



WHAT'S IN STORE FOR CANADA?

By David T. Jones

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In the summer of 2015, Canada has hit the “pause button.” “Reset” will come in October with the federal election. At this juncture, polls suggest a numerical toss up with Tories holding statistical advantages due to advantageous distribution of their voters and 30 new seats added in areas regarded as leaning conservative. But considering repeated voter flips in the last several years, don’t bet the mortgage money on any party.

In contrast to the unsettled state of the federal government, recent elections have left the major provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec) enjoying majority governments for the next three-four years. Most interesting is Alberta where a 43-year-duration Tory dynasty was upended in May, replaced by a New Democrat (socialist) party—virtually the political equivalent of a Second Coming for its stunning nature.

Quebec is of interest primarily because of the lack of discussion of sovereignty. Previously first on the lips of interlocutors, sovereignty now goes virtually without mention outside Quebec. In hope of galvanizing the sovereignist *Parti Québécois (PQ)*, members elected a media mogul Pierre Karl Peladeau, who will either resurrect the sovereignty movement or complete its marginalization.

For its part, the Canadian Armed Forces are marching in place. All significant procurement decisions are on hold, explicitly or implicitly. Only if the Tories are re-elected can one anticipate Ottawa going ahead with most currently projected purchases. Operationally, the Army is in best shape with small individual units deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine; the Air Force has F-16s running missions against ISIS, but the Navy continues to decline in capability.

U.S.-Canada bilateral relations are not the “worst of times” but certainly not “the best of times.” Ottawa appears to have given up on the Administration so far as making decisions helpful to Canadian interests (e.g., Keystone pipeline). Perhaps most noteworthy, however, many Canadians simply believe that we have lost our way, neither exercising vitally necessary global leadership nor making commensurately important domestic decisions.

The Federal Election

More often than not, elections clear the political air – or at least force those that have been loudly critical into temporary silence. Such will be the case for the Canadian federal election to be held on 19 October. As the first “fixed” date election, the government has not had the option, which is one of the greatest powers of a parliamentary system, of calling an election when it appears most fortuitous for it. Although Canada has various “work arounds” that could permit an election before the mandated four year mark (and media expended a galaxy of electrons arguing such would happen), ultimately the speculation ran into the sand. PM Stephen Harper repeatedly said that the election would be held at the four-year mark (and now it is clear that it will be).

Observers can expect Parliament's House of Commons to "rise" (end legislative work) on 23 June and the Senate on 30 June. The government will probably "drop the writ" by requesting the Governor General to call the election most likely in late August, providing for a relatively standard five week campaign. Of course, the official start to a Canadian presidential campaign is just a formality. Although not as protracted as the all-campaigning-all-the-time U.S. election, the Canadians are edging toward our format.

And everything is in play. Polls are in constant flux. The word has been that anyone who professes to know who will win is "blowing smoke." However, only twice in modern history has a sitting prime minister been defeated by a challenger that had never run a national campaign. A regular theme for individuals with a lifetime in politics has been simply that they do not know; there are so many intangibles in operation. For example:

