

THE RIPPLE EFFECT FROM QUEBEC'S REALIGNMENT ELECTION

Robin V. Sears



At both the federal and provincial levels, Quebec voters have long been held captive by the federalist and sovereignist camps. In decades of polarized elections, many Quebecers found themselves without a political home, until Stephen Harper established a Conservative beachhead in the 2006 federal election. Then on March 26 came the Mario Dumont earthquake, whose epicentre in the Quebec City region sent aftershocks through the province. Homeless or unhappy second-choice voters, long held hostage by the polarization between the Liberals and the PQ provincially and the Liberals and the Bloc federally, now have a place to go. The ripple effect from Quebec's realignment election will inevitably be felt on the other side of the Ottawa River.

Aux niveaux fédéral et provincial, les électeurs du Québec ont longtemps été captifs des camps fédéraliste et souverainiste. De nombreux Québécois se sentaient dépourvus d'appartenance politique après quelques décennies de scrutins polarisés, puis Stephen Harper a établi une tête de pont conservatrice aux élections fédérales de 2006. Des élections suivies le 26 mars dernier par le séisme Mario Dumont, dont l'épicentre dans la région de Québec a été ressenti dans toute la province. Trop longtemps tenus en otage entre libéraux et péquistes ou bloquistes, les électeurs « sans-abri » ont trouvé à se loger. L'effet d'entraînement de ce scrutin de réaligement se répercutera inévitablement au-delà de l'Outaouais.

“**Y**ou see? Elections don't matter! Look at Harper, aping the Liberals after only a year in power!” That's the plaint of the Tory blogosphere.

It's almost a cliché among young Conservative Party supporters — especially those with Reform genes — to bemoan the Harper government's apparent tack to the centre of Canadian politics. They, along with a bevy of shallow editorialists across the country, complain that Stephen Harper is nothing but another vote-buying politician with a blue tie, replacing our more conventional red variety. They could not be more wrong.

One of the media's favourite political nostrums is that the only successful political parties are those that govern from the centre. It is the received media wisdom in the developed world that so-called conviction politicians are always trumped by those expert at assembling centrist coalitions. Never mind that Margaret Thatcher, Pierre Trudeau, Ronald Reagan, George Bush the Younger and John Howard are hard proof that it ain't necessarily so.

Their anti-democratic corollary is that governmental change doesn't matter because voters will only get more of the same, with a variation only in the level of corruption.

Government is too big and too complex to indulge the policy peculiarities of “ideological parties.” Therefore, as Harper is a more successful PM than we predicted, he must be more centrist than he claimed.

New Democrats are fond of claiming that Canadian voters' choices are between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, if they don't choose their purer social democratic menu. It has only rarely been true, and today the policy gap between Liberals and Conservatives is as wide as it has been in two generations.

Elections *do* matter, and some transform their voters' lives for a generation. The 2007 Quebec election may be one of those transformational changes of power.

Since René Lévesque began his brilliantly plotted split in the Quebec Liberal Party in the late 1960s, Quebec voters had been offered a policy choice unique in Canadian politics. They had the status quo, a mildly left-of-centre Liberal government, or a party committed to creating two new countries built on the ashes of the old — even if that revolutionary goal was usually fudged.

This year, on the 300th anniversary of their union with England, Scottish voters endorsed the nationalist message of

the Scottish Nationalists with more votes and seats than ever before. As with the voters who delivered the PQ their first victory, however, it is far from clear that Scots were really endorsing the creation of a Republic of Scotland. The outcome is already transforming British politics as the national parties scramble to deal with this new reality, just as their Canadian peers did

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on the morning after November 15, 1976. If voters had provided that clear a “republican mandate” to the Scottish National Party, it would have been the most transformational election in centuries of British democracy.

The rise of the Parti Québécois, and subsequently the formation of its unnatural offspring the Bloc, twisted the choice of Quebec voters away from the norms of most developed democracies. In a pattern more common to Lebanon, Malaysia and the Balkans, they were limited to political choices based on community and clan, rather than on values or policy goals. Systems based on these narrow political choices are not only necessarily tense and socially fragile, depending as they do on keeping communal differences alive, but they also disenfranchise many voters.

If you are a Quebec voter with conservative social values and a commitment to remaining Canadian, you have had no one to vote for in a quarter-century, since the demise of the Union Nationale. If you are a Quebec social democrat not interested in sovereignty, you were similarly homeless. Abstention or unhappy second-choice voting was the reality faced by a large slice of the electorate. This election allowed them to escape that trap for the first time in a generation.

