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## Quebec

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For Canada, the year 1995 was dominated by one issue: the Quebec referendum on sovereignty. Because it threatened to end Canada as we know it, the theme of the referendum received the lion's share of attention in what many described as Canada's *annus horribilis*. For Quebec itself, little else seems to match the importance of this event in terms of the year's news stories. Though much else was going on in Quebec in 1995, most events seemed to be viewed in terms of their impact on the main story: sovereignty.

The question of a referendum on Quebec sovereignty was bound to arise now that Quebec had a new Parti Québécois government. To add to this, the premier-elect Jacques Parizeau was strongly in favour of renewing the debate over independence. Parizeau felt that since the late 1980s the Parti Québécois had lost touch with its central mission: the achievement of political independence. Upon being elected leader, Parizeau called for a renewal of the PQ's initial mandate, and an end to 'soft-pedalling' on the issue of sovereignty. Taking a hardline stance, Parizeau even resurrected the word 'separation,' long purged from the PQ's official vocabulary. Parizeau, who had gained political prominence as Quebec finance minister in the Lévesque years, was seen as the logical leader of the PQ. Observers noted, however, that Parizeau had an 'image problem.' He was seen as stiff, patrician, arrogant, and out-of-touch with the concerns of average Quebecers. Though Parizeau had led the PQ to victory in the 1994 Quebec election, pundits pointed out that this victory was attributable to the party's popularity – and not necessarily that of its leader. Upon becoming premier, Parizeau made it clear that the time was right for a second referendum on sovereignty.

Parizeau's confidence was no doubt bolstered by the presence of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa. After the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990, a new federal party had been created based on the perception that Canada was an unworkable federation that would never respond to Quebec's legitimate demands. The failure of the Charlottetown Accord in 1993 only added to this perception. Led by Lucien Bouchard, a former cabinet minister under the Mulroney government, the sovereignist Bloc had captured fifty-four of Quebec's seventy-five federal seats in the 1993 election. It represented the majority of francophone Quebec ridings in the federal Parliament, and used this setting as a platform from which to highlight sovereignist positions. Bouchard proved a masterful speaker, channelling Quebecer's sense that they were an aggrieved people, and imparting passionate idealism into a cause that once seemed doomed. With efforts at constitutional reform at a seeming impasse under the Chrétien Liberals, and with the fiery invective of Lucien Bouchard lighting up the sovereignist cause, the moment seemed right for a new referendum that would decide Quebec's political future once and for all. Unlike the case in 1980 when there was merely a sovereignist government in Quebec, in 1995 there was also a sovereignist party representing Quebec in Ottawa. At the time, it must have seemed that this parallel presence of the sovereignists on both the provincial and federal levels could not fail to bolster the separatist cause. The presence of Lucien Bouchard and the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa, however, would spell doom for Parizeau's personal political fortunes. But for the Parti Québécois, Bouchard's involvement in the 1995 referendum proved to be a charm that would bring Quebec within a hair's breadth of achieving political sovereignty.



The campaign got off to a slow start. In late January, Premier Parizeau travelled to Paris, where the two leading presidential candidates assured him that France would recognize a sovereign Quebec. In order to bring sovereignty back onto the public agenda in Quebec itself, on Monday, 5 February, the PQ government began a series of public hearings on the future of Quebec. Lasting through early March, sixteen regional commissions as well as two roving commissions (one for youth and another for seniors) heard briefings from constituent groups. The mandate of the commission was to examine the government's draft bill on Quebec sovereignty. The federalist parties, including the provincial Liberals, sensing that these hearings were designed simply as forums for supporters of the 'yes' option, decided to boycott the hearings. Although they began with great fanfare, the hearings failed to provide the expected boost to the referendum campaign. Their one-sidedness meant that they came across merely as a sovereignist gabfest, and they failed to generate any heated public debate. On Saturday, 25 March, for example, the sovereignist organ *Le Devoir* noted that the brief submitted by Quebec artists' groups was only lukewarm in its endorsement of sovereignty. Although the proceedings of the sovereignty commission were dutifully covered by Quebec cable TV, they proved to be a ratings bust – perhaps because they couldn't possibly compete with the live coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial.

By mid-April a power struggle had emerged between Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard for control of the sovereignty movement. Parizeau, always a hard-liner, felt it necessary to appeal to Quebecers with a clear choice: the status quo or separation. Bouchard favoured a softer approach, and in the first week of April he called for the sovereignty movement to

emphasize a formal economic association between a politically separate Quebec and the rest of Canada. In essence, Bouchard was reverting to the old formula used by René Lévesque, that of sovereignty-association. In doing this, Bouchard appeared to be challenging Parizeau's leadership by pointing out that his option was unworkable. Polls done by Leger & Leger in the week following 13 April, confirmed that Quebecers were more likely to favour sovereignty if it were coupled with economic association, and also revealed that they were more likely to endorse sovereignty if Lucien Bouchard were the official leader of the pro-sovereignty side.

