

Bits & pieces from Ottawa

In no Canadian election in my memory have the odds shifted so quickly from the call of the election to the last weekend of the campaign. From Bourassa and the government, a cinch winner, to Levesque and the PQ a winner, likely with a clear majority. One finds Liberal MPs from Quebec and French language reporters in the Ottawa Press Gallery now ready to concede that Bourassa has lost. A split of the seats next Monday night along the following lines won't surprise anyone: Total 110: Breaking 65 to PQ: 25 to Liberals: 15 to UN: 5 to Creditistes and the Democratic Alliance.

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Will the election of Levesque as Premier drastically change the party equations at Ottawa? One hears many scenarios:

For example, one view is that Levesque will inherit a literally awful situation — The Quebec economy in a mess; Doubts everywhere to go along with the debts; high expectations among the younger zealots for independence; high expectations among many voters simply for a clean, sane, competent government which will get more jobs going and straighten out the labor controversies. Given such an inheritance one can see a debacle for the PQ, and lots of room for Trudeau to manoeuvre as the savior of the country (in English Canada) and as the would-be stabilizer of a demoralized regional economy (in Quebec).

Another opinion, given me by a Liberal minister (by the way, latest rumor has two more ministers ready to do a "Richardson") that a Levesque win finished Trudeau as a credible Prime Minister. Simply because his chief "earnest" to the electors in 1968 was his ability to keep Quebec in place through a rather enthusiastic federalism. So this man thinks a repeat of 1967 is possible. Remember when Pearson suddenly announced before Christmas that he had decided to go.

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It is clear that Joe Clark has made one decision more firmly than did Bob Stanfield.

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Several years ago Stanfield, under reportorial prompting, said that on taking power he would make major changes in the senior bureaucracy. He even indicated at least two top mandarins whom he would not have as advisers.

Not long after, Stanfield began to back away from this. Ottawa as the public service town, dominated quietly much more by Clerks of the Privy Council and Deputy Ministers of Finance than by cabinet ministers, expressed its disquiet.

Lots of discreet talk flowed in the Rideau Club and *Le Cercle Universitaire* about the neutrality and high talents and precious anonymity of the senior bureaucracy. Would Stanfield jettison the sacred principle of ministerial responsibility? Did Conservatives not accept a public service structured around the merit principle? Was Ottawa to become a carpet-bagger town like Washington after every general election?

Stanfield ran for cover. Clark is less likely to, simply because he is developing a plan for recruitment of new deputy ministers, of senior aides for himself, plus a drastic shuffling around of those mandarins retained.

One of those now working on the plan is talking about an end to the doctrine of ministerial responsibility for all civil servants at and above a fixed high level of responsibility and/or salary.

He believes that a new Prime Minister should be entitled to have the undated letters of resignation on file from all those filling high-level appointments. Anonymity of senior officials (always a bit phoney) would be at an end. Regular inquiries by parliamentary committees into the specific performance of senior bureaucrats within their departments or agencies would become a matter of course.

Why all this? It's not just a lesson from Diefenbaker's experience. (In his latest volume the Chief whines about disloyal and unforthcoming bureaucrats, about their Liberal tinge.) More than that, Clark is coming to share a widely-held opinion about the Trudeau administration. The chief cause of its decline almost to inaction has been the triumph of the mandarins through their hiring, re-organizing, restructuring, etc.

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The *Globe and Mail* printed a hefty extract from Trudeau's speech in Japan, with the heading that the PM didn't apologize — apologize, that is, for the Canadian treatment of Japanese Canadians in the '40s. He didn't — grant it — use the word "apologize". However, several reporters on the trip quizzed the PM's two chief advisers — international specialist Ivan Head and PR specialist Richard O'Hagan. This, they said, was a rather brief, puzzling speech. What was the gist of it? How would they describe it? The advisors agreed, according to those who were there, that the speech was "An apology to the Japanese."