- A year ago, the government looked as if it were in dire straits; it was not quite road kill waiting for the street sweeper, but appeared past its "best before" shelf life. It polled significantly behind the Liberals, who finished in third place in the 2011 election but were bolstered by a charismatic new leader, Justin Trudeau, son of iconic Canadian (Liberal) Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who dominated Canadian politics in the 1970s-80s.
- Today, however, the government has rallied (or had earlier in the year) gaining strength on the basis of Canadian popular concern over domestic security following lone wolf terrorist attacks on military personnel in Quebec and, most dramatically, on Parliament after killing an honor guard soldier at the national War Memorial. The government also has adroitly handled fiscal issues, presenting a balanced budget and providing a variety of tax cuts (with promises of more to come). It has adopted a foreign policy that irritates the foreign ministry mandarins by concentrating decision making in the prime minister's office (shades of the NSC) and expressing vigorous support for Israel, Ukrainian resistance to Russian aggression, and the Iraqi efforts to fend off ISIS predations. Nevertheless, in this regard, the government is closer to public attitudes than the Opposition which would prefer more flexible diplomatic options associated with the kinder, gentler "peacekeeping" Canada.
- But many key ministers have departed. Recent years have seen, as well as a number of other long serving, prominent "names," the retirement of the highly regarded Finance Minister Jim Flaherty; the Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird in February; and on 29 May the abrupt retirement announcement of Justice Minister Peter MacKay. There are a variety of reasons behind these decisions, beside the traditional "I want to spend more time with my family." They include the crass financial drive of forthcoming change in laws that will defer obtaining a parliamentary pension from 55 to 65. Others are seeking opportunities outside government to cash in on expertise. Others are simply burned out: some have spent 20 years in politics and know that they have done all that they can within a conservative government that remains, in essence, "a Party of one" [Stephen Harper]. The result is unarguably a weaker Conservative government. At the nine-year-mark, the "A Team" has largely departed. There is talent on the front bench, but even Tory supporters will admit that it is thinner. The prime minister had few political intimates; now he has fewer still. Finding someone who can step up and say, "Don't do that, Mr. Prime Minister" is hard to do.

The Future of the Senate

The Canadian senate is an appointed body. There are many high-quality members; however, its reputation is for accumulating second tier bag men and party hacks. Prime ministers have not stooped to the level of Roman Emperor Caligula who appointed a horse as senator, but such is not possible in Canada perhaps only because the SPCA would object to animal abuse and it would not be bilingual. During the past year, the simmering legal cases against several senators have started to bubble specifically prosecution of Senator (Tory) Mike Duffy with charges focusing on fraudulent expense billing and debatable resident claims. Duffy's lawyer has done a remarkable job of obfuscation in presenting the essentially incomprehensible rules and regulations for senatorial compensation while combining witness testimony with massive documentation. As the case is being heard by a single judge and it is already far behind schedule, it could easily drift into the center of the federal campaign or even past that date—with no sense for its effect on popular attitudes.

And there is more to come. Other senators have been named and face legal action. In mid-June, an investigative body released still more names of those that violated compensation regulations with prosecution recommended for some—both Liberals and Conservatives. Interestingly, Quebecers show little interest in the Ottawa-centric contretemps.

In January 2014, Liberal leader Trudeau either acted rashly or stole a march on prospective disaster by ousting all Liberal Party senators from the Liberal Party caucus. Taken without consultation by other than a small group around Trudeau, which did not include any senators, the “senators formerly known as Liberals” continue as the “Senate Liberal Caucus.” In the anticipated naming and shaming, there are Liberal senators, but Trudeau has somewhat insulated himself from criticism.

With no senators, the New Democratic Party (NDP) can happily fire pot shots at the Senate and campaign for its abolition.

More generally, however, Canadian public opinion has little more than contempt for the Senate. It has been regarded as useless/corrupt for years, if not decades. The Supreme Court rejected proposals by PM Harper to identify legal mechanisms to end the Senate, saying, in effect, that the Senate could only be abolished by changing the Constitution—an option as inviting to Canadian politicians as an invitation to “drink the Kool-Aid” at a Jonestown reunion.

If there is any comfort to be taken from this malfeasance, it is the relatively small scale, almost petty nature, of the frauds and false billing. We are not talking of millions in Swiss or Cayman Islands bank accounts. The sinning senators are not the equivalent of FIFA executives. If Duffy and other senators have jostled to get four feet into the trough, it is a shallow trough with slim slop. One snide commentator suggested Canadians should take comfort that more than half the Senate is *not* under investigation.

Currently, there are 20 empty Senate seats (of 108) but clearly PM Harper doesn’t intend to make any appointments until after the election. If either the Liberals or the NDP win the election, various complex nominating formulae and vetting panels for worthies have been suggested. But the temptation to reward the party loyalist may still be overwhelming.

New Formula for Debates

In May PM Harper announced that he would no longer participate in the traditional debate format. Under this arrangement, Canadian public television sponsored two debates: one in French and one in English. Instead, Harper announced an up-to-five debate regime (at least one in French) to be sponsored by various organizations, some media (*Globe and Mail*, *Maclean’s*, and French television in Quebec) with possibly another by a think tank. The number of debates, sponsors, participants, topics, and formats are all still to be decided. For example, one debate could be restricted to foreign policy. There may be debates during the summer prior to the official opening of the campaign.

