

**Getting the Message Across:  
The Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois**

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**For my mother, Letha Katherine Keate**

There is a deeply ingrained tradition in Scotland that we will not finally judge one another by material standards. A country as poor as we have been for so long has at least learnt that there are more important measures of a human being than the financial - more significant assessments of the state of a nation than the stock market. We have a humane tradition to uphold second to that of no other nation.

If we wish to remain Scottish, we will honour that tradition.

William McIlvanney, *Surviving The Shipwreck*

In all his life, he had never seen an English-Canadian and a French-Canadian hostile to each other face to face. When they disliked, they disliked entirely in the group. And the result of these two group-legends was a Canada oddly naive, so far without any real villains, without overt cruelty or criminal memories, a country strangely innocent in its groping individual common sense, intent on doing the right thing in the way some children are, tongue-tied because it felt others would not be interested in what it had to say; loyal, skilled and proud, race-memories lonely in great spaces.

Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the political communications strategies of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois during the 1997 national elections in the UK and Canada and how these two political parties have promoted their nationalist message, as well as their relationship with the journalists who deliver it.

It challenges the consensus that the quality of a party's political communication is the main determinant of its electoral success, and looks at the role of other factors, such as historical, political, cultural and social conditions, and how such factors influence the role of journalists in promulgating nationalism. This is done through an examination of nationalism and cultural identity as well as political journalism in Britain, Scotland, Canada and Québec; an analysis of the histories of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois; data from interviews with journalists and party strategists; an analysis of the political communications strategies of the two parties before 1997; and case studies of the SNP and the Bloc during the 1997 elections in Canada and the UK, which include data from media coverage and party political documents.

The author concludes that it is these other factors that have had more of an influence on the electoral outcomes of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois rather than their political communication, and which have also determined the sometimes adversarial nature of the relationship that political journalists in Scotland and Québec have had with these nationalist parties.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Getting The Message Across:

### The Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois

We live in an age of territorial take-backs [Jacobs, 1994, p.107]. Since Norway's secession from Sweden in 1905, the number of sovereign states in the world has more than quadrupled, now numbering close to 200 [Cohen, 1994, p. 201]. Nationalist movements are on the rise everywhere, from Kosovo to Iraq and Northern Ireland to Spain. This thesis addresses the case of two nationalist parties: the Bloc Québécois, formed in 1991, and the Scottish National Party, established in 1934, by looking in particular at their political communications strategies during the 1997 national elections in Britain and Canada. It also examines how these two political parties have promoted their nationalist message, and their relationship with the journalists who deliver it, for the following reasons.

First, and most importantly, I wanted to challenge the common view expressed by academics and journalists that the quality of a party's political communications was *the* determining factor in electoral success. This thesis argues that the reasons for specific campaign outcomes are much more complex than that and relate to the historical, cultural and political milieu in which a political party operates. In examining two nationalist political parties who demonstrated entirely different approaches to political communication in their national elections, and whose nationalist ethos was also fundamentally different, I hoped to test that argument.

Second, I also wanted to investigate the role of journalists in the promotion of nationalism, because in many of the historical accounts of the rise of nationalism, particularly in 19th-century Europe, they were so often cited as being influential members of nationalist movements. Given my own background as a journalist, and my understanding of how journalists do their work, particularly with regards to the modern constraints of objectivity, I felt that the attitudes of political journalists in Scotland and Québec towards the nationalist parties they reported on needed to be examined as part of this communication process. How these journalists responded to nationalism could possibly influence the nature of coverage, the amount of bias in their reports, and indeed, the general political environment.

Third, as a former journalist and as a community activist with a long history of involvement in politics, I wanted to know why some groups or political organizations were able to get their message across and capture the public imagination despite all the odds against them, while others, with an equally good



or better programme or cause, were unsuccessful. How is it that organizations such as Greenpeace, for example, can win so much world-wide media attention, despite some questionable tactics on their part, while in Canada, the ploddingly honest, left-of-centre New Democratic Party finds it almost impossible to garner column inches or television sound-bites in the national media?

Finally, as an anglophone Canadian born in Québec, I am concerned with issues of national and cultural identity, and in particular, the rapid rise of the Bloc Québécois. Québec's nationalist dreams have permeated Canadian political debate almost since the time of Confederation in 1867 [Trofimenkoff, 1983], and are continuing to have profound effects on its present political climate. The future of Canada very much depends on whether Québec stays or goes: if that province ever achieved its territorial take-back, it is doubtful whether Canada would survive as a nation.

### **The Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois**

An initial comparison of the Scottish National Party with the Bloc Québécois presents striking contrasts in their performance at the polls. Ten years ago the Bloc Québécois did not exist, and its first leader, the charismatic Lucien Bouchard, was a cabinet minister in the federal Progressive Conservative government. The rise of the Bloc was meteoric; established June 15, 1991, it contested its first election in October of 1993, winning 54 out of 75 seats in Québec and becoming the official opposition in the Canadian House of Commons. This would be the equivalent, in British terms, of Alex Salmond and the Scottish National Party replacing William Hague, head of the Conservatives, as leader of the Official Opposition in the British House of Commons.

The electoral success of the Bloc was followed by that of the provincial separatist party, the Parti Québécois, which defeated the ruling Liberals in September, 1994, and pledged to hold a referendum on Québec independence within a year. The results of that referendum on October 30 took many by surprise, including Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, a native Quebecer. With more than a 93 per cent voter turn-out, the vote was 50.56 per cent against to 49.44 per cent in favour. The percentage of spoiled ballots - 1.82 - was greater than the margin of victory.

Scotland and Québec are also of interest because they present a striking contrast in the forms of their nationalism. In Scotland, language does not have the same central importance as it does in Québec, where it "is not only a cultural marker for Quebecois society, but is also a key institution of civil society through which most other things are translated and given meaning." [McCrone, 1998, p.

135) Scotland is trying to pursue a civic form of nationalism, not based on ethnicity or culture, while in Québec, ethnicity and culture is the *raison d'être* of the sovereigntist movement. One only has to look at the language of their respective political manifestos to see this. The Declaration of Sovereignty issued by the Québec government for the referendum on separation begins with these words, italicized for emphasis in the original:

*The time has come to reap the fields of history. The time has come at last to harvest what has been sown for us by four hundred years of men and women and courage, rooted in the soil and now returned to it.  
The time has come for us, tomorrow's ancestors, to make ready for our descendants harvests that are worthy of the labours of the past.  
May our toil be worthy of them, may they gather us together at last.*

These are the opening words of the 1992 Manifesto of the Scottish National Party:

SCOTLAND is a living, breathing, exciting country. Its resources are vast and varied, its people skilled and dynamic, its name and history respected throughout the world.  
By rights, we should be a confident, open people, enjoying living in one of the wealthiest nations in Europe.  
Instead, we are forced to devote all our resources and energy to resisting the policies of a London government we neither voted for nor believe in.  
It's time to put these wasted, futile years behind us and be a nation again.

One is not excited by reading these words. They remind this writer of Arnold Toynbee's utilitarian view of a nation: "A national state is not a God. It is a public utility, like a gas works." [As cited in Gibson, 1994, p. 89]

However, there is danger in Quebec's approach, for it can lead to racism. As Philip Schlesinger states in his discussion of modern-day racism and anti-semitism in Europe [Schlesinger, 1992, p. 21]:

*Ethnos threatens demos.* Whatever the distinctive motivations and causes within each national context, the demand for pure identities within the major western nation-states would seem to manifest a desire for a simple, more orderly, world, one that is purged of ambiguity - and therefore of the wrong kinds of people.

Québec's nationalism is also strikingly different from that of the rest of Canada (or ROC, as it is colloquially known), which sees itself as multi-cultural,

multi-ethnic and multilingual - a veritable post-modern state. The two visions are incompatible, particularly since Québec has difficulty acknowledging the claims to nationhood and sovereignty of the First Nations peoples within its own borders [Roth, 1991, p. 153].

Québec's move toward independence has aroused immense hostility in English Canada. Reaction in the English-language media has been uniformly critical. Business leaders have warned of dire economic consequences: for example, the \$20-billion-worth of trade between the neighbouring province of Ontario and Québec would be seriously threatened [Gibson, 1994, p. 133]. French-speaking Canadians outside of Québec have expressed concerns that they will lose their language rights. People in the Atlantic provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland are worried that they will be cut off from the rest of Canada. Aboriginal peoples in Québec, who are fighting land claims within the province, are angry that they could be forced to separate from Canada, despite their voting 96 per cent against separation in a referendum of their own held four days before the Québec vote. Finally, removing 75 MPs, 24 senators, 7.25 million people and 1,667,926 square kilometres from Canada would have enormous consequences for the political and economic balance of power in the country.

The Scottish National Party's goal of an independent Scotland in Europe has seemed relatively placid and unthreatening by comparison. Although independence has long been a topic of much interest and debate north of the border, it has not seemed to arouse the same kind of antagonism - or even interest - in the national, London-based media until very recently. It does not apparently threaten the economy of Britain. It does not have to contend with the special needs of an ethnocultural group within its borders that has claim to its territory, as do Canada's aboriginal peoples within Québec. The SNP's leadership has been careful to stress the inclusivity of the party's vision of an independent Scotland, and with its call for independence within Europe, seems more in tune with our post-modern times in which nations have "limited sovereignty in an interdependent world" [McCrone, 1992, p. 219] than does Québec and its appeal to emotion and historical memory. Finally, if Scotland leaves the United Kingdom, it will not isolate any region: before 1707 and the Act of Union, Scotland was an independent nation, not the remnant of a conquered one, as is Québec.

However, the Scottish National Party's record of electoral success has been nowhere near that of the Bloc Québécois. The SNP, now at age 66 a political senior citizen compared to the fledgling BQ, won only three out of 72 seats in Scotland during the 1992 national elections in Britain, and this after an

ICM Research poll (commissioned by the *Scotsman* and Independent Television News) showed Scots support for independence at 50 per cent. Although these results were thought at the time to be caused by a “rogue” poll, when the *Scotsman’s* then political editor, Peter Jones, asked that they be checked, the results came back the same: “support for independence, either outside both the UK and the EC or inside the EC, had reached 50 per cent” [Marr, 1995, p. 212]. But this was certainly not reflected in the election three months later, where just over a fifth of the electorate voted for the SNP [Marr, 1995, p. 230].

The Scottish National Party enjoyed a brief surge of popularity to 30 per cent in the fall of 1995 following their “Braveheart” campaign, in which SNP supporters distributed leaflets outside cinemas showing the Mel Gibson film on the life of legendary Scots hero and freedom-fighter William Wallace. However, it did not maintain that level of support in the national election of 1997, and was as far away from victory as ever. Why did the SNP not have the same success as the Bloc Québécois, despite the fact that independence for Scotland appeared to be far less contentious and less problematic than it was for Québec? Was it a measure of the effectiveness of their political communication strategies, or was this the result of the differences in the relationship between political journalists and the nationalist parties in the two regions? Or was it due to more subtle factors, based in their history and culture? These were the questions that I wanted to answer in this thesis.

### **The Effectiveness of Political Communications**

Part of the difficulty in answering these questions is that there is no clear consensus on the effects of political communications, at least not among academics (politicians and journalists seem much more inclined to believe that spin is all you need to win an election.) Some of the same doubts expressed about the effectiveness of such communications are also heard in the ongoing debate about media effects; for example, the inadequacy of research designs, the difficulty (if not impossibility) of separating out media influence from other influential factors, the role of personal belief structures in the reception of messages, the lack of long-term studies, and most frustratingly, the contradictory nature of the findings.

It is not my intention here to review the extensive literature on this debate, but to point out the connection between media effects and the effectiveness of political communications. If it can be argued, as it often has, that the case for media effects is not proven, [McLeod, Kosicki and Pan, 1991; McQuail, 1994; Livingstone, 1996; Cumberbatch, in Briggs and Copley, 1998] then it would

follow that the same can be said for the effectiveness of political communications, which rely on the media to get their message across. However, as Livingstone says: "Most media researchers believe that the media have significant effects, even though they are hard to demonstrate, and most would agree that the media make a significant contribution to the social construction of reality. The problem is to move beyond this platitude." [Livingstone, 1996, p. 321]

The same is true for the effects of political communications. As with media effects, for every claim for the influence of political communications, there is a counter-claim. Claims for a causal connection between a party's political communications and how people vote, for example, are not easy to substantiate. Some research seems to indicate that in fact, campaigns make very little difference to voters. In the 1992 general election in Britain, for example, Labour's vote increased just three per cent from start to finish of the campaign, despite its new and improved political communications [McNair, 1995, pp. 32-33]. In the 1997 election, "The party which got the most positive press backing, Labour, fell back during the campaign, while the Liberal Democrats, who rarely got even a mention, gained the most ground" [McKie, 1998, p. 129]. Evidence that how a message is communicated can have an influence, particularly with undecided voters, and that the image of party policy is the most important [McNair, 1995, p. 34] did not seem to be supported by the results of the 1992 election in Britain or the 1993 federal election in Canada. British Labour leader Neil Kinnock was certainly more telegenic than the bland John Major, as was Kim Campbell, leader of the Canadian Progressive Conservatives, compared to Jean Chrétien, who has been described by Canadian political commentator Keith Davey as looking like "the man who drove the getaway car."

In fact, the evidence for the media's influence on voting behaviour is not very robust [Negrine, 1994, p. 157], but that has not stopped the claims for that particular influence. Franklin, for example, states that the last chapter in his book *Packaging Politics* "suggests that audiences are increasingly influenced by the ever more subtle and persuasive techniques of the communications professionals and 'spin doctors'." [Franklin, 1994, p. 23] However, an examination of the chapter does not reveal any clear proof for such a statement: he refutes the theory of press influence; describes the multiplicity of social and cultural factors that can affect how people make political choices; cites a study of television coverage that concluded such coverage "followed public opinion, but did not lead it" [Franklin, 1994, p. 219]; and although he makes a convincing case for the influence of television on uncommitted voters, adds that the regulations governing

broadcasting ensure non-partisan coverage so that "television's influence is greater on public knowledge than attitudes." [Franklin, 1994, pp. 225]

Other examples abound. Crête, in his discussion of what constitutes an effective message in an election campaign, states that vague messages are most likely to be successful, but then concludes by citing studies that show "taking a stand on the issues could be more effective than being noncommittal or indecisive", and "that candidates who were neutral on the issues were considered less honest, less direct and less well informed than their opponents who took a stand." [Crête, 1991, p. 24] Miller [1994] seems to contradict his own conclusions in his study of the media and propaganda in Northern Ireland. He concludes that because "a large proportion of people" in his sample believed the main points in the British government's version of what happened when three IRA members were killed on Gibraltar in 1988, "public opinion can be vulnerable to propaganda offensives by official sources." He then makes the valid point that such influence, however, is mediated by "other sources of information available, prior beliefs, views and experiences", but adds: "Nevertheless...the media, can, under certain circumstances, have a strong influence on public perceptions of contemporary political issues and allow the powerful to legitimate their actions." [Miller, 1994, p. 283]

In McNair's discussion of the role of political communication in recent British and U.S. elections, he states: "Quantifying that role is difficult, but it is beyond dispute that effective political communication played a large part in saving Bill Clinton's term, and that it greatly helped the British Labour Party to its first government in eighteen years." [McNair, 1998, p. 49] However, could it not be argued that Clinton's election victory was due in large part to the fact that he was running against an ageing, ineffectual opponent, who could not beat Clinton's record of economic success? And likewise, with the British Labour Party, could their victory not be attributed to the fact that the voters were tired of Tory sleaze and John Major's inadequate leadership, and that after 18 years, they felt it was time for a change?

Philo states in his discussion of media audiences and message reception that "One task of good journalism is to *seek* the key pieces of information which do not 'fit' the templates and false stereotypes of some popular ways of understanding, and to develop them into alternative and critical accounts." [Philo, 1998, p. 283] This is also the task of the good researcher. Part of this researcher's difficulty with the literature on effects is that it seems to assume that voters are swayed by image, and that there is no underlying substance to their electoral choices. This is a rather cynical view, and one not supported by the evidence. The most oft-cited example of political marketing based on image is

the election campaign of Ronald Reagan in 1980, which admittedly, raised the selling of the president to new levels of sophistication. But, as Scammell points out:

Doubtless there are politicians guided by no goal other than the attainment of popularity and power, but pure, naked ambition scarcely provides an adequate explanation of political behaviour. Even Ronald Reagan, who might be thought the ultimate media-packaged candidate, developed his policies from the basis of genuinely held political convictions, although there can be no doubt about the importance of opinion research both in shaping Reagan's election campaign strategy and his actions as president.

[Scammell, 1995, p. 10]

However, Reagan's support was based not just on his image, but on his ability to communicate his political convictions, and his perceived competence in handling the important issues of peace and prosperity, according to the research done by Reagan's pollster, Dick Wirthlin [Scammell, 1995, p. 22].

Another assumption frequently made is that voters choose which political party to support on the basis of the party leader's appearance. This belief has governed the choice of leader in some political parties: for example, Labour party members elected Tony Blair as their leader "largely because of his perceived ability to look and sound good for the cameras" [McNair, 1999, p. 142]. However, this approach has had mixed results, as mentioned earlier, because the public had concerns about issues of substance that over-rode matters of style. Kinnock may have been more telegenic than Major, but Labour's own focus groups as well as public polls revealed that British voters did not like him or believe in his competence, and that he "was Labour's most serious liability" [Scammell, 1995, p. 256-257]. In Canada, Kim Campbell was chosen leader of the Progressive Conservatives because it was felt her relative youth, lively personality and blonde good looks would create the impression of a new and revitalized party for the 1993 federal election. However, this was the election in which the Progressive Conservatives went from being the government with 169 seats to being the smallest party in the House of Commons with just two seats. As Woolstencroft notes: "The leader, although dressed in fine attire, had neither the organizational preparedness nor clear and defensible policies to sustain the image so carefully nurtured." [Woolstencroft, 1994, p. 9] In fact, her rival, Jean Chrétien, managed to use his less than statesmanlike appearance to good effect during the campaign when the Tories broadcast a television advertisement mocking his facial paralysis. Chrétien responded by saying that "God gave me a physical defect and I've accepted that since I was a kid" [Woolstencroft, 1994,

p. 21], making the Conservatives look mean-minded and negative, willing to ridicule a person's physical disability in order to score political points.

The question then arises, given the uncertain nature of the evidence for the seeming ease of manipulating the public, why does the belief in it still persist? One answer to this question is provided by Andrew Calcutt, who argues that the belief in the influence of modern political communications arises out of a long history of elitist theoretical tradition, dating back to the mass society critiques of Matthew Arnold and continuing through to those of the Frankfurt School. Calcutt sees this belief as essentially anti-democratic: "Formally expressed as a criticism of media moguls and the air of unreality arising from their manipulative practices, the underlying content of this approach is to raise a question mark over the universal franchise and demean the critical faculties of the overwhelming majority of the electorate." [Calcutt, 1998, p. 165] He points to the case of Italian TV mogul Silvio Berlusconi, who was swiftly removed from office in 1994 after just a few months in power. Although Berlusconi's controlling interests in television certainly made it possible for him to raise his profile during the election period, it could not protect him from the scrutiny of the voters in Italy, who, Calcutt says,

have not lost the ability to measure media images against direct experience....Berlusconi was seen to be just like any other political operator; and all the television channels in Italy could not have saved him from the inglorious exit from government which occurred in late December 1994. Once again, political and economic realities overtook the airbrushed images of politicians and other public figures.

[Calcutt, 1998, p. 168]

These kinds of political and economic realities, I would argue, have a greater effect on political outcomes than political communications. Therefore the focus of this thesis is on the political, social and economic realities that have influenced voters in Québec and Scotland, rather than on what Negrine describes as 'Grand Theories' of mass media and democracy. [Negrine, 1996, p. x] I agree with Philo's criticism "of those areas of mass communication theory which have lost contact with the need to examine the real world in a systematic fashion." [Philo, 1999, p. 288] In order to understand the real world of political journalists and how they mediate the messages of nationalist parties, it is necessary to look at how they do their work. For this reason I chose to focus on how political journalists and nationalist parties interact with each other within the context of



such realities, as well as on how these parties get their message across through specific political communications strategies.

## **Chapter Outline**

This thesis is divided into two sections: the first, consisting of four introductory chapters giving the background and theory, and the second, describing the political communication strategies and giving the case studies of the two parties. Following this introductory chapter, chapter two gives an overview of nationalism and cultural identity in Britain, Scotland, Canada, and Québec, so as to provide an understanding of how their nationalisms have developed. Chapter three shows how nationalism in Québec and Scotland have been given political expression by detailing the background and history of the Bloc Québécois and the Scottish National Party. Chapter four takes a comparative look at political journalism in Canada, Britain, Québec and Scotland and examines the role of Québec and Scottish journalists in promulgating nationalism, as well as the climate in which they worked during the 1997 general elections. The second section of the thesis focuses on the interviews with political journalists and party strategists which provide the original material on which to base my analysis of their relationship and how it works. Chapter five describes the political communication strategies of the two parties leading up to the general election in the UK and during the federal election in Canada, both of which took place in 1997. Chapters six and seven are the case studies of the political communications of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois during their respective national elections, while chapter eight is my conclusion.

## **Methodology**

One aim of this doctoral thesis is to look at the media relations strategies of the two parties during the national elections in Canada and Britain held in 1997, in order to understand the complex inter-relationship between political journalists and nationalist parties and whether this influences electoral outcomes. The second is to compare how national identity has been projected through the political communication strategies of the Scottish National Party, the Bloc Québécois, and its predecessor, the Parti Québécois. Four main research methods are used: first, extensive background reading on the history and politics of Scotland and Québec, nationalism and cultural identity, media in Britain and Canada, and political communications theory; second, examination of the publications and public relations materials produced by both the Scottish

National Party and the Bloc Québécois; third, tracking of the media response in the influential newspapers of the respective countries: the *Montreal Gazette* and *La Presse*, in Québec; and the *Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday*, and the *Herald* in Scotland; and fourth, 20 interviews with media relations officers and others involved in developing communications strategies for both parties, as well as with political editors and columnists, so as to determine how these parties get their message across.

The emphasis in this thesis is mainly on print journalism rather than television, for both practical and theoretical reasons. First, my background is in print journalism, and so I understand the working practices of print journalists. This proved extremely useful in evaluating the differences in the practices among British and Canadian, Scottish and Québécois journalists, which I do in chapter four, and also, in gaining the confidence of the print journalists whom I interviewed for my research. Secondly, and most important, however, there is a valid case for print journalism's role in agenda-setting, particularly in Canada, where what Fletcher and Everett describe as "the prestige dailies" - the *Globe and Mail*, *Le Devoir*, *La Presse*, the *Toronto Star* and the *Montreal Gazette* - play a large part in determining the nature of election coverage [Fletcher and Everett, 1991, p. 191]. Also, newspapers are seen as better sources of political information: as MacDermid found, "attention to television news turns out to be a rather weak predictor of political knowledge, while attention to newspapers is a very strong predictor of political knowledge." [MacDermid, 1991, p. 87] In the UK, because newspapers are not bound by the same legal restrictions as the broadcast media, they can provide "an alternative, more opinionated view of elections. Besides determining *how* events are covered, the press plays an important so-called 'agenda-setting' role by determining *what* is reported." [Wring, 1997, p. 74]

Television coverage of the two national elections in 1997 has not been ignored in this thesis, however, but there is a greater amount of material on Canadian television than on British. This is because Canadian television has long been seen as an essential component in nation-building, whose aim, according to the 1991 Broadcasting Act, must be "to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada" [Romanow and Soderlund, 1996, p. 325], and as such, has played an important role in national identity. Canada's broadcasting system is also much more diverse than Britain's, with two public broadcasting services, one in French, Société Radio Canada (SRC) and one in English, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), serving francophone and anglophone communities across the country. In addition, Canadians have access to a much wider variety of channels, both private and public, available to 97 per cent of homes with television [Siegel, 1996, p. 10],

with 24-hour news services, specialty channels, parliamentary channels in both French and English, as well as the Cable Public Affairs Channel which covers, live and unedited, a broad range of political activities in Canada.

However, this is all changing - since 1998, Britain has had its own parliamentary channel, BBC Parliament - and with the rapid growth in media of all forms, it is questionable whether print will still be able to claim an agenda-setting role in the future. As Adam Boulton concludes:

The rapid development of political on-line services, the imminent multiplication of digital channels and the systemic convergence of electronic media will all mean that the public will be getting political information on-screen from many sources other than conventional television stations. Already party web-sites, 24-hour television and radio news channels, and local and cable broadcast services mean that the totality of election broadcasting is beginning to match the diversity of print.

[Boulton, 1998, p. 203]

### Being A Canadianist

Researching media effects is not easy. Most of the material on the subject - and there is a great deal of it, with more than 2,000 publications in just the years from 1979-89 - is inconclusive and contradictory [Franklin, 1994, pp. 204-205]. As John Eldridge states:

When we come to consider the multi-media world we now inhabit, with its multi-messages, multi-signifying systems and modes of discourse, the size, the scope and the velocity of it all, with its spiralling interconnections and its fragmentary discontinuities, the classical enlightenment task of understanding, explaining, interpreting and evaluating is difficult to accomplish. Let us acknowledge the difficulties but also suggest that the denial in principle of the enlightenment project (farewell to reason) may itself be a product of intellectual vertigo (all that is solid melts into air) and perhaps, if understandably, a failure of nerve.

[Eldridge, 1993b, p. 343]

There were particular difficulties with this enlightenment project, involving as it did comparative research in two regions 3,600 miles apart, in two languages, and during two national elections whose campaigns overlapped each other. A major difficulty was obtaining Canadian material. The problem of obtaining academic books on Canada in the UK is a long-standing one, which the British Association of Canadian Studies (BACS) has tackled by trying to increase awareness amongst publishers of the need for such books by the 400 "Canadianists" in

Britain. Fortunately I was able to get books at the University of Edinburgh, home to the oldest Centre of Canadian Studies in the UK, and through the Centre and BACS, discovered useful internet sources, such as the Canadian Studies list based at Trent University in Canada, which in turn provided me with other useful web-sites. The Canadian High Commission's Canadian Academic Newsheet was another excellent resource. Academic colleagues in Canada e-mailed me information and found books for me; friends and relatives clipped and saved relevant news and magazine articles; others tracked down elusive but necessary facts. The BACS conference of 1996 provided me with several papers on the Québec referendum and its political aftermath which were very helpful. The internet was an invaluable resource: through it I was able to keep abreast of events in Canada via on-line newspapers, read the Bloc's statements, contact Elections Canada for information on the regulations governing media coverage during the 1997 federal election; and arrange for interviews with Bloc (and SNP) media strategists. Without it I would have been severely handicapped in my research.

As well as the general lack of Canadian material available in Britain, there was not much material available on the Bloc Québécois anywhere. Despite the influence the party has had on the Canadian political scene, very little has been written about it. As of this writing, I had only been able to locate two articles, three book chapters, and a book written by a Canadian Press reporter, besides Bouchard's autobiography and a biography of the former Bloc leader written by journalist Lawrence Martin. In addition, because of geographical and time restrictions, I did not have the same access to Bloc strategists as I did to those in the Scottish National Party, and the turmoil in the Bloc's organization before the election added to these difficulties. Also, because the Bloc did not update its election web-site, I was not able to obtain copies of its news releases. However, these problems in gathering information were offset by my background knowledge of Québec politics acquired during my 48 years in Canada.

### A Word About Sources

When it came to sources, I made a conscious decision to use, as much as possible, materials either produced by journalists or originating in the media: for example, Robert Bothwell's *Canada and Quebec* was developed from transcripts of interviews done for Open College at radio station CJRT in Toronto; Gilles Gougeon's *A History of Quebec Nationalism* was based on a series of television programmes broadcast on Radio-Canada's nightly public affairs programme *Le Point*; *Restless Nation*, by Alan Clements, Kenny Farquharson and Kirsty Wark,

based on the television series of the same name; *Paper Lions* by business journalist Maurice Smith, and broadcaster Ludovic Kennedy's *In Bed With An Elephant* are Scottish examples. I did this because it seemed to me that if I was writing a thesis exploring how journalists and the media transmitted the message of nationalist parties, it was essential that I use examples of their work. In addition, by doing so, I hoped to make a contribution to the case-studies in this field, of which there are not many, particularly in Canada.

It was also for this reason that I did not footnote my references to newspapers and magazine articles in my text, but listed them in my bibliography, as they were primary sources. This created some difficulties when there were numerous articles by the same reporter, but it was less confusing than having two systems of referencing in my thesis. To make it easier to access the different forms of sources consulted, which also included party political documents, news releases, and material retrieved from the internet, these were listed under their specific categories, such as books and journals, newspaper and magazine articles, and party political documents.

In addition, given the swiftly-changing nature of the media, and the on-rush of new political developments in Scotland, Québec, Britain and Canada during the life of this study, my literature search was biased towards the most current sources, particularly those published in the late 1990s, in an effort to keep up-to-date. This proved almost impossible, but was extremely important, however, for the validity of my research findings. The political campaigns of the late 1990s in which voters can directly access information from on-line newspapers and political web-sites, as well as a multitude of television channels and radio stations both public and private, are quite different from those of the mid-1980s when information sources were much more restricted in form and content. As McQuail says: "The important if obvious point that the media are not constant as a potential influence, over time and between places, is often overlooked in the search for generalization." [McQuail, 1994, p. 332]. This is particularly true, I might add, of Canadian newspapers, whose fortunes have improved greatly since 1997, with not only increased profits and staff hires, but also more quality journalism [Carlin, 1998; Noble, 1998] - but that is the subject of another study.

Dealing with bias was a particular problem in my Canadian sources. The political situation is much more polarized in Canada than it is in Scotland, and so the books written on the Québec situation, especially the most recent ones, reflect this. Books by anglophone journalists such as Diane Francis's *Fighting For Canada*, William Johnson's *A Canadian Myth: Quebec, Between Canada and the Illusion of Utopia*, and Lawrence Martin's *The Antagonist* were virulently anti-

nationalist, but I had to use them because they contained useful factual information.

Unfortunately, some of the material written by Scottish academics about Québec and Canada was not always accurate, which meant it could not be used as a reliable source in the absence of Canadian books and articles. Christopher Harvie describes Canada as having “states” in *Fool’s Gold*; Lindsay Paterson talks about the Canadian “Union” in *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland*; and David McCrone refers to the Bloc Québécois becoming the official opposition in the federal government “for a time” after an election held in 1996 [McCrone, 1998, p. 147]. The brief section on Quebec in *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity* by James Kellas [1991, pp. 94-98] has numerous errors. He gets the name of the FLQ wrong; confuses the North American Free Trade Agreement with “a free trade area”; and has Pierre Trudeau being leader of the Opposition in 1987, three years after he retired. These inaccuracies are perhaps understandable, given the lack of interest in Canadian Studies up until now, but it made the search for comparative sources on Québec and Scotland more difficult and was a major obstacle in researching the thesis.

### Interviews: Questions and Answers

The question of bias was also a problem in choosing which journalists in Québec I was going to interview for my research. It is impossible to find people who do not have a strong point of view on the situation in Québec; the best I could hope for was finding journalists who, although having a particular point of view, could be counted on to be fair. I was greatly helped by a former editor of the *Montréal Gazette* who was able to give me some names of political journalists who fitted that description, and who could be considered representative of journalistic opinion as a whole. I could not possibly interview all the major political reporters and editors there as I did in Scotland, where the journalistic corps is much smaller. There was not the same difficulty with bias in Scotland, unless you consider the fact that all the political journalists I interviewed were pro-Unionist; that was seen as objectivity in the context of the general election in the UK (the issue of bias is discussed further in the thesis).

I did 20 interviews, 18 of them in-person and taped, and two of them by e-mail. I was able to interview my Scottish subjects both before and after the 1997 UK election, which was helpful in giving me some context for Scottish politics and journalism. My interviews with Québec journalists took place shortly after the Canadian election, and I spoke with Bloc strategists in late

October-early November of that year. Unfortunately, due to a rail accident I was unable to meet with the chief strategist of the Bloc campaign.

Because I changed the focus of my thesis topic, the questions that I asked did not strictly relate to my final research question. However, that did not matter. In research, as in journalism, having the “right” question matters far less than having the right attitude towards the answers your interview subjects give. As Alia says, “quieter and less obtrusive ways of presenting the journalist’s self in the world she or he is observing can lead to trust and improved access to information.” [Alia, 1996, p. 104] As I have found throughout my many years as a reporter, people tend to answer questions with what is uppermost in their minds. Sometimes that relates to your original question, but often it does not. A good reporter - or researcher - does not ask leading questions. The best information and/or insights often come from sitting back and observing, and it is more important to pay attention to what you are being told than to what you are trying to ask. If an interviewee keeps mentioning a particular topic that is not on your agenda, perhaps that is an indication that this is what you should be focusing on. For example, when one Scottish journalist kept going back to the subject of the newspaper price wars and how this was affecting his paper, I realized that it was necessary for me to discuss the role of journalists within the economic as well as the social and political culture in which they worked, which I did in chapter four. I also found that because I sat back and listened rather than trying to direct the responses, I was given enough information in a broad context that I had plenty of material for my case-study chapters - more than 125 pages of transcription. Even though in two instances, those with the political party leaders, my interviews were only 15 to 25 minutes long, I was still able to obtain some extremely useful insights that helped direct the focus of other interviews which followed.

As a result, my findings and conclusions are not as simple and straightforward as I had at first envisioned, but that is perhaps to be expected. As one of my more experienced academic colleagues advised me: “The truth is often messy. If your conclusions are too tidy, you most likely haven’t done your investigation properly.”

### **A Perfect Thesis Versus A Good One**

Another academic also advised that when trying to complete a doctorate, it was important to remember that a thesis did not have to be perfect; it only had to be good. This research project has its limitations, of course. Some of these were the inevitable result of doing a comparative study in two countries; others were due

to the inherent difficulties of the researcher's role, while some came from the author's own background and experience.

First, having to do a study of Québec from a base in Scotland and only briefly in Ottawa, Canada's capital, meant that it was physically difficult for me to obtain interviews with Bloc media strategists and francophone reporters. In addition, given the polarized nature of the debate on Québec sovereignty in Canada, there were obstacles to getting an inside look at the Bloc and its operations, as I am clearly a federalist, although in the lexicon of the sovereigntist-federalist argument, a "moderate" one. This opened some doors, but closed others: with the help of those political aides within the Bloc who were keen to improve understanding of the party and its aims in the Rest of Canada, I was able to get interviews with the leader of the party, a political assistant who worked closely with him on the campaign, a media strategist, and a francophone reporter who had spent several weeks covering the federal election in Québec. Attempts to obtain an interview with the editor/publisher of *Le Devoir*, Québec's influential sovereigntist newspaper, failed because of the perceived federalist bias of my research.

Second, contending with the insider-outsider tensions of a project such as this proved frustrating. Gaining access to the inner workings of two nationalist parties in the run-up to and aftermath of crucially important national elections was not easy. However, being an outsider can also be useful. As Alia notes: "Sometimes it takes the combined voices of insiders and outsiders" to get at the truth [Alia, 1996, p. 99]. Being an outsider often gave me the critical distance necessary for an objective view. Third, there were obviously clear limitations to such a short-term study as this, which covers the period leading up to the 1997 national elections in the two countries and shortly after: how political parties get their message across is a long-range process, not one that just occurs during the brief weeks of a national campaign, but again, lack of time and resources restricted its scope.

Fourth, the limitations imposed by my background and experience also provided obstacles, although these did not prove insurmountable. This project required a knowledge of sociology and political science, neither of which I had ever studied in any formal way; I also had little experience of research methods, having completed a Master's degree in journalism that was mostly vocational in its content. In addition, I come from a profession, journalism, and an academic research culture, North American, that has tended to emphasize the historical-empirical approach over the analytical, where facts and data count more than theoretical analysis. This necessitated a rather steep learning curve, following in



the best Scottish tradition of “the lad o’pairts”, whose talent and intellect were enough to counter deficiencies in education and experience.

Finally, the question of audience was another problem to be solved. When I first began writing my thesis, the assumed audience was that of the Canadian generalist reader; one who was interested in the comparison of the Québec and Scottish situation, but did not necessarily have an in-depth understanding of the topic. However, as the thesis progressed, I realized I would have to provide more explanation of specifically Canadian terms and background for UK readers, as well as do the same for Canadian readers who would be encountering information specific to Britain. I have tried to strike a balance, so that the writing will not be too simplistic or repetitious for either national public, and interesting to both.

## Conclusion

When I began my thesis, I had planned to analyze the media relations strategies of the Bloc Québécois and the Scottish National Party, with the goal of finding out what helped or hindered the promotion of their message. I assumed, somewhat naively, that I could not only clearly identify these factors, but could also demonstrate how they affected the performance of the two parties at the polls. I soon realized that this was not possible: there were a few independent variables I had not considered, such as several million voters, and as I read the literature, began to understand what a quagmire audience effects research is.

In addition, as I interviewed political journalists and politicians, I kept stumbling over the issue of objectivity. Upholding standards of objectivity has been particularly problematic for francophone journalists in Québec. Although uniformly nationalist, their loyalties are divided between the sovereigntist and federalist camps, and they must work in a political atmosphere that is fiercely polarized. They are also subject to strong criticism from some of their anglophone colleagues, who may not fully appreciate the constraints under which they operate, and who have a different notion of what constitutes objectivity. In Scotland, the issue seems more straightforward, on the surface, but there are difficulties there, too. As evidence from my research revealed, journalists who are not automatically anti-nationalist are perceived as less objective by their colleagues than those who support the other political parties.

Finally, the 1997 election results seemed to contradict the view that good political communications, based on a clear and well-determined overall strategy, are the key to electoral success for a political party. The Bloc, after two more changes of leadership and an election campaign widely regarded as a shambles,

managed to re-elect 44 MPs, more than all the other parties in Québec combined. The Scottish National Party, which had a five-year strategic plan, excellent communications, and an experienced and talented leader, gained half a percentage point in the popular vote, and took three seats from the Conservatives, but failed, once again, to make a breakthrough in Scotland's central belt.

Apparently other factors had a greater influence. Analyzing what these factors were, and why they had such an influence, is the task of this thesis. These include the specific historical and cultural developments that were the basis for nationalist movements in Scotland and Québec, examined in chapters two and three; the nature of political journalism in the two regions, analyzed in chapter four; and the political communications of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois and its provincial counterpart, the Parti Québécois, looked at in chapters five, six and seven. In the next chapter, I explore the historical and cultural factors that led to the rise of nationalism in Québec and Scotland, within the context of the larger nation-states in which they exist, Canada and Britain, so as to understand how their national identities were constructed, and from there, what the role of nationalist parties and the journalists who report on them are in expressing that identity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### One, Two, Three Many Nationalisms

Nationalism is a complex subject. There is a welter of theories as to its causes in the literature, many of them contradictory. In the case of Scotland, a stateless nation, and Québec, which began as a remnant of a state and is now a nation within a state, or as McCrone says, “a nationless state” [McCrone, 1998, p. 176], the theories do not easily apply. This thesis approaches nationalism as a case study in political communications, not as theory, and thus the focus in this chapter will be on the development of the particular nationalisms of these two territories. However, it is important to place the nationalisms of Québec and Scotland, as well as that of their surrounding states, Canada and Britain, within the context of current theories on nationalism if we are to understand their origins.

As McCrone so reasonably suggests, the fact that there are so many theories of nationalism should not surprise us: there is a wide range of historical experience among nations to serve as examples for them [McCrone, 1998, p. 3]. A major theoretical conflict in current debates on nationalism is between those who see it as an inevitable product of industrialization, for example, Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm, and those who see its origins as pre-dating modern times, such as Smith, Hutchinson and Greenfeld. The modernist approach as expressed by Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm, takes the view that nationalism developed as a result of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, in which it became the unifying ideology of an increasingly secular society, taking the role formerly played by religion. “Print-capitalism” was essential to its development [Anderson, 1991], as was a highly-industrialized society and a mass education system for the promulgation of culture [Gellner, 1983]. Nationalist myths and traditions were not to be taken seriously, as they were invented rather than authentic [Hobsbawm, 1990]; and nations that “have navels invented for them by their own nationalist propaganda” (in other words, were made, not born) were by far the most common, according to Gellner [1990].

Unfortunately, such modernist theories do not work for Scotland, Québec or Britain’s founding nation, England. Greenfeld’s historical analysis of the development of nationalism in England states that English identity grew out of the Protestant Reformation, and in particular, the printing of the English bible, which gave Englishmen “the language in which they could express the novel consciousness of nationality, for which no language had existed before” [Greenfeld, 1992, p. 52] a century before the Enlightenment period. Scotland’s national identity was forged during the Wars of Independence from 1290 to

1320, when Scotland was a pre-literate, pre-industrial society [Broun, Finlay and Lynch, 1998]. The Declaration of Arbroath, in its expression of a Scottish identity based on the independence of the kingdom of Scotland, demonstrated, as Watson notes, “a new form of identity which, whatever modern historians might say, is testimony to the existence of a nationalism which looks uncannily like the modern version, albeit without the emphasis on rights of citizenship.” [Watson, 1998, p. 31] With Québec, the early colonial administrators sent over to govern the impoverished, semi-literate settlers in the wilds of 18th-century New France were struck by the independent nature of *les Canadiens*, as they called themselves. This attitude of feisty independence, reinforced by the colonists’ strong resentment of their treatment by French soldiers during The Seven Years’ War, is seen by some Canadian historians as the beginning of Québec nationalism [Gougeon, 1994; Bothwell, 1995].

It is those academic writers such as Smith, Greenfeld and Hutchinson who have developed a different model for nationalism, one that is not so dependent on the modernist view, that seems more applicable to the cases of Scotland and Québec, as well as Britain and Canada. As McCrone states: “Modernism fails to locate the nation in a historical sequence of cultural shaping, and hence overdraws the distinction between ‘tradition’ and modernity, frequently missing the deep roots which nations have in an ethnic substratum” [McCrone, 1998, p. 12]. McCrone’s theory of neo-nationalism is also useful in typifying the current nationalisms of Scotland and Québec, which share some common features: multiple national identities; a predominately civic character; social-democratic politics; and certainly, ambivalence about their ultimate aims (McCrone, 1998, pp. 128-29). However, in stating that theirs are examples of nationalisms that have emerged in the late 20th century, he underestimates the historical continuity of nationalist sentiment in both regions which underpins modern Scottish and Québec nationalism and is vital to the understanding of its development.

In addition, McCrone’s model, along with modernism, fails to grasp the emotion that is the basis for national and cultural identity [Connor, 1994b]. As Smith says, nationalism

provides the sole vision and rationale of political solidarity today, one that commands popular assent and elicits popular enthusiasm. All other visions, all other rationales, appear wan and shadowy by comparison. They offer no sense of election, no unique history, no special destiny. These are the promises which nationalism for the most part fulfils, and the real reasons why so many people continue to identify with the nation.

[Smith, 1991, p. 176]

The failure to understand the emotional basis for such national and cultural identity, I would argue, has been a major factor in the movements for independence, most certainly in Québec and in Scotland. For example, why would Quebecers identify with Canada when during the late 1940s, “the French-Canadians were clearly second-class citizens in their own province, underpaid, barred from top jobs, casually dismissed as folk-singing *habitants* who would perform the drudge duties for their English overlords” [Keate, 1980, p. 55] ?

In order to understand the underlying emotions of nationalism, rather than emphasizing reason over passion, the oft-stated personal credo of former Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau [Whitaker, 1980], we must use our reason to analyze the passion. To say that people’s behaviour is irrational may just mean, after all, that we do not know what their rationale is. In the words of Jane Jacobs:

Nationalist emotions are dangerous, of course....But they are valuable emotions, too. These emotions are felt deeply by separatists, and they are felt equally deeply by those who ardently oppose separatists. The conflicts are not between different kinds of emotions. Rather, they are conflicts between different ways of identifying the nation, different choices as to what the nation is. Trying to argue about these feelings is as fruitless as trying to argue that people in love ought not to be in love, or that if they must be, then they should be cold and hard-headed about choosing their attachment. It doesn’t work that way. We feel; our feelings are their own argument.

[Jacobs, 1980, pp. 3-4]

In this chapter I look at the different ways of identifying the nation in Britain, Canada, Québec, and Scotland, and specifically, the complex layering of the many nationalisms of Canada and Britain. In Canada that includes those of Britain and France, described in the past as the country’s two founding nations; those of Québec and English-speaking Canada, or ROC, the Rest of Canada, as it is now more commonly known; and that of the First Nations, Canada’s aboriginal peoples. The nationalisms of Britain may seem less complex, but this is deceptive, for they take in not only England and Scotland, but also Northern Ireland and Wales: this chapter will focus on the first two.

I am doing this because it is essential, particularly for an understanding of nationalism in Canada, to look at its historical antecedents. Without that knowledge, the anger and hurt of Québec separatists, the bewilderment and sense of betrayal felt by English-speaking nationalists, and the icy fury of Pierre Trudeau in his life-long campaign against nationalism will seem irrational; but they are not.

Similarly, the rest of Canada's seeming inability to establish its own identity until very recently will make much more sense when looked at in the light of British nationalism, and modern Britain's own crisis of identity. English-speaking Canada has never had the same confidence of vision or sense of its own culture as does modern-day Québec, and has, in fact, tended to define itself in terms of what it is not - not British, not American.

Scotland's nationalist aspirations will not make sense, either, unless one knows the historical logic of its grievances, which makes its present role as a region within a highly-centralized, unitary state - albeit one with its own parliament and a certain measure of autonomy - still problematic.

### **British Nationalism or, the Land of Ukania**

The topic of British nationalism is a difficult one. To speak of British nationalism seems almost an oxymoron; one can talk of Welsh, Scottish, or Irish nationalism with a degree of certainty, but is there such a thing as British nationalism? Or is it just English nationalism? Even Britain's official name - the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - denies any nationality, as Benedict Anderson so trenchantly observes [Anderson, 1991].

Greenfeld's analysis of the influence of the Protestant religion in the development of British nationalism has been mentioned earlier; how the liberty embodied in Protestantism, with its emphasis on what Greenfeld describes as "the priesthood of all believers" [Greenfeld, 1992, p. 52] was also reflected in the liberal values of Britain's constitution, which, patriotic Britons believed, made theirs "the freest nation in the world" [Colley, 1996, p. 356]. England was the model for the concept of the nation; what distinguished English nationalism from that of the French, for example, was the emphasis on the individual. In France the collective rights of the nation over-rode those of the individual citizen.

In England, the source of the authority was the individual, a thinking human being; individuals delegated their authority to representatives, and thus empowered the nation. In France, it was the nation from which authority emanated, and it empowered individuals.

[Greenfeld, 1992, p. 167]

But the seeds of the decline in English nationalism were planted in the 18th century, according to Greenfeld, when British loyalties were transferred to the concrete institutions of land, government and the monarchy, rather than the principles of liberty, equality and reason. By the 19th century, the language of

patriotism had been appropriated by Britain's ruling elite, in order to restrain increasing class conflict. Patriotism became Conservative, racist and royalist [Cunningham, 1989]. In the 20th century, Britain was still dominated by what Tom Nairn calls "Royalism", which buried its nationalist impulses because of the central and unquestioned role that the monarchy played in British society.

Nationalism is inherently populist: it is the conception of a people's sovereignty and innate agency, which (therefore) a national State is in principle supposed to embody and serve. But - precisely - such populism was and has remained utter anathema to Great Britain's post-1688 State. For long the most liberal and advanced of countries in a Europe still dominated by Absolutism, it grew abruptly middle-aged in the face of 1776 and 1789.

[Nairn, 1988, p. 136]

The main difficulty in defining British nationalism today is that the traditional sources of national pride and identity - Protestantism, the constitution, economic success, the Empire, and the monarchy - no longer have the same power and resonance that they once did. The religious freedom of Protestantism is no longer unique to Britain, the constitution is seen as "a ramshackle contrivance badly in need of radical renewal" [Miller, 1995, p. 171], the UK's economic performance has declined, the empire is no more, and the monarchy is in disrepute. To what symbols of national pride can the residents of Ukania, as Tom Nairn calls it, turn to? Perhaps the solution is to build a theme park on the Isle of Wight, as in Julian Barnes' satirical novel, *England, England*, where up-market tourists view such "Quintessences of Englishness" [Barnes, 1998, p. 83] as the Royal Family, Robin Hood and His Merrie Men and the White Cliffs of Dover, and everything is as "you imagined England to be, but more convenient, cleaner, friendlier, and more efficient." [Barnes, 1998, p. 184]

This is irony, but the observation by one of the book's characters that in "the modern world, stability and longterm economic prosperity are provided more effectively by the transnational corporation than by the old-style nation state" [Barnes, 1998, p. 128] rings true as modern-day Britain struggles to find a new identity for itself, faced with the burgeoning nationalism in Wales and Scotland, as well as the perceived threat of dominance by the European Union. Britain is now suffering from "identity angst" [Nairn, 1997, p. 212], and this identity angst became a theme during the 1997 election, with the Conservatives "emphasizing the threat to the United Kingdom from devolution and federal Europe" [Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p. 152], to which Labour responded by

appropriating the traditional Tory symbol of Fitz the British bulldog for a political broadcast in an effort to prove that it was also the party of patriotism. Unfortunately, the symbolism backfired: Fitz may have been a “metaphor for Britain”, as the Labour party said, but, as Mitchell points out, “the connotation behind the metaphor for ethnic minorities was racist and xenophobic.” [Mitchell, 1997, p. 138] Labour later dropped the bulldog advertisement after complaints from minority groups who found it too reminiscent of the British National Party, but made sure that the Union Jack was in evidence at news conferences and party meetings [Mitchell, 1997, p. 138].

As we shall see in the rest of this chapter, Britain’s current identity crisis sounds familiar to Canadians, who have struggled with the issue of national identity throughout their history, first as a colony of Britain, and then later, as an economic colony of the United States. The problematic role of national identity is just one of numerous themes in the origins of English and French nationalism that are reflected in those of Britain and Scotland, Canada and Québec today. In Britain, the anti-democratic role of the monarchy, the belief in individual rights, and the Francophobia of the English; in France, the influence of the Catholic church, the belief in collective rights and the centralization of government, and in turn, the Anglophobia of the French, all echo throughout their history. In particular, the “Royalism” of the United Kingdom that Nairn describes proved to be a pivotal factor, its tradition of elitist anti-populism putting Britain on a collision course with Scotland and greatly influencing the course of Canadian nationalism in both English-speaking Canada and Québec.

### **Canadian Nationalism, or Not-Land**

As with British nationalism, the topic of Canadian nationalism is also a difficult one. The first problem is: does it even exist? I would argue that until very recently in its history, the answer is no. The second question to answer is: whose nationalism are we talking about? If we are talking about Canada as a whole, and the Canada of today, then we must speak of one, two, three many nationalisms. As Collins points out, if Québec is a nation without a state, then Canada is a state without a nation [Collins, 1990]. But this definition does not include Canada’s aboriginal peoples, who now describe themselves as the First Nations.

It is a commonly-heard cliché in Canada that it is “Not-Land”; not British, and not American. Perhaps this is the easiest way to define a country that has no shared ethnicity, language, or historical experience. But even that



phrase does not hold up when you look more closely at this baffling country. A more accurate saying would be, "Not British now, and not American then."

The history of English-speaking Canada really begins with the end of the American Revolution and the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists, those who remained faithful to the British crown and fled to Canada. But even this group of exiles were multicultural and multiracial: of the original 45,000 Loyalists, 28 per cent were German, 23 per cent Scottish, and 12 per cent black [Richler, 1993, p. 65].

Many settled in the area of Canada later to become the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. But some 25,000 settled in the province of Québec, which at that time included territory now in the province of Ontario. These settlers were unhappy that although they had come to a supposedly British land, they had none of the British institutions they were used to, in particular, an elected assembly [Bothwell, 1995, p. 24]. The response of the British government was, in 1791, to divide Québec into two: Upper Canada, with a population of 25,000, mostly Protestant and English-speaking; and Lower Canada, whose 200,000 residents were largely French, Catholic, and rural.

However, if other nations are imagined communities, Canada was a deliberately planned one, designed to thwart any of the radical and democratic impulses emanating from the French and American revolutions.

Not only did the early Loyalist settlers bear with them the usual bitterness of émigrés towards the ideas and symbols of the revolutionary nation from which they had fled - nurturing an anti-Americanism, not to speak of anti-democratic sentiments, which were to remain persistent features of Canadian political life - but this basic strain was consolidated and encouraged by the ideological mission of the Colonial Office....The colonial administrators came to Canada armed with a mission to build a conservative, un-American, and undemocratic society in the northern half of the continent.

[Whitaker, 1992, p. 11]

They largely succeeded. Even the Rebellions of 1837 in both Lower and Upper Canada did not fundamentally alter this pattern. In Upper Canada, the rebellion against the ruling clique of the Tory Family Compact, who controlled the colonial government, bureaucracy and legal system through family connections and patronage, failed for lack of support. Its defeat legitimized the status quo, in which the government gave "special privileges, pay-offs, and other forms of corruption....The Tory triumph also involved a great deal of secondary non-economic legitimation as well: British loyalty, the identification of conservative

elitism as British, and reform as American and therefore treasonous." [Whitaker, 1992, p. 18]

The British North America Act, which created the Dominion of Canada in 1867, embodied these same principles. Unlike the United States, Canada was to be highly centralized, with the main role of government being the provision of economic infrastructure, specifically the railways, which were to unite the country from coast to coast. But the BNA Act also established Québec and Ontario as two separate provinces, thus recognizing that there were two languages and two cultures. What this meant, Whitaker says, was that "Canadian nationalism, as such, would be economic nationalism more than any other kind of nationalism....The basic source of authority and legitimacy for the new nation was to be found in the traditional Tory notion of historic continuity with the British Crown." [Whitaker, 1992, p. 21]

Thus English-speaking Canada had no nationalist ethos of its own, but had to borrow one from Britain, which it did with great enthusiasm. Following Confederation, the artists and intellectuals of the Canada First group, and their successors, the ministers, teachers and writers of the Imperial Federation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "looked to their Britishness and their place within a world-wide empire." [Whitaker, 1992, p. 24] This attachment lasted long after "the British Empire began its slow evolution into the token of Commonwealth...Canada remained one of the few countries voluntarily swayed by British values and personalities, the monarchy chief among them." [Newman, 1995, p. 44] This identification with the mores of the British was not uncommon in the colonies, particularly among the upwardly mobile, as Benedict Anderson has noted, and Canada was no exception.

The most fervent admirers of the British connection were Canada's upper classes. Vincent Massey, scion of the agricultural implements firm, served as High Commissioner in London from 1935 to 1946. He took to wearing a handkerchief up his sleeve, referred to his native land as 'Canader' and became so much more English than the English that Lord Cranborne, Lord Privy Seal in Sir Winston Churchill's cabinet, once observed with a perfectly straight face: 'Fine fellow, Vincent - but he does make one feel a bit of a savage.'

[Newman, 1995, pp. 44-45]

Of course, the major difficulty with this kind of cultural nationalism and its belief in British racial superiority and the God-given right of British rule is that it could not help but antagonize French Canada. Pierre Elliot Trudeau, the son of a Scots-Canadian mother and French-Canadian father, believed that the solution was to create a new nationalism based on a pluralist vision, in which Canada

was recognized as a land of many cultures with “two main ethnic and linguistic groups...Canada could become the envied seat of a form of federalism that belongs to tomorrow’s world...it could become a brilliant prototype for the moulding of tomorrow’s civilization.” [Trudeau, 1968, p. 179] This nationalism would also help Canada resist the threat of annexation to the United States, for it would provide a unique identity, superior to the American concept of the melting-pot.

Such a pluralist vision would require a major investment by the federal government to make it work, however, especially if it was going to make Quebecers feel that it was worth their while to remain within Canada.

Resources must be diverted into such things as national flags, anthems, education, arts councils, broadcasting corporations, film boards; the territory must be bound together by a network of railways, highways, airlines; the national culture and the national economy must be protected by taxes and tariffs; ownership of resources and industry by nationals must be made a matter of policy. In short, the whole of the citizenry must be made to feel that it is only within the framework of the federal state that their language, culture, institutions, sacred traditions, and standard of living can be protected from external attack and internal strife.

[Trudeau, 1968, p. 193]

This passage, written in 1964 before Canada had its own flag or official anthem, and four years before Trudeau became Liberal prime minister, proved prophetic. During the initial years of his term as prime minister from 1968-79, this was Trudeau’s programme. But during the early 1980s and after 1984 when the Progressive Conservatives under Brian Mulroney took power, federal government support for such national institutions and policies was gradually withdrawn. Why this happened is a subject of intense and polarized debate in Canada. Right-wing analysts will say that it was because the federal government could no longer afford the costs of the welfare state; those on the left will say that it was because the government wanted to destroy Canada’s national institutions in order to encourage its economic and cultural annexation by the United States.

These two views crystallized during the election of 1988, which, Whitaker says, “was the English-Canadian equivalent of the 1980 sovereignty-association referendum in Québec.” [Whitaker, 1992, p. 310] The central issue in the campaign was the proposed Free Trade Agreement, which would reduce barriers to cross-border trade which protected home markets. However, as many

Canadians realized, doing so would reduce national sovereignty at both the federal and provincial levels, as well as threaten Canadian culture and resources.

The Pro-Canada Network formed to campaign against the deal was a broad coalition of groups, including labour, women, senior citizens, farmers, environmentalists, and artists, which despite its meagre resources, provided an effective defense against the market-driven attacks led by its neo-conservative opposition, the corporate-financed Business Council on National Issues. However, because the anti-Free Trade vote was split between the Liberals and the New Democratic Party, the Progressive Conservatives won the election, and the FTA, which later became the North American Free Trade Agreement with the addition of Mexico as a signatory, was a *fait accompli*.

The disillusionment was palpable. It did not help Canadian unity that Québec voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Tories and free trade.

Quebec stood entirely outside the passions generated by Canadian nationalism. Historically, Quebec (shielded perhaps by language) has never shared English-Canadian apprehensions about American domination. By 1988 Quebec was a business-oriented society which took its cues from a francophone economic elite who had become the new cultural heroes...Certainly the role played by Quebec in the great free trade election did not escape the notice of bitter English-Canadian nationalists.

[Whitaker, 1992, p. 315]

What had been Canadian nationalism's finest hour, creating a movement "which was generous, liberal and compassionate" [Whitaker, 1992, p. 314], turned sour. The antagonism toward Québec and the anger against the government felt by voters in the rest of Canada effectively destroyed the Meech Lake Accord, which had been engineered by Mulroney to answer Québec's demand for more autonomy and by doing so, increase his party's support in Québec. However, to become reality, it had to be ratified by all of Canada's 10 provinces, but the agreement soon began to fall apart, with opposition in the Manitoba legislature led by aboriginal member Elijah Harper, who wanted inclusion of native rights, and in Newfoundland, by Premier Clyde Wells, who disagreed with the concept of special status for Québec. The Meech Lake Accord died after the two provinces refused to endorse it. Québec had thought that because the Accord had been signed by the nine premiers in English-speaking Canada, it was a done deal. But this was not the case.

What Quebec politicians did not understand was that English Canada was no longer the kind of country where twenty million

people could be delivered by the signatures of ten politicians. As the deal unravelled on the larger stage, Quebec politicians spoke of a betrayal of trust, of a broken contract. To many English Canadians, the breach of trust was between them and their politicians, not between English and French Canada.

[Whitaker, 1992, p. 316]

The failure of Meech Lake in 1990 led inevitably to the failure of the national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord in 1992, the formation of the Bloc Québécois, and the second Québec referendum on sovereignty-association with Canada in the fall of 1995, lost by only the narrowest of margins. The aftermath has left Canada more divided than ever, but out of this situation has come a realization that perhaps Canada needs to work harder at promoting its national identity. As Gordon Gibson says:

We have been extremely diffident toward such matters in Canada, even declining the opportunity to build up national symbols or heroes. Our head of state, the Queen, is a foreigner, and that suits us just fine. We don't glorify one language, or one culture, or one religion, and we manage to see everyone's point of view to the extent where concepts of right and wrong melt and dissolve into a confused political correctness. There are some very good things about this laid-back tolerance - indeed, it is one of the finest attributes of Canada. But there is a problem. People who are not determined and passionate about anything less abstract than democracy and motherhood can get taken to the cleaners by more focused elements with more specific goals.

