



ESS-CLIPPINGS

COUPURES DE JOURNAUX

Name of Publication.....Nom de la publication

Date.....Date

Trudeau the foremost advocate of a strong central government

THE MAIN obstacle in the way of Premier Robert Bourassa's slowly emerging aims happens to be Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Perhaps it is that his political base is in Quebec, or because of his tendency towards a doctrinaire statement of ideas, or possibly because contemporary politics offer only antagonistic alternatives, but the prime minister has become the foremost advocate of a strong central government.

He stands vigorously opposed to the kind of nationalism whereby Quebec would be in Canada but not of it. But at the same time he has been working to improve the rather low status of the province in the operations of federal institutions, a situation which tended to keep Quebec in Canada but prevented it from being of it. French Power and bilingualism in the federal service became policies designed to take care of any nationalist claims Quebec might care to make.

Reforms

In the prime minister's view, there is little need for cultural sovereignty if the French presence in the civil service remains adequate. The reforms he has instituted are felt to be lasting ones. Contrary to what Bourassa may fear, the French presence in Ottawa has reached a threshold ("a critical mass," as the prime minister refers to it) whereby current reforms are irreversible.

Last October, during the debate on the Speech from the Throne, Trudeau

outlined the general directions federal policy would be taking in the difficult field of intergovernment relations. These provide little comfort for Bourassa whose inclination is to dissociate himself increasingly from federal initiatives.

The prime minister reasserted his belief that it was impossible to draw clear and straight lines of division between federal and provincial responsibilities, hence he intended improving the mechanisms for the coordination of policies by all levels of government. In other words, he was holding to the line which Bourassa has perceived as being necessary during the early days of his administration.

Trudeau also stated that there would be "an increase in the federal presence in a general way across the country." And he also indicated that he would work towards bringing the British North America Act under Canada's control and have provincial agreements on an amending formula. He was even willing to re-introduce the one that had been rejected in Victoria in 1970 if a better one could not be found.

However, the toughest aspects of Trudeau's view of federalism were not expressed in that speech. Nothing was said about the very close relationship between fiscal policy and federalism, a matter which is at the heart of the controversy between Quebec and Ottawa.

According to the prime minister, Ottawa must retain preponderant tax-

ation powers in order to assert its constitutional responsibility for the state of the economy. Taxation powers go with spending powers, and hence Ottawa is quite justified in continuing to make expenditures in areas which are constitutionally a provincial responsibility. This is what federal authorities have been doing in such key areas as health and welfare as well as for purely cultural purposes such as broadcasting and the film industry.

Anxieties

Such a theory of federalism is not made to reassure nationalists in Quebec who fear the use which an English-speaking majority might make of its power. Premier Bourassa has become very sensitive to the cultural anxieties which exist in Quebec, and his constitutional views are coming to be closely identified with them.

Nevertheless, the premier easily recognizes the validity of Ottawa's desire to retain control over the economy. Recent world crises have brought home to Quebec the need for a strong central government. The province has benefited to a considerable degree from the showdown between Ottawa and Alberta over the tax on Western oil exports to finance Eastern imports. Feed grains is another issue about which Quebec would support federal authority.

Quebec's economic needs and its cultural anxieties are pulling in op-



ESS-CLIPPINGS

COUPURES DE JOURNAUX

Name of Publication.....Nom de la publication

Date.....Date

posite directions. Politically, no premier can afford to give in completely to one or the other. He must always work to achieve an acceptable compromise and avoid destructive polarizations. It is an extremely difficult task, particularly when the prime minister in Ottawa has his political base in this province.

There are several factors which contribute to making Bourassa's balancing act such a precarious one at the moment. One is the erosion in the prestige of the provincial Liberal Party following revelations of patronage and unacceptable associations. But a more serious one is the very real shortage of funds with which new social and economic policies could be initiated. The limited tax resources of the province and of municipalities are causing an accumulation of unsolved problems and raising political tensions as a result. Increasing pressure on federal institutions is a natural consequence of this situation.

With a recession spreading through Canada and Quebec, Bourassa may not really expect to resolve the constitutional issues which he is now raising. For the time being he may want nothing more than a larger share of the country's taxation resources. But this doesn't mean that he is raising cultural issues merely as a means of recapturing lost political support. It is simply that present circumstances are making conflicting options harder to reconcile.

The Star's Quebec Editor