The one clear point emerging is that Harper believed the existing format was too rigid, permitting others to beat on him like a piñata without providing him time for ripostes. A secondary point is Conservative belief that Canadian public television leans relentlessly to the left and disadvantages the Tories, so opening the options for hosting the debates is a bit of payback.

The major Opposition party leaders, the NDP’s Mulcair and Liberals Trudeau, have accepted the new format (including the possibility the Canadian public television consortium will continue to sponsor its traditional two debates.) Mulcair is particularly enthusiastic, professing that he will be able to best both Trudeau and Harper. But will Canadian voters tune out with “too much of a good thing” in the debates?

Pipelines

Although the most noteworthy prospective pipeline is the Keystone XL, which has been under review by the USG for six years, other pipelines have risen to play increasing roles in Canadian economics. No sooner does one arise with prospective economic viability, than it attracts furious attack by environmentalists and/or aboriginal critics. Thus a Northern Gateway pipeline designed to move Albertan energy to a BC port for Asian export, approved after federal review in June 2014, has seen little further action to implement it. The Energy East pipeline is conceived as originating in Alberta and crossing Canada to terminals/refining facilities in Saint John, New Brunswick and Quebec City; subject to public and regulatory review still in the offing, it is still a far distant option for energy export to Europe.

Essentially, the Tory government endorses all of the efforts; the NDP supports only the Energy East pipeline; and the Liberals support Keystone and Energy East. As Harper has already lost the environmentalists’ support, the NDP and Liberals maneuver to explain their support/rejection for specific pipelines.

What Does the Alberta NDP Provincial Victory Mean—if Anything?

It was not just that the Tories finally lost after 43 years of uninterrupted power. It was that they were replaced by the “come-from-out-of-nowhere” NDP. Over the decades, the Alberta Tories had come to take “severely normal” Albertans for granted. They generated a string of mediocre premiers and the final premier (former Tory minister in multiple portfolios, Jim Prentice) lacked recent experience in provincial politics. Through clever political manipulation, Prentice induced the conservative Wildrose Party leader and the bulk of its parliamentary members to cross the aisle and join the Tories. This move proved too clever by half. Then Prentice called an election for May 5, ostensibly to endorse his program, a year before it was necessary.

Albertans, suffering from a decline in oil revenue from the Great Recession, disgusted with corruption/privilege from the previous leadership, and furious over a budget that added 56 taxes to individual citizens (while not raising it on corporations), voted at the highest percentage (58 percent) in 40 years. NDP leadership under Rachel Notley, appeared nonthreatening. And Tories and the Wildrose split the vote (total for conservatives was 54 percent) giving the NDP a majority government.

Naturally, the NDP federal leadership is exultant touting that this “orange wave” that previously struck Quebec in 2011, giving the party 59 of 78 seats and now has hit Alberta, will roll throughout Canada in October bringing an NDP national government.

Other analysts have said, “Not so fast.” There appears to be no comparable division of Alberta conservatives on the federal level, and the province looks secure for the federal Tories. This may be “whistling past the grave yard,” but more curious politics have occurred in recent Canadian politics.

The Parties: Some Snapshots

The Conservatives face an existential problem. Approximately, 60 percent of the electorate opposes them. They need to split these voters and can win with approximately 38 percent of the vote. Regularly arguments are made to “combine the left” (as was the case in the 1990s for the “right” when the conservatives were split into three parties, making Liberal victories virtually automatic). But neither the Liberals (that still consider themselves Canada’s “natural governing party” despite their current third place status in Parliament) nor the NDP is interested in combining with the Liberals desire such a move. Some observations:

The Tories

The truism remains that governments defeat themselves; they are not defeated. That said, to win an election, the Tories need to exercise a form of political jujitsu, maximizing their strength in heartland Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan while maintaining existing support in BC, Ontario, Atlantic Canada, and Quebec. They have a semi-hidden advantage as census results have added 30 seats to Parliament (the Canadians simply add seats when population rises; they do not have a fixed number of seats such as the U.S. House of Representatives wherein every census results in additions and subtractions for the representation of individual states). Analysts believe the additional seats are in Tory-leaning areas that could help Harper build another victory.