[Gibson, 1994, pp. 47-48]

The federal government's response was to set up a \$20-million unity agency, the Canada Information Office, whose task is "to wave the flag across the country and counter separatism in Quebec" [Globe and Mail, 1996]. The agency, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps, is designed to work with grassroots unity groups, promote youth exchanges, and dispel what the government calls separatist "myths". Perhaps Trudeau's lessons have been re-learned.

### **Québec Nationalism - Je Me Souviens**

In his book *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber says that for a nation to hold together, there must be

not just common remembering but common forgetting.  
Differences are held in suspension in successful communities of

difference - what civic nations are when they succeed - and that entails a certain amount of studied historical absentmindedness. Injuries too well remembered cannot heal.

[Barber, 1995, p. 167]

Québec remembers only too well what the rest of Canada has forgotten, or never knew. Right from its earliest days as a colony in New France, it was a beleaguered nation, fighting a fierce struggle for its existence, both physical and cultural. The French made sporadic attempts to settle in the territory known as Canada following its discovery in 1534 by Jacques Cartier, but there was no permanent settlement established until 1608, when 30 people led by Samuel de Champlain came to the colony, most of whom died. The French government was never keen to invest in the territory, a pattern that persisted throughout its history in North America, and Champlain's plans for the development of the area were ignored [Trofimenkoff, 1983]. The word "Canadiens" was used to refer to the native Iroquois, who played a vital role in the colony as trappers, warriors, and most importantly, as teachers in the ways of survival in this cold, vast land.

It was not until the 1620s and after that the population of the colony began to stabilize, supported by the rich investors of the Company of One Hundred Associates and later, the *Communauté des Habitants*, in order to take advantage of the profitable fur trade. But their dreams of wealth did not come easy, as Trofimenkoff notes: "On numerous occasions the dream even appeared to be more of a nightmare: many a night the twenty-five hundred settlers of 1660, shivering in their beds from cold and fright, hoped they would awaken in France." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 3] But from these people came the *génération de l'enracinement*, the founding generation, who, as historian Robert Lahaise says, "were born here of French parents and who weren't about to jump on the boat and go home to France." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 6]

This was the beginning of a uniquely French-Canadian identity, strongly differentiated from the French in the Old World. It was marked by a sense of freedom and lack of social stratification. Young, ambitious, and mostly penniless (Lahaise estimates that some 95 per cent of the 10,000 immigrants to New France couldn't afford to go back), *les Canadiens* - as they were now known - were sometimes obnoxiously independent, at least to their colonial masters.

North America democratized its people as much as in New France as in New England. So much so, in fact, that the French administrators repeatedly took great offence. Hocquart, one intendant, wrote in 1737 that the *Canadiens* were 'intractable by

nature'. At the very moment of our defeat, Montcalm spoke of our overly independent spirit, and the Comte de Bougainville went so far as to declare 'We seem to be two different nations, indeed enemies.'

[Gougeon, 1994, p. 7]

It was their own style of fighting, learned from the Indians, and their resentment of the high-handedness of the French soldiers during the Seven Years' War that prompted the comments of Montcalm and de Bougainville. For the feisty Canadiens, it was, as Governor Louis Frontenac had once said, every man to his own tree, rather than the rigid order of the French regulars, "which required their soldiers to die dutifully one row at a time." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 7] But not even their superior skills in battle could save them from defeat in 1759, with a fighting force of 14,000 Canadiens, 5,000 French, and 2,000 Natives against 35,000 English. Their loss at the battle of the Plains of Abraham, the infamous Conquest of 1759 and its aftermath, left wounds that have yet to heal.

### **From Conquest to Confederation**

It was a foregone conclusion that France would have lost its colonies in North America, if not in 1759, then at some point soon after. The numbers tell the story. There were 70,000 people in French Canada, but a million and half in British North America. The French government was no longer willing or able to finance Canada, for which it had no long-term plans. Britain was better-equipped militarily and financially, and moreover, wanted control of North America.

The battle that decided the fate of French Canada was over in an hour, with both its generals, Louis Montcalm and James Wolfe, killed, along with 1,200 French and Canadian soldiers and 600 British. Canadian historians, both French and English, have continued the battle in words, debating whether the Conquest was an opportunity or an obstacle. The facts seem to indicate the second. A quarter of the houses in New France were destroyed, and almost 80 per cent of those in Québec city, while the advancing British army burned every farm from the Gaspé to Québec. Many died, "either by the cannonball or from cold, hunger and epidemics, while the rest were reduced to shivering in their rags." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 15] In addition, the population was financially ruined when the paper money issued by the French up to almost the end of the war became worthless.

English Canadians have had difficulty understanding the emotional significance of this loss. But then, as Susan Mann Trofimenkoff explains, they have never known what it is like to be a conquered minority.

Therefore a great leap of imagination is required....Perhaps only an analogy can assist the leap of imagination. Conquest is like rape. The major blow takes only a few minutes, the results no matter how well camouflaged, can be at best unpredictable and at worst devastating.

[Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 20]

*Les Canadiens* had been abandoned by France, but this separation from the mother country, 5,000 kilometres away, also reinforced their linguistic identity. Unlike the French, who have many local dialects, they had an almost uniform accent which came from the *filles du roi*, the female orphans from Paris sent to New France between 1665 and 1673 to help populate the colony.

The result of this separation was to isolate the *Canadiens* within their own country, creating the two solitudes that still define Canada today.

The Canadian identity was radically split from that moment onwards. On the one hand, 95 per cent of the inhabitants were Francophone, Catholic, poor farmers, nostalgic for a past they idealized, and on the other hand, there was a tiny minority of Anglophones, wealthy Protestant tradespeople with all the usual arrogance of conquerors.

[Gougeon, 1994, p. 15]

The British government tried in vain to make the province of Québec (as it was now called) an English colony. It passed the Constitutional Act of 1791 in an attempt to accommodate the demands of the newly-arrived United Empire Loyalists, but it just reinforced the political tensions. In fact, the first debate on the first day of the newly-formed legislature of Lower Canada in 1792 concerned the preservation of the French language [Bothwell, 1995, p. 27].

It was during the early 19th century that nationalism became firmly established in Lower Canada, led by Louis Joseph Papineau and the Patriotes. Inspired by nationalist and progressive movements in Europe, Latin America, and the United States, they wanted an inclusive, democratic *Canadien* nation. Within the British Empire, this distinct society would not be for just *les Canadiens pure laine*, those of the original French stock. "It also meant coexistence with people who didn't necessarily have to speak French but who respected *Canadien*



culture and the rights of the Canadien majority in Lower Canada." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 19]

But this nationalism was not entirely benevolent. It also grew out of the anxiety felt not only by the frustrated middle-class desirous of power, but also the rural habitants, whose impoverished existence was threatened by a shortage of arable land and repeated crop failures. Papineau was quite willing to exploit this *ressentiment*, and did so effectively, as "the first of Quebec's nationalist leaders with all the charisma such leaders have subsequently displayed." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 70] But although his charisma was enough to spark the Rebellion of 1837, it was not enough to give it broad-based support. The rebellion failed, with terrible consequences that inflicted more wounds on *les Canadiens*. The British made numerous arrests, hanging and deporting many of the rebels. Hundreds were thrown in jail, people killed, houses burned, and large amounts of private property confiscated [Bothwell, 1995, p. 33].

The political consequence was the Durham Report, which contained the prescient phrase that Canada was "two nations warring in the bosom of a single state" and which recommended assimilation of the French-speaking majority. Out of this came the Act of Union in 1840, which made Upper and Lower Canada one province, with an assembly designed to give the English a majority of seats - despite their much smaller population. It would seem that Canadien nationalists were doomed, but that was not to be the case.

In fact, only five years later Papineau returned from exile in Paris, and in 1847 rejoined the assembly, where, as a member of *les Rouges*, he demanded repeal of the Union and annexation to the United States. A group of radical nationalists who opposed the growing clericalism in French Canada, *les Rouges* found a cultural home in the Institut Canadien of Montreal, which provided lectures, books and a place for the freethinkers to discuss the ideas promulgated in their paper *L'Avenir*.

Their anti-clericalism was in response to the church's growing influence in French Canada following the Union, an influence that re-defined its nationalism. Whereas religion had been seen as one part of French Canadian nationalism, and the church as a means of defending that nationalism, "clerical ideologists made religion integral to nationalism and awarded the church the central role in the defence of the nation." [Cook, 1995, p. 89]

By the 1850s, massive British immigration meant that the French had become a minority in the Canadian assembly. But former patriote Louis-Hippolyte Fontaine saw - as did Lucien Bouchard more than 140 years later - that the way to power was through bloc politics.

He argued that if French Canadians worked together, if they all voted for the same party and the same leader, and didn't divide the way English Canadians did, they could exercise greater power in the new political-constitutional arrangements than their numbers alone would have allowed them to.

[Bothwell, 1995, p. 36]

For the next two decades, that is what French Canadian leaders did, until the stability of the government itself became threatened because of brokerage politics. "Governments could rarely sustain a majority for more than a few months as the four-way pulls in the assembly tugged at the political fabric....The politicians at the time were as dizzy as history students since." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 106]

The solution was Confederation. Unlike other attempts to resolve French and English differences, this time French Canadians were consulted. It was also a subject of great debate by both the radical Rouges, who did not like it, and the conservative Bleus, who did. The Rouges were opposed because they feared - perhaps rightly - that Confederation was a just a scheme to benefit the promoters of the cross-country railways that were to be built as part of the deal. They also did not like the fact the public would not have a hand in drafting the constitution or be able to vote on it.

The reasons the Bleus liked it are extremely interesting in the light of Québec's modern history. As historian Arthur Silver explains:

It was sold to the general public, at least the public that read the press and discussed these sorts of questions, as a kind of sovereignty-association....The pro-Confederation editorialists, speech-makers, and pamphleteers pushed that aspect of the arrangement - that Quebec was going to be separated, that French Canadians were going to have a state of their own which would have complete control over all matters of provincial jurisdiction, and that it was a move towards greater separation.

[Cited in Bothwell, 1995, p. 38]

The French fact would finally be recognized in Canada, a country with two official languages and cultures, based on the two founding nations of Britain and France. That was the dream: of course, the reality was quite different.

### **From Confederation to Conscription**

The expectations that French Canadians had of Confederation were soon disappointed. Although they now had their own province, in which they could

preserve and protect their language, culture, religion, laws and way of life, it was clear that the *bonne entente* of 1867 was not being maintained. French Canadians outside of the province - first in New Brunswick, then Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and finally Saskatchewan and Alberta - gradually lost their rights to education in their own language and religion. In addition, Québec was becoming increasingly marginalized as just one of seven provinces within Confederation, and now with less than 31 per cent of the Canadian population.

However, the most dramatic example of this for French Canadians was the 1885 hanging of Louis Riel, the charismatic Métis leader of the Red River Rebellion in Saskatchewan, which became a catalyst for nationalism in Quebec. The Métis, the original inhabitants of the territory, were threatened by the incursion of white European settlers, and looked to Riel as the leader who would assert their rights to the land, and protect their way of life and their francophone, Catholic identity. Riel was believed to be the protector of the French language and Catholicism in Western Canada by francophones in Québec, and his execution "was definitely seen as a direct hit on a fellow French Canadian." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 34] Out of the reaction to Riel's death came the man described as "the father of separatist thought under Confederation" [Gougeon, 1994, p. 34], Jules-Paul Tardivel, and a strong nationalist movement under the leadership of Honoré Mercier. During the Riel Crisis Mercier had tried to create a bloc of MPs to be the voice of French Canadians in Ottawa, and when that failed, formed the provincial Parti National and became premier as leader of that party in 1887 [Bickerton, Gagnon and Smith, 1999, p. 166).

Tardivel, a journalist and novelist, believed in a separate Québec, but his was a conservative vision, based on a rural, agricultural and Catholic nation-state, the same nationalist vision that was to inspire Abbé Lionel Groulx more than 40 years later. Mercier differed from Tardivel in that he did not believe Québec should be independent; rather, he argued it should have greater autonomy from the federal government, a theme of Québec premiers to the present day. When Mercier talked about independence, he meant independence from the British Empire, and in this his views were similar to those of Henri Bourassa, another influential figure in French Canadian nationalism, who became leader of the first bloc of nationalists from Québec to sit in the House of Commons.

For Henri Bourassa, the moment of truth was the decision by Canada's first French Canadian prime minister, Wilfrid Laurier, to send volunteer troops to fight in the Boer War in 1899. He resigned his seat in protest against English Canada's subservience to Britain, a subservience that he felt threatened its independence.

Henri Bourassa and those who thought like him...tended to believe that English Canadians were the ultimate hyphenated nationality, that they were not really Canadian in spirit, no matter what their citizenship. They responded to Britain's needs and not to Canada's.

[Bothwell, 1995, p. 55]

Bourassa believed that Canada needed its own identity, one based on provincial autonomy and biculturalism. He became leader of the Nationalist League in 1903, whose goal was "to convince all Canadians that the time had come to forge an independent Canadian identity" [Bickerton, Gagnon and Smith, 1999, p. 164], and in 1910 began publishing *Le Devoir* as a platform for his views. His *Nationalistes* became part of a Nationalist-Conservative alliance that sent 27 MPs to Ottawa in 1911, the first example of a federal nationalist bloc. United by their anti-imperialist and anti-conscription views, they were unable to influence the Conservative government because of their small numbers, and when Laurier expropriated their independence stance, "the nationalists gradually lost their appeal and their movement lost its momentum." [Bickerton, Gagnon and Smith, 1999, p. 168]

This same conflict over Canada's role vis-a-vis the British Empire occurred during the Conscription Crisis of 1917, but it was much more violent - five people were killed and 70 people wounded in one Québec city riot [Johnson, 1994] - and had dramatic consequences for French-English relations. The two Canadas were united in supporting volunteer involvement of Canadians at the beginning of World War One. But as the war dragged on, and recruits were harder to find, prime minister Robert Borden wanted to impose conscription. English Canadians, still strongly attached to the Empire, were in favour; French Canadians were not. Laurier, now leader of the opposition, wanted a referendum on the question, but Borden rejected that idea and fought the election campaign of 1917 on the issue. Feelings were running so high that the government members from Québec were in physical danger during the campaign. One, cabinet minister Albert Sévigny,

lived through some horrific and terrifying moments. The only political meeting he tried to hold in his Dorchester riding took a tragic turn and he was nearly killed when the crowd's rage went wild. Attempts to poison him to death and stone-throwing attacks on his home added to his tragedy....Everywhere in Quebec, French Canadians were angry and took ferocious exception to anyone who opposed their saviour, Laurier.

[Gougeon, 1994, p. 48]

The English Canadian majority won. In response, the Québec legislative assembly debated the Francoeur motion, which stated in effect that if English Canadians felt that French Canadians were hindering Canada's progress, the province would consider breaking the 1867 Confederation agreement. The motion was made more in sorrow than anger, and never went to a vote. But it indicated to the defeated *nationalistes* that their best option was to withdraw into "fortress Québec", where they stayed for the next four decades.

### Abbé Groulx, Duplessis, and La Grande Noirceur

During the years following World War One, Québec nationalism took a rightward turn under the activist leadership of Abbé Lionel Groulx and the political leadership of Maurice Duplessis, premier of the province from 1936-39 and 1944-59. This nationalism focused on *la survivance*, the survival of the French Canadian way of life within Québec, but in doing so, displayed a disturbing tendency towards anti-semitism and fascism.

Abbé Groulx was an enormously influential figure in Québec, still revered today. Teacher, priest, writer, and historian, he founded both the nationalist journal and organization, *Action française*. He was distressed by the changes in Québec arising out of the increased industrialization and urbanization of its society, and sought to strengthen the French language, Catholicism, and the family as a defence against these changes and their corrupting effects. Like many Québec nationalists, he believed in "a convenient ethnic division of labour that gave spirituality and virtue to the French Canadians, leaving to the English materialism, practicality, and, of course, control of the economy." [Cook, 1995, p. 122] He was a visionary, however, in that he saw the need for a class of French-Canadian entrepreneurs, who would contribute to Québec's identity, and he also understood the role of the state in affirming that identity and the institutions that supported it. But he supported a boycott campaign, *Achat chez nous*, against Jewish shop-keepers, favoured the fascist philosophies of Mussolini, Salazar and Franco, and expressed strong anti-Semitic beliefs in his writings throughout his long career [Richler, 1992; Gougeon, 1993; Delisle, 1995].

The second major influence in this time period was Duplessis, *le chef*, who formed the nationalist political party, the Union Nationale, made up of a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives. Duplessis was not at heart a nationalist; he was, after all, originally a member of the Conservatives, but he could see the benefit of using nationalism to get and keep political power in the province. The expression of his nationalism was inward-looking and reactionary. He was against the centralization of the federal government, and rejected monies

from Ottawa in order to protect Québec's political autonomy, while at the same time encouraging investment from American corporations.

The hopes of nationalists that under Duplessis Québec would achieve economic independence were soon dashed. But his initial term as premier was cut short by the issue of conscription when the provincial Liberals won the 1939 election on the strength of a pledge from the federal government that Quebecers would be protected from conscription if they voted Liberal. French Canadians were not keen to participate in the war: some were more inclined to support the right-wing, Catholic Pétain government in France rather than the Free French led by Charles De Gaulle [Bothwell, 1995, p. 73]. By 1942 the federal government realized that despite more than one million volunteer recruits out of a population of 12 million, it could not keep its pledge, and held a national referendum on the issue. The results were almost evenly split, with 71 per cent of the voters in Québec saying no, and 80 per cent of the voters in the rest of Canada saying yes [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 260].

This time the protest was not violent. Instead, the anger and disillusionment focused on the formation of the Bloc Populaire, a coalition of nationalists from both right and left, not unlike that of the Bloc Québécois 50 years later or Bourassa's *Nationalistes* 40 years earlier. However, the BP was short-lived. It ran candidates in the 1944 provincial election, enabling Duplessis's Union Nationale party to get back in power by splitting the vote, and won two seats in the federal election the following year.

Duplessis was to remain in office for another 15 years. His regime was marked by widespread corruption, including bribery of the press and government officials as well as the buying of votes, persecution of religious minorities, and virulent anti-unionism [Trudeau, 1968; Keate, 1980; Trofimenkoff, 1983; Richler, 1992; Gougeon, 1993; Cook, 1995], which earned it the title of *la grande noirceur* (great gloom). Starting in the 1950s, however, some intellectual light began to pierce this gloom.

Duplessis and other traditional nationalists had not wanted Québec to participate in the post-war welfare state because they saw it as a threat to French Canadian culture. They believed that the church, not the federal government, should look after education, health and social services. But there was growing discontent with this reactionary view, expressed in the magazine *Cité Libre* founded in 1950 by Pierre Trudeau and Gérard Pelletier. They had both campaigned for the workers in the 1949 strike at Asbestos, a turning-point in the province's history. The horrific sight of workers being beaten senseless by the provincial police aroused the conscience of the church and media, and began the process of social change that was soon to permeate all levels of Québec.

The intellectuals at *Cité Libre* were opposed to this backward form of nationalism, which they saw as a means for opposing social change, and worse, as “nothing more than a rationalization of French-Canadian economic inferiority and a justification for clerical power.” [Cook, 1995, p. 125] What Québec needed, they believed, was to develop its own business class which would encourage and promote the province’s economy, and use the federal government to protect the interests of French Canadians, instead of withdrawing from it.

### **La Révolution Tranquille - Maîtres Chez Nous**

Following the death of Duplessis, the Liberals were swept into power in 1960. The party had a new leader, Jean Lesage, a former federal cabinet minister, chosen for his television-friendly image [Gougeon, 1994, p. 88], and a new programme prepared by Georges-Emile Lapalme, which became the basis for *la révolution tranquille*, or the Quiet Revolution. It also had the *équipe du tonnerre*, or thunder squad, a dynamic team of cabinet ministers which included René Lévesque, the popular television news anchor who later founded the Parti Québécois. The strategy of the new government was a nationalist one: it was determined to boost the Québec economy, and most importantly, ensure that the benefits of that economy went to Quebecers. The people of Québec were to be *maîtres chez nous*, masters in their own house, in the words of the slogan promoted by Lévesque.

During the six years of the Lesage government, five new ministries were established; the civil service increased by almost a third; regional economic councils for economic development were created; labour laws were revised; a provincial health insurance programme was implemented; a Québec pension plan, separate from the Canadian pension plan, was developed, whose funds could be used for investment in the province; and the education system was completely revised. The last was the most significant, for it broke the stranglehold the church had on education in Québec, establishing the first Ministry of Education in the province since 1873 [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990].

But nationalist tensions split the Lesage cabinet. Lesage was a committed federalist and began to isolate those on the nationalist wing of the party, particularly Lévesque. In 1966 the Liberals were unexpectedly defeated by the revived Union Nationale, due to the splitting of the vote by the Rassemblement pour l’Indépendance Nationale (RIN), a pro-independence party. Soon after Lévesque realized that he could not achieve his nationalist aims within the Liberal party, and left in 1967 to form the Mouvement Souveraineté Association, which later became the Parti Québécois.

While these conflicts were being played out at the political level, a more violent and extremist form of nationalism was occurring on the streets. In 1963 the Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ) placed bombs in an army recruiting centre and Armoury, then mail-boxes in the upper-class WASP neighbourhood of Westmount in Montréal, and three years later, a shoe factory and textile mill, “symbols of working class exploitation” [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 312]. Six people died in these incidents [Desbarats, 1976]. This angry nationalism of the FLQ was an ethnocentric one, based on the belief that only an independent Québec would save French culture and language. Any co-operation with English Canada was a sell-out of Quebecers, whom they saw as an oppressed minority - *les négres blancs d’Amérique Nord*, or the white niggers of America, in the words of FLQ strategist Pierre Vallières.

Matters were not helped by the visit of French president Charles de Gaulle to Canada for its centennial in 1967, supposedly a time to celebrate national unity.

de Gaulle landed at Quebec city, barely acknowledged the federal presence, accepted the hospitality of the provincial government, drove to Montreal, and in a memorable speech at Montreal’s City Hall, uttered a phrase that gladdened the hearts of all those who supported Quebec independence: ‘Vive le Québec libre!’ [Long live free Quebec!] The crowd cheered, leaving no doubt in the rest of Canada that there were plenty of Quebecers who did not find the idea of independence strange or repulsive. The government of Canada did, and said so, and de Gaulle departed in a hurry.

[Bothwell, 1995, p. 121]

The Canadian government’s response was not an over-reaction. As Allan Gotlieb, former undersecretary for external affairs, recalls: “there were groups within the Elysée (the French presidential palace) and within the intelligence services of France who were actively promoting and scheming for the independence of Québec.” [Bothwell, 1995, p. 122]

Canada was, as the 1965 Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism stated, “passing through the greatest crisis in its history.” [Bothwell, 1995, p. 110] Ironically, it was the formation of the Parti Québécois which rescued Canada from becoming a Northern Ireland, because it created an electoral vehicle for Québec’s nationalist goals. However, it took the terrorism of the 1970 October Crisis, in which British Trade Commissioner James Cross was taken hostage and Québec labour minister Pierre Laporte murdered, to make nationalist Quebecers pull back from the brink of the abyss and put their



faith in the PQ. Although there was protest both within and without Québec against Trudeau's imposition of the War Measures Act and the arrest and detention of 497 suspected FLQ sympathizers, none of whom had any connection with the FLQ cells responsible [Caplan, 1993, p. 27], "most Canadians, however queasy they might feel at the sight of the military, were even more unnerved by the thought of murder." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 325] Even Pierre Vallières publicly stated his opposition to terrorism, and urged nationalists to support the Parti Québécois.

Neither his endorsement nor Pierre Trudeau's disapproval proved to be obstacles for the acceptance of the PQ, and that is largely because Lévesque understood the need to reassure cautious Quebecers and anxious English Canadians. He "was able to convince many a listener that the leap from Quiet Revolutionary quarrels with Ottawa to separatist certitude was merely a matter of natural evolution...Lévesque's dream of nation was carefully fashioned to inspire, not to frighten." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 326] The PQ became the government of Québec in 1976 when it won 71 out of 110 seats in the province's national assembly.

How the Parti Québécois and later the Bloc Québécois translated their dream of nation into government action will be the subject of my next chapter, in which I examine the history and development of independence movements and parties in both Scotland and Québec. But in conclusion to this discussion of the evolution of Québec nationalism throughout the centuries, it is important to note two factors in its development. The first is its refusal to be thwarted, despite obstacles that would seem impossible to overcome. If, as historian Richard Desrosiers says, "there is a constant in the history of the Québec people, it is the rise in national self-assertion and the questioning of the link with the Canadian whole." [Gougeon, 1994, p. 95] The second is its struggle over how best to preserve its language and culture, a struggle made even more difficult in modern times as Québec finds itself becoming, along with the rest of Canada, an increasingly multi-ethnic, multicultural society. As a consequence, Québec nationalism suffers from a "profound ambiguity", Julie Bernier explains:

A closer look at the last referendum campaign [in 1995] seems to confirm that Quebec nationalism is still profoundly ambivalent, for there was a constant shifting between an appeal to cultural belonging directed mainly to French Quebecers, and an appeal based on civic, liberal and pluralist commitments directed to all those who inhabit the territory of Quebec; that is to say between an appeal to the "We", understood as Québécois from French descent, and the "We", understood as Québécois of all origins.

This ambiguity seems to be enduring, even though Quebec nationalism has undergone tremendous transformations since the 1960s.

[Bernier, 1996, p. 1]

Nowhere is this ambiguity more visible than in the relationship of the Québec government with the First Nations people living in their midst, an ambiguity that goes back to the first decades of settlement in New France.

### **The First Nations - Sovereign Nations, Too**

The first French explorers of North America labelled the native peoples as “*sauvages*”, seeing them as “uncivilized, lacking religion, laws, and government” [Cook, 1995, p. 73]. But the French in Canada soon discovered that they needed these savages to survive and prosper: without their knowledge of the fierce climate and territory, their skills at hunting, fishing and trapping, and their superior ability as warriors, their lives in the fragile colony would have been harsher and even more tenuous. They also soon realized that, contrary to the initial observation of Jacques Cartier that these were a people who could be easily converted, they could not be assimilated. The French Catholic missionaries, to their credit, recognized the importance of spirituality and ceremony in the lives of native people, similar to the emphasis in the Catholic faith, and therefore were more tolerant of native religious beliefs than the English Protestants.

For these reasons, the natives formed strong bonds with the early French settlers, and in fact were seen as indispensable allies in the colonial wars of the 17th and 18th century, operating as power brokers, “balancing the British and the French in the interest of preserving their own autonomy, their own independence.” [Bothwell, 1995, p. 11] But after the Treaty of Versailles in 1783 which settled the wars, their military influence ended. This, added to the decline of the fur trade, the loss of their lands, the decimation of their numbers through illnesses such as smallpox, measles, diphtheria and influenza, and the over-hunting and fishing which was destroying the habitat on which they depended for survival, meant that native people became isolated and marginalized.

The British conquerors were not as tolerant as their French predecessors: they made assimilation their goal, a goal pursued with great determination by Canadian governments until the increasing militancy of First Nations people put a stop to it. A document, *To the Source*, prepared by the Assembly of First Nations, describes the effect of this policy:

The struggle for cultural supremacy started as soon as the Europeans landed. Since then...virtually every authority and institution in Canada - has done everything in its power to turn Aboriginal peoples into Eurocanadians. These institutions have used force, bribery, co-option, coercion, conversion, persuasion, persecution, trickery, neglect, forcible adoption, and sheer indifference. They have employed the courts, the schools, social services, the prisons, the churches, the police, even the army, and legions of federal and provincial bureaucrats. They have taken our land, our rights, and our children....But they didn't break us. We survived.

[Cited in Cook, 1995, p. 79]

They survived, and became a third force in Canadian nationalism, one that also demanded autonomy, independence, and self-government from both federal and provincial governments. It was the aboriginal Elijah Harper who helped block the ratification of the Meech Lake Accord by refusing to give assent in the Manitoba legislature because it did not include native rights. It was Cree lobbying which stopped the \$12.7-billion Great Whale hydro-electric project planned for northern Québec, and it was the Mohawks in the confrontation at Oka who demonstrated to the world their determination to protect the land of their ancestors, threatened by the development of a golf course.

Québec aboriginals have once again becoming the spoilers in a national power struggle, this time between the Parti Québécois and the Liberal government in Ottawa, saying that if Québec decides to separate without their consent, then they will separate from Québec, taking their resource-rich territory with them. However, despite their own history, Quebecers have so far failed to understand the position of the Cree.

Native American Crees have made their own case for separatism within Quebec, although in the language of a people who see themselves more as guests on the land than its 'owners'. They have been greeted with an intensely hypocritical lack of sympathy by Quebecois who somehow cannot grasp the connection between their own suit against Canada and that of the Cree against them.

[Barber, 1995, p. 178]

In the words of Ovide Mercredi, grand chief of the Assembly of First Nations:

"You have not allowed yourselves to be assimilated, you have not allowed your collective identity as a people, as a nation, to be undermined. We are no less distinct than you. We deserve to survive just as much as you do. If it belongs to Quebecers and

no one else to decide what powers to grant themselves to ensure their full flowering, then it is the same for us.”

[Cook, 1995, p. 81]

### **Scottish Nationalism**

Scottish nationalism is difficult for a Canadian to understand. When compared with Canada's three nationalisms, it is a puzzle. Unlike English Canada, its nationalism is highly emotive, with national symbols, historical heroes, and a strong cultural identity. Like Québec, Scotland has always had an independent culture, and a strong linguistic identity. Unlike English-speaking Canadians, Scots do not usually have to explain what country they are from. Like Quebecers and First Nations peoples, Scots have resisted assimilation by the dominant culture, while English-speaking Canadians have tended to resolve their identity crisis by succumbing first to the culture of Britain, and then to that of the United States.

However, Scotland does not have political sovereignty and does not seem to want it - at least not to the same extent that Quebecers and the people of Canada's First Nations do - and in fact, voluntarily surrendered its sovereignty with the Treaty of Union in 1707. Granted, Scotland has had a great deal of political autonomy, which has given it a certain amount of independence in governing its own affairs. It is also true that the British government has been far more intransigent on the subject of constitutional change than the Canadian. Although it has now given Scotland its own parliament, this body has nothing like the legislative clout enjoyed by Canadian provinces. To a Canadian observer, the historical reluctance of the UK government to devolve power to Scotland seems all the more strange when you look at the history of Canada to Confederation, when the British imperial government made five legislative attempts to accommodate the French fact in North America (1763, 1774, 1791, 1841, and 1867). It also seems strange when you look at the history of Scotland: how could a nation formed more than 965 years ago not be considered independent now?

### **Great Beginnings**

History plays a vital role in Scotland's identity. The importance of history in the Scottish consciousness is especially striking to anyone from Canada, a country which, as Collins says, has "so much space and so little history" [Collins, 1990,

p. 115]. It is characteristic of public life in Scotland that its political leaders will hotly debate whether William Wallace was “a loser”, as have SNP leader Alex Salmond and former Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth, and that the debate would be so widely publicized in the media. This attachment to history is strong because “Scotland the nation exists because of the way its people understand their own past.” [Marr, 1995, p. 8] To understand Scotland’s past is to understand its national identity, an identity that has been threatened by war and division right from its earliest beginnings, and by the power of England.

It was in 1034 A.D. that Duncan I united the Picts, Scots, Britons and Angles in a kingdom whose territory closely resembled that of modern Scotland. Their union followed several centuries of struggle, and was promoted by five main factors, which also contributed to the nation’s sense of identity [Mackie, 1991]. The four peoples shared the common religion of Christianity, and a similar political and social structure, based on small kingdoms in which people lived as part of a kin group in small villages or homesteads. The predominance of the Picts provided a solid foundation for the nation, needed to withstand the continuing attacks from the Scandinavian countries (attacks which had prompted the earlier union of the Scots and the Picts under Kenneth MacAlpin in 843 A.D., which some historians say is the true beginning of Scotland). The union also depended on the support of England to continue the dynasty of the Canmores under Malcolm III, a mixed blessing, for, as Mackie notes, “Along with English aid came the risk of English domination.” [Mackie, 1991, p. 35]

Fortunately for Scotland, the monarchy was a strong one, and during its more than two centuries of existence, was able to give the country a unified structure based on feudalism, the reform of the church, the establishment of the royal burghs, and its own effectiveness [Smout, 1985]. The authority of the king was essential to the nation’s identity, and so it was extremely important to establish the monarch’s antiquity and independence, in order to combat English claims to Scotland based on its supposedly superior origins. Scottish medieval historians invented a monarchical tradition of their own, in which the Scottish kings were descended from a Greek prince and the daughter of the Pharaoh who came to Scotland via Spain and Ireland, carrying the Stone of Destiny. As Andrew Marr notes, tongue-in-cheek, “All true Scots are thus the descendants of a Greek hard man and an Egyptian immigrant.” [Marr, 1995, p.10]

However, the stability of the Canmore dynasty ended in 1290 with the death of the Maid of Norway, the last heir to the throne, and a fierce struggle for Scotland’s survival began, as Edward I of England used tactics “marked by sharp practice, arrogance, and brutality” [Mackie, 1991, p. 63] to conquer the Scottish nation. But if anything, this struggle strengthened Scotland’s identity.

The Wars of Independence were “a crucible in which all lost their old ethnic loyalties and became part of a coherent Scottish nation, assertive, warlike, resilient, patriotic and freedom-loving.” [Smout, 1985, p. 33] It is easier to understand the resonance of such historical figures as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce in this context, for without them, Scotland might have gone the way of Wales.

A country's defining moments tend to come when it survives threatened extinction. The independence wars, opened by the rural guerrilla William Wallace with the support of the Scottish Catholic church, really were critical to Scotland's existence....The country would have disappeared into vassalage in the early 1300s had it not been led by a military genius. Scotland's 1314 was, in that sense, like Britain's 1940.

[Marr, 1995, p. 13]

The Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, when the Scots were led to victory by Robert the Bruce, was the turning-point in Scotland's fight for independence, and as such has acquired great significance as a symbol of Scottish resistance. Another equally important symbol is the Declaration of Arbroath, whose “sonorous wording expresses all the fierce nationalism of the fourteenth century” [Smout, 1985, p. 27]. Sent by Scots nobles to the Pope in 1320 to persuade him of Robert the Bruce's legitimacy as King, it stated:

For so long as an hundred remain alive we are minded never a whit to bow beneath the yoke of English dominion. It is not for glory, riches or honours that we fight: it is for liberty alone, the liberty that no good man relinquishes but with his life.

The Declaration is also remarkable for its view of the king's role. It pledged that he could be overthrown by his subjects “if he compromised their independence. He was ‘King of Scots’, not King of Scotland, already a limited monarch of a people, not lord and owner of a land. In medieval constitutional thought this was a radical claim.” [Marr, 1995, p. 11]

The loyalty of the barons was well-rewarded. Bruce was an effective monarch, and on his death in 1329 left behind “an ordered, well-established kingdom” [Mackie, 1991, p. 79], but after his reign Scotland suffered from inadequate royal government for more than two centuries. King David II was imprisoned in England for 11 years from 1346-1357; the two kings following him, Robert II and III, “reigned for a total of thirty-five years with such desperate incompetence that in the words of one chronicler justice herself seemed an outlaw from the kingdom.” [Smout, 1985, p. 33] James I was kidnapped by the English

on his succession at age 11 in 1406; after he was released from prison in 1424 he proved himself a capable monarch but was murdered after just 13 years on the throne. Following his death in 1437 and until 1567 “every Scottish monarch came to the throne as a child” [Smout, 1985, p. 33], including James VI, who did not reach the age of majority until 1587.

It was his determined efforts that resulted in the Union of the Crowns in 1603, which began the process that inevitably led to the Treaty of Union in 1707. As Smout says, the Treaty of Union was “the capstone to a process of constitutional amalgamation that James VI and every other monarch after him had earnestly desired.” [Smout, 1985, p. 198] With royal governance in London, a weakened parliament in Scotland, and the nobles of Scotland and England joining together to put the Protestant William III on the throne in England, it was only a matter of time before the elites of the two countries decided to make a deal. The Treaty of Union has generated much propaganda on both the unionist and nationalist sides of the story: nationalists will say the only reason it happened was because the Scottish leaders were bribed with money and/or promises of political advancement, while unionists state that Scotland was too weak politically and economically to go it alone. The truth is more complex. Scottish parliamentarians would have preferred a federation, but England wanted union, and Scotland was in no position to resist, threatened by a civil war between Jacobites and Hanoverians.

Resistance to the union came from both within and without parliament. Fletcher of Saltoun has become a folk hero of present-day nationalists for his opposition to the treaty and his battle for an independent Scotland while serving as a member of the last Scottish parliament. On the streets of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dumfries mobs rioted in protest, and during the debates in parliament anti-Union petitions, almost 90 of them, came from all over Scotland. [Marr, 1995]; what was more significant, not one pro-Union petition was received [Devine, 1999]. “Rioting in Glasgow was so intense and such a threat to public order that 200 dragoons were sent to the west” [Young, 1998, p. 127] while in Dumfries several thousand watched as “the proposed Articles of Union were ritually burnt” [Devine, 1999, p. 9]. But despite the popular opposition, the treaty passed by 110 votes to 69. Its passage changed Scotland irrevocably.

The Act of Union made a separation in the nation that created a unique and confused historical legacy. The people were separated from their legislature. This meant that insofar as democratic government is the fulfilment of the people’s will,

Scots would be denied the means of self-government. Yet they retained the characteristics of a nation without the political identity of one.

[McIlvanney, 1991, p. 138]

The treaty was supposed to ease the friction with England and bring prosperity to Scotland, but initially it did neither. Scotland's economy suffered from free trade because, as Daniel Defoe wrote at the time: "the Union opens the door to all English manufacturers and suppresses their own." [Cited in Marr, 1995, p. 22] By 1713 what Mackie describes as "the patronizing attitude of the English - their assumption that England had 'bought' Scotland, and that this was no equal partnership" [Mackie, 1991, p. 266] caused such strong economic, constitutional and ecclesiastical grievances that a motion in the House of Lords to rescind the Act of Union, supported by all the Scottish members, was only narrowly defeated.

The treaty was also supposed to solve the problem of royal succession, but that took more than 30 years and the crushing of four Jacobite attempts to put a Stewart king on the throne. These attempts, culminating in the defeat of Prince Charles and his Highland army at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, accentuated the traditional divide between Highlander and Lowlander and accelerated the destruction of the Highland way of life. The brutal punishment of the prince's Highland supporters did not meet with much sympathy from Lowlanders, who saw the Gaels as lawless barbarians. In fact, says Marr, to some "their extirpation was seen as a positive liberation, a leap towards modernity, brought about by the Union with England." [Marr, 1995, p. 30]

Part of the reason for the failure of the Jacobite cause was that Scottish discontent "was both wide and deep" [Mackie, 1991, p. 268]. Scotland was becoming more prosperous, and this "growing economic prosperity inclined men, especially the wealthier men, to accept with complacency a rule of which perhaps, in theory, they did not approve." [Mackie, 1991, p. 269] But this same prosperity encouraged the rise of the middle class and the intellectual flowering of the Enlightenment, in which Scots accomplished great things in the arts and sciences (achievements still cited today by patriotic Scots, according to William McIlvanney). As Iain Finlayson describes it:

The poet sat down with the physicist, the philosopher with the painter, the artisan with the academic, so that no art or science was uninformed by any other....in this period, the Scots invented the science of sociology, the discipline of statistics, pioneered the



first census...published the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, wrote legal treatises still consulted today...and bred both Burns and Scott.

[Finlayson, 1987, p. 145]

As with so much of Scottish history, however, the reasons given for this development are based on whether the writer is in the unionist or nationalist camp. Unionist academics have been inclined to say that it was due to the civilizing influence of the Union; however, the evidence seems to indicate that the seeds of the Enlightenment were sown long before it was enacted [Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989; Mackie, 1991; McCrone, 1992; Harvie, 1994; Marr, 1995]. Beveridge and Turnbull are particularly scathing in their criticism of the unionist perspective of Scottish history, which they describe as "inferiorism", and its portrayal of The Enlightenment "as of startling precocity, near-incredible to the historians themselves...There occurs an alchemic transmutation of a base-metal culture into glittering gold." [Beveridge and Turnbull, 1987, p. 29]

Beveridge and Turnbull are also critical of Tom Nairn's view, as stated in *The Break-Up of Britain*, that there was no authentic Scottish nationalism from 1800 to 1920. Again, the evidence suggests otherwise, that there was "a thread, sometimes hidden, sometimes clear, that can be traced" of nationalist thought during this time period [Marr, 1995, p. 26]. The United Scotsmen, an underground organization of radical reformers who argued for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, operated from 1797 until 1802 [Smout, 1985]. The members of the secret Committee of Organization for forming a Provisional Government were behind the Radical War of 1820, in which 60,000 workers went out on strike [Mackie, 1991]. As well as establishing a provisional government, the committee wanted to restore the Scottish parliament and to separate from England.

A less radical manifestation of nationalism, and led by the committed unionist Sir Walter Scott, was the campaign in 1826-27 to keep the Scottish £1 note. The British government's move to ban paper money under £5 in order to aid failing British banks was angrily protested, as it would have decimated the Scottish economy with 63 per cent of Scottish currency in bills under £5 [Kennedy, 1995], and Scott's argument that English ministers were only too willing to experiment at the expense of Scotland sounds familiar after the poll-tax debacle of the Thatcher government [Marr, 1995]. In the 1850s the Scottish Rights Association pressed for changes in the way Scottish affairs were dealt with at Westminster, demands that were still being made 30 years later and which were an impetus to the drive for Home Rule [Mitchell, 1996]. In the 1880s,

the Highland Land Law Reform Association agitated for the rights of crofters, and its political arm, the Crofters' Party, won four seats in the 1885 general election [Smout, 1987]. The radical faction of the Gladstone Liberal Party provided a home for the dissident nationalism in Scotland that had been expressed earlier in the Chartist movement [Marr, 1995].

But, as Harvie explains, Scottish nationalism had a rival in the 19th century, and that was opportunity overseas. "To ask a middle-class Scot to concern himself with his country was to tell him to stay at home and let his business go hang." [Harvie, 1994, p. 56] Scots left their country to improve themselves, while acting as representatives of the British Empire in government, business, and the professions. In doing so, however, they resisted assimilation, contrary to the usual pattern which Tamir describes (and which was seen in Québec, where 800,000 French Canadians emigrated to the mill-towns of New England during the 19th century).

A powerful, although unofficial, way of motivating individuals to assimilate (or to emigrate) is to present them with a forced choice between two unequal options: either to join a stronger, wealthier nation and share in its sense of security, its economic prosperity, and, at times, its feelings of superiority, or to remain closed within their own culture, doomed to marginalisation and very often poverty.

[Tamir, 1993, p. 154]

If anything, they imposed their own cultural values on the countries where they lived, certainly in Canada, whose "very identity was the triumph of its Scots settlers" [Harvie, 1994, p. 63], and demonstrated that freed from the constraints of a rigid, class-based society, they could succeed. But their very success raised questions with Scots about Scotland's position within Britain. Why could they govern in the colonies but not at home? Why did they have to emigrate to improve themselves?

### **Great Expectations**

The Scottish nationalism of the 19th century was not a separatist one, and was committed to achieving its goals within the context of the United Kingdom. It was possible to be both a unionist and a nationalist, for the common view was "that Scotland was a partner in the Union: it could best realise itself as a nation if it remained within the Union, and could best ensure its status as a partner by always reminding England that Scotland was a nation, not a region." [Brown,

McCrone, Paterson, 1996, p. 16] It was this view that led to the establishment of the Scottish Office in 1885, the first example of 'administrative devolution' [Brown, McCrone, Paterson, 1996, p. 40], to deal with criticisms that Scottish affairs were not being given the proper amount of attention. Such unionist nationalism was the basis for the Scottish Home Rule Association founded in 1886, but it was very much a fringe movement, with goals that fit within the imperial model. The SHRA wanted a Scottish legislature, but as part of a federation which would include the colonies of the British Empire, as well as Ireland and Wales, in a United States of Great Britain [Mitchell, 1996, p. 70]. The organization did not last long, or have much concrete effect, but it was important because it was the first of several Home Rule pressure groups and was instrumental in the development of the nationalist movement in Scotland. The later movements survived because they were driven by the desire for reform in Scotland rather than the preservation of the union, and so attracted the support of radical Liberals in pre-war Scotland and that of Labour after.

Although this identification of the Home Rule movement with progressive politics enabled its survival, it did not ensure its success. James Mitchell's chronology of Scottish self-government lists 12 separate votes on bills to introduce Scottish home rule between 1889 and 1920, and that does not include the occasions when bills were introduced and either did not proceed or were talked out. The Scottish Home Rule Association, reincarnated in 1918, was increasingly frustrated by its lack of progress, while the more radical Scottish National League called for independence. Following the failure of the Government of Scotland Bill in 1927, which was based on the devolution proposals drawn up by the Scottish National Convention, the SHRA, the Scottish National League, the Scottish National Movement and the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association formed the National Party of Scotland. It merged with the Scottish (Self-Government) Party to become the Scottish National Party in 1934.

The convoluted origins and history of the SNP will be described in greater detail in chapter three. It is important to note, however, that the Scottish National Party combined two nationalist traditions that have been warring with each other ever since its start: the gradualists, personified in the SHRA, who believed in home rule; and the fundamentalists, who believed that anything less than independence was a sell-out.

## Scottish Nationalism Today

Modern Scottish nationalism has changed fundamentally from that of the 19th century. It is no longer unionist, and has none of the sentimental tartanry associated with Sir Walter Scott, the Kailyard school of literature, or the Ossian poems. It is definitely left-of-centre, and is based on the political and civic culture of Scotland, in opposition to that of England. This sense of separateness from the government of Britain increased dramatically during the Thatcher years, when the civic autonomy of Scotland was threatened by centralizing Conservative party policies:

Thatcher represented a new Toryism, one that had forgotten a sense of the Union as a partnership. Her government took the absolute sovereignty of parliament literally, neglecting a tradition that it should limit its own power in the interests of tolerable rule, and she was able to do this because the erstwhile constitution has been built on conventions and understandings, rather than on formal documents.

[Paterson, 1994, p. 169]

The result was that Scots now felt "a stronger sense of subordination to London-based government than ever before. It is this heightened awareness of its power to impose deeply unpopular policies on a sullenly hostile Scotland which has strengthened the support for Scottish nationalism." [Gallagher, 1991, p. 91]

It has also strengthened Scottish national identity. As Brown, McCrone and Paterson show in their survey of polls done in the UK from 1986 to 1992 on the question, people living in Scotland see themselves predominately as Scottish, rather than British, and this holds true across all social classes and regions. Because Scots have kept their basic institutions - the church, education and legal systems, local government - they have also kept a degree of independence which maintained their identity. "Feeling Scottish was not a sentimental left-over of previous independence, but derived from the day-to-day workings of Scottish civil society as it affected people directly." [Brown, McCrone and Paterson, p. 205] Scotland's civic culture was the unifying factor; destroy that and Scotland's identity as a nation would be destroyed. As Marr says, the defining moments of a country occur when it is threatened with extinction. In the words of William McIlvanney :

Stands Scotland where it did? Just about, but not for much longer. A crisis-point has arrived. We will either become more ourselves or less ourselves in the next few years. We cannot much longer maintain the ambiguity of our present situation:

that of a people who retain a strong sense of themselves as a nation yet have no effective structure of government within which to develop and give expression to that sense.

[McIlvanney, 1991, p. 250]

Now that Scotland has its own parliament, it has the legislative means to express its own national identity. Whether or not this will lead to independence is a moot point.

## Conclusion

Scotland and Québec are two among many nations within states who are struggling to assert their autonomy. Their stories are unique but also part of a wider trend, and as such, they can tell us a great deal. As Brown, McCrone and Paterson point out, "Small nations are like corks in the sea. They are the first indicators of the way currents are flowing, and that the tide is turning." [Brown, McCrone and Paterson, 1996, p. 215] In a world where power no longer belongs to national governments, but to what Benjamin Barber calls "one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce" [Barber, 1995, p. 4], people look to their own communities for a sense of belonging and security. In its pathological form, this desire for a national identity becomes "a threatened balkanization of nation-states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe, a Jihad." [Barber, 1996, p. 4] Both McWorld and Jihad are inter-connected, he says, for without the social alienation caused by the consumption-based values of McWorld, Jihad would not be able to attract converts.

Markets are contractual rather than communitarian, which means they stroke our solitary egos but leave unsatisfied our yearning for community, offering durable goods and fleeting dreams but not a common identity or a collective membership - something the blood communities spawned by Jihad, reinforced by the thinness of market relations, do rather too well.

[Barber, 1996, p. 243]

Barber sees citizenship, the active participation in community institutions, as the solution to the lack of meaningful existence in McWorld which Jihad tries to fulfil. "Citizenship is not a cure for spiritual malaise but spiritual malaise is a roadblock to citizenship because it impairs the capacity to create the community

institutions on which a civil society and a democratic culture must rest." [Barber, 1996, p. 275]

It is interesting to analyze where Canada, Britain, Scotland and Québec fit into his model. Looking at them in Barber's context, Britain and the rest of Canada are clearly part of the McWorld pattern, while Québec is both McWorld and Jihad at once. As Barber explains, Québec sees its security in joining the global economy which can give its culture legitimacy. "Quebec thus favors its francophone cultural roots at the same time it celebrates its emerging economic status as a highly productive economic partner" [Barber, 1996, p. 178]. Scotland, however, is neither, an anomaly in its communitarian outlook, based on "a social and cultural order which placed a premium on collective, co-operative and egalitarian commitments" [McCrone, 1992, p. 120], an outlook which seems almost anachronistic - or does it represent a model for the future? Certainly it seems to be closer to the ideal of liberal nationalism presented by Yael Tamir, in which

national fellowship symbolises a belief in the existence of special ties and obligations binding the members of a nation. Nationalists view this ideal as the natural outcome of a collective destiny, a shared culture, and a faith in a common future, emphasizing the perception of the nation as 'a caring community', where individuals are able to overcome their egoistic inclinations and cooperate for the sake of mutual prosperity.

[Tamir, 1993, p. 65]

In this chapter I have examined the histories of Britain, Canada, Québec and Scotland in order to understand how they developed their sense of national identity. In the next chapter I look at the histories of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois, how they became the political expression of nationalist movements in Scotland and Québec, and in turn, how their different political approaches affected their political communications.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois:

#### Scotland Is Not Québec

The previous chapter of this thesis examined the origins of nationalism in Scotland and Québec, placing it within the context of their own histories and current theories of nationalism. This chapter focuses on the origins of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois and how they developed as the political voice of the nationalist movements in their regions. Although the parties share some of the same characteristics, they differ greatly in their basic philosophies of nationalism.

After the defeat of the 1995 referendum in Québec, Canadians were shocked to hear Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau state that the reason for the separatist loss was "money and the ethnic vote" - that it was the support of big business and the overwhelming "No" vote among Québec's ethnic voters that had determined the result. Not only were the repercussions of what the *Scotsman* later described as "the anti-immigrant outburst" felt in Canada [MacMahon, 1995], with the PQ leader announcing his resignation 24 hours later because of the resulting controversy over what were widely perceived as racist remarks, but they also resonated in the UK House of Commons, where Labour MP Norman Hogg tabled a motion condemning Parizeau's comments.

Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond said in response to that motion: "We should remember that Quebec is not Scotland and Scotland is not Quebec." He went on to say that Québec's nationalism, based as it was on language and ethnicity, was "a two-edged sword", while Scotland followed "the path of civic nationalism." [MacMahon, 1995] Salmond's words point out a crucial distinction between the two nationalist movements and the political parties that represent them, one which cannot be emphasized too often. Although on the surface it would seem that their nationalist imperatives are similar, in fact they are completely different in almost every aspect, most strikingly in the areas of language, culture and ethnicity, but also in the context of the political structures in which they exist.

Language and culture has always been a critical element in Québec nationalism, if not its *raison d'être*. Québec's desire for economic control has been viewed by its nationalist leaders as a means of preserving the French language and promoting its own cultural agenda, but that is not the case with Scotland, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. Ethnicity has not been the issue in Scottish nationalism that it has been in Québec. There are two phrases often quoted in the two countries that vividly illustrate the difference in cultural attitudes.

Québec nationalist leaders frequently speak of "*un Québécois pure laine*", pure wool, or "*de vieille souche*", old stock, referring to someone descended from the original French colonists of more than 300 years ago; while in Scotland, the words "We are a mongrel nation", spoken by Scots author William McIlvanney to the applause of some 25,000 demonstrators at a pro-home rule rally in 1992 [Marr, 1995, p. 241] are cited repeatedly as proof of Scottish inclusiveness.

The political structures in which the two countries operate are also very distinct. Canada's federal government is among the most de-centralized of modern nations, with ten provincial legislatures which have extensive legislative and financial powers. It is unique, too, in the degree of sovereignty given its people, as evidenced in the consultative exercise undertaken by the Canadian government in 1991 before the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord. More than \$23 million was spent by the government on nation-wide consultations with some 400,000 adults and 300,000 school children, a process which Canadian writer Mordecai Richler described as "democracy gone berserk" [Richler, 1993, p. 222]. Perhaps: but it is in great contrast to the United Kingdom's highly unitary state with its unwritten constitution, in which sovereignty resides in Westminster, and where providing a national parliament without tax-varying powers was seen as a reasonable choice on a referendum ballot.

The roots of these differences lie deep in the histories of these nationalist parties and the movements that led to their birth: in Scotland, the struggle for home rule, and in Québec, the struggle for autonomy and recognition as a distinct society within Canada. The histories tell the story: by understanding them we can understand why the SNP and the Bloc have developed as they have.

### Early Beginnings

Although nationalist feeling had existed in Québec almost from its early beginnings as the colony of New France, it was not until the Rebellion of 1837 and the formation of les Patriotes under the leadership of Louis Joseph Papineau that "the idea of an independent French-speaking state in North America emerged as a clear and influential political objective." [Desbarats, 1976, p. 142] By the early 20th century, the main strands of Québec's complex nationalist tapestry had been created by the influential figures of Jules-Paul Tardivel, Honoré Mercier, Henri Bourassa, and Wilfrid Laurier.

These four men, Tardivel, Mercier, Bourassa, and Laurier, dominated the debate on the role and future of French Canada for virtually forty years, personifying four enduring aspects of political thought in Quebec: Quebec independence, Quebec



autonomy, pan-Canadian French-Canadian nationalism, and anti-nationalist conciliation.

[Fraser, 1984, p. 4]

These same strands are personified in the leaders of Québec today, with Jacques Parizeau still vigorously pursuing the *indépendantiste* stance from the sidelines; Lucien Bouchard espousing sovereignty-association, that peculiar hybrid of autonomy with economic and political association; Jean Charest, former leader of the federal Progressive Conservatives and now head of the Québec Liberals, attempting to voice the concerns of francophones throughout Canada; and prime minister Jean Chrétien, promoting the strong federalist, anti-Québec nationalist views that have made him extremely unpopular in his home province.

They also struggle with the same issues that concerned Tardivel, Mercier, Bourassa and Laurier, and which still dominate the nationalist debate in Québec and the rest of Canada: how can Quebecers best preserve their language and culture in an English-speaking continent where they feel “that we’re a cube of sugar in a gallon of coffee” [Bothwell, 1995, p. 210]? What is the relationship of Québec to the United States? Is Québec nationalism a right-wing, conservative movement, or one grounded in a socially progressive ideology? What place is there for English-speaking minorities within a sovereign Québec? How can Quebecers enhance and preserve their economic security?

The Parti Québécois has grappled with these issues for more than 30 years, winning three provincial elections, but losing two referendums. How the PQ has used its legislative power to preserve and promote French language and culture and ensure francophone control of the Québec economy makes an interesting study of the way a nationalist movement translates its dreams into action.

### **The Parti Québécois - Dreams Into Action**

For the Parti Québécois, dominated as it was by members of *l’industrie de la parole*, or the word industry - teaching, law, journalism and the civil service - the preservation of the French language was central to their vision. Thus the first task of the PQ after it came to power in November 15, 1976 was to create language legislation that would make French “the defining reality of Québec” [Fraser, 1984, p. 91], legislation that would also govern education, commerce, and social policy. Under the direction of Camille Laurin, minister of state for cultural development, who believed “that thought, and therefore culture, are inextricably linked with language” [Fraser, 1984, p. 97], the goal was “to make

Quebec as French as Ontario is English, and to do away with official bilingualism”[Fraser, 1984, p. 98]. Québec nationalists were concerned about the threat to their linguistic community from the decline of the francophone birth rate, the assimilation of immigrants into the English-speaking community through the education system, and the domination of business by anglophones. The issue of language went to the heart of these concerns, as Fraser notes:

Quebec’s language legislation flowed from the fears that are among the profoundest elements in Quebec history: fear of assimilation, fear of humiliation, fear of loss of control of society and loss of identity. It was not long since those fears had been religious, and linked to a fear of loss of faith: now they were identified with language.

[Fraser, 1984, p. 270]

The result was Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, passed in 1977. Under the terms of the bill, access to English language schools was restricted to children who had parents or older siblings educated in English within Québec, or whose parents were newcomers but had been educated in English outside Québec. French was made the language of business: commercial signs had to be in French, as did all communications in English businesses, and no longer could lack of English be used as a barrier to promotion. Firms with more than 50 employees were required to submit a plan outlining their use of French in the workplace, and if these were not satisfactory, they would not receive the francisation certificate necessary to qualify it for provincial government contracts, licenses and permits [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990].

Although Bill 101 was later amended by Bill 57, which allowed more flexibility for the use of English in its provisions, the basic thrust of the legislation remained. It was, as Fraser says, “a divisive code, conveying one message to most francophones and quite another to most non-francophones; reassuring to the one group, and threatening to the other. But it did work a transformation.” [Fraser, 1984, p. 110] Québec’s French-language schools became an integrating force, teaching both Québécois and immigrant children how to become French-speaking citizens. French became the language of everyday life, both in the community and at work. Where businesses would have given senior positions to older anglophones, they now began promoting young francophones. Ironically enough, as Fraser points out, Bill 101 promoted greater pluralism in Québec, as francophones “began to acquire a social skill that the rest of North America had been learning for over a century: how to listen to one’s language being spoken with a foreign accent.” [Fraser, 1984, p. 111] But it did not resolve the

ambiguities in Quebec's attitude towards its English-speaking minorities, both anglophone and allophone, although Laurin tried to reassure them that the law "would not legitimize xenophobia but rather eliminate it by diminishing the insecurities of Quebecers that gave rise to racism." [Fraser, 1984, p. 98]

Cultural preservation was not just a matter of language to the Parti Québécois, but also the control of immigration so that greater numbers of French-speaking immigrants would be directed to Québec; closer ties with La Francophonie, the French equivalent of the British Commonwealth, founded in 1985; and the establishment of a Québec presence in the world through a network of offices in the U.S., Western Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific Rim, as well as generous government funding of Québec film, theatre, art, music and literature.

