

SPECTRUM

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Gonzo Constitution making

Perspectives
by William Stewart

"There's nothing the matter with planning, but what counts is flexibility." Robert Ballon, *Financial Post*, 22 Aug 1970

Things are getting desperate in Ottawa. Strong men are weeping, strong women are crying, and the liquor stores are running out of hard scotch. Treachery is in the air, Joe Clark is buying a new set of luggage, and the P.M. is getting edgy. The sinking feeling is starting to settle in the stomachs of most federal politicians that no-one is ever going to listen to anything they say, ever again.

Up until September the game plan was more or less on schedule. After betting the country in 1990 and losing, with a comfortable three years left in his mandate, the P.M. re-organized his staff, sent out the Spicer and Beaudoin-Edwards to look busy, and then ordered the P.M.O. to start work on the *real* package to save the country. Sort of a double or nothing proposition. His bet, our money.

Unfortunately, nobody's buying, not in the West or East, with the Aboriginal Peoples, or in Quebec. The country isn't a caucus, and Mr. Mulroney just hasn't been able to manage the citizenry in the same slick way he controls his party, or what's left of it.

The first really *serious* sign of trouble came in P.E.I., on the first stop of the Special Joint Committee studying the present proposals, where crowds of teenagers sent the committee members packing like rabid rats. The high-school students, every one an articulate defender of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, were portrayed in the national media as being virulently francophobic, but nobody listens to the national media anymore either.

Initially undeterred, the Committee went back to Ontario, and, for most of a week, the civil servants who actually drafted the current constitutional package did their very best to explain it. Surrounded by thirty-odd grouchy members, many of whom were not Conservative and still licking their wounds from P.E.I., the experts surfaced briefly and struggled valiantly, but now are gone. This is Mr. Mulroney's style: back-room, and obsessed with secrecy. If Ronald Reagan had a son with George Bush, it would be Brian Mulroney, four times out of five.

However, before they were yanked back far away from the television cameras, the government's emissaries did some artful tap-dancing. Their

featured number was called "Distinct Society: Power and Impact in Two Parts", and ended with loud cries of "beautiful" ringing out from the astonished, encircled politicians.

In part one, an official explained that legislative powers could only be conferred on the provinces through clauses 91 and 92, and since the Distinct Society clause could not be applied to 91 or 92, no new powers were conferred. In other words, strike one for Quebec.

In part two, the same servant civilly explained that the Distinct Society clause was not without "impact", since, as a subordinate clause of the Charter, a slight

collective nuance was added to the individual rights originally enshrined there. That is, strike one for the rest of Canada, and tie game overall.

Wandering aimlessly through the halls, bumping into the furniture and each other, occasionally falling down stairs, the members could barely understand this technical definition of "power", and seriously doubted they could explain it. Several were said to have sat bolt upright in bed late at night, startling their mates and children, sweat pouring down their faces, yelling "Charlottetown" and "Summerside" in blood-curdling screams echoing down the street.

Morale was crumbling fast.

But this is professional politics we are talking about here, and the show must go on. The committee went west to Manitoba, and the crowds came out in angry swarms. Western Canada is still a newer, wilder place, where you can still see men and women walking down the street in Cowboy hats, carrying guns on their hips, if you know where to go.

Everything the Spicer Commission heard but didn't print came out in one day, and this time, the members listened. It was as though their spirit had been broken, a fateful decision made, and they were almost

relieved. The spin control had finally spun out.

This was live on T.V., the anger stronger than ever, and obviously not going away. One guy summed it all up in a couple of sentences that made all the night-time newscasts: "They interviewed this old premier of Ontario the other day, I don't know why, and he said we have to accept these proposals or Parizeau will become Premier of Quebec. Look, if the people of Quebec want to elect Mr. Parizeau, then let them elect Mr. Parizeau".

Time for a new game plan. The old one is beyond resuscitation. Constituent Assembly anyone?

...and while we are on the subject

Words can be slippery things. They spend ages lying around on the printed page all coy and disarmingly precise, but take on eel-like properties as soon as you pick them up and use them (to say nothing of their protean qualities when they fall into the hands of typesetters for this esteemed journal!). The language concerning matters sexual is a particularly hazardous semantic quagmire, but there are signposts. Webster's provides the following:

PORNOGRAPHY: from "pornographos" (Greek), the writings of harlots: obscene literature, photographs, paintings, etc., intended to cause sexual excitement.