Tory partisans believe they are well positioned. They count on the positives of a tested leader that has run repeated national campaigns (this is the first national campaign for Mulcair and Trudeau). They have guided Canada through the Great Recession better than other G-7/8 countries and presented a balanced budget this spring. Now they are dispensing goodies in the form of income tax splitting for married couples as well as focus-group directed tax relief in areas such as child care. They believe they have formulae and funds to maximize their strengths and paint their opponents in unattractive terms (e.g. Trudeau, “He’s not ready”).

Interestingly, the Tories have renewed hope for gains in Quebec. In 2011, they proved that they could win a majority government without Quebec seats, but they would prefer to expand their five-seat beachhead. In this regard, they have worked to recruit local mayors in areas that have voted Conservative in the past and hope to move their standing in the province to 10 to 15 seats, to offset anticipated losses, particularly in the Atlantic Provinces.

The NDP

The official Opposition with 95 seats is in a stronger position than anticipated. The “orange wave” of 2011 appears not to be a “one off” driven by Jack Layton’s terminal popularity. Current leader Mulcair may be existentially a mean and angry man, but he has managed to suppress his “Angry Tom” image and present (largely) a “Smiling Tom” visage.

The overwhelming bulk of his caucus comes from Quebec as a consequence of the sea change of 2011 which swept away virtually every Bloc Quebecois incumbent. This circumstance has tied Mulcair to some Quebec-friendly positions (supporting a 50 percent plus one majority for any future Quebec referendum) that are unpopular outside the province. Still he has managed his newbie team adroitly in Parliament and by consensus is regarded as the best performer in the daily “Question Period.” In preparation for the election, he has been selectively weeding some of his weaker Quebec parliamentarians by insisting on nomination competition in their ridings.

Consequently, he is in a death battle for the Quebec seats. Both the NDP and Liberals need the majority of Quebec seats to secure a federal victory (the Tories can win again without Quebec seats so they can enjoy watching Mulcair and Trudeau struggle over Quebec expending time and effort they cannot spend fighting the Tories elsewhere).

The Liberals

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau has disappointed. After heading the Liberals for two years, he still appears mistake prone—or at least prone to make decisions that are hard to explain to supporters. One judgment concluded that he needed to hire a senior Francophone advisor; better discipline his organization; and better vet his ideas with “men with gray hair.”

Observers are still puzzling over any backstory to his defenestration of the Liberal Party senators from caucus. And his decision to embrace a Tory defector jettisoned from caucus for erratic “hissy fit” behavior (but she is also a “babe.”) And his abrupt dismissal from caucus of two Liberal MPs over charges of sexual harassment/abuse by two NDP female MPs was done without anything commensurate with due process. On substantive grounds, the Tories are about to pass enhanced security legislation (NDP opposes); Trudeau says that he would amend the legislation, but will not say what he would change until he wins the election. He still appears unsteady in debate and Question Period—not quick on his feet verbally as are Harper and Trudeau.

So what does Trudeau have going for him? Great hair. Lovely wife and photogenic family. A famous name (Ask where he would be if his name were Justin Brassard?) that resonates positively with center-left Canadians. And a (mostly) friendly media hoping that he will grow in his role during the campaign.

With only 36 seats, Liberals have much ground to cover if they expect to even recover Official Opposition status. They must regain previous Liberal bastions in Atlantic Canada—but that is only 28 seats. They must rout the NDP in Quebec and gain substantial numbers of seats in Ontario and British Columbia. Technically possible, but certainly long odds.