During the early years of its first term the Parti Québécois also enacted an ambitious programme of social legislation, introducing a public automobile insurance plan, improvements in social security, consumer protection laws, and rights for women; they increased the minimum wage, passed anti-strike-breaker legislation, and established new crown corporations. Initially the relationship between the PQ and business was not a happy one: the government's belief in state intervention, its passing of Bill 101 and the tendency of some cabinet ministers to use anti-business language created conflict [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990]. However, despite this negative perception, the Parti Québécois was keen to promote the private sector, and in fact, "spent far more on trade and industry than any other Canadian province" [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990, p. 62]. The burgeoning funds in the Québec Pension Plan deposited in the Caisse de dépôt et placement were used increasingly for investment in Québec firms, and the province's purchasing policy encouraged the buying of goods from Québec companies. In 1979 René Lévesque stated publicly that business was a key player in the economic development of the province [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990, p. 63], and Jacques Parizeau, then finance minister, introduced the highly successful Québec Stock Savings Plan, which offered generous income tax deductions for investment in Québec companies.

During its second term, the PQ government became even more pro-business. Almost all areas of the private economy became eligible for government assistance, which one government minister conservatively estimated as being \$1 billion annually [Gagnon and Montcalm, 1990, p. 64]. This "market nationalism", as Canadian economist Thomas Courchene calls it, developed partly as a result of the general global shift in the 1980s towards business-oriented values, but also in response to the loss of the referendum. If the nationalists could not gain political control of their own territory, they could at

least gain economic control. The PQ became, in the words of Courchene, “the most business-oriented or market-oriented government in Canada” [Longstaff, 1992, p. 37], leading to what he called Québec Inc., “the made-in Quebec collaboration between the provincial government, business, and labour to favour Quebec-based business enterprises, francophone managers and entrepreneurs, and Quebec-based workers.” [Johnson, 1994, p. 291] They did not see the U.S. as a threat, as did nationalists in English-speaking Canada, but as a business partner. Lévesque himself was very pro-American [Fraser, 1984, Bothwell, 1995], and felt that French Canadians had been held back by the Anglo domination of business.

It had kept them from being the captains of industry and running their economy, from having the kind of pride that comes from knowing, in a mill town in Quebec, for example, that all the big houses on the hill aren't held by Anglos. And he wanted to turn that around.

[Bothwell, 1995, p. 159]

However, the government's pro-business approach led to conflict with its traditional allies, the trade unions, during the recession of the early 80s. Declining tax revenues and increasing inflation meant that the PQ was not able to pay planned wage increases to the province's 300,000 public service employees without risking its credit rating on Wall Street [Bouchard, 1992, p. 96]. Negotiations on the issue led by Bouchard failed and the cuts were imposed through government legislation, to which the unions responded with illegal strikes and angry criticism of Lévesque.

There was further conflict within the party on the constitutional issue that led to a major split and the resignation of Jacques Parizeau and other hard-liners within the PQ in 1984. In 1981, the Canadian government, under the leadership of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, began negotiations to bring home the Canadian constitution, contained in the British North America Act of 1867 passed by the British parliament. René Lévesque agreed to take part, but withdrew from the talks, which ended during what Québec nationalists bitterly refer to as “the night of the long knives” [Bouchard, 1992, p. 95] when the federal government and the nine other provinces agreed to entrench provisions in the constitution which sovereigntists felt limited Québec's powers over language and education. The Québec National Assembly voted against the constitutional agreement, but the repatriation went ahead anyway, marked by a special signing ceremony April 17, 1982 on the lawn of Parliament Hill in Ottawa attended by the Queen. The conflict with Parizeau arose over Lévesque's adoption of *le beau risque*, which

abandoned the separatist option in favour of negotiating with the newly-elected government of Brian Mulroney, who had pledged to bring Québec back into the constitutional family "with honour and enthusiasm" [Gagnon, 1999, p. 290] as part of his election platform, and in doing so, had won the support of nationalists in Québec. Lévesque felt that if "Canadian federalism would be made to work, that was a risk worth taking." [Bothwell, 1995, p. 181] But Parizeau disagreed, and took a quarter of the cabinet with him. Within a year Lévesque resigned and the PQ was defeated. Pierre Marc Johnson became leader of the party on a programme of moderate nationalism, or "national affirmation", more akin to that of the old Union Nationale [Bothwell, 1995, p. 181], but he was soon deposed by Parizeau, who became head of the PQ in 1988, committing it to a strong independence platform, which it had to abandon after another election loss in 1989.

With the help of Bloc leader Lucien Bouchard, Parizeau and the PQ narrowly won the provincial election in 1994, and soon began preparations for the referendum on sovereignty-association held in October 1995, which is described later in this chapter. After Parizeau's resignation, Bouchard became head of the PQ, and had to wrestle with the same economic and political problems that plagued René Lévesque. He antagonized the left wing of the party by imposing spending cuts to reduce the provincial deficit and pursuing a pro-business agenda, as well as pushing for the maintenance of bilingual signs [Seguin, 1996], but, despite the dislike of his deficit-cutting measures, Québec voters still supported the Parti Québécois [Mackie, 1996].

### **The Referendums of 1980 and 1995 - Defining Choices**

The Québec referendums of 1980 and 1995 were events of enormous significance in Canada. In both Quebecers chose to stay in the Canadian confederation, in the first, by a comfortable majority; in the second, by the narrowest of margins. These were defining choices, which forced Canada and Québec to confront their two solitudes as they never had before. With the 1980 referendum, it seemed for the first time that Canada's peaceable kingdom could break up. Certainly at the start of the referendum campaign, it looked as if the "Yes" side could win, with a small majority, 51 per cent [Fraser, 1984, p. 234], in favour, according to party polls.

The wording of the referendum had been chosen with particular care, "the product of millions of dollars worth of public opinion polling and thousands of hours of consideration by focus groups, advertising specialists, and communications consultants." [LeDuc, 1996a, p. 1] It was designed to assuage

the most nervous nationalist, avoiding the word independence and asking that the Québec government be given "the mandate to negotiate" a new agreement between Québec and Canada. The PQ was well aware that isolating the issue of independence from the goal of forming government had helped them to win power: to win the referendum they had to do the same [LeDuc, 1996a]. This was the question:

The government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations;

This agreement would enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes, and establish relations abroad - in other words, sovereignty - and at the same time, to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency;

No change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be effected without approval by the people through another referendum;

On these terms, do you agree to give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?

However, even with the most careful wording, a rigorous and well-planned campaign strategy, and the vigorous performance of the charismatic and much-loved René Lévesque, the referendum faced three major obstacles: the credibility and popularity of Pierre Trudeau; the reluctance of a significant percentage of francophones to endorse it; and, unexpectedly, a strong backlash from anti-feminist women prompted by an off-the-cuff remark from PQ cabinet minister Lise Payette during the campaign. Trudeau, newly returned as prime minister, was even more popular than Lévesque in his home province among both francophones and anglophones [LeDuc, 1996a], so that when he used the term "renewed federalism" as a defence of the status quo, he was believed. Trudeau's strong francophone support meant that despite his best efforts, Lévesque could not achieve the 62 per cent francophone majority needed to achieve victory [Fraser, 1984, p. 234]. Finally, the comment by Payette that the wife of the Liberal party leader was an "Yvette", the smarmy, docile little girl of Québec primers, resulted in a massive rally of 15,000 women in the Montréal Forum, who shouted their opposition to the referendum. These Yvettes, as they called themselves, "were to summon their courage and tenacity and reject the ruinous consequences of separatist seduction. It was the duty of women to say NO." [Trofimenkoff, 1983, p. 331]

The result of the May 20 referendum vote was clear: with a turn-out of 85.6 per cent, the "Yes" side received 40.44 per cent, the "No" 59.66. Losing the referendum, heart-breaking as it was for Québec nationalists, did not affect the

PQ's electoral success in the next provincial election, for the party won a second term in 1981. But as Bothwell notes: "The loss of the referendum left the Parti Québécois becalmed. It was still the provincial government of Quebec, but without a mandate to act on the issue, sovereignty or independence, that lay at its emotional core." [Bothwell, 1995, p. 166]

Jacques Parizeau, Minister of Finance in the PQ government, quit the party in 1984 when René Lévesque abandoned sovereignty-association for *le beau risque* of working with the federal government to right the wrongs of Canada's constitution. A staunch separatist, he had always believed that sovereignty-association was unworkable, and at best, a stepping-stone towards independence [Bothwell, 1995, p. 157]. He returned as leader of the Parti Québécois in 1988, determined to reach that goal. However, after the PQ's defeat in the 1989 provincial election, Parizeau was forced to learn the lesson his predecessors had. Originally he thought "that a second referendum might be unnecessary, that a future PQ government might treat an electoral mandate as a sufficient basis for a unilateral declaration of independence" [LeDuc, 1996, p. 7], but it soon became clear that this was not a good strategy. For the 1994 election, Parizeau committed the party to a second referendum within its first year in office, which helped return the PQ to power, but with only a very small majority - 45 per cent to the Liberal party's 44 per cent [LeDuc, 1996a].

The referendum question of 1995 was simplicity itself compared to that of 1980, but even so, its wording was refined to make it more palatable to the independence-shy Québec voter following province-wide consultations [LeDuc, 1996a]:

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?

As in 1980, the referendum campaign in 1995 focused on creating a new relationship with Canada and the negotiations that would make it happen if the "Yes" side won. What made the margin of victory so close the second time around were the roles played by Lucien Bouchard, then head of the Bloc Québécois, and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Bouchard had great credibility, not only as a political figure - Parizeau had designated him as the one who would negotiate with Ottawa in the event of a "Yes" vote - but on a personal level as well. Chrétien, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same popularity or credibility, and was perceived to have betrayed Québec on the constitution. [LeDuc, 1996a, p. 6] When Bouchard told Quebecers that a sovereign Québec

could still keep its ties with Canada, including economic association, dual citizenship, and a common currency, thus soothing their fears about separation, he was believed. When Chrétien spoke on behalf of federalism, he was not.

The 1995 referendum campaign was also influenced by a major rally, this time, the "Unity Rally" in Montréal held just three days before the crucial vote October 30. An estimated 100,000 Canadians from all across Canada came by bus, car, train and plane to attend the rally, many of them on discounted tickets provided by transportation companies backing the "No" side. It was said by anglophone media commentators following the event that the sight of thousands of normally reticent anglophones waving the Canadian flag and shouting themselves hoarse with enthusiasm for national unity tipped the balance in favour of the federalists, but there is no way of knowing whether this is true or not. It is true that many Quebecers perceived the demonstration much more negatively, because it was seen as just another example of ROC's inability to share identity space, as Charles Taylor explains:

The classic refusal to share identity space very often takes the form of elaborate declarations welcoming difference and assuring the people thus marginalized that they are loved. But this is received by the people concerned as an insulting acceptance of them merely as folkloric enrichment of the larger society, while refusing to allow them a say in the definition of the common identity. We love you, but shut up, is the message received.

[Taylor, 1996, p. 123]

It was, however, seen as a critical moment in the campaign, and indeed, in Canadian political history.

The Bloc Québécois had a different interpretation as to what the results of the referendum and its aftermath meant.

With a turn-out rate of 96%, the Québec voters nevertheless reject the government's project, but by very little: 50.66% NO to 49.4% YES (a majority of barely 53,000 votes). These very close results show that the sovereigntist project is even more alive than ever and that the entire Canadian dilemma remains. At the closing of this referendum, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien formulates certain proposals in an attempt to bring Québec into the constitutional fold. However, the reaction is unanimous: the cosmetic changes put forward by the Prime Minister do not respond at all to Québec's historical claims and are rebuffed. The deadlock continues.

[Bloc Québécois milestones]



The fact remains, though, that whatever the wording or the specific political circumstances of the two referendums, support for sovereignty has remained fairly constant at “well below fifty percent of the electorate” since the 1980s [LeDuc, 1996a, p. 9], because most Quebecers simply did not want to give up their connection with Canada [LeDuc, 1996a, p. 10]. As Québécois political scientist Louis Balthazar explains:

I think Quebecers love Canada and are prepared to live in a country called Canada. They've shown it on a number of occasions. But their immediate sense of belonging, their primary patriotism, is directed towards Quebec. To the extent that Quebecers can be Quebecers first and then Canadian, I believe their Canadianism can go quite a long way.

[Gougeon, 1994, p. 114]

### **Sovereignty-Association or Independence? The War of Words**

Terminology soon becomes a problem in any discussion of Québec nationalism. Just as the issue of language is central to the vision of Québec nationalists, so is the issue of wording. A bewildering array of terms is used to describe “the sovereigntist project”, as Canadian journalist Peter Newman points out:

Quebec's nationalists believed in at least six degrees of separation: independence, sovereignty, autonomy, special status, separation and sovereignty-association. Separatist Pierre Drouilly, a University of Montreal sociologist, speculated that the real problem with the sovereignty option was that it always required a “Yes” vote. Since Quebecers had an unbroken record dating to 1942 of voting “No” in provincial and national referenda, he predicted certain victory if the referendum question were reworked to read : “Don't you disagree with the idea that Quebec shouldn't be a non-sovereign state?” Or more simply: “Do you agree that Quebec shouldn't become a sovereign country?”

[Newman, 1995, p. 334]

Many a truth is spoken in jest: however, Newman has made a common error in describing Drouilly as a separatist, for it is considered a pejorative term in French as well as in English, “and has usually been avoided or resented by those advocating independence for Quebec, or sovereignty-association.” [Fraser, 1984, p. 396] This was because separatism had the connotation of cutting all ties to Canada, and that was not their goal, nor apparently, the desire of the Québec people. The preferred term in the 70s and 80s was independence or

independentist [Fraser, 1984]; but in the 90s it is sovereignist or sovereigntist. Now, it may be argued that this is sophistry, meant to disguise the true nature of what Québec nationalists want, but this ambiguity in meaning reflects the ambiguity felt by Quebecers on the issue. The language is complex and divided because the feelings are: Quebecers have dual loyalties.

Most of this terminology was developed during the debate on the referendum of 1980 and indeed, was not heard of before then [LeDuc, 1996a]. Words and phrases such as sovereignty, sovereignty-association, renewed federalism, a mandate to negotiate, economic association or a common currency were not part of the PQ platform in the 70s. These were words chosen to help win the referendum, and although it may seem that they did not work the first time around, the process by which they were chosen helped determine winning strategies for the PQ. What the extensive polling done for the referendum revealed was that if voters were convinced that the choice was between different methods of government, rather than between Québec and Canada, then the referendum had a better chance of succeeding. Although the leadership in the PQ may have liked the word independence, it was a non-starter with the Québec voter: a 1979 survey by Le Centre de recherches sur l'opinion publique showed that only 19 per cent of voters would vote "Yes" if the referendum question had proposed independence for Québec [LeDuc, 1996a]. The Parizeau definition of sovereignty - more akin to separatism - had a "very favourable" response from just 15 per cent of those surveyed in the 1993 Canadian National Election Study and a "very unfavourable" response from 30 per cent [LeDuc, 1996a].

Interestingly enough, in the run-up to the provincial election in 1994, both Parizeau and Bouchard began to use the word "separatist" again as part of their political strategy to polarize the issue, now that Québec was headed by a premier, Daniel Johnson, who was a committed federalist. "Since the nationalists were ahead in the opinion polls, they wanted to make the most of their expected mandate in the upcoming provincial elections. As their support fell away in the campaign, they dropped the expression." [Keating, 1996b, p. 80]

Québec's nationalist leaders still continue to play on words, as Keating says: whether their motives are as cynical as he seems to imply is difficult to know. It could be that the ambiguity of the term sovereignty is more convenient than just confused, but there are limits as to how far the definition will go, as LeDuc explains:

A sovereign Quebec might be an independent country, with its own currency, passports, membership in the United Nations, and foreign relations, or it might be a participant in some sort of restructured Canadian confederation. The political elasticity of

the term makes it appealing to both those who envision a fully independent sovereign Quebec state and to others who continue to believe in a more or less confederal alternative. But the concept of sovereignty can be stretched only so far before it tends to snap back toward the two more starkly defined alternatives which have always been much less popular with most Quebeckers - to remain within the Canadian federation as it presently exists, or to risk a plunge into uncharted and possibly dangerous political waters.

[LeDuc, 1996a, p. 9]

### **The Bloc Québécois - An Independence Voice in Ottawa**

The Bloc Québécois was born out of the debacle of the Meech Lake Accord and the failure of *le beau risque* initiated by Brian Mulroney and supported by René Levesque. It had been a long march to this point, according to Québec nationalists, who felt that nothing more could be done within the context of the Canadian federal system to achieve Québec's aims. The repatriation of Canada's constitution in 1982 without the province's consent was the beginning of the end, and the passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was seen as another example of English Canada's continuing attempts to assimilate Québec and make it a province just like any other [Gagnon, 1996]. The only way Québec could take charge of its destiny was through the formation of a federal political party which would fight for Québec's interests in Ottawa and work for its political sovereignty.

The BQ's meteoric rise - the party was officially founded in June of 1991, and became the Official Opposition in the Canadian House of Commons in October 1993 - was not without its problems. Like the Scottish National Party, it was plagued by ideological divisions in its early days, but unlike the SNP, these were soon overcome, enabling the Bloc to develop into a highly-disciplined political party with a clear focus and well-planned strategy for winning seats. Most of its worst conflicts occurred during the party's formative stages, when the fledgling group of sovereigntist MPs led by Bouchard was trying to decide its future. It was no wonder that tensions existed, as the group included both former Progressive Conservative and Liberal MPs, and even a former Maoist, trade union negotiator (and now Bloc leader) Gilles Duceppe. The Tories in the group wanted it to become a formal political party, while Bouchard and Duceppe wanted "to build a nonpartisan movement - a rainbow coalition - with relatively loose structures" [Cornellier, 1995, p. 47]. Bouchard resisted, partly

because he was not ready to commit himself again to a life in politics, but also because he did not want to antagonize the Parti Québécois.

There were also some concerns among PQ supporters about the sincerity of the Bloc, especially since the failure of *le beau risque*, and whether it would be a rival rather than an ally. However, these doubts were eventually overcome, but not without some political purges of executive members close to former PQ leader Pierre Marc Johnson, an opponent of Parizeau [Cornellier, 1995]. The Bloc's relationship with the PQ was cemented during the referendum campaign on the Charlottetown Accord, in which Bouchard ably performed on behalf of the "No" side. The campaign marked the beginning of the Bloc's use of the PQ's well-organized electoral machine, but also the end of the rainbow coalition, as it became clear that there was no place for members of any other parties.

Once the decision had been made to become a political party and run in the federal election, progress was swift. From October 1992 to October 1993, the Bloc increased its membership from 25,000 to 105,000, and raised approximately \$3 million, more than two-thirds of it in less than five months [Cornellier, 1995]. When the Bloc and the PQ consolidated their mailing-lists for the campaign, they discovered, much to their surprise, that some 60 to 65 per cent of the Bloc's members did not belong to the Parti Québécois; they were new sovereigntist supporters. Aided by a \$1.45 million loan from the Caisse General Desjardins who accepted the 50 per cent of election expenses authorized by Elections Canada as guarantee [Cornellier, 1995, p. 76], the Bloc was able to fund a \$4 million campaign with close to 100 staff. At the instigation of Jacques Parizeau, the PQ provided vital support in fund-raising, organization, research and polls, as well as the expertise of senior PQ strategists. When the votes were counted, they confirmed what the party's polls had been reporting throughout the campaign: the Bloc had won more than 50 per cent of the vote in Québec and 54 out of the 75 federal seats.

Bouchard did not want to antagonize English-speaking Canada and so did not move into the official Ottawa residence for the leader of the opposition, Stornoway. As the official opposition, the Bloc was entitled to several other benefits as well, including a budget of \$2.6 million for research and staff [Wills, 1997d], the right to ask the first question in the House, priority in committees and automatic membership of parliamentary delegations. Bouchard had the right of reply to government speeches without time limits, could meet foreign dignitaries, and was paid a higher salary. These resources helped enormously in achieving the goal of raising the Bloc's profile in the rest of Canada, and the strict discipline which Bouchard imposed also earned respect for the new party from parliamentary observers and the media. Under his leadership, Bloc MPs had to

adhere to a code of conduct, with everything being “organized, structured, controlled” [Cornellier, 1995, p. 93].

When the time came for the Parti Québécois to contest the provincial election in 1994, the Bloc returned the favour and worked alongside them to win victory. Bouchard campaigned “brilliantly and effectively” [Newman, 1995, p. 341], but there was a conflict between Parizeau and Bouchard as to whether the election was sufficient to assure sovereignty, or if a referendum was required. This was soon resolved in Bouchard’s favour, however, as evidenced by the campaign motto, “At first, a government, and then sovereignty” [Cornellier, 1995, p. 133]. Although the two parties worked smoothly together, Bloc strategists were critical of the PQ’s failure to deal with the sovereignty issue, a failure that left them with a small majority which would handicap the future referendum campaign.

The Bloc nearly lost its leader when he contracted necrotizing fasciitis (or the “flesh-eating disease”) in late November. Close to death, his left leg was amputated, but he rallied, and returned to the House of Commons three months later, in a cleverly orchestrated comeback that gave him maximum media exposure [Cornellier, 1995, p. 139]. He and Parizeau continued to have conflicts over the nature and timing of the referendum, with Parizeau insisting that it must be held within the first year of his government, and that it be a straightforward question on an independent Québec forming an economic partnership with the rest of Canada. Bouchard’s view was that sovereigntists “needed a softer stand to avoid a crushing defeat” [Cornellier, 1995, p. 151]. Once again, though, the conflicts were resolved, with Bouchard, Parizeau, and Mario Dumont, the young leader of the minority nationalist party, Action démocratique du Québec, signing an agreement to join forces in the referendum which outlined the terms of sovereignty and its accession.

Bouchard’s energetic and emotive campaigning during the referendum was an influential factor in its final outcome. Although the referendum was defeated, the narrowness of the defeat was due, in part, to his ability to soothe the fears of Quebecers about outright separation, and his credibility and popularity as a political figure in Québec. Bouchard’s next move was to assume the leadership of the Parti Québécois, following the resignation of Parizeau. The man chosen to replace him in February of 1996, Michel Gauthier, was a unilingual francophone, who had to deal with a party demoralized by the loss of the referendum, and the departure of its charismatic leader. Plagued by the divisions between the left and right wings of the party as well as by criticism of his performance in the media and by members of his own party, Gauthier announced his resignation December 2, 1996. Gilles Duceppe, the first elected Bloc MP and the only one

elected twice, was chosen as the BQ's new leader at the annual convention March 15. Fluently bilingual, unlike Gauthier, Duceppe had served as caucus whip under Bouchard and was said to be the Québec leader's favourite [Bauch, 1997a; Martin, 1997]. When, at the end of April, the 1997 federal election was called for June 2, he had been party leader six weeks - hardly enough time to prepare a strategy for the campaign.

The Bloc has occupied a unique place in the House of Commons. As Cornellier notes: "It has no real program other than sovereignty, and one aim - to die as fast as possible afterwards." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 157] However, with the collapse of the New Democratic Party, which was reduced to nine seats and unofficial party status in 1993, Bloc MPs "have become Canada's social conscience. This is quite ironic considering that the Bloc Québécois wants to take Québec out of the current Canadian federal system." [Gagnon, 1996, p. 22] It was the Bloc that fought against cuts to social services and unemployment insurance, pushed for improved labour legislation, proposed a total ban on handguns, and advocated amendments to the Human Rights Act to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation [Cornellier, 1995; Gagnon, 1996]. At the same time, however, the Bloc, unlike the left in English-speaking Canada, supported the North American Free Trade Agreement, "a consensus that has prevailed in Quebec for more than a decade, one that gave Brian Mulroney his second majority government." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 122] Free trade was viewed as the way to create the economic resources necessary to implement and maintain social programs [Cornellier, 1995], and also the means to liberate the Québec economy from its dependence on Canada because the province could go to the U.S. for markets and technology [Newman, 1996, p. 336].

Gagnon says that it is understandable that Quebecers can no longer see the value of staying in Canada, given the Thatcherite vision of the federal government during the last decade which has resulted in the destruction of national institutions

that had given a meaning to being Canadian. The undermining of the old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, university education, research and production centres (National Film Board, Telefilm Canada, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), the privatization of railways and airports, and the elimination of the government's arm-length agencies, such as the Economic Council, have all contributed to a crisis of identity. Such moves have led many Quebecers to believe that Canada had outlived its useful existence.

[Gagnon, 1996, p. 23]

With the Bloc in Ottawa, Québec sovereigntists could now express their own political and social identity at the national as well as at the provincial level, something they had never been able to do before.

### **A Divided House - the Origins of the Scottish National Party**

Looking at the histories of the Parti Québécois, the Bloc and the Scottish National Party, it is easy to see some strong similarities, with all three parties torn by left-right splits, dissension between the idealists who want independence and nothing else, and the pragmatists who see the road to independence as being more curved and convoluted than straight and narrow. However, there are also strong differences between the nationalist parties of Québec and the SNP, as I have noted before, and not just those arising from the ethnic dimension of Québec's nationalism. However rancorous or antagonistic the divisions within the PQ and the Bloc, they have never been allowed to damage the parties to the same extent that such divisions have in the SNP. No matter how close to the abyss the PQ or the Bloc have come, at the final moment, they have pulled back, re-grouped, and learned from their mistakes. This has not always been the case with the SNP. As James Mitchell has noted in his study of the self-government movement in Scotland:

It is striking how rarely the movement has taken account of its own history. Equally striking have been the high expectation and subsequent disillusionment. In part the disillusionment has been due to a limited appreciation of the weakness of each strategy, the history of the movement, and the strength of its opponents.

[Mitchell, 1996, p. 300]

Although he is describing here the flaws of the self-government movement in general, it is certainly applicable to the SNP. It is only in recent years that the Scottish National Party has been able to overcome these divisions, divisions that perhaps were inevitable given the origins of the party and how it developed.

It initially grew out of six separate organizations which took several years to complete their own Scottish union in 1934: the Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA), the Scots National League (SNL), the Scottish National Movement (SNM), the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association (GUSNA), the National Party of Scotland (NPS), and the Scottish Party. The SHRA, founded in 1918 by Roland Muirhead, a radical, republican businessman, lasted the longest and had the most members, but was doomed to failure because

it was unable to attract a broad base of support and most critically, to persuade Labour MPs to push for Home Rule.

Muirhead, who was a member of the Independent Labour Party, wanted the SHRA to be a non-partisan organization that would draw in Scots from all parties, but in actual fact, it soon became dominated by members of the Labour Party and their trade union supporters [Finlay, 1994]. By 1920 the SHRA had 138 organizations and 1,150 individuals belonging to it as well as its own monthly bulletin [Finlay, 1994], but the organization began to fall apart when members became frustrated by the Labour Party's unwillingness to back Home Rule bills at Westminster. It was after the failure in 1924 of a private member's bill for Home Rule put forward by Glasgow MP George Buchanan - which the SHRA had helped draft - that there was serious talk of forming a Scottish national party [Brand, 1978, p. 180].

The Scots National League, started in 1920, was, by contrast, a much smaller group, but more influential. The original impetus for the organization was a kind of Celtic romanticism, promoted by its two founders, William Gillies and Stuart R. Erskine of Mar. Most of the SNL's members lived in London, "where it was supported by bagpipe-listening, Jacobite-song-singing exiles" [Marr, 1995, p. 66], and its early years were characterized by "a chronic lack of realistic policies...ineffective and limited party machinery, together with half-baked and muddy objectives" [Finlay, 1994, p. 42]. However, the superior organizing skills of Tom Gibson, one of the many who left the SHRA after the failure of the Buchanan Home Rule bill in 1924, energized the SNL and gave it a focus and credibility. Membership increased, new branches were set up, a paper, the *Scots Independent*, was founded in 1926 (and is still publishing), and the executive was restricted to those living in Scotland. Gibson also shifted the group's emphasis away from cultural issues and more towards economic ones, making it less isolationist and closer to the mainstream of British politics [Brand, 1978, p. 187].

These changes angered some, leading to the breakaway group, the Scottish National Movement, headed by poet and journalist Lewis Spence, who "was a colourful and charismatic figure" [Finlay, 1994, p. 52], and, although good at getting publicity for the SNM [Brand, 1978, p. 189] knew little of and cared nothing for political organization, unlike Gibson. The split was, however, only a temporary set-back for the League, which began promoting the idea of a national party through the pages of the *Scots Independent*, and attacking Scottish Labour MPs for "being little more than Westminster lackeys" [Finlay, 1994, p. 55]. Most significantly, though, under Gibson's influence, the League began developing an economic rationale for independence which made it unique among the nationalist groups, a rationale very similar to that of the present-day Scottish



National Party, arguing that "Scottish social and economic maladies were the result of bad government from Westminster, and that once Scotland was in control of her own destiny, the economy would flourish." [Finlay, 1994, p. 60]

It took the intervention of John MacCormick of the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association to get the National Party of Scotland off the ground, but it took a great deal of wrangling. The chief obstacle was the conflict between the SHRA's Muirhead and Gibson over strategy. Muirhead found it difficult to abandon the idea that Home Rule could be achieved through the established parties, and even when he accepted that a new party was necessary, he disagreed with Gibson on the need for detailed policy objectives. Gibson "believed that, unless the new party could translate the Home Rule issue for the benefit of the man in the street and explain its relevance in bread-and-butter terms, they would never attract sufficient electoral support." [Finlay, 1994, p. 76]

Progress was finally made when a provisional steering committee to establish a national party, made up of the representatives of all the nationalist groups and chaired by the affable and energetic MacCormick, was formed in February, 1928. In June of that year the NPS was founded, and in January of 1929, contested its first by-election with Lewis Spence as its candidate in North Midlothian. The campaign was a disaster, not only due to the inadequacies of the candidate, but also the party's organization and policies. Its weakness in these areas was not helped by another split that developed between the fundamentalists, led by C.M. Grieve (the poet Hugh MacDiarmid), whose militant Celtic nationalism had overtones of fascism and racism [Finlay, 1994, pp. 84-85], and the moderates, who wanted the NPS to be seen as a serious political party. The lack of any electoral success exacerbated these conflicts and stymied the attempts made by MacCormick, now NPS secretary, to attract establishment nationalists to the party in order to give it a more moderate image.

A further setback occurred with the formation of the Scottish Party in 1932 by George Malcolm Thomson and Andrew Dewar Gibb, who were opposed to the separatist and socialist philosophies of NPS members, as well as to Celtic extremism. This spurred MacCormick to re-double his efforts to bring socially prominent Scots into the NPS, "often with more regard for their social standing than their political viewpoint" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 182]. The response to his overtures was not favourable, either from the aristocrats or from NPS members who were worried that he was willing to abandon party principles in order to appease more conservative nationalists. MacCormick, however, was keen to join the two parties together, so much so that he was willing to ignore the strong political differences between the two.

Following a tumultuous annual conference in 1933 which highlighted the deep divisions within the party, MacCormick began a campaign of expulsions against the fundamentalists and others who opposed the move towards union with the Scottish Party, while many others resigned because they felt the NPS had deserted its principles [Finlay, 1994]. However, negotiations continued, and as the NPS needed the money and prestige of the Scottish Party, which in turn needed the numbers and political organization of the NPS, both parties had good reasons to merge. The process was aided considerably by their sponsoring a joint candidate, Sir Alexander MacEwen, at the 1933 by-election in Kilmarnock, in which he won a respectable 16.8 per cent of the vote [Mitchell, 1996, p. 182], and in early 1934 agreement was reached on the terms of the merger, which were soon approved by both parties.

The first annual conference of the Scottish National Party was held April 7, 1934 in Stirling. It was not a happy political marriage. As Mitchell notes, there were conflicts over almost every aspect of the party, including ideology, goals, policies, strategy, tactics, and, as always, personalities. The compromises made to enable the merger nearly crippled the party, as Finlay explains:

In order to encompass people of widely differing political ideologies, the Scottish National Party had to abandon most of the social and economic policies of the NPS, which tended toward the left of centre, and replace them with a quasi-utopian brand of nationalism.

[Finlay, 1994, p. 156]

It would take almost ten years to resolve these differences. Initially, however, members of the new party were full of confidence and enthusiasm. "Previous recriminations and accusations of sell outs were forgotten in the quest to build a new force in Scottish politics." [Finlay, 1994, p. 164] Membership increased, party debts were paid off, the branch network strengthened, and the first full-time paid organizer hired.

However, this new-found unanimity did not last long. By 1935 splits between the left and right wings of the party over the issue of self-government and strategy had emerged. A further blow occurred when the party president, the Duke of Montrose, announced that he was resigning the Conservative whip in the House of Lords to join the Liberal party. This was a shock to many members of the SNP, who found that their leader not only belonged to another party, but also did not support their own policy restricting dual membership. This lack of a clear identity for the SNP as well as any clear economic and social policies,

coupled with poor election planning and organization, resulted in the worst performance by the party since entering politics [Finlay, 1994]. It was the beginning of a period of "irreversible decline" [Finlay, 1994, p. 183], characterized by schisms and factionalism. Although by 1937 the left wing of the party dominated, there were still quarrels over election strategy and co-operation with other political groups, issues that continued to trouble the SNP for several years. The party was also hindered in the 30s by the British public's fear of militant nationalism due to its association with Nazi and fascist dictators.

By the start of the war in 1939, the SNP faced numerous problems, including, "uninspiring leadership, poor discipline, low morale, declining branch activity, increasing financial pressures, and last but not least, the stigma of being nothing more than an inconsequential fringe group in Scottish politics." [Finlay, 1994, p. 207] But it was, ironically, another split that enabled the party to set a new and successful course, this time over the issue of conscription and cross-party co-operation. In 1937 the SNP had committed itself to a policy of anti-conscription, but now that war had broken out, the leadership realized that this policy would make the SNP look unpatriotic, and at the urging of John MacCormick, somewhat reluctantly came out in favour of the war effort. But there was strong pressure from the anti-war faction within the party which was angered by this stance, taken without formal consultation from the National Council [Brand, 1978; Finlay, 1994]. Radical party members were also unhappy with MacCormick's continued efforts to set up a united front on Home Rule.

When Douglas Young, a convicted anti-conscriptionist, won the post of party chairman over MacCormick's favoured candidate, journalist William Power, at the 1942 conference, MacCormick left, taking his followers with him. His departure divided the nationalist movement in Scotland, but not all the effects were negative. True, the SNP lost activists, most of whom went on to work for MacCormick's Scottish Convention, but it also brought back others such as Tom Gibson and Hugh MacDiarmid who had left the party because of their disenchantment with MacCormick's leadership. It also got rid of the party's internal opposition, making it more clearly focused on the goal of independence [Brand, 1978, p. 241].

Aided by a new leadership that was united in its left-of-centre political views, a chairman with a high public profile, and the exceptional organizing skills of Dr. Robert McIntyre in the position of secretary, the party thrived, with branch membership increasing 60 per cent in one year. It was McIntyre's efforts that enabled the SNP to become a modern political party with a clear set of policies, a well-organized membership, and a strong commitment to contesting elections both nationally and locally [Finlay, 1994]. Most importantly, the Scottish

National Party now had a distinctive political identity, which, as articulated by McIntyre, emphasized community control rather than centralized planning as the way to social justice. In 1945 the SNP won its first parliamentary seat when he took 50 per cent of the vote at the Motherwell by-election. Although his victory was short-lived (McIntyre lost his seat in the general election 12 weeks later) it accomplished a great deal, reinforcing the value of contesting elections and raising the party's profile and credibility. Choosing principle, rather than expediency, was a winning strategy.

### **Modern Times, Hard Choices**

The period from 1945 to 1967 was, as Mitchell notes, a quiet one for the SNP, a time of "sober assessment of the party's potential" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 174], with few electoral successes. But it was during this time that the SNP strengthened its organization, clarified its policies, and established the base for its political victories in the 60s and 70s under the capable leadership of McIntyre, Tom Gibson, and former journalist Arthur Donaldson. At the 1946 conference, the party adopted a statement which was to be the basis of SNP policy until the early 60s, and which expressed a strong commitment to democratic self-government and concentrated on bread and-butter issues. The 1948 conference passed a resolution supporting European unity, a first step in the party's move towards a policy of independence in Europe.

The SNP also managed to develop a somewhat co-operative relationship with the Scottish Convention Association organized by John MacCormick. Several SNP members joined the Convention, a non-partisan organization for the promotion of Home Rule. Although the party voted not to join the Scottish National Assembly organized by the Convention in 1947, individual members were free to participate as they wished, and when the Scottish Covenant was publicly launched, Robert McIntyre was one of the first to sign [Mitchell, 1996, p.196]. During the 1950s the formation of Roland Muirhead's Scottish National Congress (modelled on Gandhi's Indian National Congress) and the non-partisan group Scottish Alliance added to the party's tensions over its election-based strategy and the issue of cross-party membership, but both these organizations soon died.

It was in the 1960s that the Scottish National Party finally emerged from the political wilderness. The decline of the Covenant Association and struggles within the Labour Party helped the SNP score some important successes in by-elections, first in 1961 when Ian Macdonald won 18.7 per cent of the vote in Bridgeton, and in 1962, when William Wolfe won 23 per cent of the vote in West

Lothian, the result of having "a well-organised machine and model candidates." [Mitchell, 1996, p. 199] Macdonald became a full-time organizer for the SNP, and his considerable talents enabled the party to increase its members from 2,000 to 30,000 in just four years. Wolfe, as vice-chairman in charge of publicity and development, understood the importance of media coverage, and established the SNP's reputation as the Scottish party with the most effective publicity. In 1965 the party won the right to air political broadcasts for the first time. The Alba Pools, a nationalist pools system, was started, and became a lucrative source of funds for the party. Wolfe also began the process of revising SNP policy, and assistant national secretary Gordon Wilson drew up a new structure for the party's organization, which has remained in place since with only a few revisions. A new generation of leaders came into the party, such as Wilson, Margo MacDonald, and Winnie Ewing, leaders who are still influential today. The SNP also began an aggressive strategy of contesting local elections which raised the party's profile further: in 1967 the SNP won 200,000 votes and 69 county and burgh seats. Robert McIntyre was elected to Stirling council and later became provost. The party began fielding more candidates in national elections as well, 15 in 1964 and 23 in 1966.

The Scottish National Party's big breakthrough came shortly after, in 1967, when Winnie Ewing won the Hamilton by-election with 46 per cent of the vote, in what was presumed to have been a safe Labour seat. Ewing's energetic performance and the ensuing publicity, which Wolfe calculated was more than the party had received in the last 20 years [Marr, 1995, p. 119], certainly helped the party in the local elections that followed, when the SNP won 34 per cent of the vote. Although these victories came as a surprise to some, the reasons for them were not hard to figure out, says Marr: "disillusion with the Wilson government, which had failed to build the shiny new economy it had promised four years earlier; Tory and Labour uninterest in Home Rule; and the SNP's hard grind to make itself an effective vote-gathering outfit." [Marr, 1995, p. 119] Ian Macdonald's hard work as an organizer was certainly an important factor; by 1969 the party had 125,000 members in 470 branches [Kemp, 1993, p. 98], which provided a solid community base for the party. However, this level of achievement was not sustained. This was the beginning of what Mitchell describes as "the SNP's drunk period" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 174], in which the party reached the greatest heights of its popular support, only to have it crash dramatically in 1979.

Although Ewing lost Hamilton in the general election of 1970, the SNP won its first seat when Donald Stewart took the Western Isles constituency, but failed to make any more gains because its electoral support was spread evenly

across Scotland, in what became a consistent pattern of voting. This was a disappointment for party activists, who had great expectations of success in the 1970 election, based on the fact that the SNP had the largest membership of any party in Scotland, and had outperformed the other parties in the local elections [Harvie, 1994, p. 177]. However, more victories were to follow in by-elections, with Margo MacDonald winning Govan in 1973, while in the same year Gordon Wilson came a close second with 30 per cent in Dundee East. Former party president Robert McIntyre became provost of Stirling in 1971 after gaining 35 per cent of the vote in Stirling and Falkirk. The big breakthrough for the nationalists finally came in the two 1974 general elections, when the SNP won seven seats in February, and then increased that number to a football team of 11 in October on a vote of 30.4 per cent.

There were two main factors that made it possible: the Labour government's publication of the Kilbrandon report in 1973, which recommended a Scottish assembly; and the party's well-orchestrated publicity campaign on the North Sea oil, "the most sustained and powerful in its history" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 210]. The timing of the Kilbrandon report was especially fortuitous, coming as it did just before the by-elections and shortly before the general election, and helped give support to the nationalist cause. The oil campaign was backed by the research of economist Donald Bain, who had seen firsthand in Alberta the benefits to be derived from oil revenues, and the SNP's professional public relations team [Harvie, 1995]. The SNP showed that the oil revenues could make Scottish independence economically viable, and the strength of its research and communications office meant that journalists and businessmen used the SNP as their information source on oil policy rather than the government [Harvie, 1995, p. 123].

But oil was not enough to sustain the SNP's popularity at the polls. Its downfall was the party's failure to deal with the issue of devolution, coupled with the party's lack of parliamentary experience. The SNP had forgotten Robert McIntyre's point that it was important for party members to win local elections and participate in local government so that they could develop competence in governing. By making the pursuit of seats at Westminster its greatest goal, the party was turning its own political philosophy upside down [Mitchell, 1996].

Of the 11 MPs, only Ewing and Stewart had some parliamentary experience, and the others had very little political experience at all, which created considerable difficulties for them as they struggled with the ins-and-outs of the devolution issue while under the intense media scrutiny generated by their position as the power brokers in the minority Labour government. Although the SNP agreed to support Labour "as long as it worked for a devolved Scottish

assembly" [Newman, 1990, p. 17], the SNP "voted with the government 117 times, against it 179 times, and abstained 95 times. Splits even developed among the MPs themselves." [Newman, 1990, p. 17] There was no mechanism to establish links between the elected members - both MPs and local councillors - and the party organization, which created more conflicts. The party also made the mistake of assuming that it was the only voice of Scottish independence, and refused to join forces with nationalist politicians outwith the SNP such as Jim Sillars, who left Labour to form the Scottish Labour Party.

Most importantly, because the party could not make up its mind on devolution, it "failed to project a coherent and consistent political message. It was as easy for Labour to point to the SNP's support for 'Tory policies' as it was for the Tories to point to SNP support for 'socialist causes'" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 218]. SNP members argued about whether devolution would be a stepping-stone to independence, or a barrier, and if it was worth the political cost of its entanglement with the Callaghan Labour government. These arguments created bitter divisions in the SNP that caused both short and long-term damage to the party. By 1978 the SNP was in decline, but it was the disillusionment of the 1979 referendum campaign that almost destroyed it.

### **The Referendum of 1979 And Its Aftermath**

1978 was a year of disappointments for the SNP, beginning with the passage of an amendment to the devolution bill which stated that if less than 40 per cent of the total electorate voted 'Yes' in the referendum, the government would move an Order in Council repealing it. The passage was doubly humiliating, coming as it did on January 25, Burns' Night, and from George Cunningham, who was a Scot and Labour MP for Islington. This "wrecking amendment" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 215] was considered "the most significant backbench intervention in British politics since the war." [Clements, Farquharson, and Wark, 1996, p. 72] In April the SNP's high hopes for taking the Garscadden seat from Labour in the by-election were dashed when Donald Dewar won, and a month later George Robertson defeated Margo MacDonald in Hamilton. The SNP's campaign in the October by-election for Berwick and East Lothian was marred by conflict over the choice of candidate. At the same time there was conflict between the SNP MPs and the party executive as to whether the government should be brought down. The executive wanted to keep the government in until the referendum was held, while the MPs, disillusioned and tired of "the sordid nature of Parliamentary deals" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 216] wanted to end it all.

The referendum campaign brought further disillusionment. At the start of the campaign it looked as if the "Yes" side would win; polls had consistently shown a substantial majority in favour, and up until the last week this support held [Bochel, Denver and Macartney, 1981, p. 143]. True, there was no government money provided for the campaign as had been done for the referendum on joining the European Economic Community in 1975, and no restrictions on spending, which meant the "No" side had more of an advantage, but "not overwhelmingly so" [Bochel, Denver, Macartney, 1981, p. 145]. However, the "Yes" side was split, with the "Labour Says Yes" campaign refusing to talk to the SNP's "Yes" campaign, and both unwilling to join with the cross-party groups, Alliance For An Assembly, and Yes for Scotland (co-ordinated in West Lothian by the 24-year-old Alex Salmond). Voting day March 1 was snowy and cold. When the results came in, 62.9 per cent of eligible voters had turned out; 51.6 per cent voted yes; and 48.4 per cent voted no; but with only 32.9 per cent of the total electorate voting in favour, the vote was lost to the 40 per cent rule. Former SNP party activist Donald Bain recalls the bitter aftermath:

When the referendum came, in 1979, the SNP found itself trying to sell the Scottish people a pathetic little assembly for which even SNP members had minimal enthusiasm. The Labour party, meanwhile, made virtually no effort to back its own proposals, Labour opponents of devolution (Tam Dalyell, Brian Wilson and Neil Kinnock in particular) being more visible than proponents. When the referendum produced only a narrow 'Yes' and without crossing the notorious 40 per cent threshold the sense of betrayal and of having been duped into following a blind alley were enormous.

[Bain, 1995]

This was snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, and the resulting emotional fall-out nearly tore the SNP apart. The difference in attitude between Québec and Scottish nationalists to the results of their respective referendums is striking: a narrow defeat in the 1995 referendum was seen by Québec sovereigntists as a success, an important step on the way to achieving their goal; while to Scottish nationalists, the 3.2 per cent majority they achieved was an irredeemable failure. After the referendum SNP MPs had little heart for keeping the Labour government in power, and when the opportunity came to go against the government on a Conservative motion of non-confidence March 28, they did, in Callaghan's famous phrase, "like turkeys voting for an early Christmas". In the



election of May 1979, the SNP lost nine seats, keeping only the Western Isles and Dundee East, and winning just 17.3 per cent of the vote.

The response of the party to this defeat as it tried to re-define itself was, as Marr says, stunts and schisms. "There were campaigns of civil disobedience, expulsions, mutual denunciations of irreconcilable factions, stormings out and breakings in." [Marr, 1995, p. 185] The party split into fundamentalist and socialist camps, both, "reactions to defeat, deriving from events in the past rather than looking forward" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 221]. The '79 Group, made up of "older members with scores to settle and an irreverent youthful membership" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 223], argued that the only way forward for the SNP was to become a radical socialist republican party. The group did provide some creative energy for the party during a difficult time, but not much in the form of policy, and its strategies were questionable, causing a great deal of internecine warfare within the SNP. Its greatest success was at the 1981 conference in Aberdeen, when three of its members were elected to the executive, the most influential of these being Jim Sillars in the post of vice-chairman of policy, who had joined the party the year before. The '79 Group pushed for a policy of civil disobedience, and although the policy was approved, mainly because Sillars was its spokesman, it was not backed by party members and was strongly opposed by the more fundamentalist office-bearers on the executive. As enacted, the policy ended up making the SNP look foolish: a break-in at the Royal High School in Edinburgh, site of the proposed Scottish Assembly, resulted in the arrest of six '79 Group members, and a planned mass demonstration the week after fizzled out for lack of support.

At the 1982 conference in Ayr, senior members of the party, led by Winnie Ewing, formed the Campaign for Nationalism with the one purpose to have the '79 Group banned. Confronted with this opposition, SNP leader Gordon Wilson moved an emergency motion to ban all groups within the party, which passed 308 to 188. The Campaign for Nationalism immediately disbanded, while members of the '79 Group were televised angrily walking out of the conference; Jim Sillars, however, retained his post on the National Council. The conflict, however, still continued, as members of the '79 Group formed the cross-party Scottish Socialist Society as a means of getting around the ban. The result was the expulsion of seven members of the group, including Alex Salmond, and it was only after a "long and worrisome appeal, involving forty hours of hearings in front of a party tribunal" [Marr, 1995, p. 191] that the expulsions were commuted to suspensions and they were allowed back into the party in April 1983. However, the damage had been done: at the national election in June of that year, the SNP's share of the vote fell to 11.7 per cent and it lost 53 out of 72

deposits, although it did manage to hold onto its two seats, “despite appalling public scenes of division and a disregard for its image with the electorate.” [Mitchell, 1996, p. 230]

Once again the SNP began the slow process of renewing itself. The struggle between opposing factions became more muted as the party established itself as left-of-centre and began “to acknowledge its radicalism on social and economic issues” [Mitchell, 1996, p. 232]. The party also began revising its policy on Europe, led by Gordon Wilson, who was able to get a motion passed backing membership in the European Community at the 1983 conference. In the 1987 election the party emphasized its role as the only Scottish party, expressed in its slogan, “Play the Scottish Card”. The results were not as good as had been hoped: the party won just 14.1 per cent of the vote and lost its seats in Dundee East and the Western Isles to Labour. However, it did make new gains, bringing back Margaret Ewing in Moray and Andrew Welsh in Angus, with Alex Salmond winning in Banff and Buchan.

The following year Jim Sillars scored an impressive victory in the Glasgow Govan by-election, winning 48.7 per cent of the vote, and the month after, support for the SNP rose to 31 per cent in a Market Opinion Research International (MORI) poll [Newman, 1990]. This growing popularity was due in part to the SNP’s policy of Independence in Europe, passed at the 1988 conference, which helped ease some of the voting public’s concern about Scotland going it alone. In addition, the party’s aggressive stance towards the hated poll tax, expressed in the “Can Pay, Won’t Pay” campaign, attracted young, left-wing members of the working class who traditionally would have voted for Labour. The emergence of a new generation of “much tougher and more sophisticated” SNP activists led by Alex Salmond [Mitchell, 1996, p. 222] and the party’s decision to work for Home Rule within the cross-party Scottish Convention added to the SNP’s credibility. It looked as if the SNP was on its way back; but then another damaging split occurred which torpedoed the party’s progress until after the 1992 election.

The issue was the Scottish National Party’s participation in a Scottish Constitutional Convention, which had been fought over throughout the 1980s. Gordon Wilson had introduced motions supporting the Scottish Constitutional Convention at the 1982, 1983 and 1984 SNP conferences, and at the last one, party members narrowly agreed to it and to participating in the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly. In August 1988 the national executive voted to meet with the members of other parties to discuss the Convention proposal, and formal talks were held at the end of January, 1989 to explore the conditions for participation. Although not all of the SNP’s demands were met, progress towards some kind of

working relationship was made, and Gordon Wilson told the press that the talks had been "very successful" [Marr, 1995, p. 203].

The response from the fundamentalists in the party was immediate and outraged. After a weekend of angry telephone calls to the SNP participants, Wilson decided that the SNP had to withdraw immediately, without waiting for the next executive meeting in February. He consulted with all the party office-bearers, except Alex Salmond, his deputy leader, who was the one most likely to have protested the move [Mitchell, 1996, p. 242], not because he necessarily supported the SNP's involvement, but because he felt the timing of the withdrawal was wrong [Kemp, 1993, p. 162]. Salmond, along with other nationalists, was surprised to hear James Sillars announce on the Sunday night that the SNP was out. "That was the moment when the trust between him and Sillars disappeared." [Marr, 1995, p. 203]

When the executive did hold its meeting, the vote was 22 to 1 against participation, despite the intervention of Robert McIntyre, who warned that by quitting the talks the SNP was missing an opportunity to be seen as "statesmanlike and cooperative" [Marr, 1995, p. 204]. The executive's decision was confirmed at the March meeting of the national council by a vote of 191 to 41, following a debate that was "one of the most ill-tempered and tense in the SNP for years" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 242]. To those outside the party, the distinctions between the fundamentalist and gradualist positions were not important: what the members of the voting public saw was just another example of the SNP at war with itself, and the opinion polls reflected their unease, heading downward from a high of 32 per cent in January of 1989 to a longer-term decline "after the more hardline, non-cooperative approach became instilled in SNP campaigning." [Mitchell, 1996, p. 243]

Battle lines were drawn between the two camps represented by Sillars, Wilson, and hardliner Iain Lawson on the one side and the pragmatists led by Alex Salmond. When Wilson decided to step down as leader of the SNP in 1990 he did not inform his deputy, who was an obvious leadership candidate, and it was assumed in the contest between Salmond and Margaret Ewing that Ewing would win handily, as she was backed by Wilson, Sillars, and Lawson, had a reputation as an extremely able parliamentarian, and was well-liked. However, Salmond won overwhelmingly, 486 to 186. Ewing lost precisely because of the support from the fundamentalists, and in particular, those around Jim Sillars, who conducted a factional campaign using negative personal attacks against Salmond that Ewing herself would never have employed [Mitchell, 1995, p. 244]. The size of Salmond's majority, however, did not ease the divisions within the party, although most of his supporters won positions on the executive. Sillars

had a great deal of influence, both within the party and without, and the fundamentalists continued to exacerbate tensions within the SNP, often founded on nothing more than personalities [Mitchell, 1995, p. 245].

Despite these difficulties, though, party members thought that the SNP would improve its standing as political events in the run-up to the 1992 general election pushed the issue of Scottish independence to the forefront. Independent MP Dick Douglas crossed over to the SNP in 1990 after being expelled by Labour for his aggressive protests against the poll tax, bringing the total number of SNP MPs to five, and reinforcing the party's image as leftist, nationalist and European. It was increasingly popular among youth voters, with a healthy student membership, younger candidates and the support of pop stars such as the Proclaimers and Pat Kane giving it "the fizz and self-confidence of its earlier surges" [Marr, 1995, p. 213].

Most surprisingly, in what Marr describes as the "most dramatic example of journo-nationalism, and certainly the most bizarre" [Marr, 1995, p. 213-14], the 300,000-plus circulation *Scottish Sun* came out in favour of independence January 23, 1992, with the front page of the Rupert Murdoch-owned paper carrying the headline "Arise and be a Nation Again". This followed a debate in Edinburgh's Usher Hall a week earlier on the issue of home rule in which Alex Salmond performed superbly, "easily outwitting Donald Dewar, Malcolm Bruce and Ian Lang" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 246]. On January 28, a Scotsman poll jointly commissioned with Independent Television News and conducted by ICM Research reported that "support for independence, either outside both the UK and the EC or inside the EC, had reached 50 per cent, a jump of thirteen points on the previous September. Support for the lesser option of devolution had crashed to 27 per cent." [Marr, 1995, p. 212] SNP supporters thought the party was sure to gain more seats.

However, the results proved otherwise. The party lost Govan, prompting Jim Sillars to quit the SNP after his ill-advised comment that Scots were "90-minute patriots", and Dick Douglas failed in his bid to capture Glasgow Garscadden from Donald Dewar. The party did save all its deposits, and increased the percentage of its vote to 21.5 per cent. But its election slogan of "Free by '93", sprung on a surprised Alex Salmond and his executive by SNP convener Alex Neil at the 1991 conference [Mitchell, 1996, p. 245], certainly seemed over the top in light of events. As Mitchell states: "Once more the SNP had been defeated by its own hype." [Mitchell, 1996, p. 247]

## 1992 And After - Which Road to Independence?

There were clear reasons for the SNP's failure to make a breakthrough in the 1992 election. The most basic was that the SNP was going after the same voters as Labour, but, unlike Labour, had been unable to establish itself "as a credible party of government" [Brand, Mitchell, and SurrIDGE, 1994, p. 616]. Its base in the community was not strong, lacking the local government presence that would give its members political experience and a higher public profile. As Brand, Mitchell and SurrIDGE note, the SNP did "not have a happy record in local government, or even a very extensive one." [Brand, Mitchell and SurrIDGE, 1994, p. 629] The party also did not have the institutional support that Labour had, such as trade unions, local authorities, or community groups. In addition, both Labour and the SNP emphasized their Scottish identity and the importance of economic issues, but since support for independence was found among members of both parties, the SNP was fighting for the same voters, handicapped by far fewer resources. As a party with a national platform and the money and organization to go with it, Labour was better-placed to respond to the challenge presented by the SNP [Newell, 1994], which was severely restricted by its lack of funds and organization [Lynch, 1996b].

However, the main reason for the SNP's poor showing was the confusion in its message caused by the divisions within the party. As Lynch explains: "both fundamentalist and gradualist viewpoints were represented in the campaign teams responsible for the 1992 electoral strategy, which produced mixed messages and campaign goals and created the impression that the SNP was running a dual campaign." [Lynch, 1996b, p. 219] The fundamentalist message, given added strength by the use of a professional PR agency, coupled attacks on Labour with a "full-blown campaign for independence" [Lynch, 1996b, p. 220], while the gradualist message was one of reassurance whose "primary concern was to avoid scaring off existing supporters." [Lynch, 1996b, p. 220] The over-confident claims of the fundamentalists made it easier for the SNP's political opponents to denigrate the campaign, sowed confusion among the ranks of party workers, and damaged its credibility.

The main task of the Scottish National Party's leadership since 1992 has been to repair this damage by implementing a coherent, well-planned strategy, supported by a professional party organization. In this they have been aided by the takeover of key positions in the party by gradualists as fundamentalists have either left or been voted out of office, although, as Lynch notes, there have still been "occasional bouts of dissent by fundamentalists" [Lynch, 1996b, p. 221]. The party leadership has established a long-range plan with the objectives of

increasing electoral and institutional support, promoting independence while undermining the Union, and establishing the SNP as a European social democratic party [Lynch, 1996b, p. 223].

The results have been mixed. The party had its greatest success on the electoral level, winning 33 per cent of the vote and electing two MEPs in the 1994 European elections, and during the elections for the new unitary authorities in 1995, won 26 per cent of the vote and 181 seats, taking control of two councils. However, before the 1997 election it had not garnered the support of any influential interest groups, and its attempts to develop a network of organizations backing independence have achieved little, since these groups such as Scots Asians for Independence, New Scots For Independence and Pensioners for Independence basically just recycle existing SNP members.

The party's strategy of promoting independence while undermining the Union worked much better, with the SNP producing a plethora of documents and policy statements on how it would deal with such issues as defence, the economy and its own currency after independence, while taking every opportunity to criticize the actions of the Tory central government and the weakness of any devolution or home rule proposals put forward by Labour and the Liberal-Democrats. In addition, the Labour party's move to the right under Tony Blair and its abandonment of traditional socialist policies made it possible for the SNP to differentiate itself politically from Labour, claiming that it is the only party that truly stands for social justice.

Although the fundamentalist-gradualist tension in the party has become more muted, it can still create problems for the SNP, although Salmond has on occasion been able to use it to strengthen his hold on the party. In January 1995 *Scotland on Sunday* published an interview with him that bore the headline, "Salmond backs devolution", which aroused the ire of the fundamentalists, as it seemed to indicate that the party was moving away from its commitment to independence. Mitchell has described the story as "inaccurate and mischievous" [Mitchell, 1996, p. 292], but a closer reading of the article would indicate that the reporter was more careless than conniving, and it was the headline that was inaccurate. Despite the ensuing controversy generated by the article, Salmond was able to get the support of the party's national executive for his stance, thereby reinforcing his leadership [Clements, Farquharson and Wark, 1996].

However, when Alex Neil, vice-convenor of policy, castigated Shadow Scottish secretary George Robertson for being akin to World War Two Nazi sympathizer Lord Haw-Haw at the party's 1996 annual conference, the SNP's image as a mature political organization was damaged. The party went into the conference at 29 per cent in the polls, but dropped to 23 per cent shortly after,

where it consistently stayed before the election, despite Labour's reversal of its position on holding a devolution referendum, public anger at the handling of budget cuts by the Labour-dominated Glasgow council, and the unpopularity of Tony Blair and his New Labour policies in Scotland (revealed in a System Three report commissioned by Labour). As Mitchell concludes: "Electoral politics proved as frustrating as ever for the SNP at the close of the century. Polling well but with an even spread of support, the party awaited the breakthrough that never seemed to come." [Mitchell, 1996, p. 293]

### **Two Different Parties - Two Different Roads**

What is striking about the difference between the histories of the nationalist parties in Québec and Scotland is how easily the movements for self-government in Scotland have been divided, while those in Québec have so quickly coalesced, especially when you consider their respective histories. Québec is the remnant of a conquered nation, while Scotland has been an independent nation for two-thirds of its history, but it is in Québec where support for sovereignty has permeated all levels of society as well as all political parties. As Keating points out: "nationalism in its various forms has become a hegemonic set of ideas in Quebec. This is not to say that all Québécois are separatist, far from it; but that issues are debated largely within the context of Quebec and appraised by their impact on Quebec. All parties are thus forced to play on the nationalist field." [Keating, 1996a, p. 77] This is not the case in Scotland, where, as Arnold Kemp says, "the 'magic circle' of those enjoying power and patronage in Scotland is deeply committed to the Union, as is the business class and the financial community (with only a few exceptions)." [Kemp, 1993, p. 74] Nationalist support is largely confined to members of the SNP and the Labour Party, and is not found in business, trade union or civic organizations to the same extent that it is in Québec.

