

Ottawa Report

Canada and Quebec marriage worth saving

Over the last couple of months, I held six Town Hall meetings around the riding of Halton-Peel - in Burlington, Bolton, Georgetown, Acton, Campbellville and Palgrave. In every one of them, we talked about Quebec.

And when we started talking, almost always there was anger - along with some confusion. People told me they thought Quebecers wanted too much out of the rest of the country. Quebec wanted to be considered "distinct," like The Meech Lake Accord said - and a lot of people took that to mean "special," or more important than the rest of us.

Other said they didn't believe the prime minister, and others, when they warned that the death of Meech would mean tough times for Canada. And then there were some folks who just stood up and said "Let them go."

Well, last weekend in Montreal the Quebec Liberal party - the one in power in that province - spelled out what it wants now that Meech was defeated by what they call "English Canada." And it's not a pretty picture. It goes far beyond what was in the first accord which collapsed last June.

Quebec now wants 22 separate powers transferred from the federal government to the province, leaving Ottawa politicians with little control over anything except interest rates and the armed forces. The province,

Garth Turner
MP
Halton-Peel
Progressive Conservative



meanwhile, would control things like social affairs, culture, education, housing, natural resources, health, unemployment insurance, communications, energy, industry and the environment.

Premier Robert Bourassa - and 2,800 other Liberals at the weekend convention - endorsed this position. Quebec now says it will give the rest of Canada 18 months to hammer out a new deal along these lines. At the end of 1992, there will be a referendum in that province - to either approve a new deal within Canada, or to decide on becoming independent.

Bourassa says his first choice is for Quebec to remain a part of Canada, and he will try to negotiate that with Ottawa. The man is reflecting what public opinion polls in that province say: A clear majority of people (up to

70%) want a stronger, freer Quebec with a special relationship to the rest of the country.

This, of course, is not going to be easy.

When a majority of "English" Canadians thought that Meech Lake went too far in just calling Quebec a "distinct society," how can people now agree to gut the federal government and give Quebecers virtual control over their own lives?

I wrote here a week or two ago that there are, as Mulroney called them, dream merchants in Canada - on both sides of the debate. In Quebec the dream merchants last weekend told Liberal delegates they could be free of Canadian rule but still enjoy all the economic benefits of being Canadian.

In the rest of the country, including our own community, there are dream merchants who say Quebec can leave the country and there won't be any economic consequences. They say six million taxpayers and a quarter of the economy makes no difference to the health of Canada.

And I think they're wrong. I have no intention, as an MP, of sitting back while the map of Canada is gutted, and muttering that we may be better off as a result.

Don't get me wrong - I have no idea what would happen here in Georgetown or Milton or Bolton if Quebec took a walk. And I don't want to find out. In one of the

community papers last week I was called a "fear-monger" for even cautioning that separation could end up hurting people on both sides of a new border.

Well, I just don't see what anybody's got to gain from this. I don't agree with Robert Bourassa that the federal government should be holed, and all that power shifted to Quebec City. I also don't agree with people who say the country has to stay just like it is, and if Quebecers don't like it they can take a hike.

We can get angry at the separatists. We can question why there isn't a Canadian flag in Quebec's National Assembly. We can ask why it is Quebecers feel so mistreated in this country which gives them one of the highest standards of living in the world.

But we also shouldn't let anger or dismay blind us. The marriage has got some problems right now - but it's marriage worth saving. I'd appreciate your thoughts on how we might do that.

Queen's Park Report

NDP initiatives discussed

I would like to begin this week's report by outlining current developments to two government measures which I discussed in previous reports.

In December, my column dealt with three new initiatives, one of which was the announcement by Community and Social Services Minister Zanana Akande about four stages of a plan aimed toward addressing poverty in Ontario. I had indicated that Ms. Akande had asked the Advisory Group on New Social Assistance Legislation to report back with advice on those recommendations of the Social Assistance Review Committee (SARC) that could be implemented without legislative changes. On March 4, 1991, the Minister released Back on Track, the first report of the committee. It includes 88 "action items" designed to significantly improve and update the social assistance system and be more responsive to the needs of people. Many of these items are based on the recommendations from the 1988 SARC Report entitled "Transitions". Ms. Akande will review the report and consider what changes can be implemented.

One of my reports in January explained the proposed changes to the Pay Equity Act, 1987, and the commitment by Labour Minister Bob Mackenzie to release information papers on proportional and proxy comparisons. On February 15, 1991, the Minister released the paper "Extending Pay Equity by Proportional Value and Proxy Comparisons" which consists of two parts. The first section, developed after extensive consultations, presents the government policy on proportional value comparisons. The second part, dealing with proxy comparisons for the public sector only, outlines the approach the government proposes to take, and raises issues for consultation. Public sector unions, employee associations, employers and individuals are invited to provide input on implementing proxy comparisons. According to Mr. Mackenzie, both approaches will be included when our government introduces amendments to the Act during the spring session



Noel Duignan
Halton North
MPP
New Democratic Party

of the Legislature. He also affirmed our commitment to "finding other venues to make equitable wages a reality for all working women in Ontario," a goal to be pursued through additional public consultation. Copies of the paper are available on request by calling the Ministry at 416-326-7400.

There are also numerous new initiatives which have been announced and I would like to outline two of them.

The Ministry of Energy has awarded \$800,000 in grants for two cogeneration plants, one of which will be built in Mississauga. Cogeneration is an energy-efficient technology that involves the production of two or more types of useful energy from a simple source. Both proposed cogeneration plants will use natural gas, the cleanest-burning fossil fuel, to produce thermal and electric energy. The grant will allow TransAlta Resources Corporation of Markham to demonstrate the cogeneration technology of the two plants and to assess its possible application

to other Ontario sites. "Cogeneration is important because it can help to increase our energy supply and will have a low impact on the environment," announced Energy Minister Jenny Carter. The plants are scheduled to be completed in late 1992. The Mississauga plant will be built at the McDonnell Douglas Canada Ltd. manufacturing complex in Malton and is expected to generate 106 megawatts of electrical power.

On February 22, 1991, Skills Development Minister Richard Allen announced a program to help registered apprentices who have been laid off during the recession. When these employees lose their jobs, they may also lose the opportunity to become fully qualified journeypersons, and the workforce loses individuals important to post-recession recovery. The initiative will assist up to 2,000 apprentices continue their training and will include accelerating the in-school portion of apprenticeship training, and helping apprentices find a place with one or more employers. The program also provides technical training at an alternative location that resembles the workplace. Counselling will be offered to help these individuals determine what options are available to them. Assistance will be delivered locally by community organizations across the province, coordinated by the Ministry's District Apprenticeship Offices. For more information, call the Mississauga office at (416) 897-1551 or the Training Hotline at 1-800-387-5656.

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