When the campaign began, Jacques Parizeau, as premier of Quebec, was the official leader of the 'yes' campaign. But from the start, the question of leadership became a thorny issue, since many felt that Lucien Bouchard, head of the sovereignist Bloc Québécois in Ottawa, was the natural leader of the pro-sovereignty movement. When coupled with the fact that the two men differed greatly in terms of personality, political philosophy, and electoral style, this spelled problems for the 'oui' side from the very outset. Parizeau may have been perceived as the logical heir to the legacy of René Lévesque, but many observers found that he came across as coldly rational, overconfident, distant, and, moreover, incapable of enflaming nationalist passions. Neither his marriage to political glamour girl Lisette Lapointe nor attempts by political handlers to soften Parizeau's image had produced the desired result. Bouchard, on the other hand, though not the official leader of the campaign, seemed to have the right stuff. Telegenic and warm, Bouchard had survived a life-threatening ordeal with flesh-eating disease that had cost him a leg, but which, at the same time, conferred upon him the status of near-sainthood. A natural and masterful orator, Bouchard used strong language and mustered considerable eloquence in speeches that mixed historical fact and fiction, intellect and emotion, in equal doses. It was clear, then, that though Parizeau was the nominal leader of the sovereignty movement, that a 'yes' vote would have to be obtained in spite of him, not because of him. Thus the federalist side was somewhat justified in its early confidence that the sovereignist campaign was doomed from the start.

The official leader of the 'non' side was Daniel Johnson, the leader of the opposition Liberal Party in the Quebec National Assembly. Never a charismatic figure, the stolid Johnson was left to handle the sovereignists on his own. The federal government's initial strategy was to downplay, if not to ignore altogether, the threat of sovereignty. This was based on two perceptions: first, the sovereignist campaign, under Parizeau's leadership, was failing to draw much interest and support, and second, the infighting between the two camps within the sovereignist movement itself seemed to indicate that the campaign was going nowhere. So the Chrétien Liberals decided to stand back, stay above the fray, and watch the sovereignists self-destruct. When, on Wednesday, 19 April, the National Commission on the Future of Quebec published its report, it was perceived as a non-event, especially in Ottawa. Public-opinion polls had revealed that most Quebecers were tired of constitutional issues, and Ottawa's strategy was to capitalize on this by refusing to engage in debate. Indeed, Jean Chrétien had taken the step of putting Lucienne Robillard, a former Quebec cabinet minister under premiers Robert Bourassa and Daniel Johnson, in charge of the federal referendum campaign. This move, in itself was an indication of how lightly the Canadian Prime Minister took the threat of sovereignty. Designating a cabinet minister as being 'officially' in charge of the federal referendum campaign, the Chrétien government seemed to signal that dealing with the Quebec sovereignists was merely one other dossier among many. In her comments on the *Report of the National Commission on the Future of Quebec*, Minister Robillard was terse: 'It's time to turn to other things,' she said, implying that sovereignty was a non-issue. Essentially, the federal government's strategy was to position itself as being more in tune with the real needs of Quebecers. While the PQ spent time and money endlessly debating sovereignty, they argued, the federal government was looking after what really mattered to Quebecers. Robillard continued: 'Quebecers expect the government of Quebec to provide good government and to address the real challenges of today and the real concerns of the people, as the federal government is doing.'



On Friday, 19 May, the last class graduated from the Collège Militaire Royale in St Jean-sur-Richelieu. The federal government had announced that it was closing the Collège – a move many felt was ill-advised, since the Collège strengthened many young francophones' allegiance to Canada. Above all, the closing became another pre-referendum issue. To sovereignists it seemed to prove that the federal government didn't care about integrating francophones into the Canadian army. To perceptive federalists, the move seemed to demonstrate that Canada was abandoning yet another aspect of its symbolic presence in Quebec.

Still, the sovereignty campaign failed to evoke much interest. Instead, headlines were devoted to Quebec's biker wars, which heated up in the summer months. The federalists seemed to have gauged the public mood correctly, and Parizeau's critics had proof that neither the leader nor his hardline position had much popular appeal. Bending to pressures within

the Parti Québécois itself, Parizeau brought Lucien Bouchard into the campaign more formally. On 12 June, a pact was made between Jacques Parizeau, Lucien Bouchard, and Mario Dumont, the young leader of the fledgling Action Démocratique du Québec. According to this new pact, Quebec, following a 'yes' vote, would use the year after to offer the rest of Canada 'a formal treaty of economic and political partnership.' The pact also called for maintaining existing economic links; a council of cabinet ministers, in equal numbers from the two countries, each side having a veto; a joint Parliament with little real power; and a tribunal to settle disputes. The pact concluded, however, that Quebec would become sovereign – whether or not the rest of Canada signed a new treaty – one year after a 'yes' vote. Canadians tuning into the national news were treated with a video-clip of Parizeau with his arms crossed in front of him, shaking both Bouchard's and Dumont's hands simultaneously while standing in between them – the awkward two-handed handshake that came to symbolize the new unity of the sovereignist triumvirate. Premier Parizeau once again blundered on 13 June, when, in a meeting with Ottawa-based foreign ambassadors, he claimed that Quebecers, in the event of a 'yes' vote in a sovereignty referendum, would be 'trapped like lobsters thrown into boiling water.' Quebec cartoonists had a field day with this, issuing innumerable and memorable caricatures, like that of Terry Mosher (Aislin) of the *Montreal Gazette* depicting Jacques Parizeau himself, immersed in political hot water. When Parizeau returned from vacationing in the south of France in the first week of August, he launched a political offensive, accusing Ottawa of conspiring with the nine English-speaking premiers to 'gang up' on Quebec. This was followed by a separatist road trip, in which a busload of about thirty PQ and BQ politicians toured nationalist strongholds, hosting lunches, dinners, and news conferences, and dispensing promises of future government largesse. On 15 August, the trip culminated with the appearance of Parizeau, Bouchard, and Dumont, in Alma, Quebec – reunited for the first time since the singing of their June pact.