Perhaps the reason the SNP has found it so difficult to be united and keep its eyes on the prize, in the words of the evocative slogan from the American civil rights movement of the 60s, is the lack of an ethnic dimension to its nationalism. Québec nationalists are bound together by their common language and culture, but what is their strength is also their weakness. Although modern Québec nationalists claim that theirs is a pluralistic, non-ethnic nationalism, based on a common identity of all Québec residents as members of a distinct society and culture, there has been disturbing evidence otherwise from sovereigntist leaders. On the night of the 1995 referendum, Deputy Premier Bernard Landry said in a radio interview that non-francophones were voting

“according to their grandmother’s chromosomes”; Louise Harel, Minister of Employment, stated on television that the anglophone and allophone vote was “a distorting factor”; and the next day, the PQ’s vice-president, Monique Simard, said that Parizeau’s comments on the ethnic vote were deplorable only because “it hurts the sovereignist cause” [Bernier, 1996, p. 3]. It is statements like these that seem to belie the assertion that Québec nationalism is not xenophobic or racist, and is based on “a rhetoric of self-affirmation...the motive that counts is the sense of power and accomplishment” [Ignatieff, 1994, p. 123].

The leaders of the Scottish National Party have been very careful to avoid any suggestion of ethnic nationalism, aware as they are “that attempts to differentiate Scots on ethnic grounds could prove divisive within Scotland and might stir up ancient hatreds” [Keating, 1996a, p. 181]. Theirs is a nationalism that tends to refrain from discussing language and culture, and whose use of history seems quite restrained in comparison to Québec. It is almost entirely based on “practical arguments about institutions, accountability and policy. This has made it one of the least romantic of nationalist movements.” [Keating, 1996a, p. 182] It has also lacked the dynamism and confidence that is seen in Québec, where one of the main arguments posited by the Bloc Québécois for the province’s independence is that it could handle its economic affairs much better if it were free of the Canadian federation. In the past, SNP leaders have portrayed Scotland as a poverty-stricken nation that has been exploited and taken for granted within the Union; it has been only very recently, and most emphatically during the 1997 national election campaign, that they have taken the more positive approach.

Most importantly, for the Scottish National Party, this has meant it has had difficulty in getting its message across, because nationalism in Scotland does not have the same deep community roots that it does in Québec. As noted, the party does not have the support of trade unions or other social organizations, and has had a limited role in local government. The SNP’s focus on economic issues, forged in the early years of the Scots National League, its influential predecessor, has also meant it has focused the party’s political communications on economics - never an easy concept to get across, and not one guaranteed to appeal to the modern SNP’s working-class support - rather than issues of identity and culture. It is significant that the SNP achieved its best results in the late 60s and 70s when it had a strong community base, due to the energetic efforts of organizer Ian Macdonald; the constituencies which had the weakest organizations fared the worst in elections [Brand, 1978, p. 289].

How the different party approaches framed their political communications and determined their strategies is discussed in chapter five; how



these actually worked in the context of the 1997 national elections in Canada and the UK is examined in the case-studies described in chapters six and seven. Before that, however, I wish to look at the role of political journalists in the nationalist movements of Québec and Scotland, and in particular, their place within the economic, social and political structures of the countries in which they are situated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Political Journalism in Scotland and Québec: Different Cultures, Different Practices

The significance of the role of journalists in nationalist movements is often mentioned in studies of nationalism; however, it is not often examined in depth, if examined at all. It has been said that their role is crucial, because it is journalists who complete the process of transforming the vision of cultural identity into the practical reality of a political movement. The historians and academics “fashion the future according to the spirit of the past” [Hutchinson, 1992, p. 103] by re-discovering ancient myths and legends that define the nation’s unique identity; then the artists celebrate these in art, poetry, song and story, bringing them to the public consciousness; all this leading to a broader cultural renaissance promulgated by these intellectuals “to recreate the idea of the nation as the animating force in the lives of the people. But it is only when it is adopted by journalists and pamphleteers who translate the cultural into more concrete economic, social, and political programmes that it becomes a significant movement.” [Hutchinson, 1992, p. 104]

My purpose in this chapter is to examine the significance of the political journalist’s role in both Scotland and Québec, and also to place it within the economic, social and political culture of these regions and those of the United Kingdom and Canada, so as to set the stage for the case-studies of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois in chapters six and seven. (The focus will be on print journalism, as it is throughout my thesis, but because of the importance of television in the promotion of Québec’s national identity, electronic news gathering will be discussed as well.) I examine the overall media picture in Canada and the UK in this chapter at some length, because although both Scotland and Québec have distinct forms of media practice arising out of their particular cultures, their political journalists must work within the economic confines and media structures governing newsrooms in Britain and the rest of Canada. To understand how they differ, it is necessary to understand what the wider norms and practices are.

When examining the nature of political journalism in Britain and Canada, one might think that journalism practice would not differ that much between the two countries, or between Québec and the rest of Canada, or Scotland and the UK, given the similarity in their forms of government and their social structure. However, culture influences a great deal, including how reporters go about their daily business. Canadian newspapers, for example, are much more restrained in their coverage; there is no tabloid journalism equivalent to that found in the UK.

At the same time, Canadian journalists, reflecting their nation's values [Nevitte, 1996], are much less deferential in their treatment of political leaders, as we shall see. In this they are similar to Scottish political journalists, who show the same unwillingness to tug forelocks and the same eagerness to ask "the bastard question" as do Canadian reporters.

There are even stronger differences between Québec journalists and those in the rest of Canada. Québec political journalism is a distinct society within Canadian news-gathering, both in its style and approach. To begin with the most striking feature of Québec journalism, all francophone media are generally nationalist. Secondly, because Québec journalists work in French, their career choices are limited, for in order to achieve prominence, they must leave North America: working in the United States is not an option. However, this limitation has also encouraged a unique cohesiveness and collective solidarity among Québec journalists not found elsewhere in Canada.

Although culture is a major source of difference in newsroom practice between the countries I have studied, journalists everywhere are being affected by the economic constraints of increased media competition. The same takeovers by multinationals and conglomerates leading to mergers, down-sizing, and contracting out that have changed workplaces throughout the world are making it increasingly difficult for political journalists to do their job as they would like to: but, ironically enough, these economic constraints have tended to reinforce national identity in Québec and Scotland, rather than the opposite, as in the rest of Canada.

### **The Canadian Media: Fade to Black**

Canada is in the unfortunate position of being "virtually alone in the industrialized world in having no legislation to prevent the concentration of newspaper ownership or cross-media concentration." [Barlow and Winter, 1997, p. 22] This is due perhaps to the fact that the law which governs mergers and acquisitions, the Competition Act, was drafted for the Mulroney government by the Competition Policy Task Force of the Business Council on National Issues, Canada's major corporate lobby group. As a result, when Conrad Black, CEO of Hollinger Inc., decided to take over Southam Inc. newspapers in 1996, thus effectively giving him control of 58 of Canada's 105 English-language dailies, the Federal Competition Bureau approved the acquisition, without any public hearings. The Council of Canadians, a nationalist public interest group, launched a court challenge to the decision, but lost.

This move by Black, head of the third largest newspaper chain in the world - he owns 170 dailies world-wide, including the *London Daily Telegraph*, the *Sydney Herald*, the *Chicago Sun Times*, and the *Jerusalem Post* [Barlow, 1996, p. 9] - gives him an unprecedented amount of control over Canadian media. He now owns 80 percent of the newspapers in the province of Ontario, as well as all of those in Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, with his papers reaching 2.4 million readers a day, 43 per cent of Canada's total newspaper circulation [Taras, 1996, p. 492]. Through Hollinger, Black also has a controlling interest in Canada's national news service, Canadian Press (CP), which is run as a cooperative, gathering and redistributing news from its member newspapers, and providing newsroom copy to 86 dailies across the country. In addition, CP's ancillary Broadcast News wire is used by 425 radio, 76 television, and 142 cable stations, while its Press News service goes into all of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's radio and television stations. Black also owns *Saturday Night*, the largest-circulation magazine of current affairs and analysis in Canada, as well as part of the *Financial Post*, an influential business daily. He has increased his holdings in Canada since the 1996 takeover of Southam, and in 1997 had 60 out of 105 Canadian dailies in the Southam-Sterling-Hollinger chain [Barlow and Winter, 1997, p. 21].

At the same time that ownership of Canadian print media has become more concentrated, the budget of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has undergone significant cuts. In 1995-96, the overall budget of the CBC was cut by \$127 million and its administrative budget by \$60 million, resulting in the loss of 1500 positions. From 1984 to 1996 its funding basis was reduced in real terms by 37.5 per cent to \$32.19 per capita; by comparison, the British Broadcasting Corporation received the equivalent of \$60.82 Canadian per head in 1996 [Duke, 1996, pp. 16-17]. The result of these cuts has been fewer resources directed to investigative news, less original programming and more repeats, hiring of younger, less experienced staff on short-term contracts, and more dependence on freelancers and wire services. The trend is the same in print media; newspapers have more "news McNuggets" and fewer in-depth stories, use wire copy instead of foreign correspondents, and rely on freelancers and staffers on contract to fill the newshole that their depleted newsrooms cannot.

Although new technologies have eased some of the production difficulties of news coverage, they are a mixed blessing for Canadian political journalists. On the one hand, being able to file stories directly by telephone with a lap-top has made it easier for them to keep up with the flow of news, but on the other hand it has meant that there is less time for reflection, and greater pressure for a larger number of stories, which can make harried reporters more vulnerable to the

blandishments of political party spin doctors. It also means that media outlets can technically do more with less, because the editing process for both print and television requires fewer people, but again, it places more demands on the smaller group of people involved in political coverage. This was especially problematic for the television crews covering the Canadian federal election, as we shall see in chapter seven, as well as for electronic news-gatherers in Britain, discussed later in this chapter.

### **Scrums, Meltdowns, and Press Gallery Math**

All these factors - media concentration, budget cut-backs, and new technologies - have had dramatic effects on how politics are covered in Canada. The Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa is unable to do justice to issues of government because, as Mark Bourrie, a freelancer and member of the gallery explains:

The math is against the media. There are 310 members of the House of Commons, thousands of political staffers on Parliament Hill, a massive civil service and a judiciary that needs to be covered. Many Ottawa bureaus are one-or-two-member operations. Only two private radio stations in Canada have their own reporter on the Hill. Most of the country's largest newspapers have no full-time reporters at all, and rely on wire services.

[Bourrie, 1997]

Reporters rarely attend committee meetings, where most of the parliamentary work is done, or press conferences, "unless the person holding it is a high-powered minister" [Bourrie, 1997], focusing their attention on Question Period. However, reporters often don't even bother to walk down the hall to take their seats in the House of Commons during Question Period, preferring instead to tape it from the televisions in the press gallery newsroom. Their reliance on the in-house television is a cause for concern, says Québec television journalist Pierre Mignault. Both the House of Commons and the Québec National Assembly have these cameras, and as a consequence, "Any press-gallery journalist covering these capitals, whether for the print or electronic media, could spend an entire career sitting at his or her desk zapping from one Parliamentary commission to another." [Mignault, 1996, p. 133] But as Mignault points out, it is employees of the government who are doing the broadcasting, and they choose what will be seen on the news networks, thereby controlling parliament's image and literally

preventing the public from getting the full picture of what goes on in the House of Commons.

The public is also short-changed in another way by developments in electronic news-gathering. Modern technology is expensive, and this creates difficulties for a country such as Canada, which, although small in population, is enormous in terms of geography, spanning six time-zones, and must compete with the public expectations of news coverage done by the large American networks, "who can afford to be everywhere at once." [Mignault, 1996, p. 134] The result has been the growth of the technique called "melt-down", in which electronic media agree to use each other's pictures, interview clips or news reports, and to combine them into one report with the voice-over of the individual network's reporter. During the 1997 federal election campaign, Canadian television networks used a form of melt-down, pooling camera crews who provided daily news footage shared among all the stations, with the campaign report narrated by the individual political reporters.

Instead of the press conference, the most commonly-used method of questioning government members, both during and outside of election campaigns, is that uniquely Canadian journalistic tradition, the "scrum", which began in the late 1950s and early 60s when television started to dominate political coverage. The word was first used "to describe the chaos in the hallways of Parliament during the early Trudeau years" [Levine, 1993, p. ix], although it had existed in a more restrained form as far back as the days of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, when reporters grouped outside his office in the hopes of getting a story. The modern version "can be rough and brutal" [Levine, 1993, p. ix], similar to a rugby huddle, and is a daily occurrence during the sessions of parliament in which hordes of reporters, both print and electronic, gather in the House of Commons foyer to quiz the particular hapless minister who is the focus of "the story du jour".

The scrum can be an extremely intimidating process for even the most experienced politician, who, surrounded on all sides by cameras, lights, and microphones, can barely move, hemmed in by the crush of reporters eager to ask the first question. (I witnessed a scrum in the House of Commons in which Canada's defence minister Art Eggleton was being rushed by journalists on what I was told was a relatively quiet news day: Eggleton, who is 6'1", was completely hidden by the crowd of cameras and equipment swarming around him.) The organized anarchy of the scrum is preferred by reporters to the press conference, for it more easily provides the television sound-bites and the "tight, light, and bright" quotes needed for radio and print, as well as helping to evade the control of spin doctors. It is no substitute for investigative reporting, but

parliamentary bureaus, under-staffed as they are, and driven by the cost-cutting imperatives of Canadian media management, find it difficult to cover the issues in any depth.

The increasing reliance on news services due to cut-backs in staffing has had the further effect of contributing to the fragmentation of national unity in English-speaking Canada. The “national” news services are based in Toronto and Ottawa, and interpret news from what is termed a central Canadian perspective. Although the press gallery has close to 350 members, down from some 450 in the early 90s, “some two dozen high-profile reporters and commentators continue to have substantial influence over the focus and tone of political coverage, especially during election campaigns” [Fletcher and Everett, 1991, p. 193], predominately from media outlets in the two cities. The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, which describes itself as Canada’s national newspaper, exercises a great deal of influence, as does the Canadian Press; during the 1988 election, access to the *Globe and Mail* affected “assignment, editorial, and interpretative decisions....The CP wire was easily accessible on computer and was frequently consulted to check leads, breaking or developing stories, and opposing comment or interpretation.” [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 29] This has the effect of “further widening the gulf between the centre and the periphery. An informal ‘pecking order’ seems to have merged that privileges the ‘national’ media to the increasing resentment of the ‘regional’ press.” [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 50]

### **Canajan, Eh? Cultural Norms of Canadian Political Journalism**

The cultural norms of Canadian political journalism are strikingly different from those of Britain (and the U.S.) in several ways. The most obvious is the unwillingness of Canadian political journalists to report on the private lives of politicians. Their personal conduct or character flaws only get reported if they are seen to be affecting their public duties. Even when there is concern in the journalistic corps about the foibles of a politician, “character issues are covered in restrained or veiled terms.” [Fletcher, 1996, p. 148] This is especially true of francophone journalists: René Lévesque had been separated from his wife for six years before it was reported, and that was by anglophone journalist Peter Desbarats in his 1976 biography of the Québec premier.

Along with this restraint in political reportage is also a determinedly non-partisan approach. Reporters are careful not to identify their own political views or to ally themselves too openly with a particular party, to the point that some do not vote in order to avoid perceptions of bias [Fletcher, 1996, p. 145]. (Québec reporters have not been so reluctant, for reasons which I will explain in

the next section.) Media outlets are careful to shift reporters among parties and candidates during an election campaign so as to maintain an objective distance from their sources. This even-handed attitude has been reflected in Canadian newspapers, which have nothing equivalent to the partisan press of Britain.

There is also no tabloid press like that of Britain in Canada. There are tabloid-sized newspapers, mostly those of the Sun Media Corporation chain, but other than bolder headlines, crisper copy, and more crime news and opinion, they are "bound by much the same ethos of social responsibility as their more sober competitors. The most popular British tabloids, by contrast, have heretofore flouted such an ethos - or, at least, the notion that excess and sensation must be curbed by a sense of gentility and fair play." [Dornan, 1991, p. 167] The news stories in Canadian tabloids like the *Toronto Sun* are "brash, although rarely inaccurate" [Carlin, 1998, p. 104]; this is because the owners were committed to raising "the quality of their papers while running their businesses more efficiently...Quality in newspapers does not arise spontaneously from below; it has to be encouraged and rewarded from above." [Carlin, 1998, p. 106] The fact that the *Toronto Sun*, the founding paper in the Sun Media group, was started by journalists, might have helped ensure those standards of social responsibility were kept.

Although Canadian newspapers are generally more restrained than UK ones, Canadian political journalists are less deferential than their British counterparts. There is no lobby system in the Canadian House of Commons, and it is extremely unlikely that someone using the bullying tactics of a Peter Mandelson or Alistair Campbell would be able to browbeat Canadian reporters quite so successfully. That does not mean that spin doctors are unable to influence the political agenda; only that it is more difficult for them, and that Canadian political reporters are much more aggressive and cynical about their methods. In fact, the increasing amount of cynicism and negativism in reporting as a result of journalists' frustration at attempts by party strategists to control the political agenda is seen as a serious problem for Canadian democracy [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991; Nick Russell, 1996; Fletcher, 1996].

Some of these characteristics, it can be argued, make for a better kind of political reporting; others do not. Canada's lack of a partisan press and the adherence of its papers to stricter rules of objectivity and restraint mean that most Canadians can obtain a fairly socially responsible view of the issues in a campaign, but there is less diversity of opinion. There is, for example, no left-of-centre paper like the *Guardian*; the *Toronto Star* is the only daily which has supported the New Democratic Party editorially, and that just once during a federal election. However, perhaps this is just an accurate reflection of the



Canadian voter, who does not attach great loyalty to parties in a political system where parties, instead of “representing particular classes, religions, languages or other interests... act like brokers, trying to put together new electoral coalitions each time the country goes to the polls.” [Frizzell, Pammett, and Westell, 1994, p. 3]

The most striking difference between Canadian and British media is the fact that, journalistically, “Canada is suffering from a case of double vision” [Siegel, 1996, p. 223], with the French-language and English-language media providing widely divergent views of the nation. There have been close to 80 studies examining this duality of Canadian media coverage since the early 1960s, and they have found that anglophone and francophone media differ in style, news coverage and interpretation, as well as political subjects and their emphasis [Siegel, 1996, pp. 219-223]. Why this is so I will explore in the next section.

### Québec Journalism from Duplessis to Duceppe

Objectivity has always been a difficult ideal for journalists to follow, and even more so for Canadian journalists covering Québec politics, both anglophone and francophone. Upholding standards of objectivity has been particularly problematic for francophone journalists. Although uniformly nationalist, their loyalties have been divided between the sovereigntist and federalist camps, and they must work in a political atmosphere that is fiercely polarized. They have also been subject to strong criticism from some of their anglophone colleagues, who may not fully appreciate the constraints under which they operate, and who have a different notion of what constitutes objectivity. As former journalist Peter Desbarats explains:

French Canada’s strong tradition of opinion-oriented journalism had never completely succumbed to the marketable objectivity of the rest of North American journalism. Montreal’s *Le Devoir*, for example, had remained primarily a journal of opinion, a European-style oddity on this continent. In the 1950s, while other Quebec newspapers were silent about the abuses of power under Quebec’s Premier Maurice Duplessis, *Le Devoir* campaigned vigorously for reform.

[Desbarats, 1990, p. 118]

*Le Devoir*’s stance against Duplessis was all the more remarkable given *le chef*’s dictatorial attitude towards the press. He ensured the subservience of newspaper proprietors by the awarding of generous printing contracts, which only went to allies of the government. Reporters were not to question the party

line: "Duplessis tended to treat journalists like servants assigned to write articles as he dictated them." [Charron, 1991, p. 85] Those who dared to write critical articles, such as the legislative correspondents from *Le Devoir*, were expelled from his weekly news conferences. Those who did as they were told "were rewarded in kind or with gifts of hard cash." [Charron, 1991, p. 85]

What broke Duplessis's stranglehold on the media, and forever changed the image Quebecers had of themselves, was television. The federal government was in charge of broadcasting, and created a separate French-language network, Radio-Canada, in 1952. As Denise Bombardier, journalist and television moderator recalls: "Television played an exceptional role in Quebec society in the late 1950s. It was a genuine agent of social change, breaking the ideological monopoly of the clergy, and it was also a catalyst of the new nationalism, presenting the Québécois with a coherent image of themselves." [Cited in Charron, 1991, p. 84] It became the voice of those who later became the leading political figures in the province, among them, René Lévesque, whose enormously popular news programme, *Point de Mire*, brought the news of the world into the living-rooms of Québec. The focus of the programme was international: Lévesque, a foreign correspondent for the American Office of War Information and later the International Service of the CBC, was not interested in regional politics. The strike of Radio-Canada producers in 1958 changed all that.

The basis of the dispute between the producers and the Ottawa-based management was that although they produced 60 per cent of their own programming, making Montreal the third-largest TV production centre on the continent after New York and Hollywood [Fraser, 1984, p. 20], they were subject to the whims of the government's growing bureaucracy as far as their control over production and salaries were concerned. They decided to form a union, and went on strike, completely shutting down television service in the province for 68 days. As Lévesque said later:

"Something happened during that strike. The whole bloody French network became virtually non-existent, and nobody cared. Here Radio-Canada was supposed to be so vital a part of the CBC - it was so important to broadcast in French. But Ottawa didn't give a damn.... I learned then that French was really very secondary in the rest of Canada's mind, certainly in Ottawa's."

[Cited in Desbarats, 1976, p. 70]

He became part of the group of writers, artists, academics, popular entertainers and journalists who actively supported Québec independence and

gave it credibility. During the 60s Québec journalists increasingly identified with the goals of the Parti Québécois: they “belonged to the class of people who favoured Quebec independence and state intervention” [Charron, 1991, p. 92], sharing the same background, education, lifestyle and interests as members of the PQ. The commitment of francophone journalists to the cause of independence created some difficulties for their anglophone colleagues, who had to admit to their own federalist biases. As Peter Desbarats recalls:

It had become apparent that the news of the day was being reported differently by those who assumed that Quebec would be an independent country within five or 10 years, and those who did not. I continued to aim at fair and accurate journalism but could no longer pretend that my own federalist position was objective. The difference between my journalism and that of my francophone colleagues became clearer day by day: we were starting from a different set of assumptions.

[Desbarats, 1990, p. 119]

The relationship between journalists and the government became even more problematic in the 1970s, particularly during the October Crisis of 1970, when members of the Front de Libération du Québec kidnapped the British Trade Commissioner, James Cross, in Montreal, and Québec Labour Minister Pierre Laporte, who was later murdered. The media became inextricably involved in the events during the two months of the crisis, when the federal government invoked the War Measures Act, arrested hundreds of suspected FLQ sympathizers, and suspended civil liberties while the hunt for the terrorists and their victims went on. The FLQ insisted that their demands be publicized in the media. “It was through the media that the FLQ made its conditions known to the government. It was through them that the government replied. And it was through the media that the whole population followed the development of the events and made known its own reactions.” [Dagenais, 1992, p. 123] However, following the imposition of the War Measures Act, in which several journalists were arrested, the media were censored and bitterly criticized by politicians for their role during the crisis. The result was “a form of self-censorship in the French Québécois press which some believe still dominates constitutional matters.” [Saint-Jean, 1996, p. 27]

The close identification of francophone journalists with the Parti Québécois created difficulties for them when the PQ became the government in 1976. They were enthusiastic when the party was first elected, because, as one legislative correspondent explained, “everyone thought the government was heading toward independence, and it might have been said that journalists, too,

were bringing about independence.” [Charron, 1991, p. 93] At the same time, however, as professional journalists dedicated to maintaining standards of objectivity, they felt obligated to maintain a critical distance. In addition, the PQ members of the National Assembly could not understand why their journalistic colleagues were not willing to be unconditional allies now that they were in office. However, Québec journalists resolved this by practising “sympathetic journalism”, in which they felt free to criticize the actions of politicians, but did not take up an adversarial approach; they “formed a sort of coalition with the forces of sovereignty.”[Charron, 1991, p. 94].

This coalition did not last after the loss of the referendum in 1980, when nationalism in Québec went into decline, along with the economy. The idealism and passion for social justice that characterized the early stages of the sovereigntist movement seemed out-of-place in the neo-conservative world of the 1980s, and this change of public mood was reflected in journalists, who were no longer willing to question the established order in the same way, becoming what one cynical journalist described as “bourgeois newsmongers” [Charron, 1991, p. 95]. Their increased conservatism was due to three factors: one, the economic pressures on the media in a world of mergers, down-sizing, and diversification, which fragmented advertising markets; two, the ascendance of journalists into the ranks of the upper-middle class, and three, the attacks on sovereigntist journalists during the referendum campaign, who “were accused of promoting the destruction of Canada. These attacks cooled any political fervour journalists might have felt “[Saint-Jean, 1996, p. 27].

In the 90s the commodification of the news in Québec has reinforced the developments of the 80s, much to the chagrin of those journalists who began their careers during the heady days of the 60s and 70s. Armande Saint-Jean, who was a journalist and broadcaster for 25 years before becoming an academic, says that the abandonment of the doctrine of social responsibility for a business mentality has had “three major consequences: the recoil of press attention away from serious analysis of social problems; the profession’s vulnerability to manipulation, disinformation and propaganda initiatives; and a failure to show intellectual leadership in the formation of public opinion.” [Saint-Jean, 1996, p. 28] I would also add a great increase in cynicism, even among the current generation of sovereigntist reporters, who initially welcomed the formation of the Bloc Québécois. As one francophone journalist explained (all quotations in this chapter are from the research interviews, unless otherwise stated):

“When I look at them [the Bloc MPs] I say I am not proud of those people; I don’t want them to represent me, to work for me as politicians....I don’t want them to speak for me, so that’s why I

am, and it's the same, I think it's the same with other reporters because...a sovereigntist movement, a nationalistic movement, there's always a part of idealism; and when the PQ got elected in 1976, you could feel that, you could feel that the world would change with them, but now you feel that especially with the Bloc, you don't see the world changing for those people, they're just petty people that don't have much in their mind; they don't show the openness."

Perhaps these judgements on the mores of contemporary Québec journalists are too harsh. As Charron notes:

journalists do not live in an ethereal universe, on the fringes of a world whose convulsions they need only observe and describe. They too experience the effects of changes in social relationships. Like everyone else, journalists participate in a society in constant motion, and they report on political and social developments from an outlook that is neither neutral nor foreign to their social position.

[Charron, 1991, p. 96]

### **Language and Economics - Solidarity and Cultural Isolation**

The culture of Québec newsrooms has always been different from those of their journalism colleagues in the rest of Canada, largely due to the fact that Québec, as a French-speaking enclave in North America, took its editorial models from those of Europe, particularly France. The francophone press has long been noted for its opinionated reporting style, which relies more on analysis than the "just-the-facts-Ma'am" approach of English-language newspapers in Canada. Even after most newspapers had adopted what Desbarats describes as the "advertiser-supported mass-circulation newspapers of the prevailing North American pattern" [Desbarats, 1990, p. 92] in the mid-1960s, the prominent Québec journalists such as Gérard Pelletier and Claude Ryan were editors rather than reporters. Although René Lévesque worked in the medium of television, he was more of a commentator than a news anchor, and like Pelletier and Ryan, was able to use his prominence as a news analyst to move into politics, "following a tradition that has remained much more alive in Quebec than in English-speaking Canada." [Desbarats, 1990, p. 92]

It was also the linguistic isolation of francophone journalists that reinforced their trade union militancy, because, unlike anglophone journalists, they could not pick up and go somewhere else in North America if they did not like the working conditions in their newsrooms. "The solution for Quebec

journalists was therefore to dig in their heels and struggle, getting as much support as they could from their colleagues, their unions and their professional associations." [Charron, 1991, p. 91] The first syndicat des journalistes was formed at the Ottawa-based *Le Droit*, in 1922, and in 1936 the first contract between a Québec newspaper and its reporters was signed at *L'Action catholique*. By 1954 the first journalist's union was officially recognized by the Québec Labour Relations Commission. Four years later Québec journalists participated in two important strikes, which, significantly, says Desbarats, "involved issues of principle rather than money." [Desbarats, 1990, p. 87] When the management of *La Presse* refused to give an unpaid leave of absence for a journalist elected as leader of the major labour federation in Québec, the journalists went on strike - successfully - for 13 days. The Radio-Canada strike, which made a nationalist of René Lévesque after he was arrested on the picket line, "is now regarded as one of the triggers of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s." [Desbarats, 1990, p. 88]

With the formation of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec in the 1960s, journalists had an organization through which they could carry on their fight for press freedom and media accountability, and in particular newsroom control. Québec journalists were unique in that democratization of the newsroom mattered more than issues of money and professional status. They urged the government to pass legislation limiting the control of media managers and establishing news management committees with representation from journalists, the public as well as management. Control over editing and reporting of the news was seen as the only way to ensure real freedom of the press by activist journalists. The egalitarian outlook of francophone reporters came from the progressive social theories they had learned in the province's universities during the Quiet Revolution, reinforced by the fact that Québec's class structure was based more on level of education than wealth, as it was in the rest of Canada.

By the 1980s, however, Québec journalists had been defeated in their efforts to have a greater say in newsroom policy, and were weary of the bitter labour disputes they had endured while trying to fight the media concentration that thwarted their efforts to obtain editorial autonomy. As Florian Sauvageau, an academic researcher for the 1981 Royal Commission on Newspapers described it, Québec journalists felt that "the news is only there to gift-wrap the advertising" [Desbarats, 1990, p. 93]. They abandoned their role as agents of social change, becoming "good employees" in newspapers which, by the 1990s, were almost completely owned by large chains such as Quebecor Inc., with only *Le Devoir* in Montreal and *Le Fleuve* in Rimouski remaining as independents.

The province's economic problems, exacerbated by the uncertainty over Québec's future, has tended to reinforce its isolation from the rest of Canada, for most media outlets in Québec, other than Radio-Canada, cannot afford to have correspondents in other parts of the country. In addition, with a lower level of readership - 77 per cent to English-Canada's 87 percent [Siegel, 1996, p. 117] - Québec newspapers are on even shakier financial ground. As a result, Québec newspapers seldom cover events outside the province: the problem is, as one reporter put it, "in Québec people do not have enough money so what you do is cover...what's the nearest to you, so that is Québec. And it's too bad because the press is getting very boring." The smaller number of dailies in Québec, 11 to English-Canada's 94, means that fewer stories from Québec are fed into the Canadian Press news system, and most of the stories from English Canada for CP's French Service are translations and adaptations from copy written by anglophone reporters [Siegel, 1996, p. 201]. Thus the rest of Canada remains an unknown country to most Quebecers, and the divide between the country's two solitudes is as wide as ever.

### **We're Canadian, You're Not: A Comparison of Media Characteristics**

Although Canadian and British media are subject to many of the same economic forces that have influenced their respective newsrooms in similar ways, there are unique features of the Canadian media landscape that affect how political journalism is done and how it is perceived. The first and most obvious is the diversity of television outlets in Canada compared to that in the United Kingdom. In 1997 Britain had four terrestrial channels that were available to everyone, plus Channel 5, which was not. Cable television had yet to make much of an inroad, with only 3.8 per cent of the 22.2 million households in the UK connected in 1994, and another 13.5 per cent with satellite dishes, most of them subscribers to Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB channels, which numbered 3.6 million [Weymouth, 1996, pp. 68-69]. By 1996, the percentage of cable subscribers had increased to 10 per cent, or 2.24 million households in Britain. [Dyja, 1997, p. 46] Canada, by contrast, is "the most wired country in the world" [Siegel, 1996, p. 153], with 81 per cent of Canadian households subscribing to cable. Even those Canadians with just basic service have a multiplicity of choice, with more than 30 channels.

Canada has a formidable electronic communications system that is second to none in the world: 65 telephones for every 100 people, 5600 broadcasting operations, 46 million radios, 17 million TV sets, national French-language and English-language

broadcasting systems, several provincial television networks, cable TV which is available to 90 per cent of the populace, pay-TV and numerous specialty channels, three transcontinental microwave systems, the world's first network of communications satellites, and more fibre optic cable than any other country.

[Siegel, 1996, p. 257]

Another major difference is that Canada has had, until recently, no national press like the UK (although Conrad Black's launch of the *National Post* in October of 1998 may change this). It has been, as Dornan says, largely parochial, designed to serve the news needs of the cities in which the newspapers are based. As a result, there is no paper with the kind of circulation and reach that British newspapers have: the *Toronto Star*, Canada's biggest daily, has an average circulation of close to 520,000, while the second largest, the *Globe and Mail*, has a circulation of approximately 315,000, again, most of it in Toronto. The regional focus of Canadian newspapers is partly due to geography, for Canada, the biggest nation in the world, has provinces and regions that are several times larger than some European countries; and partly due to its smaller population, which numbered 31 million in 1997. For these reasons, there is no equivalent to British tabloids like the *Mirror* or the *Sun*, with readerships in "multiples of millions" [Dornan, 1991, p. 167].

Canada's press also differs from that in Britain in that it has not been threatened by the same type of statutory regulation as proposed by the Calcutt Committee, for example, but as Dornan explains, this is

because the circumstances that have prompted the British actions simply do not exist in Canada. Bluntly, Canadian journalism has not been tarred by the sort of allegations directed at the British tabloids. That is to say, it is not decried as licentious, sensation mongering, intrusive and vulgar. The British measures have been invoked to combat a type of excess (or a style of journalism, depending on one's perspective) of which Canadian journalism has heretofore been innocent.

[Dornan, 1991, p. 172]

Why is there no tabloid journalism similar to that of the UK in Canada? Weymouth perhaps provides the answer. He suggests five reasons why tabloids have been so successful in Britain: the long history of the commercialized press, and its strong competition; the power of media proprietors, who can and do use their power to influence editorial content; the downgrading of professional



journalistic standards; marketing by social class; and education levels [Weymouth, 1996, p. 45]. It is the last two factors that are most significant for Canada. Education levels are much higher - Canada leads the member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in the percentage of its population in postsecondary education [Galt, 2000] - and its culture more egalitarian [Nevitte, 1996], so that editors and owners, whatever their political persuasion, must market their newspapers in a more socially responsible manner if they want to keep their readers. As a consequence, Canada's tabloids attempt to focus on "the creation and maintenance of the sense of community" [Fulford, 1998, p. 24].

### **The British Media: Murdoch and Newszak of the World**

Although British media are also subject to the same competitive forces that have led to increased concentration of ownership, the extent of media concentration is not as great in Britain as it is in Canada; there is more diversity of ownership, perhaps due to the fact that government regulations are stricter. However, media barons such as Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black have had a particularly pernicious influence because they are, in effect, absentee owners; as heads of global corporations, they have no loyalties to any one country. The newspaper price wars which have been ongoing since 1993 are just one example, leading to newsroom layoffs - Black, for example, laid off 2,900 people from the *Daily Telegraph* after he acquired it in 1986 [Lewis, 1998] - poorer news coverage, and fewer media outlets as other papers, lacking the financial resources of the big media conglomerates, are pushed out of the market. The tabloidization of the press is another.

It is true that the British press has always been characterized by concentration of ownership, but the trend has accelerated in recent years. In 1947, 52 per cent of daily and Sunday newspapers were owned by five major groups; by 1995, 87 per cent were owned by the big four, News International, Mirror Group, United Newspapers, and Daily Mail and General Trust plc [Weymouth, 1996, p. 41]. By 1996, with the addition of Conrad Black's *Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*, five companies published "96 per cent of all national newspapers sold in Britain." [Franklin, 1997, p. 96] Sections 57 to 62 of the Fair Trading Act of 1973 govern press takeovers and allows these to be reviewed by the Monopolies Commission, but loopholes in the legislation

have particularly favoured prospective buyers of newspapers at the expense of the public interest requirement of a pluralistic press. Thus it has been possible for Rupert Murdoch's News

International to acquire five national titles - News of the World, Sunday Times, Today, The Times and the Sun - without ever having been referred to the Monopolies Commission!

[Weymouth, 1996, p. 49]

However, these figures about press ownership only tell part of the story. The Broadcasting Act of 1996 loosened the regulations on cross-media ownership, allowing media corporations to use the profits from one outlet to subsidize a less-profitable one. The result was that, as Franklin states, "Cross-media ownership is now so extensive that it makes little sense to talk of a newspaper industry; it has become a media industry, of which newspapers simply form one part." [Franklin, 1997, p. 97]. He cites the example of the £3 billion merger of United Newspapers with the MAI Group in 1996, which brought together United Newspaper's *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, *Daily Star*, and close to 100 regional and local newspapers with MAI's interests in Channel 3 and Channel 5. In addition, the group now owns business and advertising periodicals, NOP (National Opinion Polls), as well as financial information services, making them "substantial media players" [Franklin, 1997, p. 97].

The effects on the media have been dramatic - price wars, downsizing, casualization of staff, the growing influence of public relations, and an ever-increasing demand for news - mainly at the behest of global owners who exercise what Anthony Sampson calls "impersonal power" [Sampson, 1996, p. 50]. Media barons such as Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black have "no serious policies to put forward for Britain, or any other nation" [Sampson, 1996, p. 50], and seemingly no concern for the damage done to civic culture. A case in point is the price wars so energetically engaged in by Murdoch and Black as a response to the chronic problem of declining circulations. Between 1955 and 1995, circulation in national daily newspapers decreased by approximately 2.7 million copies [Weymouth, 1996, p. 39]; from 1965 to 1993 sales of national and Sunday papers went from 38 million to 29 [Franklin, 1997, p. 15]. Murdoch drastically cut the price of *The Times* in 1993, Black following suit shortly after, with neither owner consulting their editors, who had to deal with the effect of the cuts on their newsroom operations. The price wars doubled the sales of the *Times*, but killed off *Today*, and has further weakened the struggling *Independent*, which had to chop 100 positions between 1994 and 1996.

Increased competition has also led to job losses in the broadcast media, with the BBC losing 7000 posts between 1988 and 1994, while half of the staff at Central Television have been cut and 135 people have been made redundant at

ITN [Franklin, 1997, p. 14]. The response has been to institute "bi-media", in which electronic journalists gather news for both radio and television, a cost-cutting measure made possible by new technology. Although this has saved money, it has not necessarily preserved editorial quality.

Critics object that journalists working at small cable channels who jump into a cab with a portable camera, tripod, lights and recording equipment, writing a script en route to the story and editing the piece on their return to the studio, will not produce work of the same quality as a journalist working with a three-person film and sound crew.

[Franklin, 1997, p. 16]

Job losses have led to increased competition for the available posts, and many journalists are losing the battle for full-time work. More than one-third of journalists now work full-time as freelancers, are on contract or a combination of both, or have some other "non-staff employment arrangement" [Franklin, 1997, pp. 53-54]. The life of a freelancer is uncertain and badly-paid, and does not allow for much risk-taking or investigative journalism. As Franklin points out, they have to produce to order, and most definitely must publish or perish. At the same time that newsroom staff are being casualized, the number of people working in public relations has mushroomed; there are some 25,000 public relations and press officers compared to the 26,800 members of the National Union of Journalists listed in 1994 [Franklin, 1997, p. 19] plus the estimated 18,000 practising journalists outside the NUJ [Bromley, 1997, p. 1]. With newsrooms under pressure to produce more stories for the increased number of deadlines necessitated by new technologies, and with fewer people, there is a growing reliance on what public relations professionals can provide. The result has been that

while journalists working within media remain largely committed, at least in their rhetoric if not always in their news gathering and reporting practices, to the ideal of disinterested and rational enquiry, observation and reporting, this growing army of journalism-competent public-relations specialists and freelancers increasingly subordinate such professional values to the requirements of commercial values or political persuasion.

[Franklin, 1997, p. 20]

## Political Reporting in the UK - The Hunters and The Hunted

The tabloidization of the British press has certainly influenced the coverage of parliament and politics in general, both by broadcast and print journalists. As BBC political correspondent Nicholas Jones explains:

However much broadcasters might try to distance themselves from such influences, the excesses of the tabloids do colour their news judgement and are reflected in their treatment of politics. Newspaper exclusives about the salacious or dubious activities of politicians tend to get followed up by television and radio, even if only obliquely at first. The various sections of the media feed off each other.

[Jones, 1995, p. 11]

The result is a focus on stories of scandal rather than reports on policy, less coverage of the gallery itself, more negative stories, and during elections, fewer stories on the campaign [Franklin, 1997, pp. 236-241]. During the 1992 election campaign, for example, the *Sun* and the *Mirror* headlined election news on nine of the 22 days of the campaign, while the *Star* led with the election on four days [Franklin, 1994, p. 153]. During the 1997 campaign, election news made the front page of the *Mirror* six times, and the *Sun* five, over the 45 days of the contest (although one of these stories was about a journalist smoking heroin on Major's plane), with the *Star* headlining the election just once, on the day of the vote [Scammell and Harrop, 1997, pp. 162-63].

These changes in political coverage are due to the same factors that have affected journalists everywhere: deregulation and new technologies that have speeded up the pace of deadlines and made the competition for stories much more aggressive, resulting in what one senior political correspondent describes as "less reporting from the gallery and more naked women." [Franklin, 1997, p. 242] As in Canada, British parliamentary reporters can sit in their offices and watch House of Commons proceedings on television. With faxes, e-mail and the internet, they can gather the information for their stories, then write and edit them without even leaving their desks. It is a closed, somewhat claustrophobic world, where access to ministers is restricted by spin doctors, and the quality of information given is determined by a correspondent's place in the hierarchy of the Lobby, a uniquely British institution established in 1884.

The Lobby has been described as "a cartel for the provision of political information" [Franklin, 1994, p. 86], a system operated according to "quasi-masonic rules drawn up in Queen Victoria's time" [Harris, in McNair, 1999, p.

153] in which the more than 220 political correspondents at Westminster meet twice daily with the prime minister's press secretary for private, off-the-record briefings. Although often criticized for its secretiveness, its manipulation of the media, and its encouragement of "lazy journalism undertaken by lazy journalists" [Kellner, cited in Franklin, 1994, p. 87], it still endures. To their credit, in 1990 the correspondents of the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Scotsman* withdrew from the lobby in protest, but returned when John Major's press secretary allowed journalists to use the phrase "Downing Street sources" instead of Bernard Ingham's preferred form, "government sources" [Jones, 1995, p. 86] - hardly a blow for press freedom by Canadian standards. (Since 1997, the restrictions on anonymity have been loosened, with some briefings attributed to Alistair Campbell, Blair's press secretary.) In addition to the lobby, there is also the tradition of the "white Commonwealth", a select group of political editors and correspondents who receive fuller briefings on the basis that they are considered friendly to the government. In existence since the days of Harold Wilson, this inner circle has tended to limit the boundaries of questioning in the lobby sessions, as journalists in it are reluctant to antagonize the press secretary knowing they can get a fuller briefing later [Jones, 1995, p. 90].

Both these traditions, coupled with the demand for political news, mean that British political journalists are particularly vulnerable to the stratagems of spin doctors. They are accustomed to using tips from government sources as the basis for their stories, rather than their own investigation, and to playing a deferential role when trying to get information from such sources; they accept the status quo, with all its limitations on freedom of information. Thus when a minister insists on certain requirements for a television interview, such as who the other studio guests will be, or what time the interview will be or the content of the questions, these are met. When political spin doctors call just before a deadline trying to influence a story, the call is taken, and abusive and aggressive behaviour is tolerated. As Nicholas Jones recalls, the behaviour of Labour party spin doctor Peter Mandelson shocked even his own publicity staff, who "would sometimes stand around open-mouthed, hardly believing that their director could ridicule reporters so publicly and still get away with it." [Jones, 1995, p. 131] The BBC finally took action and decided to monitor such calls, after a fax was sent to its director general from Alistair Campbell urging that a conference speech by Tony Blair be given priority over the O.J. Simpson verdict on the nightly news - and BBC news editors acquiesced [Jones, 1995, p. 239].

Political journalists in Britain thus approached the eve of the election working in an atmosphere of obsequiousness, secrecy and media manipulation, driven by a fiercely competitive media industry to produce stories that often

were more sensational than substantive. The Scottish political corps, although subject to the same competitive economic pressures, took a different approach to reporting, an approach which, like that of Québec political journalists, came from its own unique culture.

### Media in Scotland: Paper Lions and Television Tigers

The media in Scotland, as in Québec, are distinct in character, and express a “sense of nationhood, as opposed to mere regionality” [Meech and Kilborn, 1992, p. 247], and nowhere is this more evident than in Scottish newspapers. Although the five morning newspapers and three Sunday papers produced in Scotland in 1997 had to compete with all ten of the UK dailies and nine Sundays at the newsagent’s, they attracted enormous readerships. The *Record*, Scotland’s biggest tabloid, with a readership of 1.8 million, was read by 44 per cent of Scottish adults, while the *Sun*, the Scottish edition of the British tabloid, had only a quarter of the readership [Schlesinger, 1998, p. 63]. By contrast, although Scotland has nine per cent of the UK population, the *Daily Telegraph* sold only about two per cent of its papers there. Scots also have had much higher levels of newspaper readership generally: a 1990 readership survey found that they were “20.5 percent more likely to read a daily newspaper and 14.6 percent a Sunday paper than were people living elsewhere in the UK.” [Meech and Kilborn, 1992, p. 255]

The main reason that the London-based papers have not thrived in Scotland is that they either do not pay attention to Scottish affairs, or when they do, are clumsily inconsistent. Many are, as public relations expert Max Clifford has said, “English editions with a Scottish wrap-around.” [McCubbin, 1997, p. 21] The Scottish edition of the *Sun* is the exception that proves the rule. It came out in favour of independence and the nationalist cause in 1992, a move seen as more commercially than politically motivated by some media observers [Smith, 1994; Marr, 1995]. Often pages from the English edition “carrying excoriating right-wing editorials and reports have slipped into the version sold in Scotland, providing an uncomfortable dichotomy.” [Smith, 1994, p. 113] Not too surprisingly, the paper abandoned its nationalist stance just before the 1997 election, a move foreshadowed by its adoption of a more Europhobic line in its Scottish edition the year before [Brown, 1996], and after the paper had doubled its circulation to more than 390,000.

The mid-market *Daily Mail* and the *Express* have established respectable readerships of more than a quarter of a million by catering to the Scottish market, but even so, their circulations are not much larger than those of the Dundee

*Courier* and the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*. Scottish newspaper readers are loyal to their home town papers, and there is no "national" paper per se, although the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman* both lay claim to that title. However, the reality is that people in the west of Scotland read the *Herald*, while those in the east read the *Scotsman*; the two quality broadsheets reach more than 13 per cent of Scottish readers, while the five London broadsheets are read by eight per cent [Schlesinger, 1998, pp. 62-63].

The price wars that have had such a negative effect on the quality of the London-based newspapers have in fact had a positive effect in Scotland by reinforcing the national identity of Scottish newspapers. Unable to compete on price, the Scottish press has "responded to the challenge of growing circulation for non-Scottish papers by reasserting their Scottish identity and ability to cover Scottish news and features." [Lynch, 1996b, p. 10] Branding themselves as Scottish has been an essential strategy for marketing newspapers in Scotland: the *Scotsman's* masthead displays the national symbol of the thistle, and the slogan, "Scotland's national newspaper", while the *Record* had a bumper-sticker that proclaimed, "Real Scots read the Record".

Such branding was also important in Scottish television, with the major television networks using such traditional Scottish symbols as the lion, the thistle and the saltire flag to identify themselves to their viewers as quintessentially Scottish, which, as Meech points out, is a paradox, "insofar as most of their output in fact has its source elsewhere in the UK or abroad." [Meech, 1996, p. 72]. Obtaining access to the network is difficult, as well as control over finances and creative decision-making. When Gus MacDonald moved from ITV as head of factual programming to become chief executive of Scottish Television in 1989, he found he was effectively "locked out of the network" because it was "blocked off by the old majors which still have a de facto guarantee on these slots." [McNair, 1994, p. 170] STV (now part of the multi-media conglomerate, the Scottish Media Group) has been marginally more successful than BBC Scotland in providing programmes to the network, with five per cent of its programming being shown throughout the UK, while in 1991 the BBC produced approximately three per cent [McNair, 1994, pp. 170-71]. BBC Scotland's conflicting role as a national-regional outlet has meant that Scots perceive it "as an *English* organization." [Meech, 1996, p. 77] However, BBC Scotland does excel in the area of news and current affairs programming, and "offers the most comprehensive service with a strong Scottish news service, teams of reporters located across Scotland as well as centrally in Glasgow, with access to British and international news and information from the wider BBC network." [Lynch, 1996b, p. 9] This is especially true of BBC Radio Scotland, established in 1978

when it was expected that Scotland would get its own assembly. Its morning news programme, *Good Morning Scotland*, is extremely influential, the one on which Scottish political parties are most keen to get air-time: so much so that it has created tensions with press correspondents, who resent it when embargoed stories are broadcast on GMS before they can get a crack at them.

The unique nature of the Scottish media provides significant opportunities for the political communications of Scotland's political parties and the journalists who cover them, particularly as election campaigns have become more focused on national issues such as devolution. The media serve "as a vital channel of communication at election time, as a means of agenda-setting and political mobilising support." [Lynch, 1996b, p. 10] The journalists who cover politics in Scotland thus have an especially influential role, perhaps more so than their colleagues south of the border. They also have a distinctive style of reporting, and newsroom practices that are certainly different from those in Canada and the UK.

### Political Reporting in Scotland: Wha's Like Us?

What strikes an outside observer of the Scottish journalism scene most forcibly is the lack of rivalry among political journalists. It is, as Brian Groom, former deputy editor of *Scotland on Sunday* has said, a very cosy one, reluctant to criticize the Labour party oligarchy, and "so caught up in the national question that many journalists find it hard to view objectively." [Smith, 1994, p. 50] At its best it encourages a greater sense of solidarity than exists in the London-based media, but at its worst, promotes a "pack journalism" mentality, in which a truly independent investigation of political issues is hard to find.

The smallness of the political press corps is perhaps the reason for this state of affairs. One reporter described how his home became an informal press centre for Scottish political journalists from other newspapers during the election campaign. This state of affairs would be unheard of in Canada or Québec, as is the practice in Scotland of allowing journalists to work for what would be seen in Canada as competing media outlets. For example, Iain Macwhirter had a regular column in the *Scotsman*, and now writes for the daily *Herald* and the *Sunday Herald* while also hosting the television programme *Holyrood Live* on the BBC; Ruth Wishart broadcasts on BBC Radio Scotland's Sunday current affairs programme, *Eye to Eye*, and has a column in the *Herald*. This would not be permitted in Canada, as it would be seen as going over to the competition. For the same reason, it is unheard of to "advertise" newspapers on radio and television by featuring commentaries from political journalists on what is in the



morning press. To have the political editor of the *Scotsman* discussing the headlined stories in other newspapers on *Good Morning Scotland* sounds strange to Canadian ears, although it is common practice in the UK.

Another practice which differs from that in Canada is the reporting of events before they happen; in particular, political speeches or announcements. Speeches from Canadian politicians and other public figures are often stamped "check before delivery", and even though the contents of a speech may have been leaked beforehand, journalists tend to wait until it has actually been given before writing a story about it. Not so in Scotland, which can lead to some peculiar situations: for example, the *Scotsman* reported in a story March 7, 1997 that George Robertson, Labour's then shadow Scottish Secretary of State, was going to make a speech on the opening day of the Scottish Labour Party's conference requesting the SNP's help in the referendum campaign. Unfortunately, it was not reported if he actually ever made those comments in the news stories about the conference, either in the *Scotsman* or the *Herald*. Did he make that overture to the SNP or didn't he? We do not know. At its most ludicrous, this practice resulted in the Scottish National Party sending out a four-page news release from the SNP's treasury spokesperson, John Swinney, rebutting point-by-point a proposed speech by trade secretary Ian Lang - one which Lang never delivered. It is fairly obvious how this practice can be used for political manipulation: stories can be planted about events that may or may not happen, with the spin on them unfiltered by any public reaction.

The clearest illustration of the difference in the media is how news releases from the political parties are used. It is perplexing for a Canadian to read the *Scotsman* and the *Herald* and find the same quotations, word-for-word, from Alex Salmond and other politicians in both papers. This must mean that not only do politicians in Scotland speak in perfect sentences, a phenomenon not found anywhere else in the western industrialized world, but that they speak in these same perfect sentences to rival newspapers. It was only after talking to journalist Rennie McOwan that I discovered that printing the comments of politicians unedited and unquestioned, and in supposedly competing news outlets, was common practice in Scotland. In Canada such releases are seen by journalists as a news tip to be followed up with a call to the politician for an "authentic" quote, replete with bafflegab and garbled syntax.

Political journalists in Scotland, like their colleagues in Canada, are less deferential towards politicians than their London-based colleagues. They take pride in asking the "bastard question" at news conferences, as Tony Blair found much to his discomfiture during the 1997 general election campaign, when he had to face a barrage of questions about his statement that the proposed parliament

for Scotland would have no more power than a parish council. London-based political correspondents who attended the conference (one of the relatively few held by Blair during the campaign) were shocked by the aggressiveness of the Scottish reporters, whom they perceived as, if not disrespectful, at least, discourteous: but as one Scottish political journalist recalled, Blair “didn’t particularly get a rough ride, certainly not in terms of the standard behaviour of the Scottish press corps.”

Along with this more assertive attitude comes a willingness to explore some issues in greater depth (something also seen in the Québec press, and for much the same reasons). Again, this comes out of the Scottish media’s need to establish a national rather than a regional identity. As Smith points out, such coverage gives the Scottish press the gravitas it needs to be considered more than regional.

A serious English provincial newspaper, such as the Yorkshire Post, would not presume to draft and publish its own proposals for the tax-raising powers of a devolved assembly. Yet in Scotland, both the Herald and Scotsman have done so. A Fleet Street tabloid would not devote five full pages to a thinly-veiled denunciation of Scottish independence; the Daily Record did just that prior to the 1992 call.

[Smith, 1994, p. 2]

However, although the Scottish press wants to be identified as national, it is not comfortable with being identified as nationalist, and unlike that of Québec, has a profoundly ambivalent relationship with nationalism.

### **Nationalism, News and National Identity**

The source of the Scottish media’s ambivalence is straightforward, as Smith explains: “Newspapers need a nationalist tone to Scottish politics, in order to define Scotland’s ‘difference’ from the rest of the United Kingdom. Yet leader-writers, guardians of the papers’ very soul, cannot bring themselves to condone much of what nationalism might mean to those who vote SNP.” [Smith, 1994, p. 101] The Scottish National Party provides good copy, but not good policy, as far as most political journalists are concerned. The SNP is seen as being a single issue party, and when it has provided a wider range of policies, “it raised more questions than it answered”, according to one correspondent. This has created difficulties for the SNP, because they have no consistent editorial support - the *Sun* abandoned them for Labour shortly before the 1997 election - and they are

effectively locked out of network television coverage, where their rival parties are covered on a UK-wide basis.

In addition, the SNP's media fortunes were diminished when Scotsman Publications was bought by Fred and David Barclay, who appointed Andrew Neil editor-in-chief, long known for his "adamant opposition to independence and his dismissive views of what he sees as Scotland's 'monotonic' left-of-centre consensus" [Schlesinger, 1998, p. 65]. As the man in charge of the editorial direction of the *Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday* and the *Edinburgh Evening News*, as well as the *European* and *Sunday Business*, he has been able to promote the defence of the Union with considerable vigour. The creation of Scotland's own media conglomerate, Scottish Television (now the Scottish Media Group), which gave it a concentrated power base and political profile in Scotland, did not help the SNP's cause either. Scottish Television gets 80 per cent of its programmes and 85 per cent of its advertising from the ITV network, and its executives have made it quite clear that they do not want broadcasting to be regulated by the Scottish parliament, contrary to the Scottish National Party's campaign to have control of broadcasting vested in Edinburgh [Schlesinger, 1998, p. 65].

This situation is in striking contrast to that of the Parti Québécois in the 1970s when it was first coming to power. Québec journalists were fully on side with the nationalist option, so much so that in the 1973 election the PQ platform received more media coverage than that of the party in power. In 1976, the year the Parti Québécois won, *Le Journal de Montréal*, the province's biggest tabloid daily, and a supporter of the party, "covered the PQ platform more fully and favourably than the programme of the Quebec Liberals, the party of the outgoing government." [Charron, 1991, p. 97] It is a matter of debate as to whether the media support enjoyed by the PQ enabled their success, or whether their success came from the fact that it was the party that best represented the aspirations of Quebecers at that particular time in history, aspirations shared by the political journalists of the day. It could be that Scottish political correspondents are reluctant to embrace the cause of independence because they, too, reflect the views of their fellow Scots, who are happy with devolution now, but independence maybe later.

### **Journalism in a Fish Bowl**

Election campaigns are the ultimate tests for political journalists as well as politicians. Their coverage is

journalism in a fish bowl. Reporters face not only deadline pressures but exhausting travel schedules, sophisticated manipulation by 'spin doctors' and high expectations from media critics, voters and their news organizations. There is the ever-present risk of 'flak' from parties and candidates, and pressure from news managers who expect compelling journalism in return for the high and increasing cost of covering national elections.

[Fletcher, 1996, p. 140]

However, journalists put unrealistic pressures on politicians, expecting them to produce news every day, if not several times a day, during campaigns, and according to the rules of the media game. Reporters look for the controversial comment that will make a good soundbite on the nightly news or a headline story in the paper, or for "phrases or images that further a pre-existing story line." [Fletcher, 1996, p. 149] This is true for both Britain and Canada. There are other trends in campaign coverage common to both countries as well: the increasing negativity of election news; an emphasis on journalistic comment rather than that of candidates; a change in focus from policy issues to political strategy; and the exclusion of smaller parties [Fletcher, 1996; Franklin, 1997]. The last has proved especially problematic for the Scottish National Party.

Political journalists in Québec and Scotland face unique constraints as a result of their position within stateless nations. For Québec journalists, it is the problem of objectivity; for those in Scotland, it is their ambivalent attitude towards nationalism. The nationalist parties in both regions have had to struggle to develop effective political communication strategies in these difficult political environments, with the Scottish National Party and the early Parti Québécois having to overcome the doubt and uncertainty about the workability of independence; and the Bloc Québécois, the polarization and hostility within and without the borders of Québec - no easy task, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Stratagems and Strategists

The communications strategies of political parties have become all-important in modern elections, so much so that instead of being a contest for the hearts and minds of voters, election campaigns are now media events [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 4], with journalists and political strategists struggling to control the agenda and how campaign events are to be interpreted. The growth in the numbers of party strategists, at least in Canadian political campaigns, has resulted in greater party control and less journalistic autonomy, they say, as political reporters are overwhelmed by the stratagems of political spin doctors [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 49]. The other result has been a shift to what Fletcher describes as “the strategic-game perspective” in election reporting, which “communicates a cynical view of politics that may actually do politicians and citizens a disservice. It overlooks the possibility that politicians shape their policies not only for electoral advantage but also according to their own assumptions about the public interest.” [Fletcher, 1996, p. 149]

Does this political dance between politicians and journalists actually affect the outcome of election campaigns? There does not seem to be any clear evidence that it does [Desbarats, 1990; Crête, 1991; Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995], but that does not seem to stop people from believing that it has an effect. Gilsdorf and Bernier state firmly that “we believe that journalistic practice influences the course of campaigns and the results of the vote” [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 5], without providing any support for that argument and reporting in their study “that most journalists deny that campaigns have much effect or that the media have any influence on election campaigns.” [Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991, p. 22] Despite the lack of proof, “politicians, media consultants, and journalists continue to behave as if the news media are influential, and this assumption seems to be shared by voters who are always ready to blame the media for whatever current problems afflict their political systems.” [Desbarats, 1990, p. 150] As Denis McQuail so nicely puts it: “The evidence of effectiveness is often indirect, coming mainly from the persistent behaviour of campaigners themselves.” [McQuail, 1994, p. 350]

In this chapter I will examine the persistent behaviour of campaigners within the Scottish National Party, the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois. It is essential to understand the development of campaign strategy in the PQ to understand that of the Bloc, as the two parties are so intertwined, and never more so during the 1997 federal election in Canada. The communication strategies of the SNP and the Bloc are almost opposite mirror images of each

other in their development, with the SNP's early strategic attempts showing little of the consistent professionalism of those displayed by the PQ right from its earliest beginnings, headed as it was by the media-savvy René Lévesque, or by the Bloc under Lucien Bouchard. The SNP's increasing professionalization, so clearly demonstrated in the 1997 national election in Britain, was a striking contrast to the shambles of the BQ's performance in the Canadian federal election of that same year, when the leader of the Bloc was forced to call upon the old pros in the Parti Québécois to rescue him after a series of organizational blunders at the start of his campaign.