The respected pollster Nik Nanos, of SES Research, offered some proof of the hunger of Quebec voters to escape the separatist/federalist Manichean nightmare in a study only three weeks after the election. He reported that the federal political battlefield in Quebec would be transformed by the decline of the Bloc, following the rout of the PQ. His research showed that Stephen

Harper and, surprisingly, Jack Layton would be key beneficiaries. Departing Bloc voters would split along ideological lines, with small-town and conservative *bleu* nationalists voting Conservative. The strong social democratic tendency always central to the activist core of both wings of the sovereignist movement showed a willingness to vote NDP.

While Harper’s organizational efforts to scoop up unhappy Bloc voters began six months before the last election and have accelerated since, the NDP continues to play at the margins in the province. Barring the brief period of commitment at the end of the Broadbent era, when the party did devote money and leadership time, New Democrats have consistently written off Quebec. Party pragmatists argued that with scarce resources, no real labour allies and a strong leftist appeal from the Bloc and PQ, any effort there was hopeless.

Today the party has its first genuinely bilingual leader — born in Quebec — more money than ever in its history, and a dramatically weakened labour and sovereignist opposition. The old excuses no longer apply, especially as Nanos’s research also reveals that the Liberals are far from redeemed in the eyes of these drifting voters. If

New Democrats are serious about challenging the Liberals for national credibility, their response to this new opportunity in Quebec will be proof. Layton’s recruitment of a star candidate last month, the former Quebec Liberal environment minister Tom Mulcair, is an interesting acquisition for the NDP.

In communities where democracy is new, political parties often start off built on religious, regional or language loyalties. In established democracies, however, voters support parties that successfully appeal to their economic self-interest and their values. The Parti Québécois attempted to straddle that sectarian/ideological divide with reasonable success for a generation. It all came unstuck March 26, when the seeds for a transformation of Quebec and, conceivably, Canadian politics were sown.

The rise of Mario Dumont and the ADQ has divided commentators in Quebec and the rest of Canada as to its meaning. The difference is over the ADQ’s definition as a basically federalist, socially conservative, populist party of the Ralliement Créditiste/Union Nationale school, or as a clever new Quebec First party with a thinly disguised sovereignist agenda. Dumont’s slippery rhetorical skill has provided plenty of ammunition for each. His roots in the last constitutional wars, his association with the quixotic view of federalism championed by his mentor, Jean Allaire, and his role in the 1995 referendum campaign are the touchstones for those who see Dumont as a real hidden-agenda politician.

On the morning after the election, he rejected a federalist embrace: “I hope that is not how they perceive me. That would be a mistake.”

In the infamous 1991 Allaire report to the Quebec Liberals on a proposed new relationship with Ottawa, said to have been written in part by the then

21-year-old Dumont, Ottawa would have shared jurisdiction on foreign policy, but not defence: an interesting division to have attempted to apply to Afghanistan policy today. Also shared would have been the post office, fisheries, and broadcast and telecom policy. How would one define a Quebec fish, one wonders? Conservatives unhappy about a judicially activist Supreme Court might have been happy with Allaire's proposed replacement of it by a "community tribunal." Or perhaps not, since no one knew just what it was intended to be or do. But that was more than 15 years ago, in the bitter aftermath of the death of the Meech Lake

Accord. Dumont was just a kid out of school, and Canada's tolerance for constitutional peccadilloes was considerably greater then than now.

Today his careful social populism, the fey autonomist claim, his flirtation with those unhappy about an increasingly non-white Quebec, a conservative fiscal posture and his shock jock one-liners have served to make any clear political pigeonholing difficult. The PQ tried to label him a closet racist, but that failed to stick. The Liberals tried to nail him as a crypto-separatist whose policy ideas didn't scan, but he dodged those blows as well, despite large holes and

contradictions in his very thin "program for government."

As a good student of Quebec history, it seems likely that Dumont will take a leaf from the three masters of 20th-century politics in the province: Maurice Duplessis, Robert Bourassa and René Lévesque. It was that wily small-town conservative of an earlier generation who successfully launched Quebec's endless "salami strategy" with Ottawa in the 1950s. Duplessis is not often acknowledged in English-Canadian political history as the genius behind the "threaten, retreat, negotiate" bargaining strategy that has been Quebec's *pas de deux* with



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Ottawa ever since. He got separate income tax and pension rights for the province, and regularly made life hell for federal Liberal ministers and the Ottawa bureaucrats.