OBSCENE: that which depraves, especially of that which offends or wounds the imagination in sexual matters.

EROTICA: books, drawings, paintings, films, etc, dealing with or illustrating sexual love.

You see what I mean; on the page they're harmless and deceptively straightforward. Now try the following test. Classify either as erotica, pornography, or neither, the following:

1. The Karma Sutra, 2. The Marquis de Sade's "120 Days of Sodom", 3. The Song of Solomon, 4. D.H. Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley's Lover", 5. Penthouse, 6. The Joy of Gay Sex, 7. Shakespeare's Sonnets, 8. Michelangelo's "David", 9. the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, the films 10. "Last Tango in Paris" and 11. "The Biggest One I Ever Saw!"

Your answers will probably say more about you, your prejudices (not a perjorative incidentally, we all have them), cultural background, gender and

assumptions, than any objective criteria (assuming such a thing exists!). While many of us, perhaps even all of us, would agree that literature/film/artwork depicting bestiality, necrophilia, sexual abuse of children, and rape fit the dictionary definition of obscene, that which constitutes erotica is an altogether greyer area.

Is Michelangelo's "David" rendered pornographic because of the knowledge that the sculptor was gay, and that recently discovered sketch-books and notes suggest the model was a quarryman from Carrara with whom he had some form of relationship? Or does this statue represent a classical celebration of the nobility and beauty of the male nude? Likewise, is your conception of Shakespeare's Sonnets affected by knowing that they may well have been

addressed to an 18 year old male? Are they suitable material for Grade 10 English Lit? Would the controversy surrounding the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe or the montages of Evergon have been any less had the artists' sexuality not been in the public domain? How explicit can language and artwork be in AIDS prevention literature?

Let me be quite clear on one thing. The current debate(s) on pornography and obscenity have become lightning rods for a whole number of other issues and grievances. Our perceptions of erotica/pornography do not exist in a vacuum. If radical feminists find the degrading images of women in "Penthouse" and "Men Only" offensive, perhaps the real issue here is the way for some heterosexual males, sexual imagery centres around fantasies of power and

pleasure divorced from love and intimacy. These magazines are a symptom, not the sickness itself. When a man on a rape or murder charge pleads that it was his addiction to porn videos that led him to commit his crimes, is he not really denying all responsibility for his choice of actions, and hoping to escape the consequences? When the self-appointed guardians of public morality deem all erotica obscene, are they not really saying that they have a God-given right to determine what are the acceptable expression of sexuality, or even what are the acceptable forms of sexuality itself?

Slippery things words. Best that they only be handled by suitably trained and specially chose practitioners - in the wrong hands they are simply too dangerous.

Positively Pink

by Adirian Park

Why is there air?

"Why is there air?" This was the title of an old Bill Cosby comedy album from the late sixties. Sometimes we all want to ask (scream) "WHY!?!?" Or is it that we all want to scream "WHY!?!?" sometime or other. Anyway, today I have some "WHY!?!?!?" of my own. For instance;

WHY? If I leave my office door open, (just to be friendly) do people think I'm "The Information Person"? I sit in my office trying to do my work and I get asked, "Where's the biology department?" "Do you know where Dr. Ziggafritz's office is?" "Is there a washroom on this floor?" And here's two of my very favourites; "Do you have a

stapler I can use?"

or maybe "Do you mind if I use your telephone?" Typically, these idiotic requests come when I'm talking long distance on a conference call to George (Bush), Mikhail (Gorbachev), and Redd (Fox). My good friend and mentor (Dr. Know) says, "D.J., that's just another example of the dreaded "Sesame Street Syndrome" (SSS). D.J., they're just too lazy to figure it out for themselves; they need to be fed rote information." Further s/he added, "We have a whole generation of dysfunctional learners, (note here: the mean SAT score has

Well, this is what I think..
By D.J. Eckenrode.

been dropping steadily since 1963) I said, "Yes Dr. Know, '63 is when I took the SAT." Dr. Know said, "S/he was very proud of me." Moving on:

WHY? Do students everywhere and from everywhere, think stairwells are for sitting, not for going from one level (floor) to the other? Have you noticed that often it's virtually impossible to navigate some

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