### **The Scottish National Party: Early Successes**

It was not until the 1960s and the party presidency of William Wolfe that the Scottish National Party acquired the communications skills and strategic organization of a modern party. The attempts of John MacCormick, founder of the SNP, to use the party as "a propaganda organization dedicated to persuading other parties to accept an agreed measure of Home Rule in Scotland" [Mackie, 1991, p. 372] met with failure, and after leaving the SNP in 1942, he went on to organize the Scottish National Covenant, the two-million signature petition for devolution. But, Mackie notes: "As a cheap and effective means of publicity and education, the Covenant proved valuable. It was also valuable in showing that mere opinion was of no interest to Westminster, where men dealt in power." [Mackie, 1991, p. 372]

It was the efforts of Wolfe, as well as organizer Ian Macdonald, that modernized the SNP "and created a remarkable publicity machine" [Harvie, 1994, p. 173]. As an accountant and candidate in West Lothian, where 1,000 jobs owed their existence to the shale oil industry [Mitchell, 1996, p. 198], Wolfe understood the economics of oil and its importance in convincing the Scottish public that Scotland could survive financially as an independent nation. In 1963 he became director of publicity and development, and under his guidance the SNP's publicity "soon became the best of any British party" [Harvie, 1994, p. 176]. It was also during his tenure that the SNP's popular thistle-loop logo was created (killed off in 1991 only to be reincarnated five years later), and the party was given permission to air political broadcasts on television and radio for the first time, before it had even won a seat.

The commitment to organizing, fund-raising, research and membership recruitment made under Wolfe's leadership paid off in the election of Winnie Ewing in the Hamilton by-election of 1967. Ewing's election reaped enormous publicity for the SNP. "The media now became almost indulgent" [Harvie, 1994,

p. 174], with Ewing being given a weekly column in the *Daily Record*, while the *Scottish Daily Express* had a weekly report on her activities at Westminster and most of the major Scottish papers, with the exception of the *Glasgow Herald*, "made sympathetic noises." [Harvie, 1994, p. 179] Although she lost her seat in the general election two-and-a-half years later, her brief stint in parliament did a great deal to raise the profile of the SNP. However, her slogan, "Free by '73" was "the first in a long line of over-ambitious Nationalist catch-phrases." [Clements, Farquharson and Wark, 1996, p. 50]

It was the discovery of large stores of oil and gas off the coast of Scotland in the 70s that gave the SNP a big advantage in the propaganda struggle for independence. No longer could it be argued that Scotland was too poor to govern itself, while millions of pounds in Scottish oil revenues were flooding into government coffers. Wolfe, who became chairman of the party in 1969, declared that oil should be the centrepiece of its publicity [Marr, 1995, p. 132], and with the team of economist Donald Bain as researcher, Cambridge graduate Stephen Maxwell as head of publicity, and Gordon Wilson, who had been organizer of the SNP's pirate Radio Free Scotland, "the SNP so collared the oil issue that, between 1972 and 1975, businessmen and journalists wanting information on oil policy came to the SNP rather than to government departments, as the SNP was factually better briefed." [Harvie, 1995, p. 123] Slogans such as "It's Scotland's Oil" , "Scotland's Oil - To London With Love" and "Rich Scot or Poor Briton?" hit home: the SNP won seven seats in the 1974 general election, with five of them in the north-east, the area of the country dominated by the oil industry [Harvie, 1994, p. 188]. Seven months later it won four more seats to send a total of 11 MPs to Westminster.

McCrone states that the SNP's success in the 1970s was due to the fact that it "was a 'media' party, well suited to an increasingly volatile electorate, and one which did not need to make the 'long march' through the political undergrowth as the Labour Party had to do at the turn of the century." [McCrone, 1992, pp. 167-68] In one sense this is true: the SNP was a media party in that it knew how to use the media, but not in the sense that it had any consistent media backing. Scottish members of the Labour Party had the tacit support of the influential Watchdog group during the 1970s, which included such prominent Scottish journalists as Jimmy Frame, Chris Baur and Neal Ascherson, who "gave the politicians a coterie of clever men off whom they could bounce ideas" about Home Rule [Marr, 1995, p. 144]. There was no such close relationship with journalists for the SNP. While the press were happy to use the professional expertise of the party's communications and research department, particularly on the oil issue, that respect had been hard-won, and could easily

disappear, which William Wolfe knew only too well. As devolution came closer, attacks on the SNP increased, with headlined stories linking them to “tartan terrorists”, virulent nationalism, and political extremism. As Ascherson wrote in his *Scotsman* diary: “Few days go by without a reader’s letter or political speech which accuses the SNP of either fascism or the intention to use the bomb and the Kalashnikov.” [Cited in Marr, 1995, p. 150]

It was in the context of this negative coverage of the nationalists and the growing divisions between gradualists and fundamentalists within the SNP that threatened to tear it apart that Wolfe “repeatedly warned his party to avoid an aggressive image. ‘Reassurance is the essence of what we must project.’ Keep calm, stay moderate, he kept telling the SNP, and they would come into their inheritance.” [Marr, 1995, p. 151] Unfortunately, his message was ignored, with disastrous results for the SNP. It took almost 15 years before party strategists realized what a crucial error had been made.

### **Mixed Messages, Mediocre Results: The SNP from 1979 to 1992**

The early 1980s were grim years for the Scottish National Party. Torn by factionalism and bitter party struggles that led to some highly-publicized expulsions (see chapter three), the SNP lost members and funds. Its shrinking membership “meant that the party’s income dropped by a dramatic amount, causing a contraction of the party’s headquarters and occasional paralysis to the party organization.” [Lynch, 1996a, p. 225] It only managed to survive because of a legacy to the party. Half-hearted attempts were made to revive the oil issue, but by then it had been hijacked by the other Scottish parties, who also pledged that oil revenues would stay in Scotland [Mitchell, 1996, p. 210].

Ironically, what was at the heart of the SNP’s struggles was a concern about its identity and the best strategy for communicating that to the public. The party lacked a clear vision of itself, and without it, the SNP ended up being defined by its opponents. It was the members of the ‘79 Group, which included Alex Salmond, who were most concerned about the party’s image. There was general agreement on party policies, which were mostly left-wing, but, as one member stated, “the party is not prepared to accept the implications of this and admit its actual political character to the outside world” [Cited in Mitchell, 1996, p. 232]. The ‘79 Group wanted the SNP to declare itself as a left-wing, republican party, and although it did not succeed in its aims, by 1983 the SNP had defined itself as a moderate, left-of-centre party.

However, the party had not resolved the split between fundamentalists and gradualists, and this division led to a confusion in the party’s message and



strategy that continued right up until the 1992 election. The story of the SNP from 1987 to 1992 is one of two steps forward, one step back as the gradualists within the party, led by Alex Salmond, deputy leader from 1987-91, then leader, and Mike Russell, vice-convenor for publicity 1987-92, and later chief executive, attempted to exert more control over the party's direction and strategy. It was often frustrating for those party strategists who believed a more gradualist and focused approach would be less alienating to the voters. As one of them explained (all quotations in this chapter are from the research interviews, unless otherwise stated):

“What we did between 1987 and 1992 is we spent about four years and nine months on single issue campaigns; poll tax, nuclear dumping, you name it, steel, we were there, single issue campaigns, and we failed to make any link between them. We kept on doing a single issue campaign, then hey, presto, just before the election, we decided to concentrate on explaining the meaning of independence and we almost told a shocked population that within three months Scotland was going to be independent - and we wondered why we got a fight. Now our opponents were able to ridicule us, to make us look like revolutionaries, to make us look like people to be feared.”

The mixed message sent out by the Scottish National Party during the 1992 election was a direct result of a split in its campaign strategy between the two party factions, which prevented the SNP from getting better results despite a much more professionally-organized operation - what Lynch describes as “the paradox of professionalization” [Lynch, 1996a, p. 219].

### **The Paradox of Professionalization**

The paradox during the 1992 campaign was that there were two contrary views of the Scottish National Party platform being projected by two different campaign teams: the first, “a restrained campaign of positive messages about change and reassurance to supporters”, promoted by the gradualists within the party under the leadership of Alex Salmond and operated in-house by staff, and the second, “a full-blown campaign for national independence” promulgated by the fundamentalists, headed by deputy leader Jim Sillars [Lynch, 1996a, p. 220] and run by a professional public relations firm. The major problem with the fundamentalist approach was that it seemed absurd within the context of the times; the SNP had only five MPs and its opinion poll ratings were hovering just above 20 per cent. The fundamentalist message was given extra punch by the fact that it was the one being supported by the services of an Edinburgh-based public relations firm, which had offered to help the party during the campaign on

an expenses-only basis. Billboards proclaiming "Nobody ever celebrated devolution day" and party election broadcasts that anticipated celebrating "independence day" overshadowed the more moderate and reassuring messages that the party gradualists were trying to promote. Instead of creating a unified message for the party, the agency over-emphasized the aggressive "Free by '93" position of the fundamentalists, "and created a confusion by amplifying a mixed message" [Lynch, 1996a, p. 221].

The results were as the party gradualists had feared: the SNP had even fewer MPs at the end of the campaign, just three, "which showed how ill-judged it had been to fight the election as 'the independence election.'" [Lynch, 1996a, p. 220] Angered and disappointed by what had happened, the gradualists in the leadership vowed "Never again" and immediately following the election began work on a new, more coherent strategy that would guide the party's political communications for the next five years.

### The Five-Year Plan

After the 1992 election the shift towards a gradualist strategy was hastened by the resignations of some of the fundamentalist office-bearers in the Scottish National Party, and the determined efforts of those who felt the SNP's campaign had been "just wrong. It was an alarming election campaign; it was illogical, it was irrational, it over-claimed about our performance; it was madness", according to one party member and former candidate, who decided to run for senior office in the party so that he could direct the SNP's strategy and make sure that such mistakes would be avoided in future campaigns. The party leadership embarked on a serious analysis of its strategic operations, with the result that it formulated a five-year plan to carry the SNP through the European and local elections in 1994 and the next general election, with specific targets and goals, strictly adhered to. The message was to be one of reassurance and moderation, outlining the social and economic benefits of independence, and, most importantly, was to be based on a respect for the will of the Scottish people; if they chose to reject the message there would be no comments about too many Scots being "90-minute patriots" as Jim Sillars remarked after his defeat in Govan in 1992 .

Key to the successful implementation of this strategy was the development of professional fund-raising techniques using a direct mail campaign called Challenge of the Nineties, again, as is the pattern with the SNP, using in-house staff along with appointees who had professional expertise in the area but who were also party loyalists [Lynch, 1996a]. This move was prompted by the

fact that the party had only been able to spend £120,000 on the 1992 election, compared to the £2 million spent by the Tories and the approximately £1 million spent by Labour. The money raised was used to hire more staff at the party's Edinburgh headquarters in order to provide the kind of professional and administrative support for political candidates and office-bearers that had previously been lacking.

The most significant of these was the hiring of a chief executive in December of 1994 to strengthen the party's central organization. The role of the chief executive was fourfold: first, as manager, to organize the resources of the party and develop its operations; second, to act as liaison between the office-bearers and staff; third, to act as spokesperson, spin-doctor and media strategist; and lastly, and perhaps most crucially, given the strong grass-roots basis of the SNP, help the party make the transition from being largely volunteer-run to having professional staff. The person chosen for the position was well-qualified to take on these tasks, having been a former office-bearer and parliamentary candidate, with several years of experience as a film and television producer and head of a media consultancy.

The importance of this appointment to the over-all success of the party's media strategy cannot be underestimated. Before his arrival, the stresses and strains on the members of the SNP executive trying to fulfil the media relations role were extremely demanding, particularly during moments of crisis, as one party executive member recalled. An executive with a demanding job and young family, as well as his responsibilities for the SNP's strategic planning and its publicity, he found handling the spin-doctor role without any backup during one media incident almost overwhelming. Alex Salmond had given an interview to *Scotland on Sunday* in January of 1995 in which he discussed constitutional issues and stated that he was receptive to devolution as a means of gaining independence for Scotland. The story, headlined "Salmond backs devolution" began generating controversy as soon as the paper hit the streets.

"And then he [Salmond] phones me about 7:45 am Sunday morning that he had been phoned by a journalist. He was in Peterhead; I was in Glasgow; so I ran out and bought a paper and read it over on the phone to him, and we decided what to do. I think if my employers had been watching over the next four days they would have sacked me, because I had sat the whole of that Sunday - I just said to my wife, 'Just go away for the week' - I sat on the phone all day talking to journalists, reassuring party activists, sorting out opponents within the executive who were uneasy about things, directing the issue for the convener, giving him the support that he needs at times. That was my life parcelled out for the whole of that Sunday. For the rest of the week as the story entrenched and got difficult I would do the

same thing at work - phoning journalists, you know. The temperature would go up further when someone from the party executive would attack what Alec had said; the temperature would go up further when Alec attacked that person, so again it went on for days. Now if that happened just now with the state of my life, with work, politics, the constituency and all the rest of it, I just couldn't manage, I would collapse."

Having a chief executive in place meant that the party now had someone full-time at headquarters who could handle such crises, as when Roseanna Cunningham was selected as the SNP candidate for the 1995 Perth and Kinross by-election. Her selection was allegedly criticized by party president Winnie Ewing, because of a relationship Cunningham had in 1977 with Donald Bain, who had been married to Ewing's daughter-in-law, Margaret. In Canada this kind of situation would have never have been a matter of public controversy, given the cultural constraints against discussing the personal lives of politicians by Canadian journalists. As Margaret Ewing herself said: "Press interest in events almost 20 years old is foolish and prurient" [Dinwoodie, 1995]. This time when the controversy made the news, the chief executive put in 16 to 17-hour days co-ordinating the media response which in the end "generated good publicity because there was a sense of sympathy for Roseanna in the public....It had a happy ending which we managed."

It also enabled the party to develop pro-active media strategies for her during the by-election, in which Cunningham faced strong opposition from the Tories in the formerly Conservative-held seat. The Conservatives had timed the by-election to coincide with VE Day, which they planned to use for Union flag-waving combined with an attack on Scottish nationalism, which they linked to that of Nazi Germany. In anticipation of this strategy, the SNP's communications office prepared a story about Cunningham's father, a World War Two veteran, complete with photo of him in uniform and details of his war record, timed to appear in the press on VE Day, thus scuppering the Tory plan. As Lynch states: "What could have been a difficult event for the SNP was therefore carefully managed and turned to the party's advantage." [Lynch, 1996a, p. 230]

### **A Dedicated Team**

The most important achievement of the chief executive, however, has been the creation of an extremely effective communications team, which employs all the modern strategies of political communications such as agenda-setting, story placement, photo-ops, pseudo-events and spin-doctoring to get the SNP's

message across [Lynch, 1996a]. For example, when prominent Labour Party member and Edinburgh councillor George Kerevan decided to join the SNP in the summer of 1996, the communications office arranged for an exclusive in *Scotland on Sunday*, giving the paper an essay written by Kerevan about why he made his decision. However, in order not to antagonize the other media outlets, the SNP communications office sent out its news release on the Kerevan defection at one minute after midnight, as soon as the early edition of *Scotland on Sunday* had hit the streets. On another occasion when a *Herald* reporter discovered in recently-released Scottish Records Office documents that the police had been spying on the SNP during the early 50s, the press office lined up an interview and photo session with Dr. Robert McIntyre, party leader at that time, for comment and illustration to go with the reporter's story.

Although the party has been good at projecting a positive message, it has not been so good at responding to negative campaigning from its opponents, particularly during the 1992 election [Lynch, 1996a]. This has not just been due to a lack of resources, which is a factor, but also to a philosophical reluctance of party media managers to use such techniques. As the communications director said: "Maybe we just don't have that sort of killer instinct....we're maybe not, if you like, culturally attuned to that kind of campaigning. We're much happier really when we're campaigning for independence and the great things independence will deliver." The chief executive was also not keen to use Peter Mandelson-style methods of bullying reporters, but expressed some ambivalence about his stance:

"I actually think I am at my most effective if I only ring up an editor to say 'Well done' or to shout at them once a month. I don't think ringing a journalist or an editor five times a day is sensible policy, but perhaps we should be doing that at a lower level, perhaps as an organization. Perhaps we don't do that nearly enough."

This is not to say that he does not use such tactics on occasion: one reporter recalled an incident in which the chief executive had got wind of a story he was doing but was mistaken as to what was in it, and "went into maximum rebuttal mode...phoning the editor even before I had even filed the story...but you know I kind of enjoyed the argy-bargy shouting match", although it was, he said, "a rather unpleasant example of the rebuttal technique".

The creation of "a hierarchy of media managers" at Scottish National Party headquarters [Lynch, 1996a, p. 229] was a crucial development for the SNP, because unlike the other parties in Scotland, it had not been guaranteed automatic UK-wide press coverage. Seen as a regional party with little influence

by the London-based media, it did not have the media pull of a national leader or the resources of a national party organization to promote its message. Yet in spite of these handicaps, the SNP generally managed to out-perform its political rivals on a comparative basis. As one senior strategist said:

**“The strength of what we’ve got is a dedicated team....We can play outside our league. If we were a football team we would be one of the best prospective small teams in Scotland because we have all the virtues of Scottish small teams. We’re fighters, we score goals. We’ve got all the lack of virtues of small Scottish teams too, which is we sometimes get defeated by our own ends. It’s the old Scottish psychosis.”**

This is not just the view of those within the Scottish National Party; it is one shared by the members of the Scottish political press.

### **Punching Above Their Weight**

It is not common to encounter almost complete agreement on a topic amongst members of the press. However, when discussing the Scottish National Party’s media relations, there is a unanimity of opinion as to the effectiveness of the party’s political communications. As one political journalist who had experience of both Westminster and Scottish politics described them:

**“Given their relative size compared to the two major UK parties and their relative lack of finance by comparison to the two parties in Scotland - the Tories have huge amounts of money to spend - the SNP is extremely effective. You know the old business phrase of Britain punching above their weight in national politics, well, I think the SNP punch above their weight in Scottish politics.”**

Another editor stated flatly that the SNP

**“has the strongest press operation in Scottish politics, and that’s on a number of levels. At a very basic level...they respond very well to events. You know if something flashes up on Ceefax you can guarantee that an hour later there will be an SNP press release giving the SNP’s particular take on this event, whether it’s a sport victory or an earthquake in Azerbaijan; you know there’s an SNP line on it somewhere and it comes through promptly; it’s well-written; it’s well-presented; just in terms of the real world of press releases it looks professional, it looks authoritative.”**

This view was echoed by a political correspondent, who described the SNP as having “by far the best operation in Scotland”, which he attributed to the skill of

the chief executive's dealing with the press, and the party's communications and research office. The media relations of the chief executive were "far better, more relaxed, less confrontational, less aggressive" than those of the other parties, and in the SNP's ability to quickly provide background information on issues "nobody comes close to touching them....that puts them out in a league of their own".

About the only complaint was that the SNP occasionally went over the top in its pursuit of the news and issued too many news releases (a failing admitted to by both the chief executive and the leader of the party, who confessed that sometimes his staff thought he was "daft" for wanting to issue so many), but the criticism was muted. One editor said that although he used less than one per cent of the SNP news releases, he insisted on getting them because it was "like an all-day seminar on what the SNP thinks...and it can be very illuminating". As another editor pointed out, although the SNP were sometimes over-eager it was because they had to be, to compensate for the fact that they were competing in a four-party system in which "they're fighting for attention and fighting to keep their profile".

However, agreement on their effectiveness did not mean agreement with the SNP's nationalist message. All were sceptical of the party's programme and distrustful of what they saw as the SNP's "independence-will-solve-everything" approach to policy issues, remaining unconvinced by the party's efforts to document their case for independence. As one reporter put it:

"They have laid waste to forests producing over the last few years something like the best part of 30 written policy reports, position papers and I know why they're doing that...You almost get to the point of saying, well this is going too far, but I can see why they want to do it. Just don't ask me to take it too seriously."

The SNP is a long way from receiving the kind of enthusiastic support which the Parti Québécois received from francophone reporters in Québec during the 1960s and 70s.

### **Getting Results**

The decision of the Scottish National Party's leadership to develop a more focused, long-range plan for election campaigning and to strengthen its central organization and resources paid off, particularly during the European elections in June of 1994, when it gained close to 33 per cent of the vote and elected two MEPs. Instead of casting the election as the independence election, as had been done in the past,

the representational arguments of Scotland in Europe played second fiddle to the increase in VAT on fuel, the rise in national insurance contributions and the persistence of poverty and social problems in Scotland. These themes were used to demonstrate the cost for every taxpayer of remaining in the Union with England, in contrast to the benefits of independent membership in the European Union.

[Lynch, 1994, p. 53]

This communications approach, combined with a targeting of constituencies where the SNP stood a good chance of winning or coming in second, gave it the electoral credibility it needed to set the stage for the national elections to be held within three years. Having two MEPs also helped the SNP gain more publicity, with one of them being the party's deputy leader, Allan Macartney, and the other, SNP president Winnie Ewing, whose high-profile activism in the European parliament had won her the unofficial title of "Madame Ecosse".

The party also did well in the regional elections held the month before, winning approximately 27 per cent of the vote, and for the first time, coming second to the Labour Party in terms of seats as well as votes, and gaining control of Tayside and Grampian councils. Although the percentage of votes was smaller than in the elections for MEPs, the results were more significant, as the European elections had a much smaller voter turn-out and were "seen by voters as elections of secondary importance." [Denver, 1994, p. 67]

The biggest test of the party's new strategy was during the Monklands East by-election at the end of June, in which there was a 26.9 per cent increase in the SNP vote, only 1,640 ballots behind Labour in the constituency that had belonged to John Smith, the late Labour Party leader [Pringle, 1994]. The party's candidate, Kay Ullrich, won 44.9 per cent of the vote against Helen Liddell, former general secretary of the Labour party in Scotland, in an electoral contest marked by "accusations of religious sectarianism" [Brown et al, 1999, p. 29]. This result was all the more significant given that the party had serious organizational problems at the beginning of the two-week campaign which required emergency intervention from Scottish National Party headquarters.

Thus, by the time of the run-up to the 1997 election, the Scottish National Party was better-prepared than it had ever been before, with a strong communications team and central organization, more than £500,000 in campaign funds, and a clear and well-co-ordinated message. The contrast between 1992 and 1997 was dramatic. As a senior strategist explained:

"In 1992 the SNP was a very hard, isolated, absolutist force, and by its nature very difficult for people to support. By 1997 we'd



constructed a message which was much more inclusive, much broader, much more reassuring, but no less principled in what we believed in as a party....The result was that the exercise in motivation that we did during the election campaign was much more successful and much more effective."

### The Parti Québécois in the Age of Television

The independence movement in Québec, unlike that in Scotland, has often been inspired by the leadership of charismatic, populist men, who have forcefully and eloquently given voice to nationalist aspirations. One of the most influential was René Lévesque, founder of the Parti Québécois. It has been said that the Scottish National Party of the 1960s and 70s, "was, in a crucial sense, a modern party. That is, it was able to take advantage of the media, notably television, at the key moment in its formation" [Brown, McCrone and Paterson, 1996, p. 140], and this was certainly true for the Parti Québécois under Lévesque, whose background in television journalism gave him a unique understanding of the medium and how it could be used. "The Lévesque wheeze explaining world events within a cloud of cigarette smoke and chalk dust before a blackboard in the TV studio became a familiar performance in homes where newspaper reading traditionally started at the sports pages and finished at the comics." [Desbarats, 1976, p. 67] This gift for explaining complex issues in a way the general public could understand, honed during his years as the host of *Point de Mire*, proved to be a formidable political asset. When Lévesque first entered politics, his reputation as a TV anchor attracted the crowds, but it was this ability "that made him a political star in his first campaign." [Desbarats, 1976, p. 73]

His background in journalism also garnered him a very favourable press from his former Press Gallery colleagues during the 60s who still saw him as one of their own - as did Lévesque on occasion, much to the irritation of his fellow Liberal Party cabinet members.

There was virtually no critical reporting of Lévesque. French-language journalists continually made allowances for him, rarely taking his remarks out of context and carefully avoiding the temptation to crucify him on a single careless phrase. English-language journalists didn't always attempt to be so sympathetic.

[Desbarats, 1976, pp. 73-74]

That division among the francophone and anglophone media increased as Lévesque's nationalist views became more apparent and he moved towards supporting Québec independence, founding the Parti Québécois in 1968. During

the first election he fought as leader of the PQ in 1970, the party “ran a positive, almost therapeutically affirmative campaign, with a slogan of ‘Oui!’” [Fraser, 1994, p. 54], a dramatic contrast to the negative campaign of the government party, the conservative Union Nationale, which engineered the “coups de La Brinks”, an extremely effective form of propaganda. When just a few days before the election, eight Brinks trucks full of securities worth millions were photographed leaving Montréal at dawn, the justice minister said that the millions were being moved out of the province because of the political instability caused by the separatist threat, and described Lévesque as “the Fidel Castro of Québec” [Fraser, 1994, p. 54]. Brinks officials later confirmed that this was just usual procedure for the firm, but the effect could not be undone, despite Lévesque’s valiant attempts to convince nervous Quebecers that they were “the first citizens of a normal nation, as good as any other” [Desbarats, 1976, p. 179]. The Liberals won, led by Robert Bourassa, whose background in government finance and image as a young, progressive businessman was what Québec voters wanted, according to opinion research commissioned by the party [Fraser, 1984, p. 52].

In the 1973 provincial election, the PQ executive, against Lévesque’s wishes, decided that the party should produce a model budget for the first year of independence as a means of reassuring the wary voter. Unfortunately the budget, which contained errors, was based on over-optimistic expectations of growth, which “provided the Liberals with one heaven-sent opportunity” [Fraser, 1984, p. 59]. By 1976, however, the PQ knew better, focusing its campaign on down-to-earth issues such as free drugs for pensioners, reform of health and safety laws, strict rules for election finances, and changes to the unpopular language law, Bill 22. Lévesque also softened the party’s stand on how it would achieve independence, saying that the PQ would hold a referendum first before it began negotiations.

It was this strategy of reassurance and moderation that helped them win the election in 1976. The televising of the National Assembly, begun in 1977, frustrated the opposition Liberals, whose leader, Claude Ryan, did not understand the demands of the new medium. The PQ did, with government members “more telegenic, better prepared, better organized for the new rules of the game” [Fraser, 1984, p. 170]. It was during the referendum campaign in 1980, however, that the Parti Québécois most brilliantly exploited television. Under the direction of House Leader Claude Charron, the performance of PQ members in the televised National Assembly debates on the referendum was as carefully choreographed as a Broadway musical. As journalist Graham Fraser described it:

Men who had not written or researched a speech in years painstakingly practised delivering them to their wives in basement rec rooms to get the timing and delivery perfect....Lévesque went through his own speech, scribbling changes, mouthing the phrases to judge the effect, altering and improving to the last minute. Charron....coached, co-ordinated, and marshalled the speakers, controlling the flow of debate and stressing first one theme and then another. As PQ members spoke, Lévesque would slip out of his seat to be out of camera range, so as not to be a distraction; Charron would pace the floor, just outside the camera's vision, looking for all the world like a hockey coach or a TV floor director, greeting members coming into the Assembly before their speeches with a slap on the shoulder or a hug, watching the delivery carefully, and flashing his fingers in a countdown to show how much of the allotted time remained. As each speaker finished, the members would gather around him, applauding and shaking his hand. Posed, planned - but effective.

[Fraser, 1984, p. 219]

The effectiveness was limited, however: although it was generally agreed that the PQ won the debate in the National Assembly, it did not win over the voters, who defeated the referendum 60 per cent to 40. The problem, the PQ leadership realized, was that Québec voters had been frightened by the prospect of change, and for the 1981 provincial election, they designed a strategy based on reassurance. Again, the party used the televised hearings of the National Assembly to get its message across in the run-up to the election: first, with the constitutional standing committee hearings, in which the federal government's Charter of Rights was repeatedly attacked; and secondly, the hearings on Hydro-Québec's \$55.5-billion development plan, which highlighted Québec's technological expertise. The campaign itself was, as Fraser notes, "a textbook example of a well-organized, well-structured, well-marketed campaign. Carpentier [Michel Carpentier, Lévesque's executive assistant] and the other strategists had learned from the referendum defeat: this time, there was to be no challenge to the electorate, no sense of risk, no defensiveness." [Fraser, 1984, p. 207] Against most of the predictions, the PQ won.

That was the last victory of the Parti Québécois until 1994. In 1981 Lévesque suffered a humiliating defeat when prime minister Pierre Trudeau and the other nine Canadian provinces engineered an agreement on constitutional reform that isolated Québec during the famous "night of the long knives". Soon after the constitutional accord, Lévesque "became the target of a strange anonymous whispering campaign" [Fraser, 1984, p. 319] concerning his private life, unusual for Canada and particularly Québec, where the personal peccadilloes of politicians are usually off-limits for the media. As Graham Fraser

recalls, over a period of a year, reporters at newspaper and radio stations began receiving calls saying that Lévesque's marriage was in trouble, citing various reasons, which, on investigation, were found to be untrue. The worst one was that Lévesque's father-in-law had laid charges against him for corrupting a minor - his wife's younger sister. There were no such charges; his wife did not have a younger sister. It was not until Lévesque's wife publicly protested the repeated questioning from journalists who were trying to check the accuracy of the stories that the calls just as mysteriously stopped. The premier's staff believed, quite rightly, that he and his wife "were victims of an insidious black propaganda campaign - all the more effective because of Lévesque's reputation as a womanizer." [Fraser, 1984, p. 320] It was a peculiar and rather ugly episode in Québec politics.

In June of 1985 Lévesque retired, and in December of that year the Parti Québécois was soundly defeated by the Liberals. Three years later Lévesque was dead of a heart attack. It was not until the 1990s that the independence movement in Québec had as popular and powerful a leader, in the person of Lucien Bouchard, who "combined the class of Trudeau, the common touch of René Lévesque and the fire of Réal Caouette, the passionate populist who led the Créditiste party in the 1960s and '70s. There had rarely been a mix more potent." [Martin, 1997, p. 254]

### **Lucien Bouchard and The Dance of The Seven Veils**

From his early days as a young student, Lucien Bouchard demonstrated talent in journalism, first writing for the college paper in Jonquière, and then as a stringer for *La Presse*, distinguishing himself as "an extremely active and efficient correspondent, sending *La Presse* far more stories than it could possibly handle." [Martin, 1997, p.43] At Laval University he was as devoted to his duties as editor of the student paper as he was to the study of law. Despite the brevity of his journalism career, it evidently gave him the skills to manipulate the media, which he could play "like a symphony orchestra" [Martin, 1997, p. 310], and often did. Central to Bouchard's view of political communications strategy was his absolute control, "overseeing even minor press releases as environment minister or with the Bloc. Virtually everything came under his purview." [Martin, 1997, p. 313] This often led to conflicts with journalists and Bloc MPs alike.

For the first three years of the Bloc's existence, it was an endless struggle for the party to get any coverage at all of its activities in the House of Commons. Without official party status, it was almost impossible for them to get any questions in during the all-important Question Period, and when they did, it

would usually be late in the day when the reporters had gone. The staff of Bloc strategist Jean Lapierre got around this by letting them know when a Bloc MP was going to ask a question, so there would be someone there to cover it. The group of MPs were also struggling with each other; the tension generated by their difficulties as a minority group in parliament led to personality conflicts which often threatened to break out into open warfare [Cornellier, 1995]. But despite these, the polls showed that "the Bloc and their leader were winning the battle for public opinion." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 45] However, the party needed a structure and a clearly-stated purpose. A new manifesto was drawn up emphasizing that the Bloc must explain Québec's point of view to the rest of Canada, stating that "One of the missions of the Bloc Québécois is to expose federal disinformation by speaking directly to English Canada." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 52]

It was the provincial Parti Québécois that came to the rescue with an organization plan when the members of the Bloc finally agreed in 1991 to become a formal political party rather than just a coalition. PQ strategists offered to help and put together an executive structure for the party, including commissions on legal affairs, policy, and communications. By January of 1992 a communications strategy had been drawn up "that would allow the Bloc to clarify its position on the political map" [Cornellier, 1995, p. 56], with the long-term goal of electing 60 MPs and the short-term one of setting up a small office team including a press agent for Bouchard. There was some distrust generated by power struggles between the two party organizations, but during the referendum campaign against the Charlottetown Accord (which proposed some complex and contradictory constitutional reforms), the Bloc and the PQ established a cooperative relationship that continues to the present day. PQ leader Jacques Parizeau called on Bouchard to help him in the referendum campaign; in return he would do the same for him in the up-coming federal election. "The PQ leader would tour the major centres, covered by the national press, and Bouchard would tour the regions. It was clear that the opposite would be true during the federal elections." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 65] Bouchard's dynamic performance helped defeat the Accord, a victory for sovereigntist forces in Québec, who felt it "was not Meech-plus, but Meech-less" [Martin, 1997, p. 236], and raised the profile of the Bloc as well as strengthening its organization.

When the 1993 federal election was called, the PQ machine was there to help, and provided professional expertise in advertising and polling, exchanging frequent memos. It also co-operated on the BQ's "massive direct mail campaign" [Cornellier, 1995, p. 78]. The Bloc, like the Scottish National Party, was handicapped by its lack of access to television advertising, and could only

purchase five minutes of air time for election broadcasting (under federal regulations, television stations had to provide 390 minutes of paid air time for election advertising divided among the parties by a broadcasting arbitrator). However, it made the most of what time it had, running ads run during *La Petite Vie*, one of Québec's most popular shows, and in addition, advertised on buses and billboards, and turned out large numbers of balcony and lawn signs. The party's media strategy focused on the people who had voted "No" during the Charlottetown referendum - francophones between 18 and 49 with some post secondary education - because they made up 40 per cent of Bloc supporters [Cornellier, 1995, p. 79]. The party's slogan, "*On se donne le vrai pouvoir*" (We will have the real power) was one that would appeal to this young and well-educated group.

Bouchard had to carry the burden of the campaign, as the other Bloc candidates were so little known. A poll taken half-way through revealed that only a third of francophone Québec voters knew who the Bloc candidates were in their constituency [Cornellier, 1995, p.80]. Fortunately, he was up to the task, handling the stresses of scrums, meeting with the Toronto press, and most importantly, learning how to use television, although he deplored the fact that leaders "are asked to reduce to ten seconds our thinking on anything and everything." [Martin, 1997, p. 240] As always, coverage of the Bloc and its leader was polarized between French and English Canada. "From one media perspective, Bouchard was trying to break up the country. From another, he was on the noble road towards creating one. From such divergent starting points, it was small wonder journalists saw the news differently." [Martin, 1997, p. 247]

Where Bouchard shone was in the television debates among the five leaders of Canada's major political parties, held first in English and then in French on subsequent nights and broadcast by the CBC. He was helped by a pre-debate strategy designed to prevent expectations of his performance being too high, with party spin-doctors suggesting to reporters on the campaign trail and political pundits that Bouchard was up against some tough competition in Jean Chrétien and prime minister Kim Campbell. The Bloc "did not need a knockout to succeed...its only goal was to get its message across." [Cornellier, 1995, p. 82] Bouchard followed the line promoted by his communications experts, and confessed that he was worried about the debates with such "very tough and clever challengers" [Cornellier, p. 82]. The strategy worked as planned, and the party's insistence on having Bloc supporters among the analysts in the post-debate broadcasts also helped.

During the campaign BQ staff frequently surveyed voters throughout the province as to their views, and found that the party's appeal was based not just

on Bouchard and a support for sovereignty, but “also a hostility to the old parties, a profound disillusionment that has led people to try something else.” [Cornellier, 1995, p. 83] Bouchard attempted to cater to this disillusioned federalist sector in Québec, but this occasionally led to a confused message, as he pledged to both fight for sovereignty in parliament as well as use it to forward Québec interests on the federal level. Support for the Bloc continued to grow throughout the campaign, with polls repeatedly showing the party garnering enough votes to become the official opposition, which it did October 25, winning 54 seats with 49.5 per cent of the vote in Québec.

Within five days of the party being elected, Bouchard began revving up the Bloc’s parliamentary machine, which in its discipline and concentration of power on the leader was unique in Ottawa. He was not a believer in delegating tasks, particularly the role of party spokesperson. As Manon Cornellier, a francophone parliamentary press gallery reporter for Canadian Press observed at the time:

Few MPs have had a chance to make an impact. Bouchard is at the centre of everything. He maintains a high profile in the House, dominating not only question period, as one would expect from the leader of the opposition, but also contact with the media. On a day when Bouchard gives a scrum, it is very rare for another Bloc MP to do so as well.

[Cornellier, 1995, p. 90]

MPs were not allowed to talk to reporters without first getting permission from the press office. This irritated them as well as journalists, as one francophone parliamentary reporter recalled:

“They had a lot of problems with media relations. It started under Bouchard; they were very controlling....What they would do for instance would be to control every call made by MPs to reporters. For instance, I would call a MP at his office either in his riding or from here, and his secretary would tell me, ‘Oh, he has to go through communications’, so we would need their approval. And also after Question Period, we went to see people for communication and ask them, ‘Can we see so-and-so because we want to talk about him’, and of course they would ask us, ‘What is the subject?’, and sometimes even we would tell them the subject and they would say, ‘Oh no, we have already talked about that’; they were very controlling to the point that there was a little of a revolt by the caucus.”

Bouchard’s main concern was that the Bloc present an image of responsibility and decorum; he was “so afraid of gaffes” [Cornellier, 1995, p. 92] that Bloc members were not allowed to make attacks on other MPs, indulge in insults, or

come to parliament unprepared. The goal was to score points in the media by concentrating on Question Period, the most-covered event in the House of Commons, and in this Bouchard succeeded. At least two hours a day were spent in preparation, and Bouchard led dress rehearsals for the MPs in which he advised them "on what to say and how to say it." [Martin, 1997, p. 264] The results were soon apparent.

From the time parliament began sitting in mid-January 1994, the Bloc proved a skilful player of this media game. It was surprisingly dynamic. Its questions were sharp, its tone spirited but polite. On top of what was happening, Bouchard's team kept after the government. The media had copy every day.

[Cornellier, 1995, p. 100]

The Bloc did not just focus on matters concerning Québec. The party won plaudits for its defence of Canadian culture after the government consented to the sale of Ginn Publishing Canada to an American firm. The deal contradicted the government's own policy of disallowing such sales if there were potential Canadian buyers. Bouchard "put himself and the Bloc through exhaustive preparation on the issue" [Martin, 1997, p. 264], and questioned the Conservatives about it day after day, surprising the anglophone journalists, and making "the Ginn affair" a front-page story. By defending Canadian nationalism, Bouchard and his advisors believed they would win support for Québec nationalism as well. *Globe and Mail* columnist Giles Gherson expressed a common view of the BQ's performance when he wrote: "Parliament Hill veterans hate to say it, but they do anyway: they're impressed with the Bloc Québécois." [Cited in Cornellier, 1995, p. 101]

Although masterful in the House of Commons, Bouchard's varying positions on national unity issues often got him into trouble, and the journalists began to notice. As Lysiane Gagnon wrote in *La Presse*: "The man is playing so many different and contradictory roles that one wonders how he manages to remember who he is when he gets up in the morning." [Cited in Martin, 1997, p. 265] His characteristic practice of giving one interpretation of an event and then back-tracking with a convoluted explanation was exercised to the full after his brush with death when he contracted necrotizing fasciitis, or flesh-eating disease. While fighting for his life, he had scribbled a note to his doctors saying "*Que l'on continue, merci*" ("Carry on, thank you"). Some people saw the message as a political one, urging the sovereigntist movement to continue; Bouchard's own staff thought it was just a straightforward instruction to his doctors, and put out



a statement to that effect. Bouchard gave an interview to a Radio-Canada reporter saying that his words had a political connotation for Québec's future without him. When Bouchard realized the confusion caused by the contradiction between his statement and his staff's, he tried "to make it appear it was a message of both medical and political significance." [Martin, 1997, p. 272]

Bouchard's media machinations before his dramatic return to the House of Commons resulted in even more controversy.

Bouchard redefined the term 'exclusive interview'. He gave about a dozen of them. To get one of these soul-baring exclusives, news organizations had to pass certain criteria. The stories had to run on the front page and they would follow in appropriate sequence. Exclusives given to more favoured outlets had to come first....The story soon became not the Bouchard comeback but the tawdry fashion in which he was apparently exploiting it.

[Martin, 1997, p. 273]

To its credit, *La Presse*, Montréal's largest-circulation broadsheet, refused to take part in what the paper's political columnist Chantal Hébert described as "the dance of the seven veils", and did not interview Bouchard. His stage-managing of the coverage may have been expected - the event was truly a God-given gift for a politician - but his actions seemed just a little too calculating.

Bouchard used the media again as a means of undermining his former ally Jacques Parizeau, announcing a major change, or "*virage*" for sovereigntist strategy in a speech at a Bloc convention without consulting him. Parizeau received his copy of the speech at the same time as the press, as Bouchard's call for a "*virage*", a word chosen by him and his advisers to get headlines, was bound to anger the Québec premier. Bouchard wanted the upcoming referendum to be used to give Québec a partnership with Canada similar to that of nations in the European Union, and he wanted it delayed in order to do so.

But that was not a decision for Bouchard, leader of a federal party - federal party leaders do not, as a general rule of politics in Canada, get involved in provincial campaigns - and Parizeau had already said the referendum would be held within the year, and that he was opposed to "Maastricht-style solutions." [Martin, 1997, p. 277] The press leapt all over the story, particularly the conflict between the two men over the timing of the referendum, which continued as Parizeau defended his role as the premier, and Bouchard threatened not to campaign in the referendum if his ideas were not accepted.

Bouchard also began negotiations with Mario Dumont, the leader of the Action démocratique du Québec, a minority nationalist party, to join in the referendum campaign. Parizeau was forced to come on side, and in June, the leaders of the three parties signed an agreement outlining the terms of the referendum and the negotiations with the federal government that would follow a successful "Yes" vote. If no agreement was reached with Ottawa within a year, Québec would declare independence. (These terms proved to be a contentious issue during the 1997 federal election campaign for the Bloc Québécois, as we shall see in chapter seven.) The significance of the event was not appreciated by either the politicians or the press in Ottawa.

As the referendum campaign began, Bouchard was relegated to Ottawa, while Parizeau, never known for his ability to connect with the people, led the charge in Québec. He was reluctant to follow Bouchard's strategy of emphasizing economic partnership with the rest of Canada, and this, along with his personal unpopularity, seriously threatened the sovereigntist campaign. Influential figures within the Parti Québécois urged him to give more responsibility to Bouchard. His back against the wall, Parizeau agreed, appointing Bouchard chief negotiator for the sovereigntists with the federal government. What this effectively meant, however, was that Bouchard was now in charge, and would determine the referendum strategy (including political communications).

His earlier statements that this was to be a civil campaign were soon forgotten. Bouchard bitterly attacked those he saw as being disloyal to sovereignty. "Anyone who wasn't a sovereignist fell under his sword....Now he heaped scorn on all those who laboured inside the federal system." [Martin, 1997, p. 294] It was a long list, including former Conservative colleagues Jean Charest and Brian Mulroney, Daniel Johnson, leader of the Québec Liberals, the premiers of New Brunswick and Ontario, and most particularly Jean Chrétien, whom he described as "a traitor. The little guy from Shawinigan, whose family had lived on Quebec soil for 300 years, was anti-Quebec. It was a form of intolerance rarely witnessed in modern Canadian politics." [Martin, 1997, p. 296] Bouchard also emphasized Québec's historical grievances, listing off the defeat at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, the crushing of the 1837 rebellion, the hanging of Louis Riel, the conflicts over conscription in World One and Two, and the night of the long knives, "making all these events sound like they took place last summer." [Martin, 1997, p. 284] It was the politics of resentment, not the self-affirmation that had seemed to characterize Québec since the Quiet Revolution.

Bouchard did not rely entirely on negativism. He was keen to reassure Quebecers that there would be nothing but positive consequences if they chose sovereignty. At a rally in Montréal he said that "A Yes had magical meaning because with a wave of a wand it will change the whole situation. The day after sovereignty there will be no more federalists, no more sovereignists. There will only be Quebeckers." [Cited in Martin, 1997, p. 294] Sovereignty would bring economic benefits, not hardships, and there would be no more conflicts with the rest of Canada which would then "be able to design and shape the kind of country they want." [Cited in Martin, 1997, p. 294] However, Bouchard was not clear on the details as to how this would be achieved, and refused to release studies commissioned by Parizeau on the probable effects of sovereignty. It is difficult to determine if Bouchard was deliberately misleading the Québec people, as some commentators have suggested, but certainly they were confused. A poll revealed that almost one-third believed that they would still continue to elect MPs to Ottawa after voting in favour of sovereignty [Martin, 1997, p. 298] and almost half believed they could keep their Canadian passports.

The federal government's strategy was essentially passive, and was based on an assumption that the sovereigntists could not win. There was no provision for any change of strategy if it looked as if they would, and so when polls showed the "Yes" side pulling ahead two weeks before the vote, they were unprepared. Most importantly, their campaign lacked heart. As Ed Broadbent, former leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada observed:

During the campaign, most prominent federalists sounded like bank managers threatening to foreclose on the mortgage of a house that was perceived to be losing its value anyway....But people are not cash registers. Men and women do indeed vote partly with their pocket books in mind, but they also have hearts, values, and aspirations....The federal campaign had no soul.

[Broadbent, 1996a, p. 277]

Bouchard's strength was that he appealed to the desire of Quebecers to build a better society, and when he told them that they could do it by having their own government, many chose to believe him. In the 1980 referendum the federal government had been able to portray itself as the guarantor of social benefits, but in 1995 it could no longer do so. The federalist campaign was essentially negative, warning Quebecers of what they could lose if they voted "Yes", but this was no match for Bouchard's "potent fusion of nationalism and social democracy." [Broadbent, 1996a, p. 276] He was also helped by a sympathetic press that was unwilling to examine his statements critically.

As the polls for the “No” side continued to worsen, prime minister Jean Chrétien opened “a small box of news” [Martin, 1997, p. 299] at a major rally in Verdun, promising to recognize Québec as a distinct society, give it a constitutional veto and control over labour-market training. These were old promises, ones contained in a package sent to Québec householders, but the media reported them as if they were new, and the polls began to improve. Then Bouchard made some fatal errors in what had been, up until then, a nearly-flawless campaign.

The first was his use of a front page taken from a Québec newspaper published the day after René Lévesque’s constitutional defeat in 1981 which showed a photo of Pierre Trudeau and Chrétien laughing, next to a headline saying “Lévesque Betrayed by His Allies”. Displaying a blown-up copy of the page, Bouchard accused Chrétien on a national television broadcast of trying to trick the Québec people. The only problem was, the photo was not from the constitutional conference, but from another event. To add insult to injury, Chrétien had, in the interests of fairness, given Bouchard the air-time so he could respond to his address to the nation before the crucial vote, although he was not obligated to do so [Martin, 1997, p. 300]. The front page of the newspaper was employed again as a central prop at the final, major rally of the sovereigntist campaign, displayed on two giant video screens, in which Bouchard and Parizeau attacked Chrétien as well as Trudeau - a tactic that back-fired, as Trudeau was still a popular figure in Québec.

The final mistake of the sovereigntists was not to hold any big event during the final days of the referendum campaign, in contrast to the federalists, who organized the rally in Montréal attended by an estimated 100,000 people, many of whom had travelled from other parts of Canada to attend. Coverage of the event by Québec media was muted: the province’s all-news network reported the crowd to be only 35,000 [Erin Research, 1995]. Bouchard described the rally as a “disgraceful act” [Martin, 1997, p. 305], a statement that did not help the Bloc’s relationship with the rest of Canada. The lack of a final push proved costly to the sovereigntists; they lost the referendum. However, the fact that the vote was so close was seen as a victory of sorts, although Parizeau resigned as premier 24 hours afterwards: his comment that money and the ethnic vote were what lost it was seen as too extreme. Three months later Lucien Bouchard took his place as leader of the Parti Québécois, and in February of 1996, became premier of Québec.

## After Bouchard: The Same Person Talking

Bouchard's departure created a vacuum within the Bloc Québécois. What was needed was a popular leader who could maintain the Bloc's high profile and build on the momentum established by Bouchard in the 1993 election and the 1995 referendum. But the very nature of Bouchard's leadership made that impossible. Power had been concentrated in the hands of a very few individuals within the party organization and only two others Bloc MPs had anything close to Bouchard's media presence: Michel Gauthier and Gilles Duceppe, significantly, the next two leaders of the Bloc. The lack of other voices proved to be a major weakness in the party; as there was no opportunity for new talent to emerge, and it showed. As political communications specialist Denis Monière observed during the Bloc's early days in the House of Commons:

The message is more effective when it's diversified. The more people you have with stature, a profile, credibility, the better the message carries. If you always have the same person talking, people get tired and don't listen as much. Having different faces allows the message to penetrate more deeply.

[Cited in Cornellier, 1995, p. 92]

Although Gauthier had been an aggressive questioner in the House, his lack of fluency in English meant he was largely unknown outside of Québec. The manner in which he was made party leader did not help raise his profile within the province, either; chosen by a group of fewer than 160 people within the party "acting as a 'conclave' electing a new pope, Gauthier was lacking the kind of legitimacy provided by democratic ways of selecting leaders." [Bernard, 1997, p. 136] This made it difficult for him to heal the divisions within the party, worsened by the referendum loss and concern about its future role. In addition, despite his best efforts, he was unable to communicate the Bloc's message to the rest of Canada, or even within Québec. Although he performed well in the House of Commons, his low-key style did not gain him much media attention, so much so that a Groupe Léger & Léger poll done for *Le Journal de Montréal* and the *Globe and Mail* in November of 1996 "found that more Quebeckers were familiar with Reform Party Leader Preston Manning than with Mr. Gauthier." [McIlroy, 1996b] When support for the Bloc dropped from more than 50 per cent down to 40 per cent, almost tied with the federal Liberals, rumblings of dissension over his leadership were heard within the party. On December 2, he announced his resignation, saying that

“The media treatment of me, as a person, was difficult. How I wasn’t well known, how I wasn’t popular. How I didn’t have much to say...It is easier to take when you have a personal ambition to be the leader. That was never my ambition, so my tolerance level was lower.”

[McIlroy, 1996b]

That was not the case with his successor, Gilles Duceppe, who, unlike Gauthier, was well-known throughout Canada as well as in his home province, and had a reputation for eloquence in the Commons. The leadership campaign in which he was elected was supposed to revive the Bloc’s fortunes, but for a variety of reasons (described in chapter seven), did not, and its timing, so close to the federal election, proved to be a big problem for the Bloc’s campaign organization and ultimately the campaign itself.

### **Leadership and Organization: The Bloc versus the SNP**

As we have seen in this chapter, the Scottish National Party, the PQ and the Bloc have used some of the same political strategies in making the case for independence. Certainly they have tried to reassure wary voters on the economic issues, and down-played the negative consequences of separation. But where they differ - and this is of crucial significance for modern political parties - is in the role of leadership and organization.

Research done by Canadian political scientist Neil Nevitte indicates that the future belongs to non-institutional political movements with open, non-hierarchical structures. His analysis of the changes in social values revealed by the World Values Surveys conducted in 1981 and 1990 shows that Scotland and Québec are part of a larger, world-wide pattern, in which institutional authority is being eroded and replaced by citizen participation at the grassroots level. Declining voter participation and public cynicism about politicians and the political process are not signs of disinterest in democracy, he says, but a rejection of the hierarchical nature of traditional party politics. As he explains, “democracy is not so much ‘in crisis’ as in a state of transition. All that is in crisis is ‘old politics’ - the traditional notion that democracies work best when publics are passive, disengaged, and relatively uninformed.” [Nevitte, 1996, p. 75] What this means for political parties is that to be successful, they must be able to involve citizens at the community level, and their support must be built from the ground up. A top-down approach without wide participation from a

broadly-based, activist membership will not appeal to the increasingly educated and informed voter of today.

Québec's nationalist parties, from Duplessis to Bouchard, have often relied on strong, charismatic leaders to get the message across, but they have also had very strong organizations, which enabled them to win members and support. The SNP, on the other hand, has traditionally had less of a focus on its leader, but has had strong organization only intermittently - and when it did have good organization at the community level, performed much better at the polls. Its current success in getting its message across has come from its tightly-knit communications and research team, led by its chief executive in co-operation with the leader of the party, who has had a strong media presence.

However, the SNP's good political communications and its leader's high media profile could not take the place of deep-seated roots in the community, as we shall see in chapter six. In the Québec case, charismatic leaders such as René Lévesque and Lucien Bouchard have undoubtedly helped to advance the nationalist cause, but without the widespread support for nationalism that has permeated all areas of Québec society, from the church and universities to trade unions, business and journalism, the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois would not have been able to garner the thousands of members, the millions of dollars in funds, and the votes they needed to win elections - and keep winning them. In 1997 the Scottish National Party had a clear, focused message, a professional political communications strategy, and an experienced campaign team, but it had just 15,000 members, no endorsements from any major trade union or Scottish civic organization, limited funds, and soon after the campaign started, lost its only editorial support. The consequences of this for the SNP in the 1997 election are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Scottish National Party: Standing Still In A Hurricane

In chapter five we saw how the Parti Québécois, the Bloc Québécois and the Scottish National Party developed their political communications strategies. This chapter looks at how the SNP organized its political communications for the 1997 general election, how effective their communications were in the context of a national campaign, and the reactions of the party strategists and Scottish political journalists to what happened.

On the eve of the 1997 election campaign, the Scottish National Party had reason to believe that in this election they would improve their standing in the polls and more than double their seats. Although party strategists did not expect a major breakthrough, they were hoping to get anywhere from seven to 10 seats, up from the four they currently held and the three won at the last general election in 1992. In fact, Alex Salmond was so sure of this that in one of the more unique pseudo-events of the campaign, he placed a £500 bet with a London bookie that the SNP would win between seven and 40 seats, with the proceeds to go to *The Big Issue*, a magazine which raises funds for the homeless.

There were ample grounds for this optimism. The party was better-prepared than it had ever been before in its history, with more than £550,000 in its campaign fund, a well-integrated election team led by its chief executive, a focused and clear strategy, and all the technology of a modern party, including specialised constituency software and call centres for telephone canvassing. The polls had been consistently more than 20 per cent, on occasion reaching 27 percent; and support for independence was steadily at 30 per cent; the party had the backing of a large-circulation daily, the *Scottish Sun*; and the SNP's communications office was able to place stories about the party in the media on a regular basis.

However, the May 1 results, although an improvement on the 1992 election, were something of a let-down. What the nationalists had not counted on, along with many political pundits, was the extent of the Labour Party's electoral onslaught. Certainly very few could have predicted the complete wipe-out of the Tories in Scotland. Given the overwhelming support for Labour, the fact that the SNP was able to double its seats and increased its share of the popular vote was seen as a victory of sorts by party strategists. As one of them said, "You're doing pretty well if you manage to stand still in the face of a hurricane." Compared to the results for the Bloc Québécois in the Canadian federal election, particularly in light of the Bloc's gaffe-prone campaign, however, the SNP's performance would seem a disappointment, but Scotland is not



Québec, and as we have seen, there were unique cultural, political and historical forces which determined the different outcomes in each territory. In hindsight, there were some things that SNP strategists and the political journalists who reported their campaign thought they could have done differently - specifically, put more heart into it and less head - but there were factors in the campaign that would have made it difficult for the SNP to do that. Here then is an account of how the SNP managed to stand still in the face of the political hurricane of 1997.

### **How The Campaign Was Organized: For The Reporters**

As Holli Semetko points out in her study of election coverage in Britain done for the Canadian Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, the UK is unique among Western democracies in the amount of election news presented in its media [Semetko, 1991, p. 26]. She argues that this is partly due to the legislation governing election broadcasting; another factor is the increasing demand for material generated by the expansion of media outlets, and the technological advances which make it possible to produce more news, more quickly.

However, despite the many changes in newsroom practice and production in recent years, the format of general elections in Britain and in Scotland have remained essentially the same, as outlined by Semetko. The campaign begins with a flurry of manifesto publishing (for which UK voters are expected to pay, unlike in Canada) and platform declaring, and quickly settles into a daily routine of morning press conferences, afternoon "walkabouts", and evening speeches. The 1997 election followed the traditional pattern, with two notable exceptions. The first was the extreme length of the campaign, which ran to almost seven weeks, March 17 to May 1, rather than the usual three or four. The second was Labour's refusal to meet with the press on a regular basis. This was most notable in Scotland, where Labour often cancelled press conferences at the last moment or re-scheduled them to locations away from the central belt, making it difficult for them to be scrutinised by political journalists at the major Scottish dailies. Even when reporters made the effort to follow Tony Blair to Aberdeen during the election campaign, they were not permitted to ask him any questions. As the *Herald's* Scottish political correspondent Robbie Dinwoodie described:

Faced with accusations that Labour was refusing to answer valid questions about gaps or uncertainties in the detail and funding of its policies, Mr Blair contrived to fly into Aberdeen and out again without once making himself available for queries from newspaper journalists who had converged on the Granite City from all over Scotland.

Pupils and teachers at Dyce Academy were given time with him, some broadcasters were granted brief audiences, and he tarried awhile with staff as he formally opened a youth centre...

But no press conference, however brief, was scheduled, and the opportunity for snatched questions between set-piece tableaux for the cameras was virtually eliminated as the presidential-style phalanx around the leader rushed around making up for a half-hour flight delay....

If newspaper reporters hoped to catch the leader on his arrival, they were obliged to stand outside, behind a barrier, in the rain. True to form, after a 20-minute drenching, they watched Mr. Blair emerge from his limousine and stride magisterially past them without a word for them.

[Dinwoodie, 1997b]

This was done as a deliberate strategy by Labour, according to one reporter, because “their main campaign in Scotland was on avoiding errors rather than positively getting good coverage.” (All quotations in this chapter are from the research interviews, unless otherwise stated.) The one advantage for this particular reporter, whose newspaper had very few resources for the election campaign, was that it made it easier for him to do the daily round of party press conferences. This tactic of restricting press access to Blair was part of Labour’s “‘banana-skin’ avoidance machine” [Bartle, Crewe, and Gosschalk, 1998, p. xix], in which the “emphasis was on discipline, repetition and getting across key messages rather than on answering questions from the media or challenges from other parties.” [Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p. 226] In this Labour was not that much different from the other political parties both nation-wide and in Scotland; they were just much better at it, having honed their campaign strategy in the two years before the election in daily meetings on how to manage the media [Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p. 232]. What was different in Scotland, as we shall see, was the response of Scottish political correspondents to this tactic; they were not as willing to accept that “Labour was not in the business of providing ‘interesting’ copy for the media.” [Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p. 226]

The three major broadsheets - the *Herald*, the *Scotsman*, and *Scotland on Sunday* - approached their campaign coverage quite differently. *Scotland on Sunday* chose to focus on what its political editor termed six “weathervane constituencies” which “would provide a sign as to which way the political wind was blowing...if you understood what happens in those six you understand what happens in the whole election.” The paper also deliberately kept its coverage tight, and the editor felt that it benefited from having “the smallest amount of coverage of most of our competitors....The wrong thing you can do in my opinion is have a scatter-gun approach where you just write about everything.” Readers,

especially those of Sunday papers, he thought, needed to have the news condensed down to the basics, and so the paper brought in "humour and snippets", and a diary-style feature each week. The main task of the paper, as he saw it, was to establish the political agenda for the coming week, to be what he called "the first real draft of history", and each Wednesday the editorial staff would try to determine what the focus would be and design the news stories and features around it, "so that by Saturday we would set the agenda for the campaign."