Duplessis was a master at expanding Quebec's role. It's hard to imagine even a hardline separatist premier today with as much chutzpah as *le Chef*. Imagine a provincial premier seizing the national assets of another sovereign state, refusing the federal government's order to return them, then attempting to hand them to a third country and getting away with it! That was Duplessis's anti-Communist coup, absconding with Poland's gold reserves and national treasures stored for wartime safekeeping in a Quebec monastery. He attempted to send them to Juan Perón in Argentina.

René Lévesque and Robert Bourassa loved to twist the tail of Pierre Trudeau and his succession of enraged Quebec ministers. Each premier was successful in extracting money, jurisdiction and political space from Ottawa in a series of predictable showdowns. It took an equally tough and supple Quebec political operator to develop the only successful *modus vivendi* between Ottawa and Quebec City in a generation: Brian Mulroney. The Mulroney/Bourassa entente is the clear role model for Stephen Harper today, except that this transformational election has considerably complicated his choice of dance partners.

Quebec voters expect that their nuanced political choice will deliver a range of new possibilities. They chose a minority government. This requires all three leaders now to climb a steep political learning curve, and quickly. Charest must learn how to share power without appearing to lose it. Dumont must learn when to stop dancing and deal. And André Boisclair must decide whether he has the will and the

ability to force a major strategic change on his hapless colleagues, or quit.

If he is quickly outmanoeuvred by Dumont and Charest, as they try to find a way to make a minority government work, Boisclair's colleagues may not give him the chance to drag the aging Parti Québécois into a new century. After all, it is up to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to make this new National Assembly work. If they follow the path blazed by Bill Davis, Stephen Lewis, David Peterson and Bob Rae in Ontario, Quebec could have the fascinating

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experience of the creativity of a functional minority government.

From 1975 to 1981, in two successive minorities, Davis and Lewis delivered a program of social and economic legislation that underlies many of the province's economic strengths to this day. For example, one can trace the policy lineage of the McQuinty government's current commitment to controlling land use and development in southern Ontario to the campaign Stephen Lewis fought over the accelerating loss of farmland, in the face of

Davis's admittedly timid response to the pressure. The "minority management" negotiation process was informal and often stuttered when partisanship or frayed tempers created impossible frictions. Each leader respected the other, however, and each caucus, if grudgingly, understood the benefits of the exercise in shared power.

The Peterson/Rae experience was an example of the strategic rather than the tactical approach to minority management. A detailed program of legislative commitments was negotiated between representatives of the leaders, signed, announced publicly and then used as a road map for governing over the following two years. Partisan tensions, third-party sniping by the humiliated Conservative caucus and occasional ego storms made delivery of the so-called Accord challenging.

Voters were clearly impressed by the performance of the leaders, the process and the product, giving Peterson a mandate in 1987 and passing it to Rae three years later. For Quebec today, the tactical model is probably all that is possible. If Charest and Dumont were to decide to attempt a major reform agenda, they would need the security of an Accord-style agreement.

Simply behaving like Stéphane Dion and Stephen Harper today, indulging in the jabbing and poking of tit-for-tat politics, guarantees a premature Quebec election with victory very much up for grabs. Minority governments are typically remembered for three things: what they delivered, who was blamed for their premature end and who won the runoff. In breaking with their "back the winner" tradition of voting behaviour, Quebec voters sent a clear message to their political elite: none of you deserves a majority and we want you to make this minority harness work. Dumont will suffer if he is seen

to make a premature and gratuitous grab for power by bringing the House down. His pain would be exceeded by the punishment Charest would earn if he attempted to govern as if he had a majority and was then defeated.

Canadian voters have returned eight minority federal governments in the last 50 years, more than in most advanced parliamentary democracies. We are increasingly comfortable with minorities and their ability to deliver competent government policy. Our politicians have learned not to play with defeat daily. Even the media have become appropriately skeptical about every political Chicken Little's claim on the threshold of that week's caucus meeting that, this time, "the sky really is falling!" The complex and semi-public negotiations between all the leaders that kept the Martin government alive, in contrast to the Trudeau/Lewis megaphone negotiating style in their minority marriage of 1972-74, is proof of how far we have travelled.

A minority government that is the result of a near-death experience for a party grown fat and careless after too long in power has one tempting dynamic: an heir apparent seeking the issue, and the political moment, to give the old guard one final push into oblivion. A minority that is the product of a newcomer scraping across the finish line, with an angry and cheated governing party ill reconciled to its defeat, offers a different temptation. The old guard struggles daily to find a way back. Indulging a *revanchiste* political appetite prematurely would be a disaster for any of the parties in Quebec today.