The Bloc Quebecois (BQ)

The BQ has sagged further from four seats that it won in 2011 to two. In the 2011 election, it was virtually annihilated falling from over 50 seats to four. Although a new leader (Mario Beaulieu) was sworn in on 24 May, the “powers that are” in the BQ quickly decided that he could not exploit any buyer’s regret in NDP ridings and/or ride residual distaste for the Trudeau name into victories. They suggested that Beaulieu lacked the *je ne sais quoi* to galvanize the BQ zombie into new life. Thus on 9 June Beaulieu agreed to step aside and be replaced by previous BQ leader Gilles Duceppe, who despite leading the disastrous 2011 campaign, is best placed to exploit any heartbeat beneath the lawn. Duceppe is personally popular, but the question will be whether he can transfer this support into BQ MPs. There may be some increased parliamentary representation, but Quebecois appear to have concluded the BQ is a dead end so far as benefitting them politically/economically in Ottawa.

Another Unquantifiable Factor: Harper Fatigue

A persistent underlying factor is Harper fatigue among voters. Essentially, he is not loveable; his opponents range from those that tolerate the outcome of a democratic election to those that hate/despise him. It is hard to appreciate the level of animosity toward an intelligent, hard-working, “family values” individual with no/no closet of \$2,000 suits; an attractive wife who saves abandoned kittens; children without drug or drunk driving problems; and even the author of a well-regarded book

on hockey (*A Great Game: The Forgotten Leafs and the Rise of Professional Hockey*). He has been Canadian prime minister for nine years (winning three elections), and the argument is bruited about that he is “past his shelf life.” Others, however, see him as the reincarnation of Prime Minister William Mackenzie King, who dominated Canadian politics through much of the 1920s-1940s, despite having the charisma of an arm chair. (Harper once said that he became an economist because he didn’t have the charisma to be an accountant.)

One question might be whether Harper’s success in guiding the Canadian economy into safe harbor will prompt the electorate to believe they can take a chance—despite the unproved nature of both Mulcair and Trudeau. Or will they continue to conclude that despite his functional rather than flamboyant nature, the alternatives remain more risky than not.

Election Results

It is a mugs game attempting to predict election results five months in advance. All professionals appreciate the sobriquet that “a week in politics is a life time.” And all know how fragile and volatile even the best polling and most professional judgments can be. So the best answer in response to the question “Who’s going to win the election?” from some consummately qualified professionals has been “I don’t know”—sometimes qualified with comment to the effect that it is the hardest election to predict in that individual’s professional lifetime.

There are two alternative outcomes: a majority government and a minority government.

- **Majority.** Tory partisans believe they can pull off another majority. Essentially, that would mean no change in Canadian policies either domestic or foreign. For the USG, a Tory majority government would mean continued relations with the friends we know rather than unknowns we know not.

While a majority NDP or Liberal government are not impossible, the Tories do not appear to have the existential problems that they had in 1993 (when they were annihilated by the Liberals) or the Liberals under Paul Martin in 2006 beset by the “Adscam” that cost them government. Either a Liberal or an NDP majority government, particularly an NDP majority, would require recalibration of our bilateral relations.

- **Minority.** The minority government has multiple variations. The most frequently hypothesized is a Tory minority within which Harper has previously operated (2006-08 and 2008-11). The duration of such a government could be brief and even subject to question whether PM Harper would accept leading a minority government. Other potential minority governments, e.g., NDP and Liberal, would either require massive electoral gains or agreement before or after the election on a program for mutual support with specific legislative objectives. Any minority government would be limited in what it could propose/accomplish, particularly on foreign policy.

Canadian Armed Forces: Marching in Place

In many respects, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are “waiting for Godot” in the form of the consequences of the forthcoming federal election. Most obvious is the virtual paralysis of procurement programs: what to buy; where to obtain it; how much/many to procure – all rest gently in limbo.

Indeed, the entire procurement program is hostage to the re-election of the Conservatives. A Liberal let alone an NDP government would likely result in reductions at a minimum and cancellations most likely for major programs. Former Chairman of the Defense Staff (CDS) General Rick Hillier spoke of a “decade of darkness” under Liberal management of defense and security policy. One can hear the muttering over a new era without light should the Tories be ousted from power.

Often leadership is key. And the current CDS Air Force General Thomas Lawson announced that he would retire later this year and not seek a third year as CDS which is frequently the case. As Lawson reportedly was selected to stick handle the procurement of the F-35, an effort that failed miserably, it is probably just as well that he depart. Nor will he be missed; one observer commented that he was the worst CDS in modern history.

