

SPECIAL REPORT #1



Citizens Centre
for *Freedom*
and *Democracy*

SUMMER 2005

EEE SENATE OR ELSE!

Time for a hard line

Bert Brown

There are no easy and pleasant solutions to Canada's chronic misgovernment

***Bert Brown's ultimatum in the prairie soil:
But the question remains – 'Or else what?'***

Back in 1987, Senate reform champion Bert Brown drove a big tractor and 62-foot cultivator into a field north of the Calgary International Airport, and ploughed in the brown prairie earth a message one mile long for airborne passengers to read:

"Triple E Senate or else!"

It was an inspired advertisement, but it left hanging an obvious question.

Or else what?

The answer in 1987 was Preston Manning's Reform Party. It had three core demands:

- A provincially equal, elected and effective Senate.
- The right of Canadians to decide controversial social issues by referendum.
- Getting Ottawa out of provincial areas of jurisdiction.

Ever since the Trudeau years, Canada's main problem has been the growth of unchecked power in the hands of prime ministers from Quebec.

It's something westerners, especially Albertans, have never accepted. Under the rallying cry "the West wants in," the Reform Party took 52 seats in 1993, and 60 in 1997.

Eastern Canadians, led by Ontarians, responded by electing three back-to-back majority Liberal governments under Jean Chretien.

Sensing he couldn't win, Manning began the lengthy process of reuniting the Reform Party with the Conservatives in 1999, and the three-point western agenda was quietly abandoned.

Consider, however, if the three points had been accepted, how much better Canada would be today.

A Triple E Senate, responsive to provincial parties and governments, would have blocked the federal gun registry (which most provincial governments opposed). The scrutiny of an independently elected Senate would have prevented or reduced the corruption that has become rampant in Ottawa under one-party rule. The smaller provinces controlling the Senate would probably have stopped the Prime Minister from gutting the Canadian military and abandoning the Anglo-American Alliance. In turn, the economic devastation inflicted by American softwood lumber and beef restrictions might have been far less severe. A Senate sensitive to provincial resource rights in the West and Atlantic would

Continued next page.

probably have prevented Chretien from ratifying the Kyoto accord.

Getting Ottawa out of provincial jurisdictions (health, economic development, culture, child care, cities) would have allowed provinces to set their own spending priorities according to their own resources, rather than pleading endlessly for more transfers for programs designed in Ottawa.

National referendums on major social policies, combined with Senate examination of judicial candidates, would have restrained the irresponsible Charter activism of the courts in areas like gay marriage, and probably in other key areas like aboriginal entitlements.

In short, the problem with the Reform Party was not that it had the wrong idea.

The problem was that the changes it sought couldn't be delivered by a federal political party. Too many Canadians in

other regions want a more powerful and centralized national government, even if it's corrupt and incompetent.

Thus, Bert Brown's famous ultimatum turned out to be an empty threat, leaving unanswered the question, "Or else what?"

Until some dire consequence stares a Canadian Prime Minister in the face if he does not concede in full to all three fundamental reforms, Canada can only slide further and further into corrupt, inept, abusive government.

Quebec has proven for the past forty years that the only way to move Ottawa is to threaten separation.

However, few western Canadians, even in Alberta, want to leave Canada entirely, and Ottawa knows it.

As a result, the only "or else" that can work in western Canada is one that falls short of separation, but still forces Ottawa to decentralize and disperse the power now wielded by the Prime Minister. ■

'Get in or get out'

If Ottawa refuses to reform, the Alberta government should take over federal tax collection

Reforming Canada turned out to be far more difficult than westerners anticipated in 1987. Indeed, it may in the end prove impossible. But even if it is, we must face reality. Even abundant resources do not save countries that are badly governed from becoming poor and repressive. Africa and South America are full of examples.

Unless the Reform Party's three-point agenda (Senate, courts and spending limitations) is implemented somehow, how much longer will it be before Canada reaches the point where it's not worth living in?

For the past half century, while our prime ministers have been amassing more unchecked power than any other chief executive in the free world, we have been steadily falling behind the rest of the developed world, especially our nearest and biggest trading partner.

- Canadian incomes have been stalled for the past 16 years, falling far below those in the U.S. (see graph #1).

- Every year, thousands of our best and brightest relocate to the United States (see graph #4), as well as to Australia, New Zealand and other free and democratic countries.
- Despite sanctimonious posturing in Ottawa, our actual contributions to global security (see graph #2), environmental protection and foreign aid have almost vanished.
- Our government is becoming measurably more corrupt (see graph #3).
- Our most basic civil rights - property, religion and free speech - are all being sacrificed to ever-changing notions of "equality" imposed by the federal courts.
- While Ottawa trespasses evermore into provincial areas of responsibility (social, cultural and economic development), it neglects its own duties like criminal justice and defence.