The most dangerous position in this power struggle between angry and humiliated competitors is to be the third party. If a triangle is an unstable structure in love, it is often deadly in politics. While each of the big parties may flirt and offer the most passionate

promises of future happiness and reward, the weakest player needs to be especially adept not to end up on the floor in the morning. Before Boisclair or his party adversaries decide to launch an internal cleansing, with the turmoil and wounds that would inevitably inflict, they might reflect on their timing, and the risks of an early runoff election.

In 1958 the CCF was almost wiped out by a premature election and the Diefenbaker landslide. The 1974 runoff election cut the David Lewis New Democrats in half. Stephen Lewis and Bob Rae were both sandbagged in their post-minority elections, a less humiliating if still enraging outcome after significant legislative achievements. The third party can survive climbing off the tiger as Ed Broadbent did in 1980 and Jack Layton repeated last year, but this requires incredible good luck as well as skilled political judgment.

If the stars align, and your opponents behave foolishly, you may even repeat Bob Rae's Ontario victory in 1990. It was clear with hindsight that the leadership he showed in the coalition of 1985-87, the Peterson/Rae

Alternatively, Charest could be Joe Clark. The path to certain defeat for a government leader in a new and shaky minority is to pretend that the opposition can be dismissed with the casual *hauteur* of the good old days. That was the mistake Joe Clark's team made, and it is one that the traditional arrogance of Quebec Liberals may yet tempt them into. While no party wants a rerun election anytime soon, mistakes happen when bruised egos and incompetent House management collide.

Accord government, gave voters confidence to vote for him three years later when David Peterson's Liberal government imploded. It is not impossible to imagine a similar Quebec scenario: Mario Dumont is seen to have behaved responsibly and learned well the arts of governing, but is cheated of victory in a rerun by the vagaries of a three-way split. After an unhappy interregnum, he sweeps to victory.

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Each of the two minority models to choose from — week-by-week tactical manoeuvring, or a longer-term agreement — has obvious downsides. The tactical approach preserves the greatest political space for the government but requires very adroit intelligence gathering and opposition-ego management, led by a seasoned and respected House leader.

The strategic approach, even if informal and private, provides time and protection from defeat, gives even the ham-fisted room for mistakes and recovery, but requires trusted and trusting players, a believable set of legislative compromises and a willingness to discipline any caucus members who

get offside. Seasoned, confident leadership with clear agendas and a demonstrated ability to crack the whip internally are not credentials many would choose to describe any of these three politicians.

Many Quebec observers have speculated that the *beau risque* opportunity for Charest and Dumont is to attempt to deliver — piecemeal or as part of a bigger deal — elements of the *Québec lucide* reform agenda laid out by Lucien Bouchard and a group of Quebec

luminaries. The combination of tax and spending cuts, a reduction in regulatory and state intervention in the market and a big commitment to productivity and competitiveness, it is argued, could transform the province economically and politically.

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Quebec is long overdue for the kind of governmental housecleaning championed by Charest one election earlier, and hinted at by Mario Dumont in this one, but it seems an improbable goal for a minority as shaky as this one is likely to be. Attacking union privilege, an essential component of any genuine reform, would serve only to unite the strained partnership between the PQ and its union allies. Attacking corporate welfare and regulatory protections would galvanize the Liberal corporate leadership of Quebec Inc. to attack Charest's impertinence.

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Some have speculated that Dumont will demand a revival of Canada's constitutional flea market, the slightly sleazy political bargaining between Ottawa and the provinces that almost derailed Canada for more than 30 years. But the "policy jurisdiction for cash" swap meets that Canadians used to permit the political class to indulge in are now badly out of fashion. If Dumont were to seriously attempt to recycle his jurisdictional carve-up between Ottawa and Quebec City, he would be slapped down vigorously. That perennial rummage sale was closed by Canadian voters with Charlottetown. Even a Harper government, hungry for Quebec support, daren't reopen it.

Oh, he may raise it from time to time to rally his troops, and even give a speech or two attempting to lay out a feasible approach to another round of job creation for constitutional lawyers and academics. He ran it up the flagpole very tentatively, in the glow of his election victory.

"If Ottawa were ready to open up the debate on spending power, the National Assembly should have an initiative to

facilitate its inscription in the Canadian Constitution," he told supporters. When a sound-bite-savvy politician uses such a convoluted conditional verbal construction, you know he is not serious.