The *Scotsman's* approach was more journeyman-like and thorough, with a large team of reporters working on the general election in both England and Scotland. Interestingly enough, according to the paper's political editor, although there were journalists assigned full-time to Tony Blair and John Major, reporters were "with the Scottish leaders *most* of the time" (emphasis mine). It would seem more appropriate that a newspaper called the *Scotsman* would focus on having full-time coverage of the Scottish leaders rather than of the national ones, but, as the editor himself pointed out, one of the difficulties the paper faced during the campaign was in trying to get the balance right between the UK election coverage "with the almost separate election happening north of the Border. If I was being critical, I would say that there were times when we did not get the balance right but you must remember that instant decisions are being made under pressure."

In addition to the reporters following the leaders, the *Scotsman* had three staff at Westminster, their economics correspondent in London as well as their London reporter for the coverage in England, while in Scotland, the editor said, the paper "had a large number of people out and about", including district correspondents, as well as "columnists and commentators who all got involved not only in reporting, sketching and analysing but in advising the Editor on what we covered and how. Behind the scenes there were large numbers on the news desk and sub-editors, also involved in what was a huge operation for the paper."

In contrast to the *Scotsman*, the *Herald's* campaign coverage was a shoe-string operation, with basically one person assigned to cover everything with additional people brought in as events demanded, and this in spite of the fact that the *Herald* did write features on every one of Scotland's 72 constituencies. As the journalist who had the main responsibility for the paper's political coverage recalled: "There was no great planning that really went into it. I just worked like a dog, and tried as far as possible to co-ordinate with my London colleagues and basically told the news desk when I literally could not be in three places at once." Up to 10 reporters were involved in covering the campaign overall, but there was just three or four doing the daily grind of the election news

in Scotland, and often just the one journalist covering all the daily party press conferences. This lack of resources is found in most Scottish papers, particularly at election time. However, according to one of the reporters I spoke to, this has had the effect of creating “a degree of camaraderie, if you like, between rival political journalists”, peculiar to Scotland.

By and large the Scottish journalists covering the campaign tended to have less experience than their Québec counterparts. None had covered the 1992 election in Scotland, for example, and only one had done any political reporting before then, and that was at Westminster. However, one political journalist saw this as an advantage, in that none of them brought any pre-conceptions to the political situation in Scotland, and were not, in his words, “burdened by the spectre of ‘79” or “responsible for the easy ride the devolution parties got in the ‘92 election”. To be fair, also, Scottish journalists have not needed the same amount of experience and certainly not the same amount of constitutional sophistication as Québec political reporters, where the independence issue has been a central concern in politics for more than 30 years. The best Québec political journalists must have, as a minimum job requirement, an understanding of the basics of both domestic and international constitutional law, as well as an ability to express themselves in both French and English. When Scottish political reporters have to wrestle with the complexities of regional government or debate questions of national identity, they will most likely acquire the same kind of political sophistication.

### **How the Campaign Was Organized: For The Party**

The Scottish National Party’s organization for the 1997 election was based on a completely different assumption from that of 1992 as to what was required for a successful campaign. In the past the party had concentrated on winning the most votes, and had focused its fund-raising and organizing efforts in the four to six weeks of the campaign. This time, the party’s energy went into providing support for winnable seats, and building up its funds and establishing its campaign team at headquarters long before the election was to be called. As one party strategist explained:

“I think our prospects, the seeds of our prospects, are sowed much earlier than what happens in the three weeks of an election campaign. In a sense all my political organizational instincts tell me that all an election campaign is about motivation, and the strength of your campaign is really constructed by what you have done in the preceding years.”

As a result, as early as the spring of 1996 the party had eight call centres canvassing in targeted constituencies, and specialised election computer software in operation throughout Scotland. The party was also working on drafting detailed policies, complete with cost analyses. In October of 1996 the SNP's Director of Organization, Allison Hunter, went to the U.S. for two weeks to study the presidential, congressional and state election campaigns as part of the Voluntary Visitor Program of the U.S. Information Agency. While there she met with both Democrat and Republican party organisers, looking at how they managed everything from fund-raising to media relations and constituency organization [SNP, 1996c].

By February of 1997, the SNP had brought in more than £500,000 through the co-ordination of its various fund raising programs and the introduction of new fund raising techniques begun in 1991. A membership drive was begun to increase the SNP's numbers, which were at a rather modest 15,000. (To give a Canadian comparison, in 1997 the western-based Reform Party had approximately 24,000 members in British Columbia, whose population then was close to four million.) A 12-member general election planning unit had been in place for several months, an outgrowth of the election planning unit established after the 1992 election which had been meeting regularly three to four times a year to plan the party's strategy. There was a record number of 20 election staff at the Edinburgh headquarters, in addition to the seven constituency staff. This was supplemented by a Leader's Unit of three people, whose responsibility was to handle all the arrangements for the party leader during the campaign, a first for the SNP, as well as by an Overseas Media Unit of three people fluent in German, French and Spanish to arrange interviews for the international press. Among the staff at headquarters were some new positions that proved to be key to the SNP's continued success in its media relations during the campaign; in particular, that of Andrew Wilson, senior research officer and a former Scottish Office economist, whose knowledge of government finance helped the SNP break the story that became the centrepiece of its election strategy. Alex Bell, a former broadcaster, performed a new role for the party as an assistant to the chief executive on the making of the SNP's party election broadcasts, as well as being in charge of photo opportunities and what the head of communications referred to as "stunts".

The typical day for the SNP's communications staff of five was a long one after the campaign officially began in mid-March, beginning at half-past six in the morning and going until 10 pm or later. The first task of the day was the preparation of a media coverage summary running to no more than two pages, which was given to senior staff at their main meeting each morning at 8 am. This

would be followed by the daily press conference, and then a photo-call. The rest of the day was, as the communications director described it, "a run of continually putting out news stories, responding, rebutting attacks, attacking opponents", while the overnight communication to the candidates was put together. These daily briefings, usually sent by fax or e-mail to all the candidates, made the SNP's campaign much more cohesive than it had been in the past, by ensuring that everyone was "on message" and aware of what was happening. The additional resources given to the campaign also meant that the party was able for the first time to provide detailed rebuttals to the media, whereas in the past, according to the communications director, "they wouldn't have even bothered to think of expecting it."

The extraordinary length of the campaign, however, put great strain on those resources - the eventual cost to the SNP was £600,000, compared to the £120,000 the party spent in 1992 - and although the SNP's superior organization this time around enabled the party to keep focused for the duration, it created problems as to how it got its message across.

### **The Run-Up To The Campaign**

The 1997 British election was one that seemed to go on forever, its 45 days of active campaigning preceded by several months of political foreplay culminating in a pre-election campaign that began in early January. By the time John Major finally called the election March 17, almost all the main themes of the election campaign in Scotland had been established: devolution, and the role of the Scottish National Party and the Conservatives within it; the debunking of Scotland's image as a "subsidy junkie"; the SNP's struggle for broadcasting access; and the increasingly presidential style of UK election contests.

The question of leadership was highlighted when a System Three report on the views of Scottish floating voters prepared for the Scottish Labour Party was leaked to the Scottish media in December of 1996 when Tony Blair made a visit to Scotland. (According to the SNP, the report arrived in a plain brown paper envelope at the home of Allison Hunter three weeks before Blair's arrival, and one day before it was allegedly stolen from the car of Labour's assistant Scottish general secretary Tommy Sheppard.) The focus groups consulted in September of that year perceived Blair to be too middle-class and right-wing, as well as false and untrustworthy. By contrast, the floating voters felt that Alex Salmond was "the only leader with obvious Scottish connections, and it is accepted without question that he understands the Scottish psyche." [System Three, 1996] However, understanding the Scottish psyche was not necessarily

enough, as journalist Kenny Farquharson pointed out in an article on Salmond's leadership. The SNP leader's greatest strength - his ability as an economist - was also his weakness, in that his enthusiasm for number-crunching was not one shared by the general public.

As a former economist he is masterly in his command of the dry debates about oil revenues, tax takes and unidentified expenditures central to the nationalists' case....The question is whether he has the mettle to inspire the self-belief that Nationalists feel is a pre-requisite of an SNP surge.

[Farquharson, 1997a]

It was a legitimate concern; one that was later mentioned by both SNP strategists and political reporters as a factor in the effectiveness of the party's election message.

The System Three report also highlighted the importance of devolution, which was central to the campaign in Scotland and a key element in the support for the Labour Party. As the report explained:

The devolution issue had greater significance than might be apparent in looking at the percentage of Scots who want to see this happen. The whole debate has taken on a symbolic role. For some this discussion is about the very soul of the Scottish nation. Others see it more prosaically as a symbol of commitment to meeting the needs of the Scottish people.

[System Three, 1996]

The SNP was vulnerable on this issue because it refused to say where it stood. Despite repeated questioning, Alex Salmond had not disclosed the party's intentions concerning the referendum on devolution, and it was the strict policy of all those in the party hierarchy not to reveal what the SNP planned to do if Labour won, and the referendum was held. News releases from party headquarters referred to "Blair's rigged referendum" and called for a question on independence to be placed on the ballot. However, pressure began to build on the party leadership to change its stance as the election drew closer, particularly when James Mitchell, then a senior lecturer in politics at Strathclyde University, and who was said to be "held in high esteem by the SNP", urged the party to make a commitment to a "Yes" vote [MacMahon, 1997a]. When the *Scotsman* reported January 22 that the nationalists were beginning to re-consider this policy, the SNP issued a news release rebutting what leader Alex Salmond termed "an entirely fabricated story" [SNP, 1997c]. However, just eight days

later in a speech to the Scottish European Association in Brussels, he seemed to indicate that the party would be willing to back devolution. "I am not conceding our platform of Scottish independence, but we won't obstruct devolution", Salmond said [Ritchie and Dinwoodie, 1997]. It could be argued that this was just a re-affirmation of the party's oft-stated policy that it would "not obstruct steps towards a legislative assembly", but the timing was certainly auspicious. It did not, however, change the vocabulary of the party's debate; SNP news releases continued to label the devolution referendum as "Blair's rigged referendum" ad nauseam.

In the same speech Salmond also made the first of many references to the admission by William Waldegrave, chief secretary to the treasury, that Scotland had contributed a surplus of £26.7 billion to British government revenues since 1979. Waldegrave's figures came in the form of a written parliamentary answer to questions raised by Alex Salmond in the House of Commons and drafted by Andrew Wilson, the former Scottish Office economist now on the SNP staff [Young, 1997]. This £27 billion subsidy to London, as numerous SNP press releases described it, became a recurring theme in the party's election publicity, and was widely perceived as one of their biggest propaganda coups, for it seemed to contradict the oft-stated view that Scotland could not survive economically outwith the Union because it was "a haven for subsidy junkies" [Young, 1997].

The Scottish National Party received another propaganda coup in early February when Conservative health minister Stephen Dorrell, in his subsidiary role as government spokesman on constitutional affairs, told the *Scotsman* in an interview that a future Tory government would abolish or alter the Scottish parliament if it was felt necessary. This was in direct contradiction to the position taken by Secretary of State Michael Forsyth, who had often warned against a devolved assembly, saying that once it was created, it could not be undone. "The idea that you could make this particular omelette and somehow the Tories could turn the omelette back into eggs is pure fantasy", he had said as early as 1996 [Penman, 1997a]. Dorrell was technically correct, of course: there was no constitutional barrier to abolishing the parliament if the government so wished. However, his words seemed to bolster the SNP's argument against devolution, for as the lead editorial in the *Scotsman* pointed out the day after, "Dorrell's foolishness amounts to a real question: what is a devolved parliament worth if it can be dissolved at Westminster's whim?" [Scotsman, 1997a] It also added to the perception that the Conservatives were essentially an anti-Scottish party, out of touch with the hopes and aspirations of the Scottish people.



While the controversy over Dorrell's remarks continued, the SNP scored another victory in its skirmish with the Labour Party and the Radio Authority over its party political broadcasts. For the first time in its history the party was able to send its message UK-wide, going out on Virgin Radio, Talk Radio and Classic FM, which were unable to restrict their programs to specific regions. Although Labour had opposed the allocation of time on the three commercial stations because the SNP's broadcast would be heard on the entire network and not just confined to Scotland, it was unsuccessful. The two-and-a-half minute message focused, of course, on the £27 billion London subsidy and, as the SNP release announcing the broadcast said, "the news that Scotland has bankrolled the Tory government's anti-Scottish policies since 1979." [SNP, 1997d]

Alex Salmond also performed well in a *Scotsman*/ICM poll on Scottish party leaders conducted the week of February 11 to 14, rated as the toughest of the four in Scotland and the one most likely to understand the nation's problems. In addition, he received the highest score for having lots of personality, but even so, the SNP at 26 per cent in the polls was still trailing far behind Labour, at 41 per cent [MacMahon, 1997b]. (Michael Forsyth, was rated as the most arrogant, the least trustworthy, the most insincere and the least understanding of Scotland's problems and its people.)

The first allegations of municipal corruption were aired in early February as well, when Glasgow City Council leader Robert Gould accused his Labour colleagues on council of promising votes in return for the opportunity to go on council-paid trips abroad, in what came to be known as the "junkets for votes" scandal. The SNP responded by calling for local governments to be elected by proportional representation, thus ensuring a stronger opposition on councils that could effectively block what it described as Labour's "one party states" in Scotland [SNP, 1997e]. The issue of local government sleaze was one that came back to haunt Labour after the election, but during the campaign, was kept muted by the party.

In the first week of March, Labour received a poll shock: it was down six percentage points, from 52 to 46, but tellingly enough, no one party was the beneficiary. It later turned out to be a rogue poll in a consistent pattern of Labour's increasing popularity as the election in Scotland continued. However, as Malcolm Dickson noted in his analysis of the poll, the SNP's standing at 26 per cent revealed a fairly strong base of support which could eventually threaten Labour.

If, as now appears more likely than ever, Mr Blair does enter No. 10 Downing Street, then he must prove he is capable of delivering change in Scotland. If he fails, either because of

problems nationally or in the setting up of a Scottish parliament, then he does risk a long-term shift of votes to the SNP.

[Dickson, 1997a]

Alex Salmond certainly seemed to think that this was a possibility. In an interview with *The Big Issue* (which featured a cover photo of him looking soulfully towards the heavens while ripping open his shirt to reveal a tartan superman outfit beneath his pin-striped suit) he stated that the inevitability of an SNP majority in the first election to a Scottish assembly was "one reason why I seriously doubt there's any real intention on the part of the Labour leadership to fulfil their commitment." [Trotter, 1997]

Despite this intransigence on the part of the SNP leader, George Robertson, Shadow Secretary of State, was prepared to invite SNP members to work with Labour on winning the devolution referendum following the election in his speech to the Scottish Labour Party conference March 8. This gesture was prompted by the information gained from Labour's own polling that SNP supporters would be vital to the success of the referendum vote, and therefore it was important not to alienate them at this stage [MacMahon, 1997c]. Robertson did not help matters, however, when he said at the launch of Labour's "Covenant with Scotland" March 13 (with the powerfully symbolic backdrop of the Wallace Monument behind him) that the new Scottish parliament would most likely not be able to use its tax-varying powers until 2002, the most likely date for the next general election. His announcement only added to the confusion and cynicism about the depth of Labour's commitment to the parliament, and irked party supporters who only found out about this apparent change of policy when they heard it on television [MacMahon, 1997d].

The SNP had been aware for some years that reassuring the business community about the effects of independence on the Scottish economy was crucial to its acceptance in Scotland, and during the run-up to the campaign the party launched two initiatives geared toward that community. On February 25 the party published a policy document "Delivering a Competitive Advantage for Scottish Business" which outlined the SNP's proposals for business taxation, designed, as SNP deputy treasury spokesperson Fergus Ewing said, to make Scotland "the lion economy" of Europe through a scheme of tax cuts [SNP, 1997f]. Of course, since the proposals were predicated on Scotland being independent, and the assumption that there would be £12.5 billion in North Sea oil revenues over the next five years, it was hard to prove or disprove how sound these proposals were.

The party followed this up on March 12 with the launch of the SNP-sponsored group, Business for Independence, chaired by David McCarthy, retired director of Unilever's Marine Harvest, "the world's biggest salmon farming company" [SNP, 1997i], and joined by Dennis MacLeod, former chair of Caledonian Mining, an international gold mining company. McCarthy, originally from England, and MacLeod, a Scots-born Canadian, hoped to convince Scottish businessmen of "the commercial case for going it alone" [Stokes, 1997] through a direct mailing of 10,000 copies of its strategy document, "Making Scotland World Class - a Business Case for Independence" to members of the business community. Perhaps the degree of their success can be judged by the fact that McCarthy and MacLeod, along with three other prominent business figures in Scotland, set up a new campaigning group for the SNP, Business for Scotland, a year later, but this time with enough money to fund seminars, conferences, briefings and regular supplements in the trade magazine *Scottish Business Insider* [Ritchie, 1998].

The first rumblings of conflict over the SNP's access to the television broadcasting networks during the election began in early March when John Major and Tony Blair initiated discussions about arrangements for a television debate with executives of the BBC and ITV. Mike Russell, the SNP's chief executive and the party's campaign director for the general election, wrote to the broadcasters warning that the SNP would begin legal proceedings against them if Salmond was excluded from the debate [SNP, 1997g]. This was followed by an announcement on March 7 by Russell that the party leadership had decided to appoint a senior counsel to examine the party's legal options not only in terms of participation in any debate, but also in the case of what Russell termed as the "blatantly unfair" live coverage that BBC Scotland was giving to the Scottish Labour conference in Inverness [SNP, 1997h]. Despite the SNP's aggressive approach to this issue, they were ultimately unsuccessful, and this turned out to be one of several set-backs the party experienced in terms of its ability to get its message across in the media during the election.

### **The Campaign Itself: The *Sun* Loses Heart**

On Monday, March 17, John Major finally announced the date of the election. The following day, the English edition of the *Sun* showed a smiling picture of Tony Blair with the headline in what is known in newspaper parlance as Second Coming type: "The Sun Backs Blair". By contrast, the Scottish edition showed a smiling Major and Salmond and a worried-looking Blair next to a map of Scotland emblazoned with a saltire, and the headline "Battle Nations". The next

day showed quite a different picture: on Wednesday the *Scottish Sun* again displayed the saltire, but this time with the headline: "Brave hearts must wait...it's time for brave heads", with the sub-head, "Why The Scottish Sun Is Backing Blair". In the first week of the campaign, the SNP had lost the editorial support of the one paper that had ever consistently backed it, and this after five-and-a-half years. As is the pattern for Scotland, the change in the newspaper's policy was imposed from above, for market reasons, not because there had been a change of heart in the newsroom staff, who were said to support independence and had succumbed under considerable pressure during "a strained 24 hours between Glasgow and London" [Dinwoodie and Langdon, 1997]. As Brian Wilson, Labour MP and party spin-doctor commented in the *West Highland Free Press* (which he founded), "What the press lord giveth, the press lord taketh away" [Scotland on Sunday, 1997].

The SNP interpreted the *Sun's* stance as being the result of Tony Blair's deal-making with Rupert Murdoch. In a news release issued the night before the *Scottish Sun* published its change of heart, SNP chief executive Mike Russell said:

The editorial independence of the Scottish Sun is the latest victim of Blair's dictatorial approach to Scotland. Whatever bargain he has struck, and whatever he had been prepared to offer for it, part of the price has been the silencing of the free and independent voice of the Scottish Sun.

[SNP, 1997j]

However, Blair stated in an interview with the *New Statesman* later that week that Labour had "never traded policies with Rupert Murdoch in return for the support of his papers", but at the same time said that the party would not use legislation to restrict his media acquisitions [Penman, 1997b].

It is difficult to ascertain if the *Sun's* change of editorial policy had any affect on the success of the SNP's campaign; however, in the System Three poll the week after, conducted the Thursday and Friday following the paper's volte face, the SNP's rating fell to 20 per cent, its lowest in five years, and a drop of six percentage points. This was even lower than its standing in the 1992 election, and contrary to the pattern of recent years, when it had consistently polled at or above 25 per cent. Malcolm Dickson's analysis for the *Herald* rejected the view that the loss of the *Sun's* editorial support was the cause of the SNP's poor showing. The drop in SNP support had occurred not in the paper's key readership groups of young people and men but rather, among older readers, who tended to be traditional Labour supporters. For these voters, "the apparent irresistible move towards a Labour government may be too much of a

temptation" now that Labour, at 52 per cent, looked certain to form the government [Dickson, 1997b]. In his analysis of the ICM poll results earlier in the week, John Curtice expressed doubt that the *Sun's* desertion to Labour could adversely affect the SNP, citing a British Election Panel Study that indicated newspapers have only "a marginal influence on their readers" [Curtice, 1997].

The SNP suffered a further setback when it lost its court case against Scottish Television and Grampian over the exclusion of Alex Salmond from the proposed television debates among Blair, Major and Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats. Negotiations with the BBC and ITV began after Major agreed to talks with the networks, but the SNP immediately began plans for legal action when it learned that Salmond was not being considered as a participant. On March 26 the party applied for a court order preventing Scottish and Grampian from broadcasting any political debate among the leaders before May 1 that did not include him on an equal basis. The SNP's argument was that by excluding Salmond the television networks were in violation of their duty of impartiality in matters of political controversy [McKain, 1997]. The Court of Session judge, Lord Eassie, ruled against them March 28, the same day that Labour pulled out of the negotiations with the BBC and ITV, citing differences over the time allocated among the three leaders, the number of debates, and their length [Parker, Dalton, Penman, 1997]. In his judgement Eassie stated that broadcasters should be the ones to decide how to fulfil their duty of impartiality during the election, and this should be based on their total coverage, not just one programme. In addition, he said, the debate was hypothetical, because no details had been set nor a broadcaster chosen to show it (as events later in the day certainly proved). The SNP put a brave face on the ruling, saying that it had established a legal precedent for fairer coverage.

The final blow for the SNP during that week, although not as serious, was the decision by the maker of "Independence" whisky to drop the SNP logo from its bottles because it was losing business from pub owners who did not like giving publicity to the party. Joseph Senior, director of the Edinburgh-based Independence Scotland Ltd. and a strong nationalist, had launched the label in 1991 with the slogan "Rise now and be a nation again" printed over a saltire and the SNP's looped thistle logo, but sales were poor, and part of the problem, Senior said, was that many who first bought the whisky did so in anticipation of drinking it when Scotland won independence [Morrison and McNeil, 1997].

The SNP was also handicapped in its media coverage by the amount of column inches devoted to Tory sleaze in Scotland, in particular, the story of Sir Michael Hirst, forced to resign as a result of what Iain Macwhirter rightly described as "one of the most cynical and underhand exercises in political

faction-fighting in modern Scottish history" [Macwhirter, 1997a], and the more tragic story of Eastwood MP Allan Stewart, who stepped down after his affair with another patient at a rehabilitation clinic hit the headlines. Stewart, a popular MP in what was often said to be the safest Tory seat in Scotland, suffered a nervous breakdown following the public revelations about the relationship and the struggle with alcoholism that led to his attending the clinic. Hirst, the Tory party chairman in Scotland, had his eye on Stewart's constituency, and when he declared his interest in being the candidate for Eastwood after Stewart's resignation, Scottish journalists began receiving damning reports about his alleged homosexual affairs, leaked to them by senior members of the Conservative party in Scotland. However, there was no evidence, just rumours, but under threat of exposure, Hirst resigned, saying in his letter to the prime minister that it was because of a "past indiscretion" which could have made his position "untenable" [Cochrane, 1997a]. What made this episode all the more squalid was that it was clear that the Tories had tried to use the press to bring Hirst down. From a Canadian cultural perspective it is difficult to understand why these two men had to suffer the kind of press coverage that they did. As *Scotsman* columnist Ian Bell said: "Their faults, if faults they were, were personal ones, their tragedies private. Yet still they were crucified." [Bell, 1997a]

The reporting of the Tory scandals in Scotland - along with others in England involving Conservative MPs - overshadowed coverage of other issues and events in the campaign, particularly for the SNP, who had enough of a struggle keeping to centre stage in a national campaign. Alex Salmond described the frustration of party workers in his election diary column for the *Herald*:

Saturday also brings news of Michael Hirst's resignation, and further evidence of our media's confused priorities. Within minutes of the announcement, our phones are ringing and pagers bleeping, with the media frantically seeking SNP's response. It leaves us wondering why, over the previous fortnight on the campaign trail, as we discussed real issues in packed halls and community centres, almost no journalists bothered to turn up.

[Salmond, 1997a]

Coverage was especially crucial for the party at this time, because it had scored another propaganda coup in its ongoing campaign to combat the economic arguments against Scottish independence. On the final day of parliament, March 21, the SNP received the last of its answers from William Waldegrave, in which he conceded that the SNP's initial calculations on Scotland's share of the

national debt - which had been widely criticized by the party's opponents - were actually correct. Not only that, the new analysis based on a 17.9 per cent share of the debt showed that Scotland had paid closer to £31 billion more than it had received in public spending since 1979, rather than the SNP's original figure of £27 billion. (Of course, this was based on the assumption that Scotland would have received 90 per cent of all the oil and gas revenues if it had been independent from that year.) In addition, the Treasury analysis, based on the increase in current oil and gas revenues, gave a further projected surplus of £12.5 billion during the next five years. The SNP's claims, released in a *Herald* exclusive March 27 [Dinwoodie, 1997c], were predictably attacked as fantasy, a pipe dream, and fundamentally flawed, but with the authority of the Treasury's own analysis behind them, they were difficult to dismiss. Even Jim Stevens, member of New Labour and an economist with the Fraser of Allander Institute, conceded "that the SNP are right. The evidence produced by The Scottish Office and The Treasury suggests they are right." (Stevens did, however, disagree with the SNP's future projection [MacMahon, 1997e].) It was, as the *Herald* editorial said, a breakthrough: "With these figures out in the open, even unionists should concede that, so far as we can tell by looking backwards, an independent Scotland would be, at worst, an economy with UK-style problems. It would be no basket case." [Herald, 1997a]

### **"Sovereignty Rests With Me As An English MP"**

The SNP's fortunes seemed to improve during the third week of the election, rising to 26 per cent in the *Herald's* System Three poll at the start of their formal campaign launch April 2, recovering the six points it had earlier lost. But the *Scotsman's* ICM poll showed them falling to 22 per cent, and Labour's continuing strength presented some strategic problems for the party. Alex Salmond tried to argue that with the Tories destined for defeat, the SNP were better-placed than ever before to win the election. "With the overhang of fear of a fifth Tory term lifted, Scots are free in this election to vote positively for what they want, instead of voting negatively against what they don't want." [SNP, 1997m] Perhaps they were, but that did not necessarily mean that they would, or that they wanted the SNP, and Salmond's statement seemed more wishful thinking than realistic possibility.

The next day Tony Blair flew into Scotland for the launch of the Scottish version of the Labour Party manifesto, and made his first and biggest blunder of the campaign according to the press, one that columnist Alan Cochrane described as "the virtual manna from heaven that a hitherto stagnant SNP campaign sorely

needed." [Cochrane, 1997b] In an interview with *Scotsman* political editor John Penman, the Labour leader was asked how he would deal with the possible resentment arising from the fact that even after the Scottish parliament was established, Scottish MPs would still be able to vote on strictly English policy matters, while English MPs would not be able to vote on Scottish ones - the West Lothian Question made famous by Linlithgow MP Tam Dalyell. Blair replied that he didn't believe this would be a problem, for if voters complained about this unfairness, "I will say to them, we are going to devolve these matters to a Scottish parliament but as far as, you know, we are concerned, the sovereignty rests with me as an English MP and that's the way it will stay." In addition, when asked about the Scottish parliament's tax-raising powers, he said, "a Scottish parliament once the power is given it's like a...the smallest English parish council, it's got the right to exercise it." [Penman, 1997c]

Blair had basically confirmed what Alex Salmond and the SNP had been saying all along: that the proposed parliament would be essentially powerless, have little authority, and that real control of Scotland would still be at Westminster. Even before the first edition of the *Scotsman* hit the streets in the early hours of Friday, April 4, the journalists on the campaign trail with Blair were preparing stories about what the *London Evening Standard* headlined as "Blair's First Clanger", and by 7 am it was the second item on Radio Four's *Today* programme. By 8 am Blair was being questioned on *Good Morning Scotland* about his statements, but not before Alex Salmond was able to attack him: "With these devastating remarks, Tony Blair has shown his contempt and derision for Scotland and Scotland's people, and even for his own party members here." [Penman and MacMahon, 1997] Later that morning at the press conference held at the Labour Party's media centre in Glasgow to introduce its manifesto, Scottish journalists kept up the questions about constitutional issues, refusing to be side-tracked and shocking the London-based journalists present, who had never seen Blair so aggressively challenged. The Scottish journalists, not bound by the same strictures as their Westminster counterparts, did not understand what all the fuss was about: they "thought only that there had been some tough but fair questions at a largely good-humoured one hour session." [Penman and MacMahon, 1997]

Although Blair's comments were thought to be a mistake, this may not have been the case. As James Mitchell explains:

The fact that Blair had said it in an interview with a Scottish newspaper suggests that it was deliberate. The underlying thinking was that Labour needed to prevent the Conservatives



from successfully playing the English card more than it needed to fear the SNP. Labour needed to demonstrate its British patriotism especially with Conservative taunts that its devolution policy would rip the country apart and its European policy would destroy British sovereignty.

[Mitchell, 1997, p. 137]

In this Blair was using a tactic somewhat similar to that employed by Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien in the Canadian federal election; making a statement guaranteed to antagonize nationalists in order to thwart the Conservatives and reinforce his party's patriotic credentials.

However, the SNP believed, as did many commentators, that what was perceived as Blair's gaffe would be a boost to their campaign, because it reinforced doubts about the Labour Party's commitment to devolution. Its timing was especially fortunate, coming just before the launch of the SNP's election manifesto April 7. The slogan, "You cannot trust Blair on Scotland" was said for the first of many times during the campaign by Alex Salmond at the news conference releasing the manifesto, and became the cornerstone of the SNP's campaign strategy. The manifesto featured a "fully costed budget for the first four years of independence" [SNP, 1997s] and details of the SNP's policies on everything from business, employment, taxation, and the economy to the European Union, defence, international relations and world poverty. The *Scotsman* devoted a full page to the document, listing the SNP's promises on the economy, law, constitution, schools, European Union, health, arts, defence, transport, family and environment, followed by a brief analysis and response from other political parties. Most of them were strongly critical of the SNP's proposals, except for those from the Scottish Green Party, who praised the SNP's environmental pledges with faint damns by saying that "while still short of its own policies, the SNP was at least miles ahead of both the Tories and Labour" [Booth et al, 1997]. This in-depth coverage, written by a team of seven reporters, was in marked contrast to that provided by the *Herald*, which just did a short precis of the party's promises, with no scrutiny of their implications. However, the paper's political correspondent did point out that the SNP's manifesto was unique in that it began "with a statement of claimed facts about Scotland which set out to challenge the myths of political opponents" [Dinwoodie, 1997d], but the *Herald* made no attempt to challenge these.

Despite the political controversy about Blair's supposed "gallus gaffe", [Dickson, 1997c] which prompted fierce criticism of the Labour Party leader not only from Alex Salmond but also John Major, who said that Blair's plans for a Scottish parliament would let the "genie of separatism" out of the bottle

[MacMahon et al, 1997], Scottish voters remained unmoved. The *Herald's* System Three poll the week following showed support for Labour holding steady at above 50 per cent, while the SNP fell to 23, down from 26 per cent the week before. The good news for the SNP was that according to an NOP poll, support for independence was at 35 per cent, just one per cent less than that for devolution, and 28 per cent of Scots gave the SNP as their second electoral choice, which only 14 per cent gave to Labour [Dickson, 1997c].

On the image front, the party was having a bit more success, as well as some fun. When the Labour Party's election broadcast featured Fitz the British bulldog as its national symbol, the SNP responded with a photo opportunity of its own Scottish canine representatives, a Scottish terrier and two West Highland terriers, but not before criticizing Blair for adopting Tory symbols as well as policies [Mitchell, 1997, p. 138]. George Reid, SNP candidate in Ochil, declared that "New Labour's bulldog will be no match for the SNP's determined and highly-motivated Scottish terriers!" [SNP, 1997p] The party's most imaginative contribution to the party election broadcast genre was its five-minute party election broadcast (PEB) directed and narrated by Scottish actor and film-maker David Hayman, whose soft-focus shots of joyous ceilidh dancers and the emotionally-powerful closing image of a child reaching upwards as the voice-over stated the SNP slogan, "Yes we can" was "high quality, classy propaganda" [MacMahon, 1997g].

It was also propaganda worth fighting for: once again the SNP was battling for access to broadcasting networks, this time for Channel 4 and Channel 5, which Mike Russell, the party's chief executive, said were demonstrating "absurd prejudice" by refusing to show the PEB because they could not limit it to Scotland only [SNP, 1997o]. The SNP took their case to the Independent Television Commission, which ruled in their favour, so that on April 23 bemused viewers in Bexley were able to see the SNP's call to rise and be a nation again [Wilson, 1997]. Most significantly, though, as part of the party's ongoing struggle to gain air time, the SNP commissioned research from an independent media monitoring group to track its election coverage, and the results were striking. The Broadcasting Monitoring Company found that 80 per cent of the election coverage in Scotland came from the networks, and of that, the SNP was in just 14 per cent of campaign news items, compared to 68 per cent for the Conservatives, 60 per cent for Labour, and 64 per cent for the Liberal Democrats. Acting on this information, the SNP sent letters to the networks directing their attention to the fact that they were in breach of the legal requirements to provide balanced coverage [Breen, 1997].

Although Alex Salmond had said that with the Hayman election broadcast the SNP's campaign, was moving "from the head to the heart" and away from "hammering home the economic case for independence", [Salmond, 1997b] the battle over the £27 billion raged on, becoming the subject of a vitriolic attack by Michel Forsyth, who described the SNP's figures as "a cruel deceit" [Rougvie and Booth, 1997], and its claim to 90 per cent of North Sea oil revenues as highly dubious. The response of the SNP's treasury spokesman John Swinney was to describe Forsyth as "a failing politician, peddling smears that are inaccurate and incredible" [Rougvie and Booth, 1997], while Salmond accused Forsyth of using the civil service and public funds for Tory propaganda, and compared him to "the Joker out of the Batman movies" [Booth, 1997]. Meanwhile Labour activist and economist Jim Stevens said that the SNP's budget was "about as useful as a chocolate fireguard" [Rougvie and Booth, 1997]. This was followed three days later by a four-page news release from Swinney rebutting Conservative criticism of the SNP budget in mind-numbing detail, listing 19 points from the £27 billion to Scotland's share of unidentified spending. The tone of the release showed that the SNP no longer had many doubts about negative campaigning: in it Swinney described Trade Secretary Ian Lang as "another failing Tory politician", who "has nothing to offer Scotland but bogus fears and smears", and "another anti-Scottish Tory left bereft of any credibility." [SNP, 1997n] In fact, of the 104 news releases that the SNP issued between March 17 and May 1, 41 per cent were "negative attacks upon its political rivals, particularly the Labour party" [Fisher, 1997, p. 59].

The pressure on the SNP to state its position on the proposed devolution referendum continued, when on April 10 Nigel Smith, organizer of Partnership for a Parliament, designed to be the precursor of the post-election "Yes, Yes" campaign, urged the party to consider joining his group. Funded by £130,000 worth of donations from businesses and trade unions, it would be ready to start campaigning as soon as possible after the election, and, said Smith, was set up so that the SNP "can play a proper and fully engaged part." [MacMahon, 1997f] However, the party refused to commit itself on its participation, saying that it viewed that the referendum as it stood - with no question on independence - "as a cul-de-sac to delay and obstruct change" [MacMahon, 1997f]. According to Peter MacMahon of the *Scotsman*, although the SNP had rejected Smith's appeal, privately it was discussing the matter, and this seemed to be borne out by comments made on April 15 by Roseanna Cunningham that the SNP "was not likely to put stumbling blocks in the way of devolution", and by Alex Salmond that support for any Labour Party policy "would depend on whether it was in the best interests of the people of Scotland" [MacMahon and Wilson, 1997].

As the campaign moved into its final two weeks, the SNP's support remained static, hovering at around 23 to 24 per cent, although there were a large number of undecided voters - some 25 per cent. However, there were basic flaws in the SNP's campaign that explained its inability to make a breakthrough, as *Scotsman* columnist Ian Bell pointed out. First, the SNP tactic of attacking Tony Blair as someone who couldn't be trusted was irrelevant, because the main concern of Scots voters was defeating the Tories. Secondly, the argument over the £27 billion risked "boring the electorate into insensibility with ever more abstruse calculations. Ultimately, nationalism is a variety of patriotism....It is not a conclusion drawn from a balance sheet." [Bell, 1997b] Finally, it was clear that the leadership of the SNP believed that Labour was going to win, since they were telling people that they could safely vote SNP and still defeat the Conservatives. As the parties came to the final push of the campaign, the outcome was not that difficult to discern.

### All Over Bar The Shouting

The *Scotsman's* columnists may have been complaining about the barrage of micro-economic material emanating from the SNP press office during the campaign, but that did not stop the paper from devoting a full page to the party's fiscal claims on April 18. An article by John Hall, senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies with the headline, "SNP's oil-fuelled budget slips up on the arithmetic" stated in the second paragraph, "Independence will mean higher taxes, higher borrowing or lower spending - a bleaker picture than the one painted by the Nationalist manifesto." [Hall, 1997] Unfortunately this was not what he said, according to the disclaimer the *Scotsman* published the next day in a small (albeit bolded) column headlined "SNP budget", which basically negated the whole thrust of the article. In the disclaimer, Hall asked the paper to make it clear that the second paragraph should read "independence might" have the aforesaid consequences, and that he did not suggest that there were mistakes in the SNP budget arithmetic. The *Scotsman* concluded the disclaimer by apologising "for any other impression given." [Scotsman, 1997b] To get the facts so completely wrong in a major election opinion piece was bad enough, but to print the correction in a manner almost guaranteed to obscure it was even worse; this was not political journalism at its best.

The next day the SNP had the biggest poll boost of the campaign: The *Sunday Times* NOP poll showed them at 28 per cent. Most significantly, when asked which party they would support in a Scottish parliament, 38 per cent of

those surveyed chose the SNP, compared to 39 per cent for Labour. This was good news indeed, as it was the highest poll rating the SNP had ever experienced. It was also the first indication that the voting patterns for the Scottish parliament - now seen as a definite possibility with the strengthening of Labour's lead over the Tories - would be quite different from those for Westminster. The news provided a convenient backdrop for the release of the party's latest manifesto, "The Scotland We Seek", whose upbeat message delivered in emotive language was designed to appeal "to the heart side of the campaign...an appeal to self-respect, an appeal to Scottish confidence and Scottish pride", as Alex Salmond told Magnus Linklater on the BBC Scotland's *Eye to Eye* programme [Herald, 1997b]. The SNP's strong belief that Scotland was capable of running its own affairs would be the party's message of the campaign's final days, he said.

Internally, the party was in the strange position of hoping that Labour, their traditional enemy, would continue in the lead so that Scottish voters would be rid of "the overhang of fear" and risk voting for the SNP, secure in the knowledge that doing so would not let the Tories win again. As Kenny Farquharson noted in *Scotland on Sunday* the day of a major rally for the SNP faithful in Glasgow, this view was certainly a change from previous years, when the party slogan was "Labour can't win". Now party strategists believed that the SNP could make significant gains if the current trends held, but that was a big if, and they were not certain of the result. As one strategist told Farquharson: "We are walking a ridge right now, and nobody knows if we're going to be knocked down the slope or go on to a higher peak." [Farquharson, 1997b]

On April 21, the SNP released a transcript of an interview done by Labour campaign co-ordinator Brian Wilson on RTE (Irish State Radio) which became the second constitutional bombshell of the election campaign. In it Wilson stated that a devolved assembly would not be able to hold a referendum on Scottish independence, as that was "a matter for the UK parliament" [SNP, 1997q]. The response by Labour was swift: the party's general secretary Jack McConnell stated that the Scottish parliament would "have clearly-defined powers. There will be no question of extending these powers unilaterally. We are offering devolution, not separation." [Dinwoodie, 1997d] He also confirmed that the system of proportional representation had been designed to stop the SNP from gaining control of the new parliament, a view originally expressed by Shadow Secretary of State George Robertson two years before. Robertson reaffirmed McConnell's stance in a speech to the Scottish Trades Union Congress later that day, saying that "There is no way that the Scottish parliament could, or should, be able to turn itself into an independent state." The SNP's response

was, once again, that Labour was an anti-Scottish party that couldn't be trusted on the constitution [MacMahon and Scott, 1997].

There were some more positive developments for the SNP as the campaign progressed. The party's policy of giving votes to 16-year-olds seemed like a good idea after it won mock elections at Edinburgh's Royal High, Glasgow Academy, St. Machar Academy in Aberdeen and Inverness Royal Academy, as well as BBC's *Newsround* general election, taking 40 per cent of the vote among the school children who participated. The political pundits were divided as to whether the results had any significance for the future: although an Scotsman/ICM poll the week before had shown support for the SNP at the same level as Labour in the 18-34-year-old age group, the SNP had similarly high percentages of poll support in the early 1970s among youth, who had not remained loyal to the party as they grew older [Luckhurst, 1997]. However, Peter Snow of *Newsnight* said that he always found the *Newsround* results a good indication of what was to come. "We may well be getting a first impression of the likely patterns of voting in the 21st century," he said [Dalton and Penman, 1997].

The SNP also gained two converts from Labour in Glasgow - activist Stuart MacLennan and councillor Yvonne Anderson, who said they were unhappy with Labour's move to the right, and intended to vote SNP. Their defection became the subject of controversy when Jack McConnell stated that Anderson was the subject of an internal disciplinary inquiry because of her poor performance on council, and accused MacLennan of disruptive behaviour [Smith, 1997]. McConnell's claim about Anderson was disputed by the SNP, who pointed out that her name had not been on the list of those councillors being investigated when it had first been released two weeks previously, and that her absence from council meetings had been due to serious illness [SNP, 1997r]. MacLennan had been embroiled in the controversy over the nomination of Labour candidate Mohammed Sarwar in Govan as an organizer for Mike Watson, the opposing nominee who lost by one vote in a re-run of the selection contest held amid "accusations of racism, duplicity and vote-rigging" [Wring, 1997, p. 68]. His support for Watson may not have been politically correct, but it did not necessarily constitute disruptive behaviour, either. Labour's conflicting statements and negative approach did not do much for its credibility on the issue.

As always, the SNP could rely on Sean Connery to give it much-needed publicity, but this could be a mixed blessing. When Connery did the voice-over for the party's last political broadcast before the election (which was transmitted on all five UK terrestrial channels), Alex Salmond had to defend the film star

against the criticism that he was not entitled to speak on Scottish affairs because he did not live in Scotland. As well as doing the party broadcast, Connery also gave an interview to the *Scottish Sun*, in which he declared that devolution was "the next step" to independence, and that his dream was to read the Declaration of Arbroath at the opening of the Scottish parliament. He even promised to buy a house in Scotland once it became independent [Scott, 1997].

There was more good news with the release of an ICM poll April 27 that showed the SNP's Alisdair Morgan would defeat Ian Lang in his seat of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale by 11 per cent. This poll was particularly credible as ICM was the firm used by the Tories for their own internal polling, and employed a methodology that tended to favour the Conservatives by assuming that a significant percentage of the "don't knows" would go to that party. This was followed by the appearance of some positive support in the media for the SNP's oft-repeated claim that Scotland's economy was strong enough to go it alone, with an article in the *Herald* by Professor Hervey Gibson, former head of Economics at Scottish Enterprise, who argued that Scotland's economy was as dynamic and resilient as those of other small nations [Gibson, 1997], and a letter to the *Herald* from 10 well-known academics in the fields of economics and business at universities in Scotland, Ireland, Germany and England who stated that "the Scottish economy is quite capable of supporting a successful independent future for Scotland should the electorate so decide." [Simpson et al, 1997]

But none of these events had the desired effect: two days before the election, the SNP was at 21 per cent in the *Scotsman*/ICM poll, exactly where it had been a week earlier, and the same as it had been in 1992. Party officials were obviously not hedging their bets. Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP's candidate in Glasgow Govan, urged voters to support the SNP in marginal seats, even if it meant the Conservatives might win [Dalton, 1997]. When asked how many seats he expected the party to garner, Alex Salmond said, "a barrowload", and when asked to define that number, he explained: "A barrowload is an interesting term in Scotland. It means a lot." [Scott, 1997b]

It had been a long and mean-spirited campaign, marked by an unprecedented amount of sleaze and negativism, one that seemed to turn voters off, at least from viewing it on television. The audience for BBC1's *Nine O'Clock News*, which was extended to 45 minutes for the campaign, fell below four million nine times, while ITN's *News At Ten* kept to an average weekly audience of 5.7 million [Herald, 1997d]. The drop in numbers was even more dramatic when David Dimbleby interviewed Alex Salmond and Daffyd Wigley of Plaid Cymru, with the 15 million viewers who watched *EastEnders* plummeting to just over two

million when the interview began. As campaign media analyst Stuart Cosgrove observed: "Miraculously, 13 million people disappeared within minutes when soap opera ended and constitutional discussion began. It was the greatest escape since Houdini." [Cosgrove, 1997]

These dramatic drops in audience numbers occurred despite concerted efforts by the BBC to reformulate their political programming in a way that would appeal to modern British voters, who, like those in Canada, shared "the *zeitgeist* of today's less deferential society" [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 193]. The BBC's own research had shown that the public was becoming increasingly alienated from the political process and found political coverage to be "a big turn-off" [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 180]. The response was "Populism à la BBC" [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 180], in which the BBC strove to make its political broadcasts more accessible and participatory by using straightforward language with a minimum of jargon and insider terms, getting reporters out of the studio and on site where the issues were happening, and employing more "streeters" and vox pops in which only "real people appeared", as one social affairs correspondent described them [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 188]. The BBC's move towards greater participation was also reflected in the practices of the other television and radio networks, who employed a wide variety of interactive formats, including phone-ins, studio panels and audience forums in which the public could question politicians, albeit through a moderator [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 189]. However, these laudable attempts to democratize the reporting of the campaign could not "compensate for the exposure of viewers to the 30-round heavyweight boxing match that was staged nightly at the top of the news" [Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998, p. 193], and which had them switching off in record numbers.

The Conservative Party's advertising certainly alienated the members of the *Scotsman's* Focus Group, made up of 10 floating voters in the marginal Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber constituency, who found the party's negative approach typical of the whole campaign, and not one they liked [Ross, 1997]. The Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee were so concerned by the amount of derogatory advertising in the election that they issued a report strongly criticizing its use, saying that by "encouraging an atmosphere of suspicion and fear it is positively harmful to the democratic process." [Duncan, 1997]

The SNP's advertising did not follow the Tory pattern of "knocking copy" to the same extent but it did not inspire, and this was a big missed opportunity, according to Johnathan d'Aguilar, creative director of a Glasgow advertising agency [d'Aguilar, 1997]. What the SNP campaign needed was some



emotional spark to bring it alive, and this rarely happened, despite frequent statements from Alex Salmond (the latest just two days before the election) that the campaign was now moving from head to heart. As the *Herald* concluded in its lead editorial April 30:

Possibly the best campaign has been fought by the SNP (though that is damning with faint praise) and certainly there have been no gaffes, no blunders. Alex Salmond is leading a modern, lean, well-organised, and well-briefed party and he has eschewed the vain glorious posturing which disfigured his campaign five years ago. But this is a party which should have the fervour of a movement; it is [a] party which is asking Scots to take an immense and heady, if ultimately rewarding, risk, but the opportunity is presented not as a matter of vision, of destiny, but of the details of micro-economic policy.

[Herald, 1997c]

### The Results

When the votes had been counted the morning of May 2, the Scottish National Party had obtained something less than a barrowload of seats, and less than the seven to 40 Alex Salmond had bet the party would win in his wager with *The Big Issue*. True, the party had doubled the number of its MPs to six, knocking off Conservative cabinet minister Ian Lang in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, and it had held onto its seat in Perth and Kinross, won in a by-election in 1995, the first time the party had ever done so. But it had only increased its percentage of the vote by .06, from 21.5 in 1992 to 22.1 in 1997, and its vote declined in the four cities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow.

The SNP's Research Department put a positive spin on the results, saying that the election "established the SNP as Scotland's second force" [SNP Research Department, 1997, p. 1], which statistically speaking was the case: although the Liberal Democrats had 10 seats, this was won with 13.1 per cent of the vote, and the Lib Dems came second in only one seat, while the SNP was second in 44, up from 10 in the 1992 election. Also, the SNP was the only other main party besides Labour to increase its vote, albeit by a fraction, and its percentage of the vote was the second-highest it had ever achieved in a general election, only bested by the 30.4 per cent it gained in October of 1974. In addition, Alex Salmond trebled his majority in Banff and Buchan, while Andrew Welsh's majority went from 954 in 1992 to 10,189, and this in a seat that was seen as a marginal for the SNP. The party had again kept all of its deposits, as it had in 1992, which represented considerable progress from the disastrous year of 1983 when the SNP lost 52 of them. Most significantly, the party was able to

improve on its ability to convert votes into seats, a difficult task in the first-past-the-post system, where the SNP had to gather almost five times as many votes as Labour to win a seat. Labour, with 45.6 per cent of the vote, won 78 per cent of the seats, 56 out of 72, taking an average of 22,917 votes per seat, while the SNP had an average of 103,590 votes per seat [SNP Research Department, 1997, pp. 5-6]. Because their vote was so evenly spread across Scotland, the SNP "received a poor reward for their overall performance, winning only six seats when strict proportionality would have given them 16" [Denver, 1997, p. 20].

What had happened was that the SNP had been hindered by the Labour landslide, but helped by the Tory collapse, as had Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats [Mitchell, 1997, p. 145]. The two new seats they had won since the 1992 election were the result of a swing from Conservative to SNP in Perth and Angus [Denver, 1997, p. 21]. The ironic feature of the Conservative defeat, Denver found, was that "the stronger their position the greater were their losses...they lost support most heavily in the relatively few remaining constituencies in which they still had a substantial vote." [Denver, 1997, p. 23] The result was that in the traditionally Tory seats of North Tayside and Galloway and Upper Nithsdale there was a swing of 8.4 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively from the Conservatives to the SNP. Labour's increased share of the vote mainly hurt the SNP and the Liberal Democrats, according to Denver, while the Lib Dems "disproportionately benefited" from the Conservative losses [Denver, 1997, p. 24].

An interesting characteristic of the SNP's support is that it was not confined to any particular social or economic group. There was a slight correlation between the SNP vote and the percentage of manual and agricultural workers, but this was more a reflection of the party's strength in the rural areas of north-east Scotland as the SNP tended to attract the same kind of support in all kinds of constituencies. However, this broad support presented a problem for the party, Denver explained, "because under the electoral system it is geographical concentrations of votes (which are linked to social concentrations) which win seats" [Denver, 1997, p. 27].

Analysis of opinion polls during the election period and before provides some information that helps to explain the results, particularly for the Conservatives. A poll taken in February 1997 showed that 73 per cent of those surveyed believed it to be "an English party with little relevance to Scotland", including 28 per cent of Tories [McCrone, 1997, p. 158]. Of the three major polls in Scotland - ICM, System Three, and NOP - ICM was the most accurate, with its final poll two days before the election only one percentage point off the final result. The poll showed "that Labour was by far the most popular party among

all ages, and all social classes", and that the highest support for the Tories, 24 per cent, was in the 65 and over group. Labour even managed to do twice as well as the SNP among those aged 18 to 29 - 48 to 23 per cent .

However positive the election results were for Labour and disappointing for the SNP, they were not good for democracy, according to the Electoral Reform Society, an organization which promotes proportional representation. It pointed to the turnout - the lowest since 1935 with 71.3 per cent of eligible voters casting ballots - and the distortions of the first-past-the-post system, most dramatically illustrated in Scotland, where Labour won 77.8 per cent of the seats with 45.6 per cent of the votes, and the SNP obtained 8.3 per cent with 22. Even more striking, the Conservatives had 17.5 per cent of the vote, but gained no seats, while the Liberal Democrats took 13.9 per cent of the seats with 13 per cent of the vote [Sinclair, 1997].

Post-election analysis in the media conceded that the SNP had fought the good fight but that in the end it had been defeated in an election that was more about beating the Tories than anything else. "Living to oppose Labour, the Nationalists became mere bystanders as Tony Blair's troops stormed the citadels", wrote Ian Bell in the *Scotsman* [Bell, 1997c]. The fact that the SNP held its own despite the Labour deluge "was quite remarkable given tactical voting and the similarities between the electorates of the two parties", said Peter Lynch in the *Herald*. Lynch, like Bell, did not think that the constitutional issue was important. "Frankly, this was always a very British election campaign, dominated by the issue of electing a Government." [Lynch, 1997] Perhaps, but Scotland's political climate - so different from the rest of the UK because of its four-party battle, its distinctive media, and its particular constitutional issue - had yielded some unique results. Significantly, all the parties backing constitutional change gained seats, while the only party that opposed it, the Tories, lost every single one they had. This would seem to indicate that the constitutional issue was more important to the Scottish public than the pundits realized. Certainly the SNP seemed to feel that the election demonstrated that, as their commentary on the results concluded.

The election confirms that the SNP's support is neither transient, nor based on protest. Our support comes from a growing core who demand constitutional change and independence for Scotland. Doubling our representation at Westminster, and increasing our share of the vote in the face of a landslide shift to Labour confirms the SNP as the second force in Scottish politics - and the power behind the drive for constitutional change.

[SNP Research Department, 1997, p. 7]

## What The SNP Strategists Said

The outcome of the election for the SNP was not unexpected by its party strategists, although the scale of the Labour victory and the Tory defeat in Scotland was something of a surprise. Certainly there was some disappointment, but as one strategist said:

**"I don't think anybody thought that this was going to be the big breakthrough election. It was going to be an election of some advance. The issue was just how far that advance would go. I think realistically we were talking about six or seven seats thereabouts, and there's no doubt we were disappointed not to win some seats, for example, Inverness, but I think in retrospect we took the view that on the night, our major opponent in Scotland had their best night ever, and just to be able to advance at all in the face of that was quite an achievement in itself."**

Generally the expectation had been that the SNP would have received closer to the 25 per cent mark in the vote, and with it, one or two extra seats. This lowering of expectations and emphasis on steady progress had been the whole point of the SNP's five-year plan. As one senior party executive member explained:

**"It was a couple of percentage points lower in the national vote than I would have expected, and realistically, at most two parliamentary seats locked short of what I thought we could win, and if I were really being truthful with myself, probably it would be one short. And certainly the Labour landslide I did not expect. That's what counts for the failure to win the two extra parliamentary seats, and the very modest increase in our share of the vote. But the situation with the Tories - not the fact that they lost two seats to the SNP - didn't surprise me at all. The fact they lost everything did surprise me, which was the other side of the Labour landslide coin."**

This realistic attitude towards the election results made it easier for the SNP to better manage expectations than it had in 1992, so that even though the outcome was not that spectacular, the party was "able to point to a real achievement towards progress."

When asked what the reasons were for the SNP's inability to make a breakthrough, the response was straightforward: the media's blanket coverage of Labour, which in turn, was prompted by the desire to get the Tories out of government. As one of the SNP media strategists said:

**"In the last two or three days of the campaign the Westminster dimension tended to dominate, and we tended to be swamped almost literally by wall-to-wall coverage of Tony Blair and New**

Labour, and all of the tabloids, all of the broadsheets, I just think they swung behind Blair in a big way; in the last four days really...you had the *Sun* and the *Record* devoting four, five, six pages just to Labour in the last few days of the campaign. I think what that probably did, I think it probably depressed some of our electorate, some of our voters in central Scotland.... because the coverage was wall-to-wall. It was all of course on the Westminster dimension, the need to get rid of the Tories. That's what May the first was all about."

It was true that there was a major switch to Labour in Scottish newspapers, and not in just the Murdoch papers, the *Sun* and the *Scottish News of the World*. The *Scotsman* changed its support from Liberal Democrat to Labour; *Scotland on Sunday* also backed Labour, as did the *Sunday Mail*, while the *Herald*, the *Scottish Daily Mail*, and the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* were neutral. The *Sunday Post*, the *Dundee Courier* and the *Express* remained Conservative. This new editorial support for Labour was in addition to that provided by the *Daily Record*, which, with its circulation then close to 730,000, had the biggest readership of Scotland's dailies [Scammell and Harrop, 1998, p. 174]. However, it is doubtful that the press support of Labour depressed the SNP vote. As Negrine asks, "do people choose newspapers because they reflect their own politics or do they buy newspapers and then their politics?" [Negrine, 1994, p. 177] Curtice and Semetko's detailed analysis of press influence in the 1992 election suggests the former rather than the latter: "many electors still appear to view newspaper reports (and watch television news) through a partisan filter that enables them to ignore politically uncongenial messages." [Curtice and Semetko, 1994, p. 56] McKie puts it more bluntly:

A newspaper pitch is unlikely to move many voters unless it chimes with their own experience, plays on doubts already haunting them, celebrates successes they agree are worth celebrating. This time, the mood of the voters swayed the tabloids, and not the other way round.

[McKie, 1998, p. 129]

A senior office-bearer who was also a candidate said that he thought

"the media were part of this mood within the country that had made up its mind and that in many ways were just going through the motions of the election campaign. What we increasingly found as time went on was the kind of romance of the Scottish media with the Labour Party was just all-consuming. You could hardly move through either the broadsheets or the tabloids without confronting the softest coverage you'd ever find of the Labour Party."

Again, there is evidence for this view. Nationally, the Conservatives also questioned the lack of journalistic scrutiny of Labour's policies, complaining that "the media allowed it to bluff its way out of trouble". Labour was seen as the government in waiting, and was dealt with accordingly in the press [Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p. 232]. However, the benefit for the SNP in the media's focus on Labour was that the party was not scrutinised in the way it had been in 1992.

"We did not have a tough election campaign. It was hard work, but it was not critically examining, because effectively the journalists were willing us to succeed where it mattered to them, which was in getting the Tory MPs out, and they weren't much interested in our strategic challenge to the Labour Party, because they were doing everything in their power to get the Labour party in. So the Scottish media were pretty soft on reflection, and certainly not as critically examining as they had been in 1992, when they were bitterly sceptical about the political message we put forward."

It was not just that the journalists were not interested in the SNP's strategic challenge to Labour; they simply did not believe it, as I discuss later in the chapter.