The Reform Party having failed, and Canada being a shared-sovereignty federation created by the provinces, it now falls to provincial governments to either fix our federal system or get out of it.

The heaviest responsibility in this regard falls on Alberta, which has the most to gain if present problems are solved, and the most to lose if they are not.

Instead of begging Ottawa to "let the West in," Albertans should tell their legislature - and the sooner the better - to notify Ottawa that if all three points (Senate, courts and federal spending limitations) are not implemented within one year, Alberta will take whatever steps are necessary to defend its future.



The Citizens Centre promotes responsible government in Canada, by helping citizens to press for honest, accountable and constitutional government, a clear division of power between Ottawa and the provinces, and a democratic counterbalance to the increasing power of the courts.

Chairman: Link Byfield
Operations manager: Craig Dockstader
Address: #203 10441 178 Street
 Edmonton, Alberta, T5S 1R5
Telephone: 780-481-7844, or toll-free 866-666-6768
Fax: 780-481-9983
E-mail: contact@citizenscentre.com
Web site: www.citizenscentre.com

It should do so in two stages.

First it should take immediate control of all provincial responsibilities which it has unwisely entrusted to Ottawa in the past. These include provincial policing, provincial tax collection and Albertans' share of the Canada Pension Plan. This proposal has already been promoted as the Alberta Agenda, and is widely understood and accepted.

Assuming provincial control of these three things opens the door to stage two.

If Ottawa still refuses to reform the Senate, the courts and federal spending, the provincial government would then ask Albertans in a referendum to support taking provincial control of federal tax collection, and remitting to the federal government only what the Alberta Legislature considers to be fair

payment for desired federal services to Albertans.

Albertans pay some \$10 billion a year more in federal taxes than they get back in federal spending, a net contribution that grows every year. (It consistently exceeds the Alberta government's own resource revenues.)

This would come very close to a declaration of independence, because the essence of sovereignty is (among other things) the power to tax. However, Albertans would probably see it for what it is - temporary leverage against Ottawa, not separation from Canada and from other Canadians. The borders would remain open, the flag would still fly, the laws would remain otherwise the same, the signs in national parks would still be bilingual, and business would continue as usual. The only difference would be that after a date set by the Legislature, all tax deductions, including federal ones,

would be remitted by force of provincial law to the provincial treasury until further notice.

Ottawa would denounce it as blatantly unconstitutional, but would have only three options:

- Implement the specified reforms (Senate, courts and federal spending restrictions).
- Put Albertans and their legislature under martial law and run the province from Ottawa.
- Watch Alberta - and very possibly other provinces - leave the federation.

Which course the federal government would choose is impossible to predict.

However, as Quebec has shown, Albertans can only come out ahead. There is but one long-term losing scenario for Alberta, which is to continue doing nothing. ■

So now what?

Alberta's own history lays out the forward path

The "get in or get out" option will work if Albertans, encouraged by reform-minded Canadians elsewhere, understand that the status quo is suicidal for the whole country.

Most sensible people realize Canada has problems. Unfortunately, however, governments wedded to the present system are skilled at concealing the severity of the crisis.

In this regard, the government of Ralph Klein is as bad as the rest. It has spent the past decade arguing with Chretien and Martin over funding levels rather than building systematically on the work of Peter

Lougheed, Don Getty and Preston Manning to reform national institutions like the Senate, the courts and the Prime Minister's Office.

Impromptu Senate elections every six years do not constitute a reform agenda.

Rather than supporting the federal Reform Party, Klein ridiculed it as "a pimple on an elephant's butt." A provincial committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation rejected last year anything that might increase tension between Ottawa and the province.

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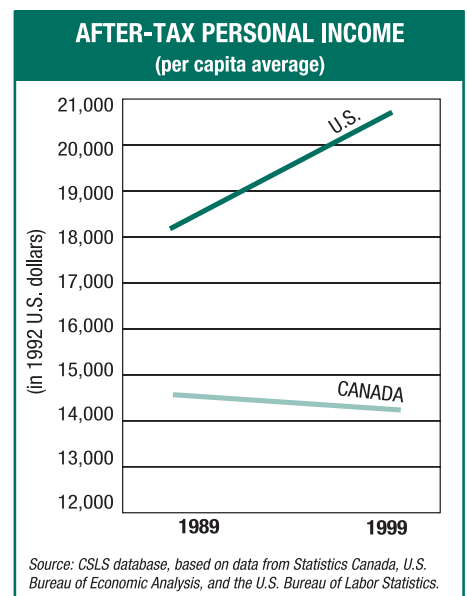
THE THREE NECESSARY REFORMS