No one saluted his trial balloon and the "autonomy" flag disappeared again. If he were foolish enough to precipitate an election on the issue, Dumont would be returned to a more pastoral life in rural Quebec within weeks.

So Dumont and Charest will probably carefully work out their dance steps, cobbling together a pretence of legislative content to their governing for a year or 18 months, before launching round two in the transformation of Quebec politics. Some have argued that Charest will not be around for the rematch, but cynics ask why the Big Red Machine of Quebec politics would waste a new horse on an election that they are very unlikely to win. Unless Dumont commits serious gaffes in the run-up to that campaign, it is hard to see how either the Liberals or the PQ can prevent his winning power.

Would it not be wiser for the party to grant Jean Charest one last chance to redeem himself, or more

likely get clobbered, before rebuilding under a new leader? Unless he decides that a life on board committees looks less painful and more rewarding, and falls on his own sword...

The toughest quandary is the one faced by the PQ and its hapless leader. Social movement or crusade-based political parties universally arrive at the crossroads Quebec's aging sovereignists now face: should not the pursuit of electoral success trump increasingly discredited principle? Tommy Douglas schooled Saskatchewan's socialist true believers on the issue in the 1940s, and their party has been in power for much of the past 70 years. Stephen Harper is pounding a similar lesson into his hardliners today.

From right or left, in a separatist party or an environmental movement, if you are serious about politics and the power to deliver change, first you must win. In other words, as politicians from Gladstone to Churchill to Lyndon Johnson have cautioned their zealots: "The first job of a politician is to get elected; the second is to get re-elected." Boisclair has signalled that he understands this and wants to conduct an ideological and organizational spring cleaning within the PQ, such as it has not had since its formation.

Boisclair's vision appears to be closer to a Catalan, Scottish or Belgian sectarian party model than to the genuinely sovereignist brand of old: a party that fights resolutely for community or parochial interests in the regional or national parliament, but avoids calling for the dissolution of the state. If the party were able to so transform itself, its message and its appeal — big ifs indeed — it would join a constellation of such parties in the democracies with very secure niches, and occasional access to power. Such a PQ role, though, once the party has given up the crusade for a Republic of Quebec, explicitly or with a nudge and wink to weary voters, would have to be shared with the ADQ.

For it is clear that, like Maurice Duplessis before him, Dumont intends to be a tough Quebec champion locally and with Ottawa, if given the chance. Quebecers would then have two autonomist parties, one mildly left of centre and one to the right. More importantly, though, Quebecers would have large, competent political players offering domestic policy choices from across the philosophic spectrum. Quebec Liberals might find the room remaining for themselves in such a new carve-up of the political landscape — especially among francophone voters — a little too narrow for comfort.

As dramatic as this possible transformation of the Quebec landscape may be, the impact federally could be even more surprising. Nik Nanos's research forecasts that Quebec voters are eager to drive their votes out of the Bloc parking lot where they have been sitting for more than a decade. That would have the effect of releasing some 30 to 50 seats onto the national political marketplace, making majority governments possible again. It would also mean that Quebec MPs would likely be more evenly distributed across all three national parties, ironically increasing their role and impact over their years in the Bloc ghetto.

If the NDP took up the challenge of being a competitor in Quebec, and the Harper Conservatives do reap as large a harvest from this change as many Quebec observers believe they will, this would create ominous new challenges for the federal Liberal Party. Canada's natural governing party of the past century, already chastened by its devastation in all of Canada west of Ontario, would then face challenges to its only other bastion, Quebec.

The party has not won a majority of ridings or francophone votes in Quebec in more than 25 years. Its anglophone, allophone and Montreal

redoubts, freed of the need to rally against the sovereigntist bogeyman for the first time in a generation, may begin to consider new options along with the rest of Quebecers.

The man who will determine the outcome of this dizzying change of players and musical chairs is, of course, Stephen Harper. After all, he is the one who can arguably claim credit for having launched the partisan merry-go-round.

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commitment to party discipline that allowed them to regain power. It was Harper, alone, who saw the opportunity for an anti-Liberal federal voice in Quebec and seized a Quebec City beachhead when no one else thought it possible. As PM, with the discretion and legerdemain of a seasoned courtier in the Versailles of Louis XIV, Harper has ably seduced the Quebec electorate, its political class and the media. And this from a suburban Toronto boy, seasoned in Calgary!

