

# 'Indulgence in Ethnicity'

*Leads Canada to divorce  
but would lead the U.S. to disaster*

by Charles Krauthammer

A few years ago, *The New Republic* held a competition for the most boring headline in history. The winner of the contest — the benchmark for dull — was: "Worthwhile Canadian Initiative."

The key adjective was "Canadian": boring, bland, safe. I regret to report that this is no longer true. No country in the process of imploding has the right to be called boring. True, the excruciatingly slow and almost civilized way it is doing so is characteristically Canadian. But the reasons it is falling apart should be of great interest, especially to Americans.

[In late May], Canada held a national election. The results show a country in an advanced stage of fracture.

Canada used to have three major parties. They represented different ideologies: there was a party of the left (the New Democratic Party), the center (the Liberals) and the right (the Progressive Conservatives).

No longer. The NDP and the PC were effectively wiped out in the 1993 parliamentary elections and have made only feeble

*Charles Krauthammer is a nationally syndicated columnist. ©1997, Washington Post Writers Group. Reprinted with permission.*

comebacks. What is left?

There are still three major parties. But they are regional and ethnic. The Liberal Party has survived and with a bare majority in the new Parliament remains the ruling party. But it did so by winning two-thirds of all its seats in one province, Ontario. (Canada has 10.) In Ontario, the Liberals won 101 of 103 seats.

Ontario is the geographic and economic center of Canada. To one side is Quebec; to the other, the West. In Quebec, the majority of seats in Parliament were won by a radically ethnic and separatist party, the Bloc Quebecois. Its platform is the separation of Quebec from Canada. It sends its delegation to the national parliament in Ottawa for the principal purpose of breaking up the country.

To the other side of Ontario are the Western (prairie) provinces stretching all the way to the Pacific. The Reform Party, the second largest party in the Parliament and now the official opposition, swept 70 percent of the seats in the West. It won not a single seat anywhere else in Canada.

The Reform Party does talk about lower taxes and less government, standard conservative fare. But its real attraction is that it is anti-Quebec. The establishment, it charges, has been trying to keep Canada

together with too many concessions to Quebec. The soft Easterners would give Quebec the status of a "Distinct Society" within Canada and extraordinary control over its language, cul-ture, immigration and other functions. Reform rejects special status. Its platform is equality for all the provinces — read: Get Quebec off its pedestal — and if Quebec doesn't like it, it can go jump in the Atlantic.

In May, the Liberals won. Ontario — bland, reasonable, accommodating — rules. For now. But the Reform Party will rail and Quebec will soon have another one of its independence referendums. The separatists have lost twice. But they lost the last one by less than one percent. And they vow to keep holding them until they win, at which point Canada will indeed col-lapse. The next referendum is about two years away.

Why is this important to Americans? We know what can happen when parties and politics become radically regionalized, as in, oh, the election of 1860. Now along comes Canada to remind us again what politically inspired, politically encouraged, politically hyped ethnic and regional differences can lead to: They can threaten the very existence of a country as civil as Canada.

For 20 years, Canadian governments have tried to satisfy Quebec's demands by granting it more and more autonomy. Quebec has, for example, its own language police. It goes around fining people for putting up linguistically incorrect signs. Hence, too one of the triumphs of French Canadian separatism to date: the abolition of the apostrophe. (French does not have them.) Eaton's, Canada's Macy's, is now Eaton. Liberté!

There is more, of course. Laws to force immigrants to

send their kids to French-speaking schools. Quasi-diplomatic status for Quebec at meetings of French-speaking nations. But all of this will not do. Quebec's French-speaking majority is not appeased. It wants more. It wants independence.

Quebec should be an object lesson to those American politicians who thrive on the promise of the multilingual, multicultural nirvana awaiting us if only we grant special rights and status to America's various languages, races and

ethnicities. And the disaster awaiting us would be even greater than Canada's.

Why? Because Canada has one saving grace. For the most part, the French live in one place, the English in another. Canada's groups enjoy a neat geographic distinctness. They can have themselves a divorce and build a fence.

We can't. Americans are hopelessly, physically enmeshed with each other. Canada can afford its disastrous indulgence in ethnicity. It has a way out. We don't. **TSC**