His successor, Army LTG Jonathan Vance, was announced at the end of April and expected to assume his position within the next several months. Vance has considerable command experience, currently as the Joint Operations Command commander overseeing the Canadian force commitment in Iraq and twice commanded Canadian forces in Kandahar. Reportedly, he is more in the Rick Hillier mold of willingness to speak truth (to whomever).

The individual services are of mixed standing:

Army

Perhaps in the best shape. It continues to deploy contingents operationally in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine as well as participating in show-the-NATO-emblem exercises. Supposedly, it will get new trucks, but its major need is to continue to exercise/deploy with USG and Alliance forces to maintain the expertise gained in Afghanistan.

Air Force

Despite the kick-the-can down the road approach to the F-35 decision, the Canadian Air Force has improved with earlier purchase of C-17 heavy lift cargo planes and helicopters. The F-35, however, is an entirely different issue. Analysts don't dispute that it is an outstanding aircraft, but debate whether it is the best plane for Canadian security requirements. Essentially, however, if Canada wants to continue to coordinate with NATO partners, it needs to purchase F-35. Unfortunately, the decision process has been botched/bungled and fallen into a slough of despond driven by the massive price increases and issues of full life costing. Tossed to an Independent Review Panel in 2012, the resulting study generated no specific recommendations, but rather an expectation for further government review. Meantime, Ottawa committed to a life extension of its existing F-16 fleet pushing its utility into the 2025 range. Ultimately, observers still predict F-35 purchases albeit in numbers reduced from the original proposed 65 aircraft.

Navy

The service is in serious short term difficulty. Its two fleet resupply vessels are no longer operational, requiring support from USG vessels during exercises. Other major combatants are at "rust out" end of lifetime status. Ottawa has elected to follow a rebuild-from-the-ground-up approach rebuilding and rehabilitating ship yards to do construction. This will make procurement both substantially slower and more expensive than foreign purchases, but if managed properly it could revive a substantial element of Canadian manufacturing.

And nobody says a word about the Canadian submarine force, which rarely has more than one of its six vessels operational.

Canadians appear comfortable with the current levels of overseas troop commitments. The government's budget process continues to appropriate more for defense than DOD can use, so the returned funds have helped reduce perceived deficits.

The Provinces: A Once Over Lightly

The political status of the major Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec) has been resolved for the next several years. BC voters will not go to the polls again until May 2017 in a fixed election cycle; Ontario elected a majority Liberal government in June 2014; and, as noted above, in a stunning development, Alberta elected an NDP majority government in (April 2015) and Quebec (see below) elected a Liberal government in (April 2014).

British Columbia

The province continues to struggle its way out of recession. And to reconcile options and environmental challenges associated with bringing Albertan energy through the province for export. There have been years of official reviews, and one can estimate that there will be years of litigation regardless of decisions stemming from the official reviews.

Alberta

NDP leader Rachel Notley faces obvious challenges. She has virtually nobody with any governing experience. There are school teachers and union leaders galore in the caucus, but probably nobody that has any business/financial knowledge. The question is whether it will be a repeat of the Bob Rae experience in 1991 Ontario when the NDP won an unexpected majority with a likewise inexperienced team (and crashed and burned through scandal and incompetence, resulting in its ouster after a single term). Notley may have a better chance. While Rae found the province running into recession and attempted to spend his way out of it, Notley may benefit from steady recovery from the Great Recession and able to combine increased oil revenue from taxes/fees on producers with government spending cuts and greater taxes on manufacturers.

Ontario

Against many predictions, gay grandmother Premier Kathleen Wynne transformed a minority government into a majority in June 2014. Despite being dogged by various scandals inherited from the previous Liberal government and a massive deficit/debt, she was aided by inept campaigning by the Tory leader, Tim Hudak. Having lost twice, Hudak resigned and in May 2015, Patrick Brown, a previously invisible federal Tory backbencher, won the leadership. He has the unenviable task of reviving a party that has squandered opportunities in the past two elections and now faces a bright, engaging female premier at a time when the economy is reviving. As the next election is not scheduled until 2018, Brown has enough time—if he uses it effectively.