In early September, Bill 1, outlining the strategy for the achievement of sovereignty, was tabled in the National Assembly. The bill included items on self-determination, sovereignty, a partnership treaty, a new constitution, and considerations of territory, citizenship, treaties, and international organizations and alliances. Interestingly, the 12 June pact was only included as a 'schedule' tacked on to the end of the bill. On 1 October, Jacques Parizeau issued the official decree launching the referendum. Meanwhile, 'yes' support had been given an unexpected boost by the statements of two federalist Quebec businessmen. On 24 September,



insurance executive Claude Garcia stated publicly, 'You must not just win October 30, you have to crush them.' And on 3 October, Bombardier chief Laurent Beaudoin suggested that he might move the company out of Quebec if it separated. Such statements helped strengthen the view that the 'no' side was led by big-business interests, and that for them, keeping Canada together was merely a matter of looking after the bottom line. Another federalist blunder occurred when Senator Jacques Hébert referred to separatist commentator Josée Legault as a 'separatist cow.' Sovereignist women began wearing cow stickers to show their solidarity with Ms Legault, in a kind of bizarre inversion of the infamous 'Yvette' affair of the 1980 referendum.

But faux-pas were not limited to the 'no' side. In a 15 October speech to women, Lucien Bouchard stated, 'Do you think it makes sense that we have so few children in Quebec? We are one of the white races that has the fewest children. It doesn't make sense.' This comment was seized upon by the media as not only racist, but degrading to women, since it implied women shouldn't have the right to limit their fertility. Suzanne Marcil, wife of 'no' leader Daniel Johnson, called the comments 'insulting, degrading, humiliating.' Later, Vice-Premier Bernard Landry penned a letter to the American Secretary of State in which he scolded the Clinton administration, warning it not to intervene in Quebec's affairs.

The federalist response to the Quebec referendum was low-key, especially when compared to that waged by Trudeau in 1980. The federal Liberals read the polls as indicating that there would not be a sovereignist victory. Prime Minister Chrétien, who polls revealed continued to be unpopular in Quebec, was largely absent from the campaign. By putting Labour Minister Lucienne Robillard in charge of responding to the separatists, the Prime Minister effectively silenced other strong federalist voices in the cabinet. Also, Robillard, a relative unknown in Quebec, was unable to muster much support in that province for federalism. Unlike Trudeau, Chrétien made no constitutional promises to Quebec, choosing instead to extoll the merits of Canada and the negative economic consequences of separation. Chrétien made a calculated effort to avoid making too many speeches and public appearances in Quebec, because he did not want to give the impression that the government's entire agenda would be consumed by the sovereignty campaign. Nor did the federal government distribute any extra money in Quebec in order to attract votes to the 'no' side. Political analysts pointed out the fact that many of Chrétien's key political advisers were Montreal anglophones. The Chrétien team's strategy can be easily summarized: it was to give the appearance that the political sovereignty of Quebec was not a threat. By

refusing to treat it as a serious possibility, the government hoped to convey an image of strength. The federal Liberals had to give the appearance of not being cowed into a defensive position by the separatists for two reasons. First, they believed that any appearance of panic or weakness would give the impression that the sovereingtists were a force to contend with. Second, Chrétien had to be sensitive to critics in the Reform Party who argued that Quebec, once again, was dominating the federal political agenda.

The task of defending federalism in Quebec, then, was left to the provincial Liberals. The Liberal team was highly skilled and effectively organized, and Johnson himself surprised many observers with his trenchant critique of the sovereignists' goals and strategy and his strong defence of a united Canada. As opposition leader, Johnson was fighting the battle that would make or break his political career. A stellar performance would ensure his re-election at the end of the Parti Québécois mandate, but a lacklustre campaign would spell political doom. Still, Johnson, plagued at the outset by what many called an 'image problem' – he appeared cold and phlegmatic to voters – was no match for the messianic appeal of Lucien Bouchard. Also, he and Jean Chrétien, his federal counterpart, appeared to be at odds over the question of whether or not Quebec should be recognized as a distinct society. Appealing to the 'soft' nationalist vote, Johnson hinted that a 'no' vote was not a vote for the status quo, whereas Chrétien's adamant refusal to even discuss constitutional issues suggested that in effect it was. In the end, the most that could be said was that, under Johnson's leadership, the Quebec federalists did not lose any ground – which is a way of saying that he waged a competent, if unspectacular, campaign.

