

# PATRIOT GAMES

In a political variation of the good cop-bad cop routine, there must always be two major leaders from Quebec: a separatist bogeyman threatening to 'break up the country' and a messianic prime minister to 'keep the country together'

**TOM FLANAGAN**  
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**P**reston Manning's challenge to the monopoly of "Quebec-based politicians" over the national-unity issue has drawn vituperative responses from his political opponents. Charges of fomenting hatred and civil war fill the air.

What explains the vehemence of the attacks? Why do the Liberals and the Conservatives attack Manning, who is a loyal Canadian, far more viciously than they have ever attacked Lucien Bouchard, who wants to destroy Canada? Because Manning is starting to expose the "patriot game," as the journalist Peter Brimelow once called it.

The patriot game is a system of domination that has ruled Canada for the past 30 years, since Trudeauania swept the land. Like all games, it has rules:

1. In a political variation of the good cop-bad cop routine, there must always be two major leaders from Quebec: a separatist bogeyman threatening to "break up the country" (Come on down, Daniel Johnson, Rene Levesque, Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard!) and a messianic prime minister to "keep the country together" (Step right up, Pierre Trudeau, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chretien and maybe Jean Charest!).

2. Everyone in Quebec must engage in ethno-linguistic block voting. Anglophones and allophones have to vote 90 per cent Liberal at every election.

Francophones can vote only for parties headed by a Quebec leader. Thus, they had to desert the Liberals when John Turner replaced Pierre Trudeau, and the Conservatives when Kim Campbell replaced Brian Mulroney. Under no circumstances may they vote for a functionally bilingual leader from outside Quebec (too bad, Joe Clark and Ed Broadbent).

3. Canada must be officially bilingual, so that the prime minister and a large percentage of cabinet ministers, advisers and senior civil servants will be from Quebec. Quebec, however, must be officially unilingual.



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4. Federalism must work; that is, it must be profitable for Quebec, but the transfer of resources must be disguised to make it hard for voters to figure out what's going on. Pierre Trudeau's "Just Society" was the perfect solution. In the name of helping the less fortunate, it legitimated equalization, regional economic development and unemployment insurance with different rules for different parts of the country, thus creating a permanent majority receiver coalition of Quebec, the four Atlantic provinces and Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Because of its larger population, Quebec receives more from these programs than the other six provinces combined, but a pretence of evenhandedness is maintained.

5. Any criticism of the system must be rejected as racist. Albertans and British Columbians, who foot the bill for the fiscal transfers, must be labelled rednecks or dinosaurs, so their grumbling can be dismissed as bigotry.

The Reform party, which elected MPs in five provinces in 1993, must be labelled a "regional party," in contrast to true "national parties" such as the Progressive Conservatives (MPs from two provinces in 1993) or the NDP (three provinces and one territory).

Confirming Karl Marx's insight that systems of domination destroy themselves through their internal contradictions, the demise of the patriot game is well under way. Fiscally, the game could only be played by running up huge debts, which have curtailed the ability to keep on playing. Politically, the game is extremely dangerous even for the most talented play-

ers. Patriation of the Constitution destroyed the federal Liberals' support in francophone Quebec.

Failure to pass the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords broke the Conservative Party of Canada into three parts. The federal NDP drove away half its traditional voters by supporting the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords.

Above all, what has kept the game going is Quebec's threat to separate, which for a time made any price seem worth paying. But the Canadian people and politicians are, after many years of compliance, gradually losing their fear. Natives and anglophones in Quebec are threatening partition of the province in case of separation. Jean Chretien's Liberal government, no longer based in francophone Quebec, has referred the question of a unilateral declaration of independence to the Supreme Court of Canada. Chretien also demands to approve the question in case of another referendum and says he may not accept a majority vote in any case. And now Manning says the previously unsayable, that the future of Canada is the business of all Canadians.

The patriot game is in its last period, and the ice is getting slushy. Quebec will either separate or not by the year 2000. Either way, the game will be over.

If a prime minister from Quebec is to succeed Jean Chretien — and Paul Martin certainly deserves consideration — he will have to get elected because of executive ability and sensible policies, not because he claims to be the only one who can "keep the country together."

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