Quebec

In previous years, an observer talking with Canadians would quickly encounter commentary on “the Quebec issue” or “Quebec sovereignty.” Now it goes unmentioned. Perhaps the passage of almost 20 years since the October 1995 “near death” referendum experience has provided de facto immunization against a near term referendum. There was an exhaustion factor associated with the “neverendumreferendum” that has not dissipated.

To be sure, pollsters find that approximately 40 percent of the population still want Quebec independence. But the second level question, “Do you want to have a referendum on sovereignty?” isn’t asked. Indeed, the 2014 provincial election which morphed from a carefully stage-managed election focused on a *Parti Quebecois* (PQ) devised charter of Quebecker rights into an implicit judgment on sovereignty resulted in a devastating PQ defeat.

One of the baseline elements of the sovereignist strategy has not happened. Although old federalists continue to die, Quebec youth have not shown the interest in sovereignty that was predicted post-1995 referendum. Instead, the “millennials” have not so much rejected Quebec sovereignty as concluded it is irrelevant for what they want in the way of control over Quebec issues such as protecting the French language and culture, immigration, education, worker training, etc. They are indifferent to federalist propaganda that the Canadian Rockies are also “their” mountains. They are denizens of the internet, aficionados of computer games, more excited (to the point of riot) over the possibility of minor increases in university tuition than of any international issue.

Nevertheless, the PQ while daunted is not demoralized. Although having lost a winnable election in 2014 (along with the resignation of their defeated leader, the first woman premier of Quebec Pauline Marois), they have reorganized. On 13-15 May they elected Pierre Karl Peladeau (PKP) as PQ party leader.

For many analysts, PKP is an unlikely leader/savior for the PQ. His fist-pumping exhortation for Quebec sovereignty as he was introduced as a star candidate during the 2014 campaign was a major factor in the party’s defeat. Moreover, he is an extremely wealthy media mogul, owning a substantial portion of Quebec media; despite putting his holdings in a limited blind trust, it is unclear how “hands off” he will be. Throughout his career, Peladeau reputation has been for confrontational hostility to unions (while the PQ was and remains a crypto-socialist party devoted to social welfare). Nevertheless, the PQ swallowed the camel and elected PKP as leader as the best of limited alternatives.

Now comes the hard part. Liberal premier Philippe Couillard has a solid majority and a four year mandate. He is personally uninspiring, but “bland works”; and he is attempting to put Quebec’s fiscal house in order. Good ministerial appointments could be helped with a rising economy, giving him a solid chance for re-election in 2018. Unfortunately for the PQ, PKP likewise lacks the rhetorical brilliance that often characterized sovereignist leaders. Moreover, he is inexperienced in parliamentary politics and has a steep learning curve ahead. Accustomed to dealing with subordinates in his corporation that leap when he says “frog,” he may well be frustrated by the different species of amphibian found in the PQ caucus and its party members.

As if to put a period to the end of a sovereignist generation, PQ leader Jacques Parizeau died on 1 June. Parizeau, who led the PQ into the 1995 “near death” referendum, will be primarily remembered for his outburst of pique at the result (50.58 percent “no” to 49.42 percent “yes”), attributing the loss to “money and the ethnic vote.”

U.S.-Canada Relations

The surface tranquility of U.S.-Canadian relations conceals a less pleasant circumstance: Canadians have simply given up on the current administration. One no longer hears “keystone, Keystone, KEYSTONE” at every encounter; however, Canadians simply cannot understand why the President would ignore a major Canadian national objective to satisfy the ideological interests of a group that would vote for him anyway. And even more so now that the 2014 election has passed. It is profoundly disappointing and will be conditioning for years to come. Trust is hard to win and easy to destroy.

Consequently, Canadians of whatever political persuasion are simply waiting for the 2016 election, hoping against hope that the apparently positive endorsements of Democratic and Republican candidates regarding the Keystone XL pipeline will transmute into an endorsement to go forward with the pipeline.