Public opinion at the time seemed to indicate that the combined federalist strategy was working. Despite months of build-up, polls continued to show the 'yes' side trailing the 'no' side. Facing the prospect of inevitable defeat, at an 7 October rally at the Université de Montréal, Parizeau handed over the referendum campaign to Lucien Bouchard, who polls revealed was by far the most popular politician in Quebec. Parizeau nominated Bouchard as his 'chief negotiator' for a partnership with Canada in the event of a sovereignist victory. 'Who will really defend our interests?' Parizeau asked after he appointed the Bloc Québécois leader chief negotiator. 'Who will represent us with honesty and efficiency? Who will keep his word?' The largely sovereignist crowd of students chanted 'Lucien! Lucien! Lucien!' Bouchard had become the symbolic leader of the sovereignist campaign, and with this gesture Parizeau tactfully stepped aside. This change immediately reversed the fortunes of the sovereignist camp, and in a few short weeks Lucien Bouchard would single-handedly transform a losing campaign into a winning proposition.



Aside from the enormous personal popularity of Lucien Bouchard, several elements contributed to the sovereignist near-victory. The sovereignist publicity campaign used warm, bright, colours, and eye-popping visuals that imparted a feel-good, flower-power atmosphere to the 'yes' side. The sovereignist posters had a simple message: the word OUI in large letters. Daisies, peace signs, happy faces, globes, and even a Canadian loonie were used in lieu of the 'O' in OUI. Below the OUI were the words 'et ça devient possible.' The slogan, 'OUI et ça devient possible,' didn't really mean anything, other than a vague promise of the potential for change in a sovereign Quebec. Television ads featured Lucien Bouchard in casual clothes and informal surroundings, in soft-focus, and speaking in a relaxed way about his life, his dreams, and his hopes for a bright future. This publicity campaign was designed to attract female voters, who, statistics had shown, tended to vote 'non' and somehow needed to be wooed into the soveregnist camp.

In terms of its promotional materials, the 'no' side's performance was disastrous. Only one official poster was designed: a red sign with the words 'La Separa-NON-tion?' blazed across it. The word 'NON' was placed in the middle of 'Separation,' dividing the word in half, emphasizing that what was at stake here was the separation of Quebec from Canada. Actually, above these large letters was the phrase 'On a raison de dire.' In effect, though it was hard to decipher, the poster said 'La separation? On a raison de dire NON.' The slogan was probably designed to impart the message that what was indeed at stake was the separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada, since polls revealed that only a minority of Quebecers were in favour of outright separation. But instead, the sign seemed bland, strident, and pronounced a confused and confusing message of angry impotence. It seemed to be launching a challenge, to be saying 'NON' you cannot separate. The dull federalist poster, then, said a loud 'NON' to separation (a negative message), whereas the PQ's posters exploded with the colorful possibilities of a 'OUI' to Quebec (a positive message). Even if you read the federalist sign more carefully, the stark lettering and the message itself invoked reason ('on a raison de dire NON') whereas the PQ's bright and whimsical signs invoked passion. At the same time, other PQ campaign posters said 'OUI – Changement' and implied that the alternative was 'NON – status quo.' Sovereignist campaigners hammered home this point: that a 'yes' vote was a vote for change, and a No vote was a vote for the status quo.

In this way the sovereignist side successfully created a strong message that only a 'yes' vote would lead to significant change, and an end to years of tiresome – and fruitless – constitutional negotiation.

The 'oui' side was also more successful in sending out a message about the role of (Quebec) government to effect positive change in (Quebec) society. In June, Conservative Mike Harris had won the Ontario election, promising a 'Common Sense Revolution' that would bring down taxes through dramatically reducing government spending and the role of government in people's lives. At the same time, the Chrétien Liberals had turned to a program of fiscal austerity in their own attempt to balance the federal government's books. The government of Quebec also needed to address its debt and deficit problems, but the Parti Québécois promised that theirs would be a better way. Bouchard promised that a vote for sovereignty would mean endorsement of a kinder, gentler, made-in-Quebec solution to the problem of balancing the government's books. There would be no workfare programs, no homeless people, no soup kitchens, no hospital closings and school board amalgamations of the kind seen in Mike Harris's Ontario. Instead, in a sovereign Quebec, there would be a lower deficit without increasing taxes, and maintenance, if not improvement, of existing social services. Thus the sovereignist camp was able to style itself as a proponent of the old-style social democracy so familiar to PQ supporters. Saying 'oui,' then, would not only be about creating a new country, it would also be about saying 'yes' to a more caring society. While the rest of Canada seemed to be engaged in a relentless, socially disruptive campaign of slash-and-burn deficit reduction, Bouchard argued that Quebec, once sovereign, would take the high road to fiscal health. Though the PQ had plans to begin drastic cuts to government spending, these plans were carefully put off until after the referendum results. Interestingly, Bouchard was never able to explain exactly how he would maintain social programs in the face of severe financial constraints. When faced with this and other tough questions about Quebec in the aftermath of a 'yes' vote, Bouchard would promise that the transformative power of sovereignty would be a 'baton magique' that would put things right. To quote him exactly, 'A Yes has magical meaning, because with a wave of a wand it will change the whole situation.'

