those chosen people who have French as their mother tongue. Remember the repressive language laws of Levesque and Bourassa? I hate to say this, but that could be minor compared with whatever the current government of Quebec may have in mind.

Unfortunately, he has a lot of time to do this. Parizeau's PQ, elected in 1994, does not have to call an election for

another four years. That time will encompass the constitutional negotiations that will inevitably follow the close referendum vote, and it begs the question of how Canada will be forced to deal with a government whose declared mandate is to take Quebec out of the federation.

It will not be a pretty sight. Simply put, there is no reason to suggest that Parizeau and his government will bargain in good faith. I'm willing to bet that Parizeau has only one thing in mind now: revenge. Any politician who, in 1995, is willing to stand in front of millions of television viewers and play "ethnic" politics so blatantly is just not someone who can be trusted to negotiate in the best interests of this country. Frankly, I'm willing to say that the best strategy now may be to invite Quebec federalist leader Daniel Johnson to the constitutional talks, let him negotiate on behalf of Quebec, and use any resulting deal as part of the Quebec Liberals' platform in the next provincial election! If only it were that simple.

All in all, this country is about to enter a period of great uncertainty. And it's not like Canada is going to have strong federal leadership, for that matter. Until now, Jean Chretien has been a "Teflon Prime Minister", able to shake off any criticism and remain wildly popular with an electorate that kept *On The Take* on the best-seller list for the better part of a year. I hate to break this to any Liberal readers, but these days are over.

Simply put, Chretien blew it. With the federalists holding a wide lead in all the polls following the PQ's election, the message from the Prime Minister's office could be summed up in three words: "What, me worry?" There is no way the separatists would win, Chretien said. He would not even contemplate the possibility. Quebecers would never even think about leaving the greatest country on earth. *Vive le Canada!*

For a while, some commentators attacked Canadians for their seeming indifference to the referendum in Quebec. This was partly due to the fact that people in the rest of Canada were sick of dealing with the national-unity issue, the political agenda having been dominated by it for more than two decades. But, with the message we got from our Prime Minister, how could Canadians have been expected to react any differently?

Granted, late in the campaign, both Chretien and the diverse mass known as "The Rest of Canada" became concerned, and tried to convince Quebecers not to separate. This last-minute show of support may have made the difference, but it does not change the fact that Chretien having lulled Canadians into blowing the seemingly insurmountable lead federalists held just a month ago, now has a greatly weakened position among his supporters. The same goes for his party and cabinet; there are going to be a lot of Liberals out there who will be asking why the Prime Minister did not take a larger role in the campaign until it was almost too late.

And so, that is the situation in which Canada now finds itself: Quebec nearly having separated, and under the thumb of a vengeful intolerant, semicompetent government, with Canada having no clear indication of which way to act. Would a "Yes" vote really have been much worse than this?

The Left Jab

Overpopulation
by Nik Carrier

One of the explanations of the scenes of mass starvation in Ethiopia and of the appalling phenomenon of third world poverty is that these countries suffer from "overpopulation". There are simply too many mouths to feed, or so it is said.

This argument is given added force by the fact that it seems to be believed by a number of third world governments. In recent years, for example there have been the late Sanjay Gandhi's forcible sterilisation campaign in India, and the one-child policy in "communist" China.

Let us begin with the example of Ethiopia itself. Ethiopia has a population of 31 million in an area of 1,222,000 square kilometres. This gives it a population density of 25 per square kilometre, as compared with 228 per square kilometre in Britain. Comparisons could also be made with West Germany (population density 248 per square kilometre), the Netherlands (347), and Japan (315). In other words, far from being "overpopulated", Ethiopia is, in reality, very sparsely populated.

But perhaps Ethiopia is an exception, or perhaps it is unreasonable to compare a largely rural third world country with advanced industrial nations. Let us have a look at a number of third world countries.

The large majority of third world countries have relatively low population

densities. Not that this helps them much. For example, Chad, the Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Paraguay and Bolivia all have population densities of less than 10 per square kilometre, yet all remain desperately poor.

But what of India and China with their so-called "teeming millions" and their attempts at state population control? In fact, both have a population density less than Britain - India 208 per square kilometre, and China 102.

Finally, there are those areas of the third world that are densely populated: Bangladesh (616 per square kilometre), Hong Kong (4,827), Singapore (4,122), South Korea (382), Taiwan (486), Mauritius (480). Strangely for the "overpopulation" theory, these areas turn out to be among the most prosperous in the third world. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are, after Japan, the three richest places in the whole of southern and eastern Asia. Mauritius, off the east coast of Africa, is undoubtedly poor, but it has wealth per head more than four times the average for the area.

In short, an examination of the facts shows that there is no connection between high population and poverty. Every extra person is not only an extra mouth to feed, but also an extra worker to produce goods.

It is important to ask why the population is growing in third world

countries. The answer is not that people are having more children - but that the death rate, in particular the infant mortality rate, is falling. This in turn comes from an improvement, albeit slight, in general living standards (diet, medical care, sanitation and so on). Far from population growth causing poverty, it is in general a result of a small increase in prosperity.