As far as strengths and weaknesses of the SNP's campaign, SNP strategists were agreed that the party's improved organization and resources were a definite plus; the fact that the SNP was so well-prepared meant that there were no real surprises in the campaign. Said one strategist: "We went through an election campaign that was sober; it was well-organized, it was very effective, it had its punch; but it really didn't depart from the script as to what was likely to happen." However, although there was agreement as to the importance of the SNP's economic message and its centrality to the success of the campaign, there was also some concern that it had been over-played, to the detriment of the emotional aspects of the SNP's independence vision. A party strategist who helped draft the party's economic message said:

"We were very good at putting across the detailed substantial economic message. We weren't terribly good at lifting people's hearts and their sights, and that sparkle - in a sense it's an interesting contrast with the history of the SNP. If we are criticized for anything as a party in the past it has been that we've been too dependent on the emotion and the rhetoric, and deficient on the detail and the substance, and effectively in the 1997 election we swung the other way, and we got a real dose of detail and the substance, but we were deficient in the emotion and the passion and the fire."

He personally took responsibility for the failure "to concentrate on that aspect of the campaign", but added that given the interests of the party leadership, most

of whom had a strong background and interest in economics, it was difficult to say whether it could have been handled differently. This was most likely true. As Mitchell notes: "Absent from the SNP's 1997 campaign were Jim Sillars and his fiery oratory. In his place were SNP economists. Accounting and statistics shored up the SNP vote across Scotland, but failed to ignite its campaign." [Mitchell, 1997, p. 144]

Labour's domination of the political agenda made it difficult for the SNP to get coverage, particularly towards the end of the campaign when the media were focused on the drama of Major's struggle to hang on while Blair looked certain to sweep into power. Coupled with the weakness of their message at that stage - which was to tell voters that they could now safely vote for the SNP because there was no risk of another Tory win - and its lack of emotional inspiration, the party could not compete with the excitement of the Labour-Tory conflict in what was, after all, a Westminster election.

Despite the frustrations of trying to get their message across in these circumstances, SNP strategists were ambivalent in their criticisms of the Scottish media. On the one hand they were unhappy with the coverage that was biased so heavily toward Labour, but were relieved that they were not subject to closer scrutiny as a result of that, and were pleased that the SNP was beginning to be taken seriously as a political force, although this placed more demands on the party. As the SNP's communications director said: "the media treated us with probably more respect than it had done in previous elections. They actually took all what we had to say seriously, which was a good thing, but of course, that means everything you have got to say had to make absolute sense." Their biggest problem was with the London-based media, and particularly the networks. Although they were pleased with the fact that they got more network coverage than they ever had before, it was still not representative of the SNP's share of the vote. Here the party was the beneficiary of increased regional programming in Scotland, with the BBC alone running 12 editions of *Campaign Scotland*, three *Words with Wark* programmes, four *Election Calls* with each of the Scottish party leaders, as well as extensive analysis and reports on *Good Morning Scotland*, *News Afternoon* and *Newsdrive* [Harrison, 1997, p. 147].

Pairing Alex Salmond with Daffyd Wigley for programmes such as *Question Time* proved useful, but the party found it extremely difficult to get into the daily news bulletins, especially the all-important evening news programmes, according to the communications director. "These were the ones that showed the most resistance to covering the SNP, so whilst we got more of that kind of coverage than ever before, it still wasn't anything...like on a par with what the other parties got, nothing like it." However, Salmond was quite successful in

getting on radio and television news: he was quoted 61 times on BBC1, ITV, Channel 4 and Radio 4, while George Robertson was quoted 27 times, Michael Forsyth 24, and Jim Wallace 23 [Harrison, 1997, p. 144].

A senior office-bearer who was also a candidate said that he found the Scottish broadcasting media were “pretty fair, pretty neutral; there was no really critical insight in the broadcasters to our message. I certainly felt that at no stage was our message under threat from the media.” He was scathing in his criticism, however, of the London-based media, whom, he said, he held “in utter contempt” for their lack of knowledge about Scottish affairs. “I increasingly got frustrated by the amount of time that one had to spend re-educating, or educating for the first time the UK media about issues which are supposedly, in the former prime minister’s words, further directed to the integrity of the nation...they had absolutely no idea what Scottish politics was about.” He found their coverage “naive”, and “part of a very, very laissez-faire attitude towards the Labour Party”. He contrasted this with a programme he did on Radio Scotland, where he was questioned for an hour on SNP policy by academics, professionals and other specialists.

“It was one of the very few interviews I took part in during the election that I felt somebody had got to the nitty-gritty, was actually testing out the real core offering to the public: now, how does this work out? How does it stack up? What will it mean? And you know, increasingly that was not evident at all during the election campaign...that kind of interviewing was very rare.”

### **What The Political Journalists Said**

If the SNP felt that the election coverage was unfairly weighted towards the Labour Party, and that the Scottish media had been soft on Labour and to a certain extent, themselves, the Scottish political journalists did not seem to be aware of it, for it was never mentioned in their interviews. They did, however, agree with the view of the SNP strategists that the 1997 election was all about getting rid of the Tories, which makes it somewhat surprising that they were so taken aback by the extent of the Tory losses in Scotland, especially since they were aware that the Progressive Conservatives in Canada went from 169 seats to two in the 1993 Canadian federal election. None of them were prepared for the Tory wipe-out, or the size of the Labour landslide; one of them did think the SNP might have done better, but, as he said, “they were up against what seemed to be, with hindsight, an unstoppable Labour bandwagon.” A political editor said he thought that until the last Scotsman/ICM poll of the campaign showing the party’s support static at 21 per cent the SNP “had convinced themselves that



they were about to make a major breakthrough. The poll told them that it was not happening.” However, there was no evidence of such a belief in any of the interviews with the SNP, nor was it corroborated by any other Scottish political correspondents or SNP members I talked to. As another political editor said:

“This election was always about the Tories getting trounced and a New Labour government coming in and introducing a new element in the Scottish constitutional debate. That’s what this election was always going to be about, it was never going to be the independence election, and that was recognized, so the SNP strategy was how do...we play this so we end up in the best position afterwards.”

When analysing why the SNP did not make much headway, one political correspondent explained that it was due to the fact that Labour had an almost flawless campaign.

“I think the defining moment for the SNP was that Labour didn’t falter. I am in no doubt that if in the final fortnight of the campaign Blair had begun to look seriously vulnerable, or Labour’s late campaign had had any serious errors or gaffes, the beneficiaries of that north of the border would undoubtedly have been the SNP. But the truth is that Labour didn’t; Labour were pretty relentless; under Mandelson they did run an excellent campaign. They didn’t really put a foot wrong; [there were] a couple of wobbles but they really did well, and I just feel the longer it looked like Labour were definitely going to win, the more potentially wavering SNP supporters, potential supporters nevertheless, wanted to back a winner. And I think there is a psychological thing about being on the side of the winner, and Blair looked like a winner. And in the light of that, with hindsight, it was very, very difficult for the SNP to crack that very solid campaign that Labour mounted. I don’t think there was anything obvious they could have done that they didn’t do. I don’t think there [were] any errors that they made. I think they set up everything right to maximise their chances, but actually achieving that would have depended on Labour faltering, and it didn’t.”

Another problem for the SNP was the campaign’s extraordinary length, which greatly handicapped the party’s election strategy, according to one political editor.

“The fact that it was such a long campaign...it was, you know, weeks and weeks and weeks and it ran into months, and that did not suit the kind of campaign the SNP wanted to run. The SNP wanted to run a campaign which in its closing stages was a real *Braveheart* campaign. This was the original plan as it was described to me, but because the campaign was so long they felt they couldn’t go too early with a *Braveheart*-type of appeal to most people because that is hard to sustain over a long period of time. If they went with that then people would tire of it. It had

to be a kind of big hit over a short period of time at the end of the campaign, so the length of the campaign meant that for too long they were forced to...fall back on just one or two bits of campaigning strategy, and basically they flogged them to death for weeks and weeks and weeks. The things they had were good things but...the question was, were they good enough to sustain interest in the party and gain momentum for the party over a long period of time."

The political journalists were all agreed on the strengths of the SNP campaign: it was well-organized, professional, and had, one editor said, "the best media/PR/spin operation in Scottish politics", as well as an extremely capable leader. For this editor, "The main strength of the campaign can be summed up in two words: Alex Salmond. Though he has his detractors, Salmond is a formidable campaigner." However, the journalists' views on the weaknesses of the party's campaign were more complex and reflected their scepticism as to the validity of the SNP's claims for independence. One political journalist stated that the main weakness was simply that the SNP was a single issue party, and although "they tried very hard to present a range of policies on different issues...there were times when that was counter-productive. For example, when they produced a 'defence policy', it raised more questions than it answered." The second major weakness was that the SNP was fighting for attention in a national election in which "Labour managed successfully to make it them vs the Tories and this was a very difficult argument for the SNP to counter."

Another political correspondent was somewhat amused by the SNP's attempts to counter that argument, particularly in light of its stance on Labour in previous campaigns.

"They tried to argue...'Well, now that Blair is pretty safe and a shoo-in in England, you don't have to have the fear about letting the Tories back in so vote for us, vote for who you really want to vote for.' It became clear that people didn't do that....It was an interesting try, but it was of course completely contradictory, because for years the SNP have been saying a Labour vote's a wasted vote. The Tories get in; no matter what you vote you get the government you don't want, vote for us. Now they were really saying, well, you're going to get the government you want anyway, so you're free to vote for us [Laughter]....So they were arguing precisely the opposite; and it was a fair try, but it was pretty easy to attack on that basis."

One editor saw the SNP's apparent unwillingness to attack Labour as a weakness.

**“The SNP campaign, if you compare it with previous SNP campaigns...was very easy on the Labour Party; there must have been something of conscious effort, a conscious decision not to go for the jugular....There was no real attempt to portray the Labour Party as they had done in the past as somehow selling out Scotland, unworthy of the Scots, of betraying Scots interests, this kind of thing.”**

**He believed it was part of the SNP’s overall strategy to ensure that they came out of the election in a good position: there was no point in their trying to defeat Labour, especially since the SNP stood to gain seats if Tory votes went to Labour - which of course they did.**

**On the strengths and weaknesses of their own coverage of the campaign, the Scottish political journalists did not have too much to say, which was not that surprising. Critical self-analysis is not something that journalists do well, given the constraints of time and their own work culture, which rewards the critiquing of other institutions, but not their own [Desbarats, 1990, pp. 104-107; Bromley, 1997, p. 9]. The political editor of a Sunday paper said that the major weakness of their coverage was the lack of dramatic incidents during the campaign, caused by its long, drawn-out nature, which meant that**

**“there was less fast and furious action which needed explaining.... a more dynamic, close-fought, eventful campaign would have suited us better because there would have been more for us to explain...too much was self-evident. There wasn’t enough for us to detail the story behind it, which is what Sunday papers do best....Also...we didn’t grab any exclusives which shed dramatic new light in the campaign or changed the course of how the campaign was fought...apparently it wasn’t that kind of campaign.”**

**A political correspondent said that his newspaper’s major weakness in its coverage was its poor organization and its unwillingness to commit more resources to election news gathering. (The two problems are of course inter-related, in that a newspaper management which was strongly committed to good election coverage would have made sure that the newsroom organization and resources were in place for the campaign.) He also felt that his paper could have exercised more scepticism concerning devolution.**

**For another political editor, the only flaw in his newspaper’s coverage was that sometimes it had difficulties balancing coverage of the UK election and the campaign in Scotland, but generally, he thought “we did manage to cover the mixture of the UK and Scottish issues pretty well, though we could always have used more space in the paper to give even more in-depth coverage.” He was particularly pleased with his paper’s role in questioning Tony Blair on the**

constitutional issue and its examination of the SNP's financial case for independence. "We can also take some pride in the fact that it was our paper which gave Tony Blair the most difficult time in the Labour campaign....It is the job of papers to ask difficult questions and raise issues. Blair, through very good media management and because of Tory disarray, got a very easy time during the campaign. But not when he came to Scotland." However, in light of Mitchell's assessment that Tony Blair's "parish council" remarks were made as part of a calculated political strategy to foil the Tories, Scottish journalists may not have scored such a coup.

### Conclusion

Overall, Scottish political journalists admired the SNP's campaigning skills, and thought the discovery of the £27 billion subsidy figure through the questions directed to the Treasury Secretary was a definite propaganda victory for the party, although it was also definitely over-played. However, they did not accept the SNP's financial arguments, and were highly sceptical of the SNP's "overhang of fear" voting strategy. To be fair, though, the Scottish press took a much more critical attitude towards Blair than did the London-based media. The SNP obviously did not see it that way, although they certainly took advantage of Blair's answers to the probing questions of a Scottish reporter on what the proposed Scottish assembly could do. As always, the relationship between the SNP and the Scottish press was a confused one:

Nationalists who tingle with joy when a newspaper espouses a cause or argument which they share, will shriek in dismay when they stand condemned as the nuisance, not-to-be-taken seriously section of Scottish public life. It is a relationship of extremes. The happy couple - press and party - are walking up the aisle one day, only to turf each other from the honeymoon bed the next. It is not too cynical to suggest that this tempestuous love-me-or-leave-me routine reflects some of the truth of Scottish politics, and much of the media's attitude to the "Scottish issue".

[Smith, 1994, p. 101]

The difficulty for the Scottish National Party was explained by what their organizational director, Allison Hunter, said she learned on her trip to the United States to study elections there: all campaigns are local [SNP, 1997b]. Certainly that was the case with the Labour and Tory campaigns in the rest of the UK: the Tories suffered because of lack of organization on the ground [Denver and Hands, 1998, p. 85] and its declining membership [Geddes and Tonge, 1997, p.

196], while Labour was bolstered by a young, growing activist membership that provided a strong canvassing team for the party [Geddes and Tonge, 1997, p. 199]. The SNP was a local party fighting in a national contest: asking Scottish voters to elect nationalists to Westminster made about as much sense as television viewers in Bexley watching their *Braveheart* party election broadcast. The SNP, as a uniquely Scottish party, could never logically hope to succeed by fighting elections to Westminster, no matter how good its political communications. The party's underlying message - you can vote for us because Labour is going to win - was inherently contradictory, as it had to be, given that Scotland had no legislature, and the only way to get it was by voting Labour. The SNP's best chance for success would come when it was able to play on its home turf, and establish a local base from which it could later fight national contests, as the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois have done in Québec. Despite a very poorly-organized campaign during the 1997 federal election in Canada, the Bloc was saved by a local community base that formed the bedrock of its support and which could not be destroyed, no matter how incompetent it seemed to be - as I describe in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Bloc Québécois: There For You - But In The Wrong Place

Chapter six examined the political communications of the Scottish National Party during the British national election of 1997, and in particular, the factors that hindered the SNP's electoral performance despite the party's well-organized and professional communications strategy. In this chapter, we will be looking at the political communications of the Bloc Québécois in the 1997 Canadian federal election, in which, by comparison with the SNP, the Bloc seemed to do just about everything wrong, but still achieved positive results.

The 1997 federal election in Canada did not begin well for the ruling Liberal Party. Unlike John Major, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien thought he had a better chance of second-term victory if he called the election early. Not too surprisingly, when he announced the election call Sunday, April 27, just three-and-a-half years after going to the polls in 1993, journalists asked him why he had done so. Surprisingly, however, he could not give a clear reason, as the *Globe and Mail's* Ottawa bureau chief Edward Greenspon reported.

"Why now?" he asked rhetorically. "It's because it's the fourth year of the mandate. We had four budgets. Because the success of our...against the deficit. The Canadians have to make a choice - to finish the job and invest in health care, children, jobs for tomorrow. Because for me, it's very important that we go to the people. We're campaigning. Not me as much as my other opponents - they have been campaigning since weeks. And we did not want to have an election that will last like Americans, six months."

And on it went, making little sense at all.

[Greenspon, 1997, p. 23]

This inauspicious start was an indicator of how the election would be for all of the five Canadian federal parties, whose campaigns were dogged by gaffes and/or setbacks which led to disappointing results. However, of all the campaigns, that of the Bloc Québécois was the worst. Led by an inexperienced leader, with an amateur election team that had never organized a federal campaign before, let alone for someone at the level of Opposition Leader, the Bloc floundered badly during the first week of the contest, and spent the rest of the election frantically playing catch-up. It only managed to do as well as it did because of some political gifts which helped to strengthen the sovereigntist vote, first from the prime minister himself, and second, from the anti-Québec Reform Party, and because of these, was able to convince Québec voters that the Bloc was their best representative in Ottawa.

Originally the focus of the 1997 election was on jobs and health care, issues that polls had shown were most important to Canadians throughout the country. But *L’Affaire Parizeau* - the revelation that the former Québec premier had been prepared to issue a unilateral declaration of independence if the 1995 referendum had been successful - changed all that, much to the delight of the Ottawa media, who “had never been terribly comfortable with the jobs issue, which required some economic grounding and a policy orientation. National unity was sexier and, given its heavy reliance on rhetoric, far easier to deal with.” [Greenspon, 1997, p. 29] Thanks to the political journalists, the Québec issue became the central theme of the campaign.

### **How The Campaign Was Organized: The New Rules**

The conduct of the 1997 campaign was markedly different from those of previous federal elections due to changes in the procedures governing the campaign, as well as to electoral boundaries and the number of seats. Some of these were a result of the research contained in the 23 volumes of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing published in 1992, “the most impressive examination ever conducted of electoral reform issues in this country, and one of the best contributions of that kind in the world” [Massicotte, 1997, p. 171], in particular, extensions to the franchise and more restrictions on becoming a candidate. The vote was now given to judges and Canadians living abroad, as well as to persons with mental disabilities and prisoners with terms of less than two years, and voting registration for homeless people was made easier. Most importantly for average Canadian voters, however, was that no longer would they have to suffer “administrative disenfranchisement” resulting from the failure of door-to-door enumeration to get them on the voters’ list; they could now register on polling day as long as they were able to provide satisfactory identification.

The biggest change was to voting hours, which had long been a source of regional alienation, because, in the past, “Canadians would cast ballots between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. local time. Westerners would utter a string of expletives when, seconds after their polls closed, TV anchors smugly announced a majority government had already been declared based on results from central Canada.” [Feschuk, 1997] Hours were staggered to accommodate Canada’s six time zones, so that voters across Canada would find out the election results at roughly the same time. Polls were also open an hour longer, and a permanent voter’s list was created from an enumeration done just before the election, to be-up-dated with

information from provincial and federal government records such as those for income tax, citizenship, or driver's licences.

There were also more Members of Parliament to vote for this time around, 301, up from 295, with four of the new MPs from Ontario, and two from British Columbia. In addition, all but 31 of the constituency boundaries were changed, some quite drastically, with old constituencies removed, and completely new ones created, in the first major re-drawing of electoral boundaries since the 1960s. This was done in order to equalize the population of constituencies, no easy task in a country as geographically varied as Canada, where immigration and migration can rapidly change the pattern of settlement.

These changes were meant to make voting easier and fairer for Canadian citizens and were broadly welcomed, even if initially they made the process more confusing as people adjusted to them. There were other changes whose benefits were not quite so clear. The election period was shortened from a minimum of 47 days to 36, which, one reporter predicted, meant that "Political leaders will have less time to recover from a blunder and will be obliged to travel across the country at a more frantic pace if they wish to wage a national campaign." [Feschuk, 1997] This certainly proved true for the Bloc in the first case, and the New Democratic Party in the second. It also made it difficult to discuss more complex issues such as jobs and health care, and easier for reporters to focus on more emotive issues such as national unity.

The most contentious of the changes concerned advertising and polling. As in previous elections, political party advertising was banned until 28 days before the election, and 48 hours before polls opened, but since the campaign was shorter, the advertising began eight days after it started, rather than the 19 days of previous campaigns. In addition, as a result of a court ruling in the province of Alberta, restrictions on third-party advertising were removed (although, as Massicotte notes, such restrictions were supported by the Canadian public, and "an almost unanimous House of Commons" when originally legislated). As well, the internet and the World Wide Web were not subject to any controls, so that Canadian political parties could continue to advertise themselves on the web even as votes were being cast. The black-out on publication of opinion polls three days before the election was the subject of ongoing legal wrangling, with Thomson Newspapers initiating judicial proceedings to have the ban declared unconstitutional. This motion was rejected at both the lower and Appeal Court level in Ontario, but although the Supreme Court of Canada granted leave to appeal the decision, it refused to suspend the blackout while the case was waiting to be heard. This was the subject of much complaint in Canadian newspapers, some of whom had "the elegance of pointing out in those comments



they were party to the judicial proceedings against the ban" [Massicotte, 1997, p. 191].

These changes in procedures and regulations were mirrored by changes in how the election was covered by political journalists, some of them necessitated by the heavy costs of having to cover five different parties in the \$100-million campaign, and others by new developments in Canadian broadcasting.

### **How The Campaign Was Organized: For The Reporters**

The lessons learned from the 1993 election campaign influenced the way the 1997 election was covered by the Canadian media. Although there were the same five parties in 1993 as there were in 1997 - the Progressive Conservatives, the Liberals, the New Democratic Party, the Bloc Québécois and Reform - the media then had essentially organized their coverage around the three "old-line" parties, the Conservatives, Liberals, and NDP, based on the assumption that the Bloc and Reform were regional fringe parties and not worthy of the same attention. The results of that election, in which the supposedly marginal Reform and Bloc battled each other for the role of Canada's Official Opposition, demonstrated that a new strategy would be required for any future elections, one in which all five parties and their leaders would be given as much scrutiny as time - and constrained media budgets - would allow. Providing this kind of coverage presented particular difficulties in a country where most leaders toured the country by plane, the one exception being the Bloc, where the political entourage travelled mainly by bus (but even that mode of transport created problems for the hapless Bloc leader, as we shall see later).

The practice in previous elections had been for each of the networks to have its own five-person television crew made up of a reporter, producer, editor, camera operators and sound technician, on each of the leaders' planes. At an average cost of \$15,000 per person, that was not cheap, but as Dornan notes, "in the past, there were only three major parties and the networks had more money to spend. In this election, there were five leaders to cover and not a lot of money to spare" [Dornan, 1997, p. 164]. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation came up with the solution to share resources, putting a team of five people, a pool producer, editor, sound technician and two camera operators on each of the planes, who would then feed coverage of each leader's tour to the five networks, the English-language CBC, CTV, and CanWest Global, and the French-language Radio-Canada and TVA. The networks would have their own journalists on the planes, but they did not stay on them throughout the whole election, as had been done previously. In addition, senior political journalists were assigned to

particular areas of the country, reflecting the increasingly regional emphasis of the campaign, and instead of following the leaders, "They would stay put, and the leaders would come to them." [Dornan, 1997, p. 164]

There were pluses and minuses to this approach. On the one hand, it did save considerable amounts of money, but, with just one television crew on each plane responsible for filing three network feeds of up to 10 minutes a day to all the networks as well as filming "stand-ups" for five television reporters, "the demands on the pool crew were harrowing" [Dornan, 1997, p. 165]. The pressures on available airtime also meant that the networks often used "melt-downs", in which pool footage from the five campaigns was combined into one news story with a voice-over from the television studio anchor. Another drawback was that having the same footage did not allow for alternative interpretations of events during the campaign, despite the fact that there were different voices describing what was happening. Television viewers watching the nightly news saw the same images over and over again on each of the networks, with similar explanations, but given by different journalists; the result was more confusing than enlightening.

Two other innovations in broadcast election coverage were the morning news conferences on CBC Newsworld, the 24-hour news network, offered Monday to Friday, and the unlimited, unedited reportage provided by the Cable Public Affairs Channel. The news conferences, which provided 15 minutes of free air time to the political parties, were designed "to provide the parties with a morning soapbox from which to address the electorate and react to campaign developments" [Dornan, 1997, p. 163]. Unfortunately, not all of them took the opportunity, perhaps because, as Dornan explains, they were cautious about this new form of electioneering; but it did give them a means of speaking directly to voters. The biggest complaint about the news conferences, interestingly enough, came from print journalists, who "grumbled about being used as props for network coverage." [Dornan, 1997, p. 164]

The Cable Public Affairs Channel, funded by Canada's cable companies as part of their requirement to provide community programming, provided all-day long coverage of politics, live and unedited, simultaneously translated. "Uncut, unfiltered and unmistakable", as CPAC's own advertising said, it was nirvana for political aficionados, who could watch everything from news conferences and party caucus sessions to all-candidates' meetings and election rallies, as well as all the minutiae of life on the campaign trail. It was "the television channel of record in 1997" [Dornan, 1997, p. 153], and as such gave viewers the alternative view and the behind-the-scenes look at the election process and the media coverage of it which the other broadcasting outlets could

not. What had been designed as cheap way to provide community programming ended up being a fascinating - although admittedly, sometimes tedious - examination of the Canadian election.

Although television, as always, was the main medium of political communication during the election, it was the newspapers that set the agenda, and in fact, changed the direction of the campaign. After *Le Soleil* broke the story about Jacques Parizeau's intention to make a unilateral declaration of independence following the referendum of 1995, and the *Globe and Mail* printed the front page headline "Unity Becomes Campaign Focus" [Greenspon, 1997, p. 29] the election agenda moved away from the economic and social issues of most concern to Canadian citizens and towards that of national unity.

### **How The Campaign Was Organized: For The Party**

The organization of the Bloc Québécois campaign was a striking contrast to that of the Scottish National Party. Ad hoc, disorganised, and seemingly pointless, the Bloc had nothing like the five-year strategic plan of the SNP, with its regular check-points on an organizational grid. Even after professional campaign staff were brought in from the provincial Parti Québécois, the Bloc's strategy still operated on the basis of examining what the issues of the day - or "lines" - were in the major newspapers and electronic media, and adjusting the day's message accordingly. It was a case of "checking the lines" versus checking the grid, with little of the smooth competence of the SNP's election planning.

The Bloc basically had two campaigns: the first, run for the initial 10 days by what one political journalist referred to as "well-meaning amateurs" who had never organized an election campaign before; and the second, organized by the communications professionals based at the Parti Québécois headquarters in Montréal for the last four weeks. (All quotations in this chapter are from the research interviews, unless otherwise stated.) The Bloc also had two different messages: one designed to appeal to "soft sovereigntists", those who voted for the party because of its social democratic policies rather than its commitment to sovereignty; and the other, directed at the hard-core supporters of the sovereigntist project.

Given that the Bloc could have just as easily obtained the services of the PQ's skilled marketing and communications staff from the beginning of the campaign, it is unfortunate that BQ leader Gilles Duceppe did not take advantage of their expertise right from the start. The Parti Québécois had pioneered sophisticated techniques of political marketing based on modern social science methods promoted by the political scientists, sociologists, psychologists

and communications specialists who were members of the party [Charron, 1991, p. 115], techniques which had been honed in PQ campaigns since the 1980s. Certainly there was no shortage of money, with \$5-million earmarked for the 1997 campaign, as in 1993 [Howard, 1997]. But, according to one political journalist, Duceppe, still bruised from a divisive leadership campaign, wanted to “prove that he could run things and that his people could run things, but the problem was his people had never run things.”

After the Parti Québécois came to the aid of the Bloc campaign, with Bob Dufour, currently director-general of the PQ and former director-general of the Bloc, appointed as campaign manager, the organization improved. A team of five professional staff, including one specifically to handle the press, were put on the bus with Duceppe, supported by some 40 people working full-time on the campaign at party headquarters doing organization, fund-raising, advertising, communications and strategic planning. The daily schedule for the leader was revised to reduce the pressure on the inexperienced Duceppe, so that instead of four or five activities a day, there were just two, and efforts were made to keep him away from scrums as much as possible.

But the basic problem remained. Gilles Duceppe had only been leader of the party for six weeks before the election was called: certainly not enough time to develop the kind of detailed strategic planning needed for a federal election, or the communication skills required to handle the intense media scrutiny that he should have expected as leader of the Official Opposition in a national campaign.

### **The Run-Up To The Campaign**

The fact that Duceppe did not have enough time to prepare for the election was the result of the Bloc's ill-fated leadership race, held in the hopes that it would revive the Bloc's fortunes, which had started to decline during the autumn of 1996. Under the direction of Michel Gauthier, the affable but uncharismatic leader who had been chosen by a small group within the party after the departure of Lucien Bouchard, the BQ was rent by divisions resulting from the 1995 referendum and Bouchard's approach to public spending in Québec.

Duceppe and other members of the Bloc Québécois caucus became increasingly worried about the future of the party under Gauthier, as polls showed their party falling in public support from a high of 53 per cent in March of 1996, 18 per cent more than the Liberals, [Bernard, 1997, p. 136], to being almost neck-and-neck with the Liberal party at approximately 40 per cent of decided voters in October [McIlroy, 1996b]. Pressure began to mount for

Gauthier to resign, with the most outspoken critics being constitutional lawyer and eventual leadership candidate Daniel Turp, and Réal Ménard, who suggested in a Canadian Press story that "in the interest of the party", Gauthier "had to think about the decision he was to take." [Bernard, 1997, p. 135] Duceppe's role in this may not have been entirely innocent, either: it was widely rumoured that he had been behind the attempts to oust Gauthier. On December 2, just 10 months after he became leader, Gauthier announced he would resign, but not until the leadership convention in March. The belief of Bloc strategists that a leadership race would raise the profile of the party and focus attention on its policies over-rode any concern that it might not allow enough time to get ready for a possible spring election, or that it would project the image of a divided party so close to when the election was due to be called.

At first it seemed as if the leadership campaign was achieving its aim; surveys showed that the Bloc was once again riding high in the polls, at 49 per cent, a full 16 points ahead of the Liberals [Bernard, 1997, p. 137]. However, the execution of the selection process and the conduct of the actual convention on March 15 proved to be a harbinger of the election campaign to come. In contrast to the method used to elect Gauthier, in which only a small number participated, this time all of the registered party members, 113,000, were to be polled by mail. Unfortunately, only 45 per cent bothered to return their ballots, which created an impression of party apathy. The debates among the candidates which were supposed to be "confrontations", were actually, as one political journalist recalled, "boring; like good sovereigntists they all got up and said the same thing." This reached almost comical proportions, as Bernard describes it: "Indeed, when one of the six candidates, Yves Duhaime, spoke of 'renewal', the other five replied by saying that the caucus members had done a marvellous job in the House of Commons and deserved the praise of their party." [Bernard, 1997, p. 137] However, although the candidates did their best to present a picture of unity within the party, they could not hide the fact that there were major disputes on policy issues, and that the two leading candidates, Duhaime and Duceppe, were openly hostile to each other. The convention itself did little to inspire excitement.

From the standpoint of the television viewer, that convention looked like a disaster. The hall in which it was held seemed, at best, half full. The mood of the convention was very dull, and the whole thing was amateurish. One of the speakers (Yves Duhaime) was even interrupted by a bigot bearing a Quebec flag where each fleur-de-lis had been replaced by a swastika (this

person had not only been able to get into the convention hall, he had been able to come near to the platform and to jump behind Yves Duhaime!).

[Bernard, 1997, p. 137]

This television image was certainly a strong contrast to that created by the well-orchestrated performance of the Parti Québécois in the National Assembly during the debates on the referendum in 1980.

In addition, although having the vote done by mail might have been more democratic, it did not provide the same kind of drama as the usual leadership contest. The process was also handicapped by the fact that there was some mistrust of the postal ballot process among BQ members because the system was so easily open to abuse, as anyone could fill them in [Bernard, 1997, p. 138]. When the count was finally made, Duceppe was the first choice of 48 per cent of the members, and second choice of another five per cent, with the remaining 47 per cent of the votes going to Duhaime, who received 33.9 per cent, or Rodrigue Biron, 13.3 per cent. It was not a resounding victory, and the fighting began almost as soon as the results were announced. Duhaime refused to join Duceppe and the other candidates on stage at the close of the convention, and openly questioned Duceppe's ability to lead the party. Bloc MP Nic Leblanc announced he would quit the party to sit as an independent rather than accept Duceppe as leader, a move that jeopardized the BQ's official-opposition status, as it left the party tied with Reform at 50 seats. The most damaging response came from André Neron, former aide to Michel Gauthier, who flatly stated in a Radio-Canada interview that Duceppe's victory was "the worst thing that could happen for the Bloc". Neron went on to accuse Lucien Bouchard and his allies of helping to arrange Duceppe's win and conspiring "to dump Gauthier because Duceppe is more willing to take marching orders from Bouchard than Gauthier was" [Bauch, 1997b]. Far from being a display of sovereigntist solidarity, "the convention showed a spectacle of dissension" [Bernard, 1997, p. 138].

The divisions within the party were not helped by Duceppe's decision to deny Gauthier the position of House Leader, a mean-spirited gesture that antagonized party members and political journalists alike, so much so that the francophone reporters in the House of Commons felt sorry for Gauthier, and abandoned their usual professional objectivity to comfort him. As one of them described the event:

"Duceppe rejected it in a very rude manner, and in the scrum, the Monday [after the convention] Gauthier was there...and we

were asking him, 'What happened with you? [Gauthier said] 'Oh, I, I, Duceppe told me I wasn't chosen as parliamentary leader. We said, 'Are you...disappointed?' He said, 'Yes, I'm disappointed', and the drama is there right in front of the TV cameras, and us as the reporters, the French reporters, were going, 'Poor guy'...it's not human; the cameras shut up and we go on the side and start talking to him without our tape recorders, saying, 'Poor you'; but that's...unique; you don't see that with politicians; and suddenly you see a camera from CPAC...they come here and want to be on the record with him and we say to CPAC, 'Stop; go away'; reporters are saying that; it shows that for us it was like a big human event; it was really bad. So Duceppe has a bad reputation."

This negative perception of the Bloc leader, added to the history of conflicts with the BQ's communications office over its earlier attempts to control access to Bloc MPs, did not create a favourable atmosphere for the party's media relations during the soon-to-be called election. It also did not do much to convince party members or political journalists that Duceppe could unite the fractious Bloc. The fact that he was generally seen as Bouchard's man, his "surrogate in Ottawa" [Martin, 1997, p. 314], was a source of conflict with those in the party who supported the hard-line sovereigntist and social democratic views of former PQ leader Jacques Parizeau, and rejected Bouchard's softer position of sovereignty-association and more conservative attitude towards budget cuts and deficit control. As former cabinet ministers in the PQ government, defeated leadership candidates Duhaime and Biron "had posed a serious threat to Mr. Bouchard's iron-fisted control over the separatist movement" [Seguin and Unland, 1997]. With Duceppe as leader of the Bloc, Bouchard had "a man who marched to his drumbeat." [Martin, 1997, p. 314]

Bouchard's close identification with Duceppe and the Bloc campaign caused serious problems for the fledgling leader, who, in his stubborn determination to be his own man, chose his own equally inexperienced people for his campaign team, with disastrous results. Secondly, although Bouchard was an extremely popular figure in Québec, his moves to balance the provincial budget through massive cuts to education, health and social service spending were not, and Québec voters did not necessarily accept Duceppe's argument that this was the result of the federal government's own cuts in social spending transfers to the provinces. Thirdly, Bouchard's prominent role also made it difficult for Duceppe to come up with good enough reasons for supporting the Bloc, when the real power of the sovereigntist movement was seen as based in the provincial government with Bouchard and the Parti Québécois, and the only role left for the Bloc was to be, as one anglophone reporter put it, "a heckler for the government in Ottawa and the cheerleader for the government in Québec City".

The most significant aspect of Bouchard's involvement, however, was, that it violated the unwritten rule of Canadian politics, which is, said one anglophone journalist,

"that politicians at one level stay out of politics on the other level...provincial politicians don't get involved in federal politics on a public partisan level...they may comment on the election campaign but they have always preserved or try to preserve at least a facade of neutrality....In this campaign Bouchard not only endorsed the Bloc and urged his people to go out and support the Bloc, but he laid himself on the line to a certain extent by campaigning, by making a number of campaign appearances on behalf of the Bloc with Duceppe and other people during the election campaign. So this was unprecedented, and it represented a certain amount of risk on Bouchard's part; the fact that he was identifying himself with the Bloc means he was going to be associated with the results of the campaign."

This rule was obviously one Québec voters also accepted, according to a Sondagem poll carried out for the sovereigntist paper *Le Devoir* in early April, which revealed that 63 per cent of the more than 1,000 surveyed preferred that Bouchard not get involved in the campaign [McKenzie, 1997].

The increase in poll support generated by the leadership race was soon dissipated. A poll done for both the English and French-language networks of the CBC and *La Presse* five weeks later put the Bloc two points behind the Liberals, who were at 37 per cent, while two other surveys showed them to be ahead of the Liberal Party, but by only five or six per cent. In addition, the CBC poll showed the support for sovereignty at 35 per cent, down 10 per cent from the previous year, and a dramatic decline from the 49.6 per cent who voted "Yes" during the 1995 referendum. The timing could not have been worse, for the discouraging results of the CBC poll were broadcast the evening of the Bloc's campaign launch April 28 at Duceppe's nomination meeting in Montréal - a meeting at which Lucien Bouchard and Gilles Duceppe were supposed to demonstrate the strength and solidarity of the sovereigntist movement. However, the negative poll results cast a pall over the crowd of 400 at the meeting, and Bouchard's dynamic performance stole the show from Duceppe at what was supposed to be his forum - a foretaste of what was to come.

### **The Campaign Itself: "It Was The Wrong Place"**

There was more bad news for the Bloc the next day. The results of two provincial by-elections held the day of the campaign launch showed a worrisome trend, with the Parti Québécois losing one seat and a considerable share of the



vote in the other, with voter turnout dropping from 81 per cent in 1994 to 48 per cent [Gazette, 1997a]. A tense and nervous Duceppe could only blame the federal government for "shovelling its problems into the province's backyard" [Bernard, 1997, p. 139] by cutting transfer payments, which in turn had forced Bouchard to initiate his deeply unpopular programme of budget cuts. That argument had worked in the past for the sovereigntists, but apparently, no longer; another finding of the CBC survey was that "only a minority of the Quebec respondents blamed the federal government for the cuts in the most sensitive sector, that of health." [Bernard, 1997, p. 139] It was a difficult start to what turned out to be the most disastrous day of his campaign, and one that set the tone for the rest of the election.

The Bloc's campaign slogan - "Le Bloc est là pour toi parole de Québécois" (The Bloc is there for you a Quebecer keeps his word) - was meant to reinforce the Bloc's main campaign theme that the Liberals and Tories could not be trusted to defend the interests of Québec in Ottawa. The events of the first week of the campaign, however, seemed to demonstrate that although the Bloc was there for you, it was in the wrong place - a metaphor, perhaps for the Bloc's ambivalent position as a federal party whose aim was to break up the Canadian federation.

What happened on April 29 was this. The first stop of the day was at a cheese factory in Sorel, and Duceppe, along with all the accompanying journalists and Bloc campaign aides, donned the obligatory plastic hair-net required by health regulations, which resembled a shower-cap and did nothing to enhance his dignity. Unfortunately for Duceppe, this cheese factory was the wrong place. In 1996 the Bloc had led a very successful public relations campaign against the federal government's proposed legislation banning raw-milk-cheese, a profitable gourmet product for several small cheese factories in Québec. Their campaign culminated in a cheese-tasting in the foyer of the House of Commons for journalists and politicians at which even Health Minister David Dingwall was seen attending and nibbling on some cheese. As a result the planned legislation was dropped, and since then sales of the raw-milk- cheese in Québec had increased by 30 per cent [Richer, 1997].

But the cheese factory in Sorel used only pasteurized milk, and the owner told the visiting journalists that "he personally had reservations about the norms permitted by Agriculture Canada in the raw-milk cheese industry" [Authier, 1997d]. As the press aide to Duceppe parachuted into his campaign after the first week by the PQ explained: "It was the wrong place. If they had gone to the right place with the right person saying 'Yes, the Bloc helped me a lot' - and we had people like that who were ready to do that - but it happened [we had]...an

organization problem." The reporters were bored: they had no story, so they focused on the hair-net. A Canadian Press photographer took a close-up photo of Duceppe in the silly-looking headgear, and *Le Journal de Montréal*, Québec's highest-circulation daily, put the picture on the top corner of the front page with the caption, "Une drôle campagne" (A funny campaign), and the cascade of ridicule began - the worst perhaps being Serge Chapleau's cartoon on the editorial page of *La Presse* the following day showing a solemn Duceppe in the now-famous "cheese hat" saying, "Tomorrow I visit a condom factory" - which prompted reporters to begin referring to it as the "condom hat" [Dornan, 1997, p. 159].

The reason for this reaction cannot just be attributed to the usual mischievousness of jaded political journalists on the campaign trail. It is significant that it was *Le Journal de Montréal*, founded by long-time sovereigntist publisher Pierre Péladeau, that made the cheese hat story. It is not unusual, after all, for politicians to wear funny-looking hats; in fact, it is almost an occupational hazard for them. As one anglophone reporter said, "I've seen 500 politicians walk through a factory with something dumb on their heads". But the nature of the coverage showed that francophone journalists were no longer willing to report the Bloc with the same kind of sympathetic journalism that the PQ had enjoyed. The media's willingness to make fun of Duceppe was, as one veteran anglophone journalist said, "a bad omen...the campaign never really recovered from that".

The campaign continued to flounder. The second event of the day of the cheese hat was a visit to a well-known veterinary college in Ste-Hyacinthe, a Québec agricultural centre. Unfortunately, few of the veterinary students were available as they were writing exams, "so Duceppe saw more horses and cows than students, and we counted them", one of the journalists on the leader's tour recalled. It was only then that reporters were told Duceppe would be discussing the Bloc's agricultural programme. When Duceppe complained that Québec received far less in agricultural subsidies from the federal government than the western provinces, "opponents were quick to contrast his criticism of the federal government policy and the sorry plight of all those Manitoba farmers who were, at the very same time, hit by a terrible flood" [Bernard, 1997, p. 141].

The next day was no better. The first scheduled visit to a pet-food factory was cancelled "for unclear reasons" [Bauch, 1997d], and a hastily-called press conference at the party's Montréal headquarters was held instead. After lunch with a women's group, attended by barely a dozen people, "the Bloc road show arrived late for a scheduled tour of an explosives plant" [Bauch, 1997d], so Duceppe and local candidate Daniel Turp shook hands with the workers as

they left the factory at the end of their shift. This led to another embarrassing television image for the Bloc leader, as one of the workers refused to shake Duceppe's hand, saying, "I'm not going to give my hand to a guy who wants to destroy the country" [Bauch, 1997d].

There was more bad news for the beleaguered leader: the province's biggest trade union organization, the Québec Federation of Labour, was considering withdrawing its support from the Bloc. Clément Godbout, head of the 480,000-member QFL, said at a May Day rally attended by 700 people that if the QFL supported the Bloc, it would indicate that they agreed with Bouchard's budget-cutting policies, as the Bloc and the PQ were one and the same. The Bloc had not taken a strong enough stand against such policies, and, he said, "I think it's very important that the union movement send a message." [Norris, 1997] The federation's governing general council sent the message at its May 9 meeting when it accepted the recommendation that the QFL discontinue its support for the Bloc.

Even the sovereigntist newspaper *Le Devoir* was critical of the Bloc's approach. Columnist Michel Venne, while attacking the prime minister's approach to national unity, saying that the Liberal Party "offers no significant reform, relying instead on Canada's success on the scale of global misery...and on administrative accords with provinces in order to show that the country is not a prison," wrote that the challenge for the Bloc was to abandon its "crybaby rhetoric and instead present stimulating reasons on why sovereignty would make sense" [Gazette, 1997a].

A gaffe a day keeps a journalist happy, as one francophone reporter wrote of the Bloc campaign [Richer, 1997], and in the first week the journalists were very happy indeed. On May 2 the bus full of political journalists got lost on the way to meet Duceppe at Kingsey Falls and arrived 45 minutes late. This in itself would have not been a story, but what happened was that when the bus arrived, before journalists could ask a single question, a fuming Duceppe fired the bus-driver and launched into a tirade against his organization. The bus driver, angry at being fired, "told any reporter who would listen, and there were many, that it was the Bloc's fault he'd got lost; after all, wasn't it they who had provided the map? 'If the Bloc isn't able to get an agenda right, imagine what they'd be like in government!' he said." [Heinrich, 1997] It was too good to resist, and the picture of the hapless driver at the wheel trying to find the leader became another one of the dominant images of the campaign, along with the cheese hat.

Something had to be done, and it was. The day after, Duceppe fired his press attaché and his media bus co-ordinator, who were replaced with PQ cabinet minister staff, and a PQ campaign organizer from Lucien Bouchard's

office “was given more authority on the Duceppe team” [Siblin, 1997b]. On Sunday, Duceppe replaced his campaign manager, MP Michel Daviault, with Bob Dufour, director-general of the Parti Québécois. As well as being an old friend of Duceppe’s, Dufour had been director-general of the Bloc and the party’s chief campaign organizer in the 1993 election. He had a long history with the PQ, having worked as a party organizer during the 1970s and 80s, and was a key figure in Duceppe’s election in 1990 as the first member of the Bloc to be elected to the House of Commons. Under Dufour’s direction, the campaign gained new energy and a more coherent strategy, with a focus on what made the Bloc unique: not its social democratic policies, which were similar to those of the New Democratic Party, but the goal of Québec independence. The 35-page booklet which summarized the Bloc’s platform, *Plate-forme électorale. Document synthèse. Bloc Québécois*, had made only one mention of the party’s main objective, perhaps in the belief “that such a tactic can bring new votes.” [Bernard, 1997, p. 143] However, Dufour did not share that view. As far as he was concerned, from now on the Bloc “had to focus on the project making Quebec a sovereign country.” [Bernard, 1997, p. 143]

The new campaign team acted quickly to relieve the stresses on the leader by reducing the number of campaign events, recalled one strategist, who had worked in every PQ election since 1980. “We slowed down the beat of activities in one day...In the first days there was something like four activities a day and there was something like 50 journalists with cameras and everything else; the pressure was much too strong on someone who had never been a leader of a party.” Another strategy was to bolster Duceppe’s confidence, which had been badly shaken by the media’s reactions to the gaffes of the previous week. One aide, a former journalist who had spent several years as press attaché to Québec federal cabinet ministers before working for the PQ and the Bloc, found that some of the journalists on the campaign felt so sorry for Duceppe that they tried to help.

“I recall when I arrived, some of them told me, because some of them I know very well, and they told me he’s too serious, and he’s stressed and the message doesn’t go through....I told him, ‘Listen, you know your stuff, you know the content, so why don’t you relax, and when you do your speech the people we have in front of you are BQ people, are partisan people, so don’t try to convince them, make them laugh, make them laugh and make them believe that you will win,’ and he changed totally his speech, and he made jokes and he was totally different. And at the end the journalists were saying, what happened, and that evening he had good coverage because they realized Gilles Duceppe had a good sense of humour....”

Duceppe's relief was almost palpable: the relaxed and newly-energized leader gave a dynamic performance, "hitting some passionate notes and cracking jokes" [Siblin, 1997a] as he attacked the prime minister for his elitist fund-raising techniques and neglect of the unemployed. The campaign was beginning to recover, it seemed. When the Liberals attacked Lucien Bouchard for sending a letter to PQ members asking them to give to the Bloc's \$3.2-million election fund-raising drive, saying that it showed "how desperate the Bloc's campaign must be" [Authier, 1997e], the PQ calmly denied that the premier had done anything wrong, and that was the end of the controversy. It looked as if the "long martyrdom" [Bernard, 1997, p. 140] of the campaign was over, and the Bloc at last had an effective strategy and a team capable of carrying it out. But once again, Duceppe was to be over-shadowed by another prominent figure in the sovereigntist movement, Jacques Parizeau.

### L'affaire Parizeau

When Parizeau indicated in a newspaper interview May 5 that he was eager to campaign for the Bloc in the federal election, Duceppe welcomed his participation, describing the former PQ leader as "an elder statesman" [Siblin, 1997c]. He deflected criticism that Parizeau's comments about "money and the ethnic vote" on the night of the referendum showed him to be intolerant of minorities by saying that Parizeau had been married to a woman who came from Poland. But, however receptive Duceppe seemed to be to Parizeau's involvement in the campaign, it presented both an opportunity and a threat to the Bloc leader. Parizeau was useful in that he was enormously popular with the hard-line *indépendantistes*, whose activist energy was needed to do the work of the campaign and give it a boost, but his uncompromising stance on independence could also scare off the "soft sovereigntist" voters, those who were willing to support the PQ and the Bloc but not necessarily their goal of independence. As it happened, Parizeau turned out to be more of a threat to the Bloc campaign, and in fact, almost derailed it completely.

Bob Dufour had not yet stepped into his position as campaign director when the Parizeau bombshell hit. In a story published May 7, journalist Michel Vastel of *Le Soleil* revealed that Parizeau had apparently planned to unilaterally declare independence shortly after the referendum if the sovereigntist forces had won, despite the fact that he had signed an agreement with Lucien Bouchard and Mario Dumont of Action démocratique du Québec that negotiations with Canada would take place first. An excerpt from his book, *Pour un Québec Souverain*, scheduled to be released May 12, described what Parizeau referred to as "le

grand jeu" (or great wager): his scheme to ensure international endorsement of Québec's sovereignty by having the Québec National Assembly approve a unilateral declaration of independence within a week of the vote, which would have then been used as a lever to persuade France and afterwards, the United States, to recognize Québec's independence. In the book Parizeau confirmed

that in the days before the vote, he had dispatched former PQ cabinet minister Jacques-Yvan Morin to Paris as his emissary to arrange details of a quick French recognition of Quebec's impending independence; that the National Assembly would have been convened within 48 hours of the vote; and that an emergency reserve of \$17 billion, almost half of it from Quebec's pension fund, had been set aside to prop up the Canadian dollar in case financial markets panicked after a Yes vote.

[Bauch, 1997f]

Although it was certainly not news that Parizeau had always been a reluctant player in the sovereignty-association game, preferring outright independence, the fact that it seemed he had deliberately plotted in secret to instigate a fast-track route to Québec's independence was a major shock to both Bouchard and Duceppe, who said they knew nothing about what their colleague had planned. The disclosure put both of them in an extremely difficult position, for, as one anglophone reporter explained, Parizeau "revealed every one of his allies to be either duplicitous along with him, or frozen out of the real decisions of...a movement in which they had claimed to be full partners." It was also exactly the kind of news that would frighten away the soft sovereigntists who would vote for the Bloc and the PQ as long as there was no real danger of separation.

For the next 48 hours Bouchard and Duceppe made desperate attempts at damage control, disassociating themselves as much as possible from their sovereigntist partner, along with "almost all the articulate political class", both federalist and separatist [Johnson, 1997a]. The media reaction, both francophone and anglophone, was equally fierce. Bouchard's close friend and former Bloc MP Jean Lapierre, host of one of Montréal's most popular morning talk-shows, lampooned the Bloc's campaign slogan, "Parole de Québécois" (A Quebecer keeps his word), and said that Parizeau's broken promise to Quebecers and his sovereigntist allies that he would negotiate in good faith with Canada was a disaster for the BQ campaign [Scott, 1997]. Duceppe said he would not campaign on the same platform with Parizeau, while Bouchard said in the National Assembly that he had not known about the plan, and as the designated chief negotiator, he would never have permitted the contravention of the signed agreement [Séguin and Fraser, 1997].

Parizeau was unavailable for comment the day the story broke. On the day after, May 8, he released a statement which, depending on your point of view, was "an extraordinarily weasel-worded document" (this, from an anglophone political journalist) or an explanation that put the "few controversial sentences" that Parizeau had written "in their context", so that they "were shown to refer to one simple hypothesis which had been discarded." [Bernard, 1997, p. 141] Parizeau blamed the journalist who had written the initial story, Michel Vastel, accusing him of "more than a falsehood...a lie", and he "challenged anyone to find a sentence in which he said he intended an immediate unilateral declaration of independence" [Fraser, 1997b]. That was enough to bring him back into the sovereigntist fold. As the headline in *La Presse* so aptly put it: "Au Bloc, Parizeau passe de vilain à héros en un jour" ("To the Bloc, Parizeau goes from villain to hero in a day") [Gagnon, 1997].

For Duceppe, the transformation occurred in less than a day. The morning of May 8 the Bloc leader said in a radio interview of Parizeau's plans for a UDI, "c'est de la fabulation" ("it's make-believe"). By the afternoon, when his aides had told him about Parizeau's statement, "he proclaimed himself perfectly satisfied with the ex-premier's complicated clarification" [Siblin, 1997f]. The sudden change raised more questions for Duceppe from the journalists: why, for example, hadn't he contacted Parizeau himself to find out what was going on? Why had Parizeau left his sovereigntist allies to deal with the controversy alone? Lastly, why did Duceppe go "from supportive to disapproving to attacking and back to supportive within 24 hours?" [Siblin, 1997f] There were no concrete answers, and Duceppe said he was not worried that he would be appearing in his first television leadership debate the same day that Parizeau would be officially launching his controversial book.

Although the worst of it was over, *L'affaire Parizeau* had exposed the deep rifts within the sovereigntist movement, particularly the conflict between Bouchard and Parizeau's vision of how Québec independence could and should be achieved. Parizeau's more revolutionary - and admittedly realistic - view that the rest of Canada would not want to negotiate its break-up was irreconcilable with Bouchard's plans for a partnership, in which hard-line sovereigntists did not put much faith. Mistrustful of Bouchard's sovereigntist intentions, they were also wary of Gilles Duceppe, whose arguments for sovereignty lacked the force and precision displayed by the former PQ leader. The extent of Parizeau's popularity was clearly demonstrated at his book launch May 12, when 500 people crowded into the lobby of the Bibliothèque Nationale while 100 more waited outside. Bouchard was conspicuous by his absence at what one reporter

described as “a separatist love-in” [Bauch, 1997g]. The contrast between Parizeau and Duceppe could have not been more striking.

### **The Television Debates: A Lost Opportunity**

As a result of *L'affaire Parizeau*, national unity had become the focus of the campaign, and the other federal parties were quick to exploit the opportunity. Jean Chrétien attacked Jean Charest, leader of the Progressive Conservatives, for opposing the federal government's move to have the Supreme Court rule on the legality of Québec making a unilateral declaration of independence. Charest, in turn, criticized the Liberals for their hard-line strategy, known as “Plan B”, saying it showed they were planning for the break-up of the country, just like the separatists, and lambasted the Reform Party for being willing to negotiate such a break-up. The Reform Party leader, Preston Manning, portrayed both parties as incapable of dealing with the national unity issue, and described Chrétien as unwilling and unable to provide leadership on Québec. As the *Globe and Mail* noted in its May 9 story headlined “Unity becomes campaign focus”: “The spectre of Canada's breakup now looms over the federal election campaign, with the politicians who want to lead a united Canada fighting over its potential disintegration” [Delacourt and Greenspon, 1997].

The argument was intensified by intergovernmental affairs minister Stéphane Dion when, in what was described as “an extraordinary half-hour interview” [Wells, 1997b] for a Radio-Canada television programme May 11, he outlined the details of the government's Plan B: Ottawa would not negotiate with Québec on independence unless it was satisfied with the referendum question wording, the conduct of the campaign, and what constituted a winning majority. This last issue was of critical concern, for sovereigntists had long said that “50 plus one” was enough to achieve victory in a vote on independence. As it turned out, it was to be the most influential question of the French-language television debate held two days later - largely because, for reasons of fate, it went un-asked.

The television debates were crucial for Duceppe, the French-language debate in particular, as they provided him with his best opportunity for reinvigorating the faltering Bloc campaign. Watched by more than 50 per cent of eligible Canadian voters [LeDuc, 1997, p. 212], and broadcast on both the CBC and the private CTV network, televised leaders' debates had been a fixture of Canadian elections since 1984, which was also the year they were first broadcast in both French and English. The debates were important in that they attracted large audiences - more than 3.37-million in 1993, for example [Evenson, 1997] -



but over the years, as the format changed to accommodate Canada's multi-party system, they tended to have less of a dramatic effect on the outcome of the federal elections. Their chief value was to political parties with new, unknown leaders such as Duceppe, Charest, or the NDP's Alexa McDonough, who could use the debates "to establish a positive image with the public rather than to attempt to dispel or reinforce an existing one" [LeDuc, 1997, p. 214]. The Bloc organization was obviously very much aware of this, for Duceppe was cloistered in a hotel for three days before the debate with his team, aided by Yves Dupré, director of the influential Montréal communications firm, BDDS, whose task it was to polish the leader's image, and Pierre-Paul Roy, an advisor from Bouchard's office, who developed sound-bites that could be used to attack the other leaders, while Éric Meunier, Duceppe's cabinet chief, prepared background files on the comments made by the other leaders about Québec issues [Gagnon, 1997c].

However, all this careful preparation came to naught, as once again, Duceppe was sabotaged by events outwith his control. Although he had not expected much of the English-language debate May 12, at one point saying it "was a dress rehearsal for the only one that mattered" [McIlroy and Thanh Ha, 1997], the way it was conducted made it even more difficult for him to participate. The moderator, the CBC's Ann Medina, announced "that she intended to intervene as little as possible...With five participants, this announcement all but guaranteed that it would be an unruly and undisciplined affair" [LeDuc, 1997, p. 215], and it was. The debate was dominated by Chrétien and Charest, with Manning and McDonough shouting over each other to be heard, and after a half hour of this, Duceppe seemed to give up and only joined the debate to plead for a separate Québec [Wills, 1997b]. The consensus of viewers and pundits alike was that it had been Charest's night. Forceful, energetic, and confident, the Conservative leader attracted the only applause from the studio audience when he declared "that if there's one commitment to my children, it's that I'm going to pass on to them the country I received from my parents. I am determined to make that happen.'" [Dornan, 1997, p. 159]

The French-language debate was where Duceppe had to make a good impression; he was operating on his home turf, speaking to a francophone audience, and it was essential that he convince Québec voters that the Bloc really was there for them. At first it looked as if the this debate would go better for him. Although its structure was the same as that of the English-language one the night before, the moderator, TVA's Claire Lamarche, kept tighter control of the proceedings, preventing aggressive interruptions and allowing more participation by Manning and McDonough. The focus was on Duceppe, and he seemed to rise

to the occasion: certainly his performance was more vigorous and he was obviously eager to challenge the federalist Chrétien and Charest on the national unity issue. But the opportunity never came. Two hours into the debate, just when journalist Jean-François Lepine was preparing to ask the prime minister the question: "Mr. Chrétien, if the YES won by a proportion of 50.6 per cent the next time, would you accept the popular verdict?" Claire Lamarche fell ill and collapsed. (Duceppe was the only leader of the five who went to her aid, a fact little noticed by the media.) After she had been taken to hospital by ambulance about 10 minutes later, the debate was suspended, and with it, "an unequivocal answer to the unity issue's most volatile question. The question hung in the air over the entire country." [Dornan, 1997, p. 160]

Lamarche's treatment by the media also became a subject of public controversy. At the moment of her collapse, the television cameras did not move away from Lepine to focus on her, but when she was carried out of the building on a stretcher, they did, much to her obvious discomfort.

The distress of this public figure at such a public moment suddenly became a private matter. To their credit, most Canadians concurred. Though Ms. Lamarche had been on television screens across the country only moments before, television had no business shoving cameras in her face simply because she had been taken ill.

[Dornan, 1997, p. 161]

The sudden end to the debate may have helped Chrétien, who was perceived as being rescued from "having to take a position on one of the most difficult questions of the sovereignty debate" [LeDuc, 1997, p. 217], but it certainly did not help Duceppe. A continuation of the debate was held Sunday, May 18, but at only 45 minutes long, and with the discussion centred on such well-worn constitutional issues as the Meech Lake agreement, the Charlottetown Accord, and Québec's "distinct society", it did not cover any new ground and seemed anti-climactic.

It also did not make any difference to the attitudes of viewers as to who had performed the best. It was not Duceppe. More than half of the respondents nation-wide to a post-election survey who had seen at least one of the debates chose Charest as the "winner", and this increased to two-thirds among francophone viewers, while only four per cent of Québec respondents chose Duceppe. These findings were supported by an Environics poll conducted immediately following the debates, which showed the Conservatives had gained five per cent in the popular vote nationally. Most worrisome for the sovereigntists, the same poll revealed that the Tories had made big gains in

Québec, mostly at the expense of the Bloc, who were trailing the Conservatives by nine points at 27 per cent [LeDuc, 1997, p. 219]. Bloc activists were beginning to panic, and more prominent figures in the Parti Québécois, including the television artist and producer, Lise Payette, got involved in the campaign "in the hope of reversing the down-hill slide of the Bloc Québécois." [Bernard, 1997, p. 144]

### Qui dit vrai

One subtext in the dialogue between political journalists and Canadian politicians in the 1997 election was the issue of truth. Always a somewhat ambiguous concept for those in politics, or, as former NDP leader Ed Broadbent so nicely described it, "a second order commitment" [Broadbent, 1996, p. 271], truth - or its lack of it - was a concern for the academics and journalists who observed "a campaign characterized by cranky citizens telling reporters, politicians and phone-in radio shows that they don't believe their ballots will matter." [Thanh Ha, 1997] The difficulties this could create for Canadian democracy were obvious.