Other aspects of the Bouchard campaign compelled voters to endorse the sovereignist side. Once Bouchard came to the helm, the 'yes' side was able to strongly convey the message that a 'no' vote was a vote for the status quo, whereas a 'oui' was the first step in a wonderful societal transformation. Following the aftermath of a successful 'yes' victory,



Quebecers would not be divided by race, language, geography, or ethnicity, and not feel anxious and fearful for the future. Instead, Quebecers would gather together and embark upon a new path in solidarity, with feelings of warmth and with sincere hopes for a bright and prosperous future. In his speeches, Bouchard often conjured up memories of Quebec's humiliation at the hands of the federalists – the 'Night of the Long Knives' (in which Bouchard stated that the federalists abandoned the Quebec negotiating team in Hull and returned to Ottawa, when indeed the opposite was true), Meech Lake, Charlottetown – and promised an end to such humiliation. After a 'yes' vote, Quebec would negotiate a new political and economic partnership with Canada 'd'égal à égal' (between equals). In retrospect, many would observe that, aside from the personal charisma of the man himself, it was Bouchard's offer of sovereignty as a renewed partnership between Quebec and Canada that had the most profound impact on the resulting vote. Exit polls taken on the night of the referendum demonstrated that this had indeed been the case – Quebecers who endorsed sovereignty believed that, in the aftermath of a 'yes' victory, voters would still use Canadian currency, hold Canadian passports, and send ministers to Ottawa. In short, many 'yes' supporters believed they were endorsing a new federal-provincial arrangement, not the outright political independence of Quebec.

In the month of October, the question of citizenship and passports became a hot-button issue. Would Quebecers still have the right to bear a Canadian passport after a 'yes' vote? Would they have to surrender their Canadian passports in favour of a Québécois passport? Lucien Bouchard was quoted as saying, 'The Quebec passport will be a beautiful thing. It will be a symbol of what we are, the symbol of our people, the symbol of our state, the symbol of our identity, and we'll be well-received everywhere with a Québécois passport.' Not surprisingly, Montreal's passport offices were deluged with panicked citizens trying to apply for a Canadian passport or renewing their existing one.

As was the case in 1980, the wording of the actual referendum question must also be taken into consideration when examining the results. Quebecers, in 1995, were not being asked to vote 'yes' or 'no' to a short, clearly worded, specific question. They were being asked to endorse Bill 1 and the 21 June pact signed by Parizeau, Bouchard, and Dumont. The deal was already in place, and Quebecers were now being asked if they endorsed it. This had the advantage of making sovereignty seem like a *fait accompli,* which merely needed popular endorsement to go into effect. On 30 October, the question Quebecers voted on was: 'Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer

to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?' The question made it appear that voters were ratifying a kind of new deal with Canada – a governing arrangement that recognized Quebec's sovereignty while creating a new political and economic partnership with the rest of Canada.

Meanwhile, Quebec's Cree and Inuit nations staged referendums of their own. Long recognized for their overwhelmingly anti-separatist stance, Quebec's Native peoples decided to add their voice to the referendum campaign, and to do so in a splashy and very effective way. Quebec's 12,000-member Cree nation held a referendum on the question on 23 October, followed two days later by a similar poll of Quebec's 7,500 Inuit. The question asked was much more succinct than that proposed by the PQ: 'Do you agree that Quebec will become sovereign? Yes or No?' In both cases Quebec independence was rejected by 96 per cent of voters. Together, the Cree and Inuit lay claim to the resources of two-thirds of northern Quebec – territory they said would not be included in a sovereign Quebec. This gesture presented a dire counterpoint to the sovereignist promise of a smooth transition to nationhood for a sovereign Quebec. It also raised the question of just who had the right to secede from whom and on what terms. The First Nations' campaign seemed to suggest that if Canada were divisible, so was Quebec.

On Tuesday, 24 October, the 'no' camp staged a monster rally in the Verdun arena that was broadcast live on Quebec television. The rally was intended to bolster federalist morale, but the media coverage revealed just how desperate the situation truly was. The CBC's backstage cameras revealed a momentary expression of near-panic on the Prime Minister's face as he was about to go out and address the anxious crowd. Chrétien was even seen warmly greeting political opponent Jean Charest, who throughout the campaign seemed to be the only federalist capable of mustering some genuine passion for Canada. The Prime Minister looked genuinely grateful for Charest's contribution. The cameras revealed what many Canadians feared was only too true: that the federalists were aware that they could quite possibly go down to defeat and were making an extraordinary, desperate, and last-ditch effort to do whatever was in their power to prevent this from happening. Polls taken days before the actual vote revealed that more voters believed the 'yes' side would win, and the media was explaining this surge in sovereignist support to 'l'effet Bouchard.' At the rally, Chrétien seemingly reversed his strategy on the question of recognizing Quebec as a distinct society, saying, 'We will be keeping



open all the other paths for change, including the administrative and constitutional paths.'