Why then, if it is such nonsense, is the overpopulation argument so popular? The answer is simple. It is because, for the world's ruling classes in both the developed countries and the third world itself, it is the perfect alibi. It distracts attention from the vast sums spent on arms which, if redirected, could solve the world's malnutrition problem, from the obscenity of food mountains hoarded because there is no profit in selling to the poor, and from the looting of the third world by imperialism and the multinationals. Like so many capitalist ideas it shifts the blame for the results of oppression from the system onto the oppressed themselves.

The myth of overpopulation can be compared to society's other myths. For example that 'people are unemployed because they're too lazy to work'; that women are raped and battered 'because they ask for it'; that people are poor because they are idle and spendthrift.

The origins of the whole 'overpopulation' theory date back to the 18th-century parson and economist, Thomas Malthus, whose 'Essay on Population', published in 1798, was designed to counter radical ideas coming from the French Revolution. Marx scathingly dismissed Malthus' theory as 'a libel on the human race'. 197 years have not improved it.

Metanoia

by John Walk

Head Tax

(Toronto Star, Mar. 7/95, p. A10).

In February of this year, the Federal Government imposed a \$975 Right of Landing Fee ("Head Tax") on immigrants and refugees entering Canada. This fee is oppressive and prohibitive for refugees.

Prime Minister Chretien stated, in a referendum address, that "we have built and founded our country on the values of freedom, peace, tolerance, generosity, openness to differences, sharing and compassion towards those less fortunate among us." Those words are consistent with his Liberal "Red Book": "Canadians have to see themselves as belonging... to a society of reciprocal obligations, in which each of us is responsible for the well-being of the other" (p. 11). The "other" includes the refugee: "the need to respond humanely to the world refugee crisis... is particularly important to Canadians" (p. 87). The "Head Tax" contradicts these statements.

Refugees suffer oppression in their country of origin. "Freedom" does not demand entry fees from the poor. "Generosity" does not require further sacrifice from those who have lost so much. "Sharing and compassion" does not put a person or family in situations of little hope.

The \$975 fee represents an unattainable amount for most people fleeing desperate situations. The refugee processing system has operational costs. But might not alternative sources, for example a tax on lottery winnings, more than adequately cover these costs?

The "Head Tax" violates international law. The United Nations Commission on Refugees expressed serious concern about this policy. Others describe it as a perversion of the idea of refugee protection. Canada drafted the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, a document advocating family reunification as a right of children. Yet the "Head Tax" prevents this very thing, creating an additional strain to an already stressful situation.

The government and the media must give Canadians a true and accurate account of the contributions made to our society by immigrants and settled refugees. They do not take more than they return to the Canadian economy. In fact, "over a lifetime, the [average] foreign-born household contributes between \$34,615 and \$46,695 more in taxes than [it] extracts in public services"

Christians hear God directing them to treat with respect the stranger in the land: "when an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you, you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt (Lev. 19: 33-34). Jesus instructs us to protect the poor:

"for I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matt. 25: 35-36).

In the name of freedom, peace, tolerance and generosity, and in the name of our Lord, the oppressive "Head Tax" must be rescinded.



Forest Breeze

Clear, Cutting and Dry
by Helen Rooney

Bill described in full detail the ravages JD Irving was inflicting on New Brunswick's forests as Mr. Irving cut every tree in sight. Bill was making a strong argument for replacing clear cutting with selective cutting.

Every September for the past five years I have bicycled from my home in Montreal to Fredericton. Wherever I stop people gather around to ask questions. I like answering their questions, all except one. Two nights before reaching Fredericton on this year's trip I camped near Perth-Andover. There was only one other vehicle, an RV, in the campground. As I took my usual walk after supper I saw an older man come out of the RV and wave. He introduced himself and his wife, explained they were tourists from Maryland, and then asked me the usual questions. All went well until he came to that question: "So, what are you studying?" I winced. "Forest engineering", I replied faintly. After a few years I knew what was coming. As usual, I was right.

"What do you think of clear cutting?", he (Bill?) asked. Being somewhat knowledgeable in the basics of forestry, I replied that clear cutting was an excellent method of harvesting and regenerating most Canadian forests. Suddenly, Bill's face went from mildly interested to contorted with self-righteous anger. For the next five minutes I listened to a diatribe against every forest company that ever existed.

Fortunately, Bill's lungs were only so big and they soon ran out of air. While he recovered I explained that Canadian forests, being boreal forests, need to be clear-cut rather than selectively cut because selective cutting has negative effect on boreal forests, so much so that selective cutting is outlawed in Sweden (you never hear any complaints from Greenpeace about Sweden, do you?) I thought I was as convincing - maybe not quite as dramatic - as Bill, but Bill had not heard a word I had said. Much like the typical layperson, Bill was not interested in scientific or rational explanations, regardless of whether or not they are right. For Bill, as for the average citizen, the loudest voice was the right voice, and other voices were not even worthy of consideration.

The next time you read an article about an issue you have taken a firm stand on, ask yourself where you got your opinion: was it from the side with the most captivating slogan, or the side with the facts to back up its argument? Regardless of what your opinion is, you will have at least given both sides complete scrutiny before deciding.

WOMYN
Dear Sirs, man to man, midpower, craftsman, working men, the thinking man, the man in the street, fellow countrymen, the history of mankind, one-man show, man in his wisdom, statesman, forefathers, masterful, masterpiece, old masters, the brotherhood of man, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, sons of free men, faith of our fathers, god the father, god the son, yours fraternally, amen.
W ords fail me.

STEPHANIE DOWRICK