A secondary puzzling/infuriating exercise was the extended effort to get agreement to build a new international bridge at Detroit-Windsor. Canadians simply could not understand why the USG was unable to overcome the multiple obstacles erected by the owner of the existing bridge. Thus the Canadian decision to fund the bridge themselves (and obtain reimbursement from tolls over time). And, to add insult to injury in Canadian eyes, the USA wasn't even able to fund its toll plaza—again totally baffling in visceral terms regardless of the U.S. explanations proffered regarding congressional funding, political infighting, yada yada.

Such circumstances are exacerbated by our current ambassador who generates head-shaking (while his wife is noted as a “star”). Ambassador Bruce Heyman made some adroit moves in traveling extensively shortly after arrival to get a sense for Canada. He memorably mangled, however, an admittedly snarky interview with former Canadian ambassador to the United States Frank McKenna by suggesting that the Keystone pipeline imbroglio is no more than a “scratch” on the automobile of our bilateral relations. Canadians really didn't see it that way.

Canadian ambassador to Washington, Gary Doer, reportedly is working hard, but is puzzlingly absent at some major national holidays and frequently returns to Winnipeg on weekends where his wife lives and works. He has no close links with Prime Minister Harper (who admittedly has close links with few of his officials). Nevertheless, neither ambassador is a superstar (or even a star) of the luminance of previous ambassadors.

Canadians don't believe the USG accords them sufficient respect for their foreign affairs efforts, starting with leading the NATO effort to depose Qaddafi. Canadians have been in the forefront of denouncing Iranian efforts to achieve nuclear weapons. They have boots (and aircraft) on the ground supporting Iraqi forces against ISIS. They have a substantial training mission in Ukraine. And they have contributed ships and military personnel to NATO-related and “show-the-flag” exercises from the Baltic to the Gulf of Hormuz. And its troops remain in Afghanistan training/training/training.

Additionally, some look with irritation over the absence of an official visit to Washington by PM Harper. Such neglect does not even include addressing the issue of an address to Congress by the prime minister—the last Canadian prime minister to address Congress was Brian Mulroney in 1988. In subsequent years, Israeli leaders have had this honor five times; Mexican twice; and “luminaries” such as Emil Constantinesco (Romania, 1998) and Jose Maria Aznar (Spain 2009) can also be counted on the list. Whether the disrespect is deliberate or inadvertent, it is still noted.

The quick visit to Ottawa immediately after President Obama's inauguration seemed to imply the possibility for mutual personal appreciation, if not deep affection. However, while relations are nowhere as hostile as the Obama-Netanyahu distaste/distain, they lack the bonhomie that Canadians have appreciated in previous president-prime minister relationships.

To be sure, not every foreign policy venture has been driven by high-minded principles. There are over a million Ukrainian-Canadians that the government wants to induce to support them. Support for Israel generates Jewish-Canadian support, albeit Canadian election laws limiting political contributions. But neither is Ottawa's foreign policy crass opportunism although closer relations with Beijing reversed Harper's earlier refusal to attend the 2008s Olympic ceremonies.

But perhaps most important, although again less blatant, is the impression projected by many Canadians that the United States has lost its way. We are not leading; our government remains in implicit paralysis; we are not living by our historical political and philosophical principles; we are generating confusion rather than confidence among allies. Perhaps this also reflects Canadian self-satisfaction when the country is ranked fifth most happy in an international poll while the USA voters consistently poll that only approximately 30 percent believe the country is headed in the right direction.

Ultimately, however, one should not overweigh problems in the bilateral relationship. It is mediocre, rather than poor. This is not 2003 when PM Chretien refused to support a Coalition of the Willing against Iraq.

Consequently, while maintaining the largest trading relationship in the world, we continue to grind through the traditional rolling laundry list of secondary problems. There is a plethora of niggling trade problems that keep bureaucrats busy. We work steadily to make the border more transparent and seek devices to make border crossings less arduous for day-to-day visitors. We coordinate work in the Arctic, while reserving our position that the Northwest Passage is international waters.

In short, neither the best nor the worst of times. The regret is that it could be considerably better—but that result will have to await the forthcoming Canadian and U.S. elections and a consequent sorting of the new players.

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