After Bouchard took control of the 'oui' campaign, polls revealed that the sovereignists were now marginally in the lead. It became clear that the 'yes' camp could indeed win, if only by a slim majority. The federalist camp was in disarray, having realized too late that they had misjudged the situation. Canadians watched as the nightly national newscasts beamed in images of a beatific Lucien Bouchard touring Quebec and being hailed as a victor, surrounded by sovereignist campaigners jubilant after yet another poll revealed the likelihood of a 'yes' victory. At what seemed like the eleventh hour, Canadians seemed to have decided that if the fate of their country was left to federalist politicians, then they were about to lose Canada. A huge rally was organized by ordinary Canadians who decided to march to Montreal to show their love and support of the Québécois people. The message was supposed to be 'O.K., so the federal government of Canada has gotten us into this mess, but see how much we love you and care about you and want you to stay.' On Friday, 27 October – three days before the referendum vote – an estimated 150,000 citizens from across Canada descended on Montreal, invading the downtown streets, waving Canadian and Quebec flags, demonstrating their patriotism and their heartfelt concern.

Despite the good intentions of these patriotic Canadians, their effort was seen by many as 'too little, too late.' Many sovereignists felt that this unusual display of affection was only brought upon by the direness of the situation, and that it lacked sincerity. Still, during the demonstration, patriotic Canadians had held up a giant Canadian flag that was passed hand-to-hand like a wave across the oceanic crowd. Sensing a moment of incredible poignancy and power, the media provided aerial photographs of this huge flag floating on a sea of desperate Canadians, which became a startling image of the sense of urgency, if not panic, felt by many in the days leading up to the Quebec referendum of 1995. Indeed, this became the image of the year – not just for Quebec but for all of Canada. The sovereignists launched a formal complaint challenging the legality of the event, alleging Quebec's electoral laws had been violated. Meanwhile, newspapers began to speak of a recurrence of the 'Brinks phenomenon,' as nervous Quebec investors began moving their funds out of the province. The Quebec government and its agencies bought up hundreds of millions of Canadian dollars on 24 October in a move to stabilize markets in the days leading up to the vote. On Wednesday, 25 October, U.S. President Bill Clinton, ignoring Bernard Landry's dire

warning, waded into the campaign, strongly endorsing Canada as 'a great model for the rest of the world and a great partner for the United States.'

On the day of the referendum, all of Canada seemed to hold its collective breath as it awaited the outcome of the vote. Early in the evening, when enough votes began to come in, Quebecers – and Canadians – witnessed an agonizing spectacle. Federalists and sovereignists were frozen in front of their television screens as early results put the sovereignists in the lead. The vote was so extremely close that for hours it vacillated somewhere above, then somewhere below, the 50-per-cent mark. This razor-thin margin of victory continued to shift from one camp to other throughout the evening, and Quebecers lived through what could only be described as extreme anguish. Finally, poll results from Montreal-area ridings placed the federalists slightly in the lead, and there was a sigh of relief from the 'no' camp, and deep despondency for the 'yes' supporters. The final vote results – 50.6 voting against independence and 49.4 in favour – left Quebecers and Canadians of all political leanings stunned. Sovereignist sympathizers were left feeling they had come dazzlingly close to victory, which somehow seemed a small comfort when compared to the realization that, in effect, they had lost. Federalists across Canada felt a mixture of relief, anger, and confusion. Their option had won, but only by the narrowest of margins. Federalists felt that Canada had dodged a bullet, but there was no exhilarating feeling that usually accompanies a brush with death. Instead, many Canadians felt bitter because they believed that the politicians of both provincial and federal levels had bungled things so badly that the situation had gotten to this point. In the aftermath of the near-win by the 'oui' side, patriotic Canadians, all too aware of the possibility that things could easily have gone otherwise, embarked on collective soul-searching to determine how to ensure this kind of thing would never happen again. Sovereignists, after tasting the bitterness of defeat, realized that the narrowness of the 'non' victory meant that they were closer than ever to their goal. The headline of Quebec City's *Le Soleil* put it succinctly: 'On recommence' (We begin again).

On the night of the referendum itself, Jacques Parizeau conceded defeat in a speech in which he blamed the result on 'money and the ethnic vote.' This was probably the worst faux pas of the entire referendum campaign, since it came across as a stridently racist comment. It severely damaged the hard-won credibility of the sovereignist movement, so it came as no surprise when, on 31 October, Jacques Parizeau announced his resignation as leader of the Parti Québécois. By this point, it was clear who had become the real leader of sovereignist forces in



Quebec. The near-victory of the 'yes' side on 30 October had been due to the efforts of one man: Lucien Bouchard. On 22 December, on his fifty-seventh birthday, Bouchard filed his nomination papers for the Parti Québécois leadership. At the same time, federalists across Canada recognized that Jean Charest, leader of the residual Conservative forces on Parliament Hill, had proven himself by far the most effective defender of Canada throughout the referendum campaign. Charest had spoken on radio, appeared on television, and had made innumerable public appearances passionately defending his vision of Canada. Many felt that this man, who officially had had no formal role to play in the federalist campaign, was, just as Bouchard had been for the sovereignist camp, its de facto leader. He seemed able to speak to the Québécois people as one of their own, and demonstrated that he had the political credibility, intellectual clout, and enough passion and persuasiveness to take on Lucien Bouchard as an equal. Charest, despite his youthfulness and cherub-like appearance, shone as a rather hawkish and relentless critic of Parizeau, Bouchard, and the whole sovereignist campaign. Shortly after the close referendum result, rumours began to circulate that Jean Charest was being considered as an eventual successor to Daniel Johnson.