Triple E
Senate

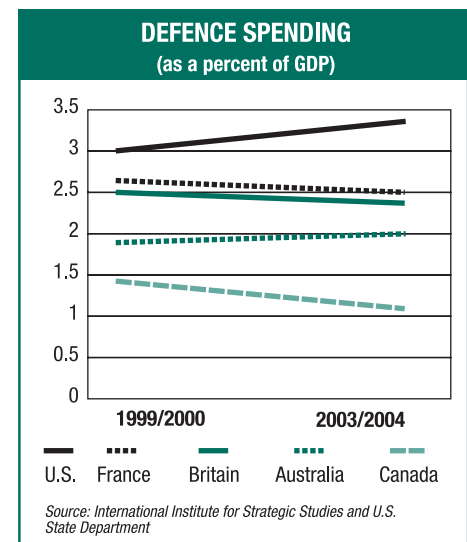
Referendums on
controversial
Charter rulings

Constitutional
restrictions on
federal spending

GRAPH 1



GRAPH 2



The Klein government, like others, has vested great hopes in the new Council of the Federation. The council is just a new name for the annual premiers' conferences of the past, and no more effective. Unlike the Senate, the council has no constitutional authority and is never likely to acquire any. It provides a platform for premiers to complain about federal funding, something they've been doing regularly for forty years.

If Canada is to be reformed, the Alberta government must be prodded into action. For that to happen, Albertans themselves must be shaken out of their current complacency, and shown the special responsibility that confronts them.

Albertans have risen to political challenges before. There were two huge social and political revolutions in

the province's past, the farm co-op movement and the social credit movement.

Both began as nonpartisan movements which educated and focused Albertans on the need for a specific, radical change. Both movements assumed that the provincial government would implement the necessary legislation, and both movements were turned down. Only then did they go political. In both cases they swept the old party out of office in a single election.

The "get in or get out" movement should emulate this winning strategy.

It should organize itself into local nonpartisan associations the way the UFA and Social Credit did, to spread information, build public awareness, gather supporting signatures and lobby MLAs from existing parties, especially the Conservatives.

There are modern ways of doing this, such as computer networking, opinion polling and media advertising. But in the end it still comes down to personal contact, and individuals volunteering personal time and effort.

The approaching Conservative leadership change in Alberta offers an opportune moment. Within the next year or so it will determine who Alberta's next premier will be.

At least one leadership candidate, Rockyview MLA Ted Morton, espouses the "Alberta Agenda" - provincialization of police, pensions and provincial income tax collection. If public demand for this sort of hard line is rising as the leadership contest develops, other candidates may do the same.

The "get in or get out" movement could arrive in the premier's office along with the next premier.

At this early

stage, effort spent on starting new separatist or quasi-separatist political parties will be mostly wasted. Political parties have never been effective at public education, and most Albertans do not want to separate from Canada.

Until the Alberta public can see a way of defeating Ottawa without wrecking Canada, separatist parties will probably never find an audience. Albertans are the most patriotic citizens in the country.

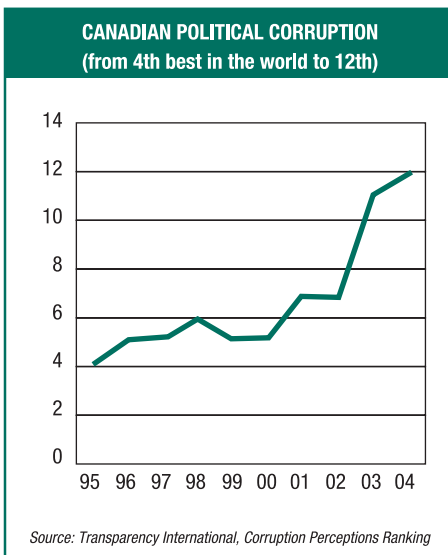
If, however, there is widespread demand for a hard line against Ottawa, and the new Alberta premier ignores it, then all bets are off. The new movement, already organized, need only choose its own leader and "go political."

It has happened twice before.

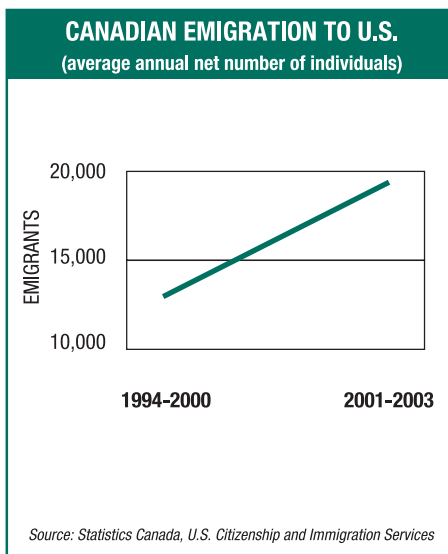
It can happen again. ■

There is only one long-term losing scenario for Alberta, which is to continue doing nothing.

GRAPH 3



GRAPH 4



The Citizens Centre needs your support

You can financially support the Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy in any of the following ways:

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