The young rebel who helped wreck the Mulroney coalition, in an

irony of political life, is now the architect and master of its reconstruction — unless the very forces which ripped it asunder the last time are not better managed today. There are grumbles from Alberta conservatives about income trusts, from Saskatchewan and Newfoundland about resource revenues and from old Reformers about big-spending government.

We may be on our way to a federal Canadian politics made up of Newfoundland parties and Alberta *über alles* parties, as well as Quebec advocates, as regional grievances harden and the national parties' ability to broker acceptable national bargains continues to fray. The painful experience of France and the UK illustrates that even a National Front reaction to an increasingly non-white Canada is as possible as a national Green Party breakthrough.

The sad dance between a wobbly Stéphane Dion and an increasingly too-smarmy-by-half Green rival is less likely to deliver a Green Party breakthrough than to be simply another nail in the coffin of the Liberals' gormless new leader. Elizabeth May can plead that her get-elected-for-free pass from the Liberals was not a backroom deal, but voter reaction made it clear they could smell the cigar smoke a mile away. Sadly, when Peter MacKay convincingly defeats her, it may be seen as a rejection of environmental activism among Canadians, rather than as the judgment of a savvy group of Nova Scotia voters about an attempt by power brokers to limit their political choices.

It seems unlikely that the tensions in the Canadian political fabric will produce more successful regional or special-interest mini-parties, however. The first-past-the-post system is brutal to small parties. The established parties have written into legislation tough barriers to entry, as well.

We have probably seen only the opening act of an impressive new

player with a strong show and cast on the national political stage. Harper will use all his considerable political skill to hold his reunited coalition together. Disciplined and determined to keep their confidence and their zeal under wraps, his insiders are nonetheless bursting with pride at their successes organizationally, politically and especially in Quebec. They whisper quietly, “You ain’t seen nothing yet...”

If those predictable Conservative complainers about Jim Flaherty’s budget, and their echoes among conservative pundits, really think Stephen Harper is becoming a light-blue Liberal wannabe, they misunderstand their leader’s game plan entirely. It is not yet time for him to highlight publicly the distinctive policy threads that make up this government’s fabric. The volatile public opinion numbers reveal that Canadians remain susceptible to “hidden agenda” attacks where the Conservatives are concerned.

The differences between the wobbly legs of the urban and ethnic brokerage coalition the Liberals risk being reduced to and the foundation stones of a reascent Harper Conservative alliance are, however, stark. Not in the social conservative/Bushite fashion that Liberals and New Democrats like to pretend, though.

The Harper vision is much closer to that of John Howard, Tony Blair or even Nicolas Sarkozy — a heterodox blend of conservatism, populism and nationalism: anticorporate, antiprotectionist and confident. Among the many clear differences in vision and perspective are:

- A Canada that is a leading member of the Anglosphere, proud of its special relationship with London and Washington, versus a Canada that is a northern European middle power broker,

attempting to mediate between Americans and the world.

- A Canada that is a significant military power, able and willing to use force internationally to defend its national and allied security interests, versus a peacekeeping Canada, more comfortable shipping blankets than tanks.
- A Canada that is an energy and resource superpower, sacrificing revenue and jobs to the environ-

- Canada as a vibrant diverse community made up of many ethnic and regional threads, sharing common values, goals and institutions, versus a Canada that is a multicultural federation with respect for the differences and even conflicts among us.

It is not certain that such a robust and self-reliant value system, light on empathy for the less fortunate and uncompetitive, will appeal

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ment only to the extent that our competitors do, versus Canada as a global green leader proud of its pioneering sacrifices on behalf of the planet and our children.

- A Canada that rewards innovation and entrepreneurship and new and small business, and challenges cartels, protected markets and regulatory market protection with conviction, versus a Canada of cosseted national champions, regional taboos and regulated industries sliding down the global competitiveness curve.
- A Canada with two levels of government that respect each other’s domains, provinces whose markets are open to each other and the world, with cities under provincial tutelage, versus a Canada where the federal government innovates national programs as needed, including direct program delivery with the cities if required.

to a new generation of Quebecers or all Canadians. For some years, the Conservatives may need to continue watering their wine to win a majority for their vision of a different kind of Canada.

One truth should be rattling Dion and Layton to their core. When voters are hungry for change, the clear, coherent new political vision delivered lucidly and with passion always trumps even powerful competitors tied to a tired and compromised message.

On March 26, Quebec voters signalled their hunger for a change, unlocking a transformation of the province. Its ripples may roll from sea to sea.

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