The issue of truth-telling by politicians had initially been highlighted by the publication of a book, *Le Syndrome de Pinocchio: Essai sur le mensonge en politique* by *La Presse* reporter André Pratte, which analyzed the extent of lying in modern political life and the danger it posed for civil society. Pratte saw the obfuscation of politicians as "a gangrene infecting the entire system" [Thanh Ha, 1997], and in his daily election column, "Qui dit vrai", did his best to cure the malady by identifying the deceptions and falsehoods promulgated by the candidates. There was plenty of them, with Chrétien's stated reasons for the election and Parizeau's denial of his plans for a UDI being the most blatant examples. Gilles Duceppe was not immune to the disease - his statement during the English-language debate that Québec had more investment than any other Canadian province was disproved in a Pratte column - but more often than not, he seemed to get in trouble for telling the truth.

The first controversy was when he told members of the Canadian Jewish Congress in Montréal that if in an independent Québec a federalist party came to power, nothing could stop it from proposing a referendum to rejoin Canada. "This is democracy. We can't decide for the next generation," he said [Bryden, 1997]. A report of his comments was headlined "Neverendum referendum", and Duceppe was ridiculed by both federalist and sovereigntist leaders, and PQ Government House leader Pierre Bélanger quickly re-asserted the official sovereigntist line that once a referendum was held and Québec became

independent, there would be no turning back [Séguin, 1997b]. To André Pratte, the reaction to Duceppe's remarks was another instance of the Pinocchio Syndrome. "He tells the truth. So he gets clobbered," Pratte said of the Bloc leader's remarks [Thanh Ha, 1997].

His most contentious comments were those on the subject of the possible partition of Québec following a referendum, prompted by a journalist's query as to what a sovereign Québec would "do with the Cree people if they want to stay in Canada after a Yes vote". Duceppe said that an independent Québec would negotiate with the First Nations people, and if the negotiations failed, would never use force, but would go to an international tribunal to "know what are the rights of natives around the world, not only in Quebec. There can't be one law for Quebec and another for the rest of the world." [Riga, 1997a] The next day, May 22, Lucien Bouchard made it quite clear that there would be no negotiation with the Cree over partition of their homeland in the north of the province. "The territory of Quebec is endowed with a fundamental characteristic, which is its integrity," he told reporters. "Legally, we are told by studies that we have a territory to which we have impeccable title." Contradicted by the PQ leader, Duceppe could only say that he had been misunderstood [Thompson and Riga, 1997]. As columnist William Johnson described him: "Duceppe, still fundamentally an innocent, blurts out his embarrassing truths that his mentors then rush to contradict." [Johnson, 1997b]

However, as one anglophone political journalist explained, perhaps Duceppe's difficulties arose because he did not tell the truth well enough.

"At least as important as all the trivia and static like the hair-net and the bus-driver was Duceppe's almost touching willingness to answer questions that sovereigntists have been wise not to answer for a long time. How do you arbitrate the rights of the natives in northern Québec as against the rights of all other Quebecers in the event of a secession? Boy, you don't want to touch that question; he gave it his best shot and inevitably stirred up controversy with the movement...Duceppe's problem was that he kind of only half-answered these questions. He offered an opening gambit...in what would have been a long debate over, you know, fundamental questions, but he clearly hadn't thought them through; and so to the extent the choice was between shutting up or thinking hard as to what a really valid answer would be he didn't do either. He barged in and found himself having to back out amid emergency damage control by his staff."

Certainly that view was echoed by Duceppe's own communications specialist, Yves Dupré, who, on May 23, just 10 days before the end of the campaign, gave an interview to *La Presse* saying that the Bloc leader was partly to blame for the negative performance of his party. There were obviously some things outside his

control such as the logistical errors of the first days of the campaign, Dupré said, but the ambiguity of Duceppe's responses to such questions as the integrity of Québec territory and whether the next referendum would be the last understandably led to some contradictions [Lessard, 1997c].

The response of the anxious Bloc strategists was to sideline Duceppe and highlight Bouchard and Parizeau, who were seen as much more effective campaigners. Certainly, they were able to bring in the crowds of sovereigntist supporters in a way that Duceppe could not, but even with their participation, the Bloc seemed to be in free-fall, with "*L'effet Charest*" (the Charest Effect) stealing votes from the party's soft-sovereigntist supporters. At 31 per cent in the polls May 23, it was only one per cent ahead of the Conservatives, and four points behind the Liberals. Party strategists feared the worst; the last week of the campaign was, as the headline in *La Presse* said, "*Une semaine pour sauver les meubles*" (A week to save the furniture) [Marissal, 1997b].

### Chrétien and Reform to The Rescue

The Bloc's furniture did get saved during the final days of the election, not because of its own actions, but, ironically, because of those of the Reform Party and Jean Chrétien, the BQ's ideological enemies. It was Reform's "secret ad" on national unity - not even the party's own candidates knew about it [Ellis and Archer, 1997] - first aired on Canadian television May 22 that gave the Bloc campaign the impetus it needed, for its hostile, anti-Québec message frightened soft sovereigntists and federalists alike. Reform strategists had wanted to make national unity a key campaign issue, because they saw it "as a so-called wedge issue, one which separated them from all the other parties" [Greenspon, 1997, p. 30]. Their television commercial certainly did that.

It began with grainy black and white pictures of Chrétien and Charest. The voice-over then stated: "The last time, these men almost lost our country and will do it again with distinct society when these men (pictures of Bouchard and Duceppe were shown) hold their next referendum." The commercial switched to colour with a background of soothing music. The voice-over continued: "Preston Manning and the Reform Party believe there is a better way to keep our country together: equality of all provinces; a real plan to deal with any future votes on separation and a real vote for all Canadians. Not just Quebec politicians." The final image on the screen showed black-and-white photos of Charest, Chrétien, Duceppe and Bouchard with the international symbol for "Stop", a red slash in a circle, across their faces. The fact that it lumped together federalist leaders Charest and Chrétien with sovereigntists Bouchard and Duceppe was

particularly offensive, as was the omission of any anglophone leaders from Québec, such as Brian Mulroney. The ad represented a new low in Canadian politics, and immediately became the subject of fierce criticism.

Charest accused Manning of "bigotry"; Alexa McDonough warned that the Reform leader's policies would lead Canada "straight into a civil war"; and Chrétien accused him "of running the most divisive campaign in Canadian history" [Ellis and Archer, 1997, p. 127]. Roger Bilodeau, vice-president of the Fédération des Communautés Francophones et Acadiennes du Canada, the national organization for francophones, said that Manning was "fostering hatred" and his position on national unity meant "nothing less than splitting up the country" [Wills, 1997c]. For his part, Duceppe said that the Reform leader's exploitation of anti-Québec feeling just showed how futile the national unity debate was: "He's surfing on a stream right now that shows the whole debate between Quebec and the rest of Canada cannot be resolved." [Clark, 1997a] The Reform Party chose not to broadcast the ad in Québec, but that did not prevent it from having an impact in the province, for its content "made many French-speaking Quebecers feel that they were not wanted in Canada" [Bernard, 1997, p. 144]. Duceppe blamed Chrétien and Charest, saying it was their attitude toward francophone Quebecers "that was fuelling the Quebec bashing" [Bernard, 1997, p. 144]. The Reform ad had a dramatic effect on the polls, according to Bloc strategists, and certainly, on May 23, the percentage of support for the Bloc began to climb, while that for the Liberals and the Conservatives began to fall [Pratte, 1997b].

However, what proved to be the defining moment for the Bloc's campaign came from the prime minister. In a television interview taped on May 25 for the French-language all-news network, Jean Chrétien said that he would not recognize a majority vote of 50 plus one in a referendum on Québec sovereignty. It was significant that the prime minister chose this particular venue for his statement, guaranteeing the maximum coverage for a francophone audience. The timing was also interesting: Chrétien had said much the same thing before during the referendum of 1995, and again in 1996. However, he had not been that willing to talk about it during the early days of the election, and had been able to avoid answering the question during the French-language television debates, but now, he "appeared to be going out of his way to make sure the matter was raised." [Greenspon, 1997, p. 34] The reason he did so, Conservative party strategists believed, was to block Charest, whose popularity in Québec was a bigger threat to the Liberals than the Bloc. Chrétien, they thought, "was trying to polarize the vote within Quebec, to squeeze out Charest by driving soft nationalists back to the Bloc Québécois while federalists rallied around the Liberal flag" [Greenspon,

1997, p. 34]. The prime minister's stratagem worked, and to the benefit of the Bloc, whose campaign was newly energized. "Pour le Bloc québécois, en quête d'un moyen de prendre un envol pour le blitz de la dernière semaine de campagne, les propos de M. Chrétien ont eu l'effet d'un électrochoc," ("For the Bloc Québécois, in quest of a way of taking flight for the blitz of the last week of the campaign, the words of Chrétien had the effect of an electric shock") reported Chantal Hébert, Ottawa Bureau Chief for *La Presse* [Hébert, 1997c].

When Gilles Duceppe described the prime minister's comments as an "assault against Québec" [Hébert, 1997c], he was drawing on the same fears that had prompted Quebecers to vote for the Bloc after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. As pollster Jean-Marc Léger explained, each time Quebecers felt threatened, whether it be by the government's move to ask the Supreme Court to rule on the legality of a referendum on sovereignty or discussion of the possibility of partitioning Québec's territory, the percentage of support for the Bloc went up. This was not because they were in favour of the Bloc, but rather, against the federal system and the Chrétien government [Ouimet, 1997]. Having an identifiable enemy united the factions within the sovereigntist movement. As one anglophone reporter recalled: "It almost had a placebo effect in terms of healing their campaign....they cheered up noticeably in the two or three days after...they sprinted to the finish with a lot more gusto than they had run in the first four weeks of the campaign."

Duceppe's delivery became more dynamic and confident, and when gaffes and setbacks occurred - as they still did to the end of the campaign - he was able to handle them with greater ease. He delighted a rally of 350 with his humorous descriptions of federalist leaders using matrushkas, the wooden Russian dolls that contain identical, smaller versions inside, especially when he said that the smallest and the prettiest was Jean Charest, but "when you look inside, there's nothing there" [Clark, 1997b]. When Bloc MP Suzanne Tremblay implied that Charest was not an authentic Quebecer because the name on his birth certificate was John, not Jean as he called himself - Charest, like Duceppe, had a mother of British origin - Duceppe disassociated himself from her remarks, but also immediately asked her for an explanation, and later told reporters that regardless of origin, everyone who lives in Québec is a Quebecer [Séguin, 1997d].

Before the change in the Bloc's fortunes, there had been speculation that the party's new television and radio ads scheduled for broadcast during the final week of the election would feature "the rescue team of sovereigntist leaders" - Bouchard, Parizeau, Yves Duhaime and Michel Gauthier - rather than Duceppe, given his performance throughout the campaign [Riga, 1997c]. But instead they focused exclusively on the leader, showing him in a relaxed pose, walking down a

street in his neighbourhood, and emphasized that he was "un homme franc, fidèle à ce quartier qu'il représente, fidèle à la souveraineté. Aujourd'hui, Gilles Duceppe vous demande de rester fidèles à vos convictions et de voter pour le Québec. De voter pour le Bloc québécois." ("a frank man, faithful to this area that he represents, faithful to sovereignty. Today, Gilles Duceppe asks you to remain faithful to your convictions and vote for Québec. Vote for the Bloc Québécois.") They were in marked contrast to those of the Liberals, which featured Jean Chrétien - despite his personal unpopularity in the province - and his team of Québec cabinet ministers, focusing on their actions to balance the budget while preserving social programmes [Authier, 1997f]. The Liberals also translated their newspaper ads into 11 languages in order to win the votes of Québec's ethnic minorities, who were reluctant to support the sovereigntist party [Block, 1997].

It was clear that both parties saw Jean Charest as the man to beat: the Liberals in their slogan, "Bloquer? Parler? ou agir?" portraying the Conservative leader as someone whose ability as an orator was not matched by his organization, and the Bloc, in its picture of Duceppe as a man who knew his community and was faithful to it and his sovereigntist ideals, underlining Charest's supposed lack of commitment to the province of his birth (the view unfortunately evidenced in Suzanne Tremblay's remarks). However, the impression of the Conservative campaign's strength was an illusion, as Charest lacked the organization to take advantage of his strong showing in the debates and on the election trail. Both the Liberals and the Bloc were in the ascendant, and in the last days of the campaign, the Bloc was rising faster, according to the polls [Bernard, 1997, p. 145]: even the prime minister's seat was threatened.

### **The Results**

The morning of June 3 Canadians woke to find that they had what English-speaking pundits called "a pizza parliament" and French-speaking ones, "le parlement des pots cassés". There were now five parties with official status in the 301-seat House of Commons, up from three in the last parliament, and the ruling Liberals had won a bare majority with 155 seats, 101 of these from the province of Ontario; the Reform party had replaced the Bloc as the Official Opposition, with 60 seats mainly concentrated in Alberta and British Columbia; the Bloc Québécois won 44 seats, down from the 50 it had at the dissolution of parliament, and 10 fewer than it had won in 1993; the New Democratic Party went from nine seats to 21, making a historic breakthrough in the Atlantic provinces, where it gained eight new seats; while the Progressive Conservatives



were in last place with 20. The voter turn-out nation-wide, at 67 per cent, was the lowest in 44 years, much lower than the post-war norm of 75 per cent, and a significant drop from the 70 per cent of the 1993 election.

The results in Québec were equally complex. The Bloc, with 44 seats, won more than all the other parties put together, at 37.86 per cent of the popular vote, but the Liberals, victims of the first-past-the-post system, came first in only 26 constituencies, with 36.68 per cent, little more than one per cent behind the Bloc. The Conservatives had just five seats, up four from 1993, with 22.17 per cent of the vote, while the NDP, never a significant player in Québec politics, had less than two per cent, and Reform, a minuscule 0.29 per cent; neither party won seats. Voter turn-out in Québec was the highest in Canada, at 70.5 per cent, but down significantly from 1993, when it was 77.1 per cent.

The Bloc's support, like that of the Scottish National Party, tended to come from young, working-class males. The Bloc, in fact, had the youngest supporters of Canadian political parties, with 40 per cent of its voters under 35 years of age, and it also had the biggest percentage with just secondary school education or lower. In addition, Bloc supporters had the lowest income levels of any political party, but despite this, were not "particularly dissatisfied with their standard of living", and were more likely to be "idealistic young men" rather than "the disgruntled older men" of the Reform Party, whose supporters were also predominantly male and poorly-educated, but who were older and economically better-off than average [Pammett, 1997, p. 245].

The results were disappointing for the Liberals. Despite pouring considerable time, effort and resources into the Québec campaign, they only increased their percentage of the vote by three per cent, gaining seven seats. This was not the breakthrough election that would return them "to their historical norm of garnering four fifths of Quebec's seats" [Clarkson, 1997, p. 60], and they lost by more than 15 per cent in 47 of the 49 seats where they were defeated [Clarkson, 1997, p. 60]. Jean Chrétien had a tough fight to maintain his own seat in the constituency of Ste-Maurice, where Bloc challenger Yves Duhaime was less than 1,000 votes behind him, and at one point during election night, pulled ahead of the prime minister. Part of the problem was Chrétien's unpopularity, which the Liberal strategists countered by emphasizing the party's strong team of francophone candidates.

The other problem was that, of course, the Liberals were also fighting a national campaign, so that even what appeared to be advantages - its allowance of 118 minutes of paid political advertising versus the Bloc's 43 - were not. The Bloc, as a regional party, could use its allotment on cheaper, local advertising, while the Liberals had to spend their money on the more expensive national

networks. The same national constraints hindered the Conservatives, but at least they were not handicapped by their leader; he was their greatest asset, and although the final results showed only small gains for the Tories in Québec, they influenced the outcome for the other parties. The four new seats for the party were taken from the Bloc, and in five other new constituencies where the Liberals won seats from the Bloc, it was due to an increase in the Conservative vote [Bernard, 1997, p. 145]. Unfortunately, Charest was not able to build on the momentum from the television debates, because he and his strategists had mistakenly pinned their hopes on winning seats in Ontario, which had a popular provincial Conservative government, and "there was little organizational capacity to mobilize whatever support the party had" [Clarkson, 1997, p. 87].

The results for the Bloc were, as Bernard says, "an indisputable set-back" [Bernard, 1997, p. 135] when compared with the 1993 election, in which the party won 49.3 per cent of the popular vote and 54 seats. At just under 38 per cent of the popular vote, the Bloc had fallen below the 40 per cent considered to be "its cruising speed" [Bernard, 1993, p. 85], and had lost a quarter of its support, as well as its status as Official Opposition. True, it had elected a larger percentage of its candidates than any other party - 59 per cent to the 51 per cent of the Liberals - but that was due to the fact that it ran a regional campaign. In addition, of the 44 seats the Bloc had won, only 11 of them were clear majorities, compared to 41 out of 54 in 1993; the other 33 were won because of a split in the vote for the two federalist parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives [Bauch, 1997i]. It is perhaps too easy to blame this set-back on the leadership of Gilles Duceppe, for as Bernard indicates, the final results were very close to what the polls were saying at the beginning of the campaign, when the Bloc and the Liberals were within a few percentage points of each other in Québec [Bernard, 1997, pp. 145-46] The real decline in the Bloc's support started at the same time as the first effects of the budget cuts imposed by the Parti Québécois government under Lucien Bouchard began to be felt in the province. The hostility expressed by Clément Godbout of the Québec Federation of Labour towards the PQ's policy of budget cuts in social services was a strong indicator of grassroots opinion.

It is also questionable to assume that the Bloc could have maintained the same high level of support that it had in 1993, which came out of specific political circumstances - the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown referendum - and when Lucien Bouchard was its leader, unsullied by the fiscal brutalities of deficit-cutting. The Bloc was not that unhappy to be relieved of its role as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, even though before polling day Bouchard had attacked Chrétien and Manning as "the couple from hell" and

warned Québec voters that having Manning as the leader of the opposition would be “the worst thing that could happen” [Thompson, 1997c]. It had always been difficult and contradictory for the Bloc to perform this role; now its MPs would be free to concentrate on matters only concerning Québec, and its independence. As Gilles Duceppe said later: “The Bloc has a very clear mandate to defend Quebecers’ interests. We will no longer have to represent any group’s interests outside Quebec. There will be other parties outside Quebec to put forward their concerns.” [LaSalle, 1997] Although the utility of the Bloc being in Ottawa had been questioned by such prominent Québec figures as Clément Godbout, 42 per cent of voters surveyed as to whether the BQ was “still useful” agreed that it was. “To most sovereigntists, the Bloc Québécois presence in the Canadian House of Commons is a ‘must’: it is required in order to help the Parti Québécois in its endeavours.” [Bernard, 1997, p. 146]

The replacement of the Bloc by Reform was perhaps not that great a change, in the sense that one regional party had replaced another. With all of its seats now in western Canada, having lost the only one it had in Ontario because its belligerent stance on Québec was too extreme for the moderate voters of that province [Marzolini, 1997, p. 202, Pammett, 1997, p. 241], Reform clearly could not claim national status. As Pammett explains: “Reform may try to *act* more like a national party than the Bloc, but they have yet to prove themselves to be one.” [Pammett, 1997, p. 247] The negativity of the party’s advertising did not do much for national unity, or for Canadian voters, who elected to opt out of the democratic process in greater numbers than ever before, a worrying trend, says former journalist Anthony Westell:

It is conventional wisdom among political operatives that negative advertising ‘works’, even when people say they do not like it. However, this judgement appears to ignore the fact that it may produce an increasingly small pool of others to ‘work on’. Champions of popular participation in Canadian public life have reason to be concerned with the conduct of the campaign of 1997.

[Westell, 1997, p. 9]

### **What The Bloc Strategists Said**

Bloc Québécois strategists, like their counterparts in the Scottish National Party, were not too surprised by the election night outcome. They had not expected to repeat what had happened in 1993. “We knew we couldn’t do that twice,” said one veteran campaign advisor, “but the press didn’t...the result was not too far from what we thought it should be in the circumstances...the Bloc didn’t have

this quality of being new anymore, as it was in 1993." They were also not disappointed by the Bloc's loss of its official opposition role, he said.

"In terms of results finally, it's not a disaster; far from that, and the Bloc is not the official opposition, but the Bloc never wanted to be the official opposition. Nobody believed in 1993 that could be possible. It happened like that. So this year we knew there were very slight chances that we could keep that, but we didn't want that anyway."

In fact, a year-and-a-half before the election, the party leadership had estimated that the Bloc would win anywhere from 40 to 55 seats in the next federal contest, so the final total was not that far off their expectations, although at the low end. What was a surprise was that the sovereigntist vote had dropped below 40 percent, although just slightly - for the first time in 20 years [Gagnon, 1997f].

The party leadership and most of its strategists agreed that the defining moments for the Bloc campaign were the Reform Party's ad and the prime minister's statement that he would not accept a majority vote of 50 plus one in a referendum on Québec, which, the leader said, "gave us the opportunity to come back with the sovereignty message." He also attributed the Bloc's success to the fact that it was a grassroots party, and as a result, had a much better organization than the Conservatives at the local constituency level. This is why, perhaps, the Bloc's last series of ads, focusing on Gilles Duceppe in his own neighbourhood were so successful, giving him some extra percentage points in the popular vote in the last few days of the election, according to the campaign's communications specialist. He felt that, compared to the other parties, the Bloc's advertising "really had...something striking", and in the last week particularly, had a definite effect in terms of intention to vote.

"Everybody thought we would pull Mr. Duceppe out of the advertising. We did exactly the contrary; we made a 30-second commercial of him only walking the street in his riding and with a voice-over of himself admitting that he could seem like somebody who was unexperienced, but he knew the people blah blah blah...and this I guess made the difference for the last stretch; he gained a few points specifically because of that."

The actual conduct of the campaign was a more difficult subject. The leader himself admitted that the disastrous first week of the campaign "was very, very, very painful", and "the fact is being elected only what, a month before - it didn't give me the chance to get prepared to act the role; secondly, to face the consequences of the leadership race. So it was tough." The part of his role that he had the most problems with on the election trail were the continual scrums.

As the communications specialist, a veteran of both provincial and federal elections, recalled:

**“There is obviously in an electoral campaign official press conferences, but there are scrums, all the time, especially if you travel. This time we were travelling in one bus; the journalists were in another bus. In other cases with Mr. Parizeau [during provincial campaigns] he was in the same bus; he almost went out of his mind, because it means you have scrums all the time, which makes no sense. So we stopped that and this year - not only us, all the parties separate the press from the politicians so that there can be moments of peace and quiet, and not be in a scrum all the time. But every time you set a foot on the ground you’ve got 45 microphones in there anyway, and this is very, in terms of strategy, specifically with Mr. Duceppe, who did not have very much experience as a leader at least, this was very difficult because you did not know what he was going to say, but he was going to say something because he’s got 45 microphones there, and you can’t keep them away, and you can’t refuse, so it’s very tough....we didn’t have that problem with Mr. Bouchard in the first Bloc campaign, at all....We had continuous scrums, but he was a more experienced politician; so he’d get out of them very well; he’d do it very well, while for Mr. Duceppe it proved to be a danger, and in fact proved to be every day there was something new we had to correct, or change, or modify or cancel or whatever.”**

Comparing Duceppe in his first Bloc campaign to Bouchard in his is not particularly fair: Bouchard, after all, had been a Conservative party cabinet minister and the ambassador to France before he took up his role as leader of the Bloc, which gave him plenty of experience in dealing with the intense scrutiny of the media, whereas Duceppe had only three days of media relations training before the 1997 election. Bouchard was just as incompetent during his first election campaign in 1988, if not more so, and according to those who were there, “was so ill at ease on the hustings that he didn’t want to shake hands with constituents” [Martin, 1997, p. 138].

Even those campaign aides who had experience dealing with the media found the demands of the press corps were sometimes almost overwhelming in this election. The leader’s press attaché, brought in after the first week, described one such incident during the campaign:

**“I recall days they wanted scrums and scrums and scrums, and at one point we were giving like four scrums a day, just like what we were doing during the day was not enough, and they always wanted more. They always wanted more, and I know at one point the Conservatives were not doing that, and they were saying, ‘We’re doing that; we’re having one just once a day, and that’s it’; but with us they were asking more and more....I recall the day when Gilles Duceppe in the morning did something like five radio interviews, and the journalists on the bus were all**

there; they could listen to what he was saying; so lunch-time I said, 'No scrums today; the scrum will be later if we do one because he did so many media interviews in the morning'; I said, 'I mean, that's enough.' And they were yelling at me, and they were so angry because they didn't have their little scrum and they had to take what Gilles was saying from the media interviews. They were very demanding on that, very, very, very demanding. A little bit too much; too much."

Everyone agreed that the initial organization of the Bloc's campaign had been poor; what they found hard to deal with was the media's continuing emphasis on gaffes and mistakes throughout the campaign. Said one senior strategist: "The campaign didn't start very well in terms of organization...and the journalists decided they were going in that direction, and so they had fun with that for a long while, up until the end in fact." The leader was particularly irked that when he was greeting factory workers outside a plant gate in Montréal, of all the people he met, "only *one* man refused to shake hands with me; went into his car, and the other journalists asked him to come back to tape him live refusing to shake hands with me; that was the scenario....I just can't believe that." The "fuss" about the cheese-hat was baffling to him. "I just can't believe we have that kind of journalism," he said, "very inspired by CNN and I don't think it goes to the substance; it's only the image." When Bloc MP Suzanne Tremblay made her comments about "John" Charest, the press attaché knew what to expect: "I said, that's it, that's the news, and in fact [laughter] it was the news, and I said, too bad, because we had good things to say, and we had good lines...but that little thing [made] everything derail."

There was also the issue of censorship by Radio-Canada to contend with, resulting from a decision by the French-language 24-hour news service, *le réseau de l'information* (RDI), not to broadcast a speech by Duceppe at a Bloc rally in Jonquiére May 19. The initial agreement with the broadcaster was that RDI was going to air both Duceppe's speech and that of Lucien Bouchard, who was to speak first, but the broadcast was cut after Bouchard's speech. The party decided to make a formal complaint to the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission following a report in *Le Devoir* that Claude Saint-Laurent, a general manager at Radio-Canada, had ordered that Duceppe's speech not be televised. RDI's response was that the decision to cut the broadcast was made because the producer thought the speeches would run too late [Fraser, 1997d], and later offered to televise the Bloc live the next time they had a big meeting, but, as the Bloc's press attaché explained, "the damage had been done, because it was a very good speech".

Another source of frustration to Bloc strategists - as well as to the Canadian public and some of the journalists themselves - was the trivialization of the issues. One of the senior aides compared the journalists to vultures who prey on dying animals. Once they sensed the campaign was in difficulty, all they wanted to do was attack,

“and after that it was very difficult, except for the last week, to get them out of that mood. So all they were looking for is how can we get another story, either something that has to do with their campaign that’s not functioning, or something that he said that he shouldn’t say, and they weren’t...listening whatsoever to what he was saying and the releases that were coming out. The Bloc had a huge programme; nobody heard about it. The press did not want to hear about that. For them...since he could not be in power they believed the programme was no good, worth nothing.”

Sometimes the only strategies that seemed to work were those that relied on their entertainment value. The most successful was when Duceppe came up with the idea of using “*les poupées-gigognes*” or *matrushkas*, the little nested wooden Russian dolls, to explain the constitution. As one of the press aides recalled,

“I said, ‘Okay, there’s a speech tonight and we’ve got to have something, we’ve got to make them laugh, let’s find something; and we wanted to talk about the constitution...and Gilles said, ‘Well, let’s use [*matrushkas*]...and it took us maybe an hour to script it; there was nothing new in the speech per se, but only...a different image; and I was looking at the journalists and they were laughing and laughing and laughing, saying ‘Ha, ha, ha; it’s good’....Unfortunately when you’re doing a campaign it’s not really the content; it’s more the way you’re giving out your lines; and that evening Gilles was making everybody [laugh] ....But the day after and in the evening news it was everywhere, everywhere, just because he used five little dolls to explain the history of the constitution, and it worked beautifully.”

Similarly, towards the end of the campaign, Duceppe received positive publicity when he appeared on *Politiquement direct* on MusiquePlus, a cable television station devoted to pop music, wearing a slightly smarter version of the famous hair-bonnet. It might have been because he was the only federal leader to accept an invitation to participate in the programme, but despite the skepticism of his staff as to whether this was a good move or not, his willingness to make fun of himself scored him some points in the political public relations game.

It was, a former Bloc candidate and political advisor wrote in an analysis of the results, a media campaign based on image.

The Bloc Québécois had nevertheless perfected an electoral platform longer and more detailed than that of the Conservatives and in which the large themes had unfolded gradually during the campaign. Far from delighting in negativism, the Bloc sought to present to the electorate a constructive critique of the Chrétien regime and concrete solutions to the problems of Québec. But very little of this had filtered through the media coverage, despite numerous communiqués and plentiful statements. [Translation mine]

The view of the political journalists, of course, was somewhat different, as I discuss in the next section.

### **What The Political Journalists Said**

There may have been numerous press releases and statements, but unfortunately the Bloc did not make them available to all the media outlets, and this created some antagonism. Unlike the Scottish National Party, which has made concerted efforts to reach out to all media, whether sympathetic or hostile to the independence cause, the Bloc refused appearances on English-language television programs and contacts with federalist newspapers, whether francophone or anglophone. A francophone editor of one of the major French-language papers said that other than the reporters in the newspaper's Ottawa Bureau,

“we don't have any relationship with anybody in the Bloc, period. We never had any contact with anybody in the Bloc during the campaign, never. Nobody ever sent us any texts [news releases] or tried to convince us otherwise of the pros [of the Bloc's position], and it shows that their machine was not that efficient....some 60 per cent of our readers voted 'Yes' in the referendum and so there are some people that they would have liked to reach, and we're fair enough with people to do a good job; our information policy is to be objective...we would have published any kind of open text they would have submitted to us; we would have written fair articles about what Duceppe would have said.”

The incompetence of the campaign organization was another source of irritation, because its lack of direction made it difficult for journalists to do their job. As this editor explained, the Bloc “had some system, but the only people who knew it were people who were with the Duceppe leader campaign....The way in which they controlled the visits they made, the messages they tried to get across every day, was very erratic.”

The frustration of dealing with this was best described by *Globe and Mail* reporter Karen Unland, who, as one of the political journalists on the leader's bus, followed Duceppe on the campaign trail. In her Election notebook column



headlined "Pointless wanderings with the Bloc", Unland illustrated why reporters were inclined to be so negative. On this day, less than a week before the end of the campaign, the reporters had travelled for a half-hour to a nearly empty gymnasium to view a mosaic protesting war toys which had been created by a local woman.

The question on everyone's mind was not: "Why are war toys bad?" or "What will the Bloc Québécois do about war toys?" The question on everyone's mind was: "What the heck are we doing here?" There was no news, no crowd and precious few photo opportunities. It was what is referred to technically as a big waste of time.

It is difficult to fathom just how terrible Mr. Duceppe's campaign has been at giving him an even chance to generate positive coverage. He meets few throngs of supporters and makes few speeches....

It seems the only new things the news media have had to say about Mr. Duceppe lately have centred on his gaffes or the latest friendly fire from separatist allies.

On the day of the visit to the gym, reporters were relieved to hear that Quebec Federation of Labour leader Clément Godbout had questioned the purpose of the Bloc.

This was not because the journalists had anything against the Bloc or separatism. It was because they needed a story and another knife in Mr. Duceppe's back was a much stronger angle than the war-toy petition.

In the fiercely competitive - and expensive - world of campaign journalism, it is not a good idea to waste journalists' time. Newspapers like *La Presse*, for example, spent close to \$300,000 on covering the election, employing a team of more than 20 journalists and columnists, as well as extra photographers, graphic artists, and illustrators [Masson, 1997], and national newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail* would have spent even more.

The reasons for the Bloc's problems with its media relations were more complex than just the party's lack of campaign organization. They were the result of a fundamental weakness, as one veteran francophone journalist explained:

In politics as in much else, media relations is a packaging that can hardly hide the fact of an empty box....There is only so much media relations can do for a party. Bottom line: they can make the right people available at the right time and try to explain the message to their best capacity....The picture of Gilles Duceppe with a hairnet on his head became a defining moment because it illustrated the apparent purposelessness that had seized the Bloc. If Duceppe had been perceived as leading a vibrant party and as a strong leader, that picture would have gone away in no time.

Even if the Bloc had another leader, it would not have made much difference, because the “core problem of the party was that it did not work seriously at giving itself a post-referendum *raison d’être*....the sovereigntist leadership seemed content to assume that ‘Yes’ voters from the referendum were basically captive votes that required no efforts on their part to keep.” This view was echoed by an anglophone political journalist. “I got the strong impression that only part of their problem had to do with their organization or bad communications strategy as such. The problem had to do with their lack of anything to communicate.”

The other issue that always has to be examined when discussing coverage of a sovereigntist political party in Québec is the polarization between the views of francophone and anglophone journalists. As one anglophone journalist said, news media outside of Québec are “almost gleefully hostile towards the Québec sovereigntist movement”, while criticizing the Québec media for separatist bias. However, another anglophone journalist who had been covering Québec politics for more than 35 years explained, francophone journalists are under more pressure to be fair because they have to represent the views of both sovereigntists and federalists, and there is a problem with that situation because

“it absolves English-speaking journalists from that responsibility to be fair...I think that there’s a sense on the part of the English-speaking public and to a certain extent, English-speaking journalists that we’re not supposed to be fair towards separatists; after all they’re traitors, quote unquote, they’re out to destroy the country.”

The hypocrisy of those members of the anglophone media who do attack francophone journalists for bias was most trenchantly explained by a veteran francophone reporter:

In French, both sovereignty and federalism are assumed to be valid options that deserve fair treatment. In English, federalism is assumed to be good and sovereignty evil. 99.9 per cent of English-speaking [reporters] are openly federalists. What kind of society would Quebec be if the same was said of French-speaking journalists? At the very least, it would be a society whose media is completely divorced from it. From that angle, I let you judge where fairness and objectivity is mostly found.

It is significant that in the 1997 election the Bloc was hammered almost equally by both the English and French-language media, and it was the francophone press that initially published the photo of Gilles Duceppe in the “cheese-hat” and broke the story of *L’affaire Parizeau*; the ridicule and condemnation of the party could not be blamed on anglophone anti-sovereigntist bias.

What helped the Bloc most was that the Reform Party, and later, the Liberals, exploited the national unity issue for their own purposes, and the media followed their lead, although Canadian voters were more concerned about unemployment [Pammett, 1997, p. 235]. Some journalists protested the emphasis on "The election issue that never was" [Valpy, 1997], but their voices were few in number. As *Globe and Mail* columnist Michael Valpy wrote:

The news media, having fabricated national unity as Canada's major election issue, appear puzzled by Canadians' insistence on being more interested in other things. Like employment, their children's future and the country's general quality of life. It is astonishing, in a word, to realize just how capable the media are of manufacturing something out of thin air - egged on by some clever political strategists and one-note academics and ancillary commentators.

The result was a divisive campaign in which the real issues never got discussed in any depth, as Terrance Wills noted [1997d]:

Canada has 1.5 million jobless; youth unemployment at a withering 17 percent; record bankruptcies; more than one million children living in poverty; hospitals being closed; welfare cuts; more homeless beggars while bank profits soar - and our political leaders spent the best part of five weeks throwing mud at each other over the national-unity question.

Canadian voters were alienated. Close to 30 per cent said they could not identify an important issue in the campaign, or did not know of one, and that, combined with the decline in the percentage of those voting was "worrisome for the health of Canadian democracy" [Pammett, 1997, p. 236]. When the Cable Public Affairs Channel interviewed Canadians after the election, the general response was that there had been not enough discussion of matters such as health care, education, social security, and jobs. "What voters wanted, it seemed, was a debate between the parties about the state of the nation, its social and economic well-being," says Dornan. "For the most part they felt they were denied it." [Dornan, 1997, p. 153] What made it worse was that far from resolving the national unity question, the campaign had exacerbated the tensions, and the media was at least partly responsible, Dornan concludes.

It was as though the politicians managed to sidestep the issues, and the media let them get away with it. When the campaign dynamic turned to name calling over Quebec, again the media failed to call things to heel. In the eyes of the public, the sin of the networks and newspapers in this campaign was not that they

highjacked the proceedings, but that they should have. By not doing so, by hewing to the politicians' agenda, they became blameworthy.

[Dornan, 1997, p. 154]

## Conclusion

If the criticisms of the media were anything to go by, the Bloc Québécois should not have done as well as it did in the 1997 election, for to them the party did almost everything wrong. It did not seem to have a coherent strategy, or at least one discernible to outside observers. Its message was inconsistent, changing from the Bloc as Québec's voice in Ottawa, to the Bloc as the force for sovereignty, and then back again. The campaign organization was poor, and even after the importation of professional help from the Parti Québécois, lacked focus and purpose. Its leader was ineffective, someone who, as one reporter described him, seemed "to project his insecurities on audiences rather than erase them", and who was not experienced enough to handle the pressures of the intense media scrutiny that attends a leader in a federal election. Its support was divided between followers of the hard-line sovereigntist Jacques Parizeau and those of the more accommodating Lucien Bouchard, which confused its message, and it didn't help that both men overshadowed the fledgling leader, understandably adding to his insecurities. Also, in a country dominated by federalist media, the journalists began the campaign with a certain amount of hostility towards the Bloc because it is sovereigntist, and because of the party's past history of heavy-handed dealings with the House of Commons press corps - not a good group for a political party to antagonize. Add to this the Bloc's incompetent organization, which irritated reporters hard-pressed for news stories because so many of the election events were, in Karen Unland's phrase, "a big waste of time", and it was a wonder that the Bloc managed to get any good coverage.

But in the end it didn't seem to matter. What did, most unfortunately, was the cynical political manipulation of the prime minister, when he stated that 50 plus one would not be a big enough majority to sanction Québec independence. The effect of the Liberal leader's action - both during the election and after - cannot be underestimated. As Clarkson wrote:

The party with its ascribed role as historic national conciliator, the bridge between the two founding peoples, showed that in the crunch that it preferred to have separatists rather than rival federalists elected in Quebec and preferred the possibility of having Gilles Duceppe as leader of the Opposition than Jean

Charest, even though the latter's support had been crucial in saving the last referendum and his contribution would be essential once again in the next.

[Clarkson, 1997, p. 50]

**The basic problem for the Bloc at the start of the campaign had been its lack of *raison d'être* post-Bouchard. Were they a social democratic party or an independence party? The resulting lack of focus in its policies led in turn to the confusion and lack of direction in its poorly-planned campaign, which exacerbated the bad relations the Bloc had with the media, dating back to its first days in the House of Commons, which did not help the party's efforts at damage control when things went wrong - as they so often did during this exceptionally ill-fated campaign. Jean Chrétien's "carefully staged intervention" [Clarkson, 1997, p. 50] gave the BQ a focus and purpose, by demonstrating that the Liberals could not be trusted to represent the interests of Quebecers in the House of Commons: only the Bloc could do that.**

However, the most significant factor in the Bloc's last-minute rally was the deep-rooted, community base of sovereigntist support in Québec, which gave the Bloc's message a fundamental resilience even despite its poor campaign communications. With 113,000 members in the Bloc Québécois, plus several thousand more in the provincial Parti Québécois, the sovereigntist movement had considerable strength which could be effectively mobilized as needs be - and the Bloc's final outcome in the election was a result of its being able to rally its supporters to the cause after Reform's anti-Québec ad and the prime minister's rejection of 50 plus one aroused the old fears that the Rest of Canada was anti-Québec. Québec's struggle to assert its national identity has had a long history within the Canadian federation, and it would take much more than one badly-managed political communications plan to seriously damage the credibility of the sovereigntist project within that province.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion

**The study of political communication and its effects is a thorny one, involving as it does the complex inter-relationships amongst media, politicians, and the public. Trying to make sense of these relationships has been the task of this thesis. Academics, like most people, tend to examine subjects through the lens of their own experience, and the lens chosen for this study are those of political journalists, the symbol-operators, in Nairn's words [Nairn, 1997, p. 3], members of the class of cultural specialists such as teachers, writers, politicians, and academics.**

At times the examination has seemed rather prolix for this former journalist, involving as it did lengthy discussions of the differing nationalisms of Canada and Britain, Scotland and Québec, along with historical accounts of the PQ, the Bloc Québécois, and the Scottish National Party, as well as analyses of the role of political journalism in both countries and their contested regions, and most importantly, the role of political communications in determining the electoral outcomes of these two parties during the national elections of 1997.

#### **Scotland and Québec: Civic versus Ethnic Nationalism**

In Scotland and Québec we have independence movements in what McCrone describes as a stateless nation - that is, a nation without a formal state - [McCrone, 1998, p. 176]. However, there is a crucial difference, as I described in chapter three, for the danger of racism lurks in Québec's sovereignty project, while Scotland's push for independence is based more on a desire for grown-up government.

The question of racism is a complex one in relation to the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois, for although both political parties condemn it, and have repeatedly stated their commitment to cultural tolerance and diversity, there are numerous instances where leading members of both parties have expressed views that can only be interpreted as racist (described in chapter three). Jacques Parizeau, still a very influential figure in the sovereignty movement, has never recanted or apologized for his remarks the night of the 1995 referendum loss that it was due to "money and the ethnic vote", and in fact, on a speaking tour a year later, identified the campaigning by Italian, Greek and Jewish organizations as the reason for its defeat. To his credit, Gilles Duceppe, the current Bloc leader, has consistently disavowed Parizeau's comments concerning the ethnic vote, but his voice is not the dominant one in Québec [Authier, 1997h]. Significantly, Lucien

**Bouchard, who is widely perceived as the most prominent leader in the sovereignty movement, refused to condemn Parizeau's remarks, describing him as "a great democrat" [Robinson, 1997].**

**During the referendum campaign itself, Bouchard was accused of racism when he asked why it was that Québec had such a low birth-rate. "We're one of the white races that has the fewest children. That's really something. That suggests we haven't resolved our family problem", he is reported to have said [Martin, 1997, p. 292]. His comments predictably aroused great controversy, with women's groups, ethnic organizations, prime minister Chrétien and other prominent Quebecers criticizing Bouchard for making racist and sexist remarks, but he denied both charges. However, it has long been a tenet of ethnic nationalism that "by bearing and rearing children, women maintain the racial purity of the stock, and transmit its culture" [McCrone, 1998, p. 121], and Bouchard's words certainly seemed to reflect this view. It is true that the declining number of births in Québec has long been a concern of the political elites on both sides of the sovereignty debate, for it was the provincial Liberals who enacted legislation that paid Québec women to have children in an effort to improve the province's birth-rate, and in 1991, increased the amount to \$500 for the first child; \$1,000 for the second; and \$7,000 for the third [Maroney, 1992] - but these funds were for all Québec mothers, and not just those of "the white races".**

**Gellner, in his discussion of the five transition stages of nationalism, describes ethnic cleansing as stage four, in which nations based on ethnicity must ensure "that everyone, or very nearly everyone, within the political unit be of the same culture, and that all those of the same culture be within the same political unit." [Gellner, 1997, p. 45] Nations can do this either violently or peacefully, he explains. The lucky ones do it through the process of oblivion as identified by Ernest Renan: "the members of the nation, and hence of the state, have simply *forgotten* their diversity of cultural origin." [Gellner, 1997, p. 45] Québec seems to be one of the lucky nations, for it has chosen to forget how culturally diverse it has been since the days of the United Empire Loyalists. Where it has problems now is in dealing with the reality of its cultural diversity today, and although sovereigntist leaders speak of territorial or civic nationalism, there is still an under-current of intolerance that surfaces during moments of political crisis.**

**It is this element of racism that accounts for so much of the hostility to the sovereigntist project in Canada's anglophone media. Anglophone journalists could possibly be persuaded that there is a valid case for Québec sovereignty on the basis of its cultural distinctiveness, but not when this argument is founded on such concepts of racial purity as expressed in the phrases *un Québécois pure laine***

**and *de vieille souche***, or in the comments made by Deputy Premier Bernard Landry **that non-francophones** voted in the 1995 referendum “according to their **grandmother’s chromosomes**”. There is little or no suggestion of such racism in **Scottish nationalism**, despite politically-motivated claims to the contrary. It is a **civic nationalism**, based on inclusion and the desire for self-government and **political autonomy**, and as such, its message would seem, one would think, to be **more socially acceptable** to Scotland’s journalists. It is true that in past centuries **Scotland** has benefited from its “civil society”, as Lindsay Paterson describes it, **enjoying** the freedom of autonomy within the protective structure of the larger **British state**. But, as Nairn explains, the growth of nationalism in modern **Scotland** has come out of a longing for full government, and is more than “simply **a wish for exit** from the United Kingdom: it was, in effect, the desire to escape from ‘civil society’ and resume business as political society.” [Nairn, 1997, p. 88].

### **The Role of Journalists in Nationalist Movements**

**It is often said** that journalists have an important role in the promulgation of **national identity**. As Nairn explains, they are part of the middle-class **intelligentsia** that forms the basis of nationalist movements.

All comparative studies of nationality have underlined the crucial place of such professional strata in generating the identity shifts behind nationalism: it is teachers, clerics, lawyers, journalists and loose screws who cause the trouble, far more than landlords, bankers, manufacturers or trade unionists.

[Nairn, 1997, p. 188]

**However**, there is a basic contradiction here, for if there is such a limited case for **media effects**, how then can we say that journalists influence the nation-building process? What is it that political journalists do that promotes nationalism? **And which comes first**: the change in attitudes towards national identity, which the journalists then report on, or the reports of the journalists, which in turn change attitudes, in some unidentifiable way? Or could it be that the two march together, step-by-step, and that journalists, like other citizens, have their consciousness changed by the political and social forces of their time? Looking at the two different cases of Scotland and Québec, I think that journalists follow as much as lead in this process of social change.



In Québec, as I have shown in chapter four, francophone journalists were on side with the independence movement from the very beginning. During the 1966 provincial election, for example, for example, the francophone press was highly critical of the Liberals, while the fledgling separatist party, Reassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale (RIN), precursor to the Parti Québécois, received only positive coverage [Siegel, 1996, p. 220]. This was a result of two factors, the first being the long-standing tradition of journalists as intellectual leaders in Québec. As Lysiane Gagnon has said:

French Canada's first great journalists were, first and foremost, politicians and debaters. This was, of course, a result of the fact that politics was, from the outset, the one field above all others in which outstanding French Canadians could assert themselves, since industry and commerce had been monopolized by the English since the conquest.

[Cited in Siegel, 1996, p. 219]

The second was the major social changes that occurred during *la révolution tranquille*, in which the traditional bearers of cultural values in Québec - the church, the family and the educational system - were supplanted by the mass media and what Siegel calls "the global youth revolution" [Siegel, 1996, p. 230]. The reporters in the 1960s were themselves part of that youth revolution, and along with the new class of teachers now operating in a state-run education system rather than one administered by the church, became a major influence in Québec's burgeoning separatist movement. As Siegel notes, "it is no accident that former teachers and journalists have played central roles in the PQ leadership." [Siegel, 1996, p. 230]

The picture has been much different in Scotland, where there is no such tradition of editorial leadership in the newsroom, and most political journalists have never shared the commitment to independence now expressed not only by Scottish National Party supporters but also those of Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. In fact, if anything, such support would have hindered their careers, for it has long been a job requirement for political editors in Scotland that they be Unionist. The *Herald's* Scottish political editor Murray Ritchie explains why:

But what of the Scottish media which remains defiantly and unanimously Unionist? It does seem odd - not to say anti-democratic - that the second political force in Scotland in terms of votes, suffers a complete lack of editorial sympathy while the political Establishment of Tories and New Labour/Lib Dem

pact partners, bask in the full constitutional endorsement of the press.

The roots of this perversity are deep in Scotland. Some of us are old enough to remember the *Bulletin* newspaper which flirted with nationalism in the 1950s. Its fate was to be closed while reportedly profitable and its editor fired. The lesson was not lost on succeeding generations of Scottish editors.

[Ritchie, 1998]

The tradition in Scotland has been instead that rather than coming from the newsroom, support for nationalism comes from management, but strictly as a marketing tool [Kerr, 1978; Smith, 1994; Marr, 1995; Mitchell, 1996]. The first instance of this, of course, was when Lord Beaverbrook (himself a Canadian) published a letter on the front page of the *Daily Express* pledging his support for Scottish Home Rule on July 14, 1932 in the hopes of defeating the *Daily Record* in the ongoing circulation battle between the two newspapers. Sixty years later the *Scottish Sun* declared its support for Scottish nationalism, for precisely the same reason, and when Rupert Murdoch decided that he was going to back Blair in the 1997 election, the independence cause was dumped within 24 hours.

Scottish journalists have also not had the same influence on nationalist thought as have other symbol-operators in Scotland - artists, academics, intellectuals - because of their cultural approach to objectivity. Unlike the Québécois journalists of the 1960s and 70s, they cannot openly identify with a cause, but, like anglophone Canadian journalists, are expected to sublimate their own political beliefs as a professional requirement. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, when the press was more partisan, [Dornan, 1991; Levine, 1993] journalists could take a more activist role; their inclusion as key figures in the dissemination of nationalist ideas was valid. But in 20th century journalism, with its tradition of non-partisan objectivity, the situation is different. In Québec, where objectivity is defined as giving equal weight to discussions of both federalism and sovereignty as valid options, nationalism could be taken seriously - but not so in Scotland. As Smith points out, not all members of the intelligentsia want to be involved in promulgating nationalist ideas: "Many are concerned with their own career prospects." [Smith, 1991, p. 120]

The reluctance of Scottish journalists to take the independence option seriously is understandable, given the unfavourable political climate and the career difficulties that doing so would create for them, but still, it is worrisome that independence, which regularly receives poll support of more than 30 per cent, has not been examined more thoroughly up until very recently. Political journalists in Québec have seen it as their responsibility to examine both federalism and sovereignty equally, despite the hostility that this generates from

their anglophone media colleagues in the Rest of Canada, because this reflects the views of Quebecers. Scottish journalists, at least up until now, have not seen the necessity of exploring the independence option in depth, although with the arrival of devolution and the Scottish parliament, this has changed, but the scrutiny is still coming from a strong anti-nationalist and Unionist perspective.

During the 1999 Scottish parliamentary elections the SNP, now perceived as a serious rival for Labour, was subjected to a much more critical examination of its policies, which party strategists had not expected. The coverage, "which ranged from the sceptical to the outright hostile" [Jones, 1999, p. 5], did not demonstrate the same kind of commitment to fairness and balance found in present-day Québec journalism. As Iain Macwhirter said: "The SNP was never going to get an easy ride from the overwhelmingly Labour-supporting Scottish print media - though the ferocity of the assault...took even seasoned hacks by surprise." [Macwhirter, 1999] Nationalism is here to stay, and political journalists in Scotland, like their counterparts in Québec, will have to learn how to deal with the consequences of this new political reality, and that requires critical scrutiny of both the unionist and independence options. This may be difficult, but not impossible; as Negrine says, "The task of interpretation cannot be abdicated by journalists though it may be one that they cannot sometimes undertake, perhaps for professional reasons or reasons of competence." [Negrine, 1996, p. 21]

### **The Effectiveness of Political Communications**

One question that needs to be answered in judging the effectiveness - or the relevance - of the political communications of the Scottish National Party and the Bloc Québécois: how successful were they in achieving their goals? My answer to this question may seem surprising, but I believe that the Scottish National Party was not, while the Bloc Québécois was, due, however, to political and social forces outwith the control of both parties.

To explain: despite having what was universally described by Scottish political journalists as an extremely well-run and effective political communications strategy, the SNP only managed to increase its share of the popular vote by half a per cent, and although it doubled its seats to six, it still did not achieve its long sought-after breakthrough in the central belt. However, this was because of three factors about which they could do nothing. First, they continued to be heavily penalised by the first-past-the post electoral system because their vote was evenly spread throughout Scotland. Secondly, they were handicapped by the fact that they were a secessionist party fighting for seats in

what Nairn describes as “easily the most dense, refractory and metropole-centred power system in Europe” [Nairn, 1998, p. 217]. The inherent contradiction in trying to win seats for the parliament you want to be rid of is extremely difficult to overcome. Thirdly, and particular to this general election, they were hampered by the political reality that if Scottish voters wanted devolution, there was only one party they could vote for, which was Labour. Under these circumstances, it would have been extremely difficult for the SNP to make any significant gains.

By contrast, for the Bloc, political events worked in their favour, despite their disastrous political communications. Although their percentage of the popular vote was down, falling below 40 per cent for the first time, they won more seats in Québec than all the other parties combined. In addition, their loss of official opposition status was a help rather than a hindrance to the sovereigntist cause, especially with the anti-Québec Reform Party now taking that role. Prime Minister Chrétien’s eagerness to undermine the Conservative campaign, even at the expense of national unity, was an even more significant factor in their last-minute surge. The Bloc, unlike the SNP, benefited from the first-past-the-post system in Canada, because their votes were concentrated in the francophone-dominated constituencies in the rural areas of Québec, while the Liberal party’s gains were in the heavily-populated but anglophone-dominated Montréal region.

However, what the Bloc had to draw on, which the SNP did not, was a strong, community base of support which has been in place for more than 30 years, backed by the Parti Québécois, the provincial wing of the sovereigntist movement, and its driving force of Lucien Bouchard’s leadership. Canada is one of the most de-centralized federations in the world, second only to Switzerland, and the province of Québec, like the other Canadian provinces, has long enjoyed a degree of autonomy that the new Scottish parliament does not even begin to match. This, combined with Québec’s distinct society and the cultural solidarity reinforced by its francophone identity, means that Quebecers are more willing to give their votes to the parties that they believe will defend their unique place in the Canadian confederation, and will renegotiate that place if they feel their interests are not being served. As Charron states: “Images and marketing can do nothing to change the deepest convictions of the people; at best they allow political parties to adapt and take some advantage of them - and that is already plenty.” [Charron, 1991, p. 137]

In conclusion, there are many factors that contribute to the success of a political party’s message, particularly a nationalist party’s message, and to think that its political communication is the only one is simplistic. Leadership, good

organization, the quality of candidates and the cogency of a party's particular political ideology as well as economic and social forces are among the many determinants, along with the transitory nature of party loyalties in modern politics. Even with the benefit of mass communications to get the message across, the effects of urbanization and geographical and social mobility in modern society can make it difficult to establish party loyalties [Newman, 1992, p. 9]. Good communications are an important part of any political campaign, but they have to be developed within the context of an overall strategy and political philosophy. However, even with the best of communications, the message of the party may not be accepted by the general public or the political journalists who are transmitting that message, for reasons completely outwith the party's control.

That certainly seemed to be the case for the SNP and Bloc in the Canadian and British national elections of 1997. What became clear when analyzing the performance of the two parties during these elections was that political communications are not as important as deep-rooted social, political and cultural forces in the outcomes of election campaigns. That was why the SNP failed to make a breakthrough in not only the 1997 election but also the 1999 elections for the Scottish parliament, and the reason for the continued electoral success of the Bloc in the 1997 federal election and the PQ in the 1998 provincial election.

Both parties have had to battle a hostile or indifferent press during their campaigns, but significantly for the Bloc and the PQ, within Québec they enjoyed, if not always a supportive press, one that was willing to take them seriously. Those who argue the case for media influence on political outcomes would say that the francophone media's less-hostile coverage enabled the relative electoral success of the PQ and the Bloc; this writer does not share that view. The key difference is that the journalists in Québec had the same social, cultural and political values of their nationalist political colleagues, which arose out of a shared sense of national identity. This is not the case in Scotland, and will not be until the SNP has established the same deep roots in the Scottish community that the sovereigntists in Québec have - and that is also a matter of political organization as well as identity.

Simply put, getting the message across is not enough to ensure electoral success. If the voters are not ready to accept the message of a nationalist party, for whatever combination of historical, cultural or economic reasons - the party will not gain support, no matter how well-delivered that message may be. The political expression of Québec nationalism has been a force in that province since the 1900s, and nationalism long before that, strengthened by Québec's position

as a distinct society within Canada. Its cultural and linguistic isolation has reinforced the solidarity of Québec nationalists throughout its history, and given it a distinct public sphere. Nationalism is hegemonic in Québec, but it is not in Scotland, where the nationalist movement has been much more divided and therefore less effective. It has little or no presence in civic institutions, unlike Québec, where sovereigntist supporters are found in business, unions, professional organizations and the media. As a result, the SNP has a weak community base, and only 15,000 members, compared to the Bloc's 113,000.

These same political, cultural and social factors that have influenced the development of nationalism in the two regions have also influenced the role of their journalists in promulgating nationalism. In Québec, journalists were on side with the sovereigntist cause during the 60s and 70s, but that is because they shared the same education, lifestyle, background and social-democratic ideals as those in the independence movement, and the norms in francophone journalism encouraged the expression of opinion and political analysis. In Scotland, where objectivity means being anti-nationalist, political journalists have not had the same freedom to report on nationalism as in Québec, where journalists see balanced reporting as covering both federalism and sovereignty, and nationalism has been used mainly as a marketing tool to establish a particular brand identity for Scottish media, in order to give them a unique selling-point against their London-based competition.

Future research into the two solitudes of Canadian reporting on Québec, as well as on francophone issues outwith Québec - which have been largely neglected by the Canadian media - and the disjunction between the Scottish media's coverage of the new parliament and the public's perception of its workings, will add more to our understanding of the complex relationship between nationalist movements, the political parties that represent them, and journalists, a relationship that has often been assumed, but all too infrequently analyzed.

## Appendix

### List of Interviewees

#### A. Scotland

1. Mike Russell, Chief Executive of the SNP, Tuesday, July 9, 1996
2. John Swinney, SNP Vice-Convener of Publicity, Saturday, July 13, 1996
3. Kevin Pringle, SNP Director of Communications and Research, Tuesday, July 23, 1996
4. Alex Salmond, Leader of the SNP, Friday, November 1, 1996
5. Peter MacMahon, Scottish Political Editor, the *Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 19, 1996
6. Kenny Farquharson, Scottish Political Editor, *Scotland on Sunday*, Wednesday, December 4, 1996
7. Robbie Dinwoodie, Scottish Political Correspondent, the *Herald*, Friday, December 13, 1996
8. Kevin Pringle, Thursday, August 14, 1997
9. Kenny Farquharson, Friday, August 15, 1997
10. Robbie Dinwoodie, Monday, August 18, 1997
11. Peter MacMahon, Monday, September 22, 1997 (via e-mail)
12. John Swinney, Friday, October 10, 1997

#### B. Canada

1. Alain Dubuc, Editorial Page Editor, *La Presse*, Tuesday, June 17, 1997
2. Chantal Hébert, Ottawa bureau chief for *La Presse*, Wednesday, June 18, 1997 (via e-mail)
3. Paul Wells, Ottawa bureau, *Montreal Gazette*, Thursday, June 19, 1997
4. Don Macpherson, Quebec Affairs columnist, *Montreal Gazette*, Thursday, June 26, 1997
5. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc, Tuesday, October 27, 1997
6. Francine Amyot, executive assistant to Duceppe, Tuesday, October 27, 1997
7. Jules Richer, Ottawa bureau, *La Presse Canadienne*, Friday, October 31, 1997
8. Yves Dupré, président, BDDS, Monday, November 3, 1997

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