In December 1995, Chrétien sought to make good on his campaign promises of change by trying to achieve politically what had proven impossible constitutionally. Using their strong majority in the House of Commons, the Chrétien Liberals passed legislation recognizing Quebec as a distinct society, and offering to extend its veto on constitutional changes to four regions: Quebec, Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, and the West. Chrétien insisted that these measures would achieve 'change without revolution, progress without rupture.' This was almost immediately followed by protest from British Columbia, which felt slighted by the fact that, as the most populous province west of Ontario, it had been lumped into the amorphous 'West.' The Chrétien government, recognizing its error, amended the formula to include British Columbia as a separate region. These changes were received poorly in Quebec, where they were seen as cosmetic, face-saving strategies on the part of the federal government. By trying to achieve legislatively what had been impossible to attain constitutionally, the Chrétien government indicated its inability to effect real changes in Canadian federation.

Quebec's economy withered in 1995, and Montreal had the dubious honour of becoming what one journalist called 'the welfare capital of Canada.' Any success stories of 1995 were dwarfed by news about nervous investors shaken by the potential of Quebec achieving sovereignty. Another theme that dominated business headlines was whether or not a

sovereign Quebec would have to renegotiate its entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement. The only businesses that benefited from the Quebec referendum, it seems, were polling companies, which posted record profits. In the days leading up to the referendum vote, some banks stocked their Quebec branches with extra cash anticipating a run of Canadian dollars by depositors nervous about the referendum. Rumours spread that banks south of the border were receiving imputs of funds from jittery Canadians wishing to transfer their savings into U.S. dollars. And in an unprecedented move, in the days before the referendum, the big banks all but shut down Canada's $300-billion-a-day foreign exchange market. On 27 October, when the major banks stopped trading, the Canadian dollar was pegged at 73.21 cents U.S.

In the world of Quebec sports, 1995 was also an *annus horribilis*. The Montreal Canadiens did not make the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time in twenty-five years. The Quebec City NHL franchise finally decamped for Colorado, and on 2 December, Canadiens goalie Patrick Roy left the ice in the middle of a game with Detroit, saying, 'This is my last game in Montreal.' Four days later he was traded to the Colorado Avalanche, which went on to win the Stanley Cup playoffs. The night of the Avalanche's Stanley Cup victory, the Quebec CBC television news carried a rather pathetic story of a group of diehard Nordiques fans celebrating on the streets of Quebec City the victory of a team which they still saw as theirs. On a more upbeat note, in May, Quebec driving demi-god Jacques Villeneuve won the Indianapolis 500, winning the princely sum of $1,312,019 U.S.

Politics also seemed to cast a pall on Quebec's cultural life. Two Quebec culture ministers resigned – Marie Malavoy was forced to leave at the end of 1994 when it was revealed that she had voted in Quebec elections before becoming a Canadian citizen. She was succeeded by Rita-Dionne Marsolais, whose hands-on management style alienated the artistic community. Premier Parizeau took over the all-important culture portfolio himself, and finally, in early August, handed the job to high-profile minister Louise Beaudoin. Establishing good relations between the Quebec government and the artistic community was a high priority, since artists, traditionally, had been strong supporters of sovereignty. During the referendum campaign itself, however, observers noted that artists were nowhere to be seen, especially if one compared the situation to that which had prevailed in 1980. Sovereignty, it seemed, was no longer an important issue to artists, an impression that was only bolstered by the fact that the 'yes' side appeared to be losing until the final weeks of the referendum. Perhaps because of the fact that the media noted their absence, the artistic community did come out in favour of the 'yes' side, belatedly staging a concert at the Montreal Forum, featuring stars like Paul Piché and Rémy Girard, among others.



In film, theatre wonderkid Robert Lepage made his film-directing debut with *Le Confessional*, a complex story of family and betrayal that took Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* as its starting point. Though it received much media attention, *Le Confessional* was neither a critical nor financial success. Much more popular with Quebec moviegoers was *Liste Noire*, a thriller about a prostitute and a corrupt judge. In theatre, Denise Filiatrault revived Michel Tremblay's 1970 musical *Demain matin Montreal m'attend*, and Michel-Marc Bouchard's allegorical *Le Voyage du couronnement* was produced by the Theatre du Nouveau Monde to both critical and popular acclaim. Record numbers of Quebecers tuned in to watch Radio-Canada's *La Petite Vie*, a farcical satire of life in suburban Quebec. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts staged two megashows simultaneously on symbolist art and classic cars, but neither proved very popular with Quebec audiences, leaving the Museum with a multi-million dollar debt. On a more positive note, the Francofolies, an annual festival of French-language pop music, attracted nearly half-a-million people in 1995.

For Quebec, 1995 meant an ever-declining economy as investment withered because of political uncertainty. Montreal, Quebec's economic engine, continued to lose ground and became known more for record-level unemployment and welfare than for job creation and prosperity. The Quebec government's indebtedness and high levels of regulation and taxation continued to limit growth. The province's cultural life seemed stymied by a difficult relationship between government and artists, and rapid personnel and administrative changes in the government. The fate of Quebec's major-league sports teams reflected the negative tone of the year, and the bloody turf war between rival biker gangs suggested that important matters were going unattended while the government focused on achieving sovereignty. But most of all, 1995 will be remembered for a costly political roller-coaster ride – one with the direst of potential consequences – that the Parizeau government imposed on the Quebec electorate, seemingly against their wishes. It comes as no surprise, then, that in the months following the referendum, psychiatrists noted that the province had experienced a kind of collective trauma. Josh Freed, the award-winning humorist of the *Montreal Gazette*, coined a new word to be added to the Quebec lexicon: the 'neverendum.' This word captured a new state of mind induced by the inconclusive results of the second Quebec referendum on sovereignty-association: the fear that Quebecers, and

Canadians, would be plagued by this unresolved question forever. The polls, which had revealed so much about how Quebecers felt throughout this *annus horribilus*, finally admitted that they were fed up with politics and wanted to turn to other things.

## Nova Scotia

ROBERT FINBOW

Nova Scotia basked in the spotlight as Halifax hosted the G7 summit of industrialized countries. A new $1-million program was created to promote black studies in the schools and to fund black students training to be teachers. Spousal benefits for government employees were granted to homosexual partners. Neptune Theatre began a $12.9-million renovation after receiving $7 million in funding from the government. A provincial judge was investigated by a judicial council for making remarks insensitive to women victims of domestic violence. The province announced a 'zero tolerance' approach to family violence. The Cape Breton Regional Hospital psychiatric unit was reviewed by outside experts after a rash of patient suicides. The province pledged $10 million in compensation for victims of abuse at a youth detention centre (*Chronicle-Herald*, 14 November).

Former premier Gerald Regan was arraigned on sixteen charges of rape, indecent assault, and unlawful detention for incidents alleged to have occurred between 1956 and 1978. Regan maintained his innocence and called for an investigation of the RCMP, claiming he had been singled out as a public figure (*Globe and Mail*, 16 March). The provincial inquiry into the Westray disaster began hearings while criminal charges against two former mine managers were delayed. The prosecution sought a mistrial after Mr Justice Robert Anderson called the lead prosecutor incompetent. Later, the judge stayed the charges because prosecutors withheld evidence from the defence. However, the Court of Appeal reinstated the charges in December. Prosecutors in the Westray case and in the Regan sexual assault trial were replaced by year's end (*Globe and Mail*, 19 December). Five Halifax newspaper reporters were charged for releasing information that could identify a witness or defendant in a rape case involving persons protected by the *Young Offenders Act*. Five drivers initiated a court challenge to a law that allowed police to take away the licenses of drivers charged with impaired driving after failing or refusing a Breathalyzer. Donald Marshall challenged charges of illegal fishing by citing historic treaties protecting Mi'kmaq fishing rights. The *Bluenose II* was refitted in time for the G7 summit, ending plans to construct a new replica. The provincial Court of Appeal opened proceedings to TV cameras.



### *Politics*

John Savage's leadership of the Liberals was challenged. Over 3,000 unionists joined the party to oust the Premier, whom they blamed for high unemployment and civil service wage cuts. Unionized contractors also protested legislation that overturned a Supreme Court ban on hiring non-unionized contractors to work on unionized sites. Other party members were angry over Savage's refusal to distribute patronage appointments to Liberals. After several delays, the party held a secret ballot vote to decide whether the Premier should face a leadership review. Savage won the vote, but the totals were not made public. The party changed its constitution so that leadership reviews were only required after an election defeat. The executive could veto constitutional changes adopted by party conventions, and the powers of new party members were limited (*Daily News*, 9 July). A cabinet shuffle was announced after Economic Renewal Minister Ross Bragg resigned. Jay Abbass moved to Human Resources; Eleanor Norrie to Housing and Consumer Affairs; Guy Brown to Labour; Robbie Harrison to the Economic Renewal Agency; Wayne Adams to Environment; and Gerald O'Malley to Supply and Services.

The federal auditor general investigated the transfer of $24 million from a project twinning a dangerous section of the Trans-Canada Highway in Cumberland County to a rural road in the Cape Breton riding of federal Public Works Minister David Dingwall. While this decision was later reversed under pressure from the PMO, the province was criticized for turning the Cumberland project into a privately run toll road. Outrage over this decision was compounded by revelations that the winning company, Atlantic Highways Corporation, included backers who had contributed to the provincial Liberal Party (*Chronicle-Herald*, 10 November). Critics assailed the move of a Canada Post office and an Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency office in Sydney to buildings owned by Liberal supporters of Dingwall, who was minister for both Crown corporations. Independent audits found no evidence that Dingwall had interfered with these leases. But critics claimed that one-fifth of ACOA funds in Nova Scotia were spent in Dingwall's riding (*Globe and Mail*, 1, 24 August).

The Liberals were criticized for appointing party members to the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation and to the Gaming Commission (*Chronicle-Herald*, 31 March). The Premier's expense accounts were queried over flights to Switzerland and Ottawa, paid for by provincial funds but not properly recorded (*Chronicle-Herald*, 23 November). A Toronto consultant found that Nova Scotia wasted millions on high-priced leases for office space – money that could be saved by moving offices to a few provincially owned buildings.