



SEAT COUNT: New legislation would add as many as 34 seats to the current 308, all of them in Tory-friendly parts of the country

Hey Liberals, the House faces West



ANDREW COYNE

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an incisive exploration of the Liberal party's latest self-inflicted wounds in Quebec. As for me, my only contribution is to ask of certain members of that great party: will you please get real?

If, as we are told, the subtext to the unpleasantness over who is to be the party's nominee in Outremont is the rivalry between Denis Coderre and Martin Cauchon to succeed Michael Ignatieff as leader; and if the supposition, as that suggests, is that the next Liberal leader must come from Quebec, in the historic party tradition of *alternance*; and if, as *that* suggests, certain members of the party are still fixated on regaining Quebec as the route to their eventual restoration as the natural governing party—then again I ask: will you please get real?

Has there been a more stunning example of a ruling caste succumbing to the delights of fratricide, at the very moment the forces that would consign them all to oblivion were amassing? The last act of *Hamlet* comes to mind, but aside from that? Already the Tories are blanketing the country with pre-election spending, in the name of "stimulus." In the campaign to come, they will invoke the coal-

ition power grab to remind voters of Liberal hubris. And if ever the Tories win their majority, there goes the party's public subsidy.

But it is the Liberals who will be responsible for their own demise if they do not put aside their fascination with disembowelling themselves long enough to notice a much more ominous trend, one that threatens to lock them out of power for decades. In a word, it is called redistribution. Even as the Battle of Outremont was raging last week, the Conservatives were letting it be known they were preparing legislation that would radically reapportion the seats in the House of Commons, adding as many as 34 seats to the current 308, all of them in Tory-friendly parts of the country: B.C., Alberta, and suburban Ontario.

The Liberals can't say they weren't warned: the Conservatives have twice brought forward similar legislation before this, only to see both die on the order paper. Neither can they object to the bill on any principled basis: these are the fastest-growing parts of the country, and the ones suffering the starkest discrimination under the present allocation. Between them, the three provinces are home to nearly 63 per cent of the population, yet receive just 55 per cent of the seats. Alberta, with a population of nearly 3.7 million, gets just 28 seats, or one seat for every

131,702 residents. At the other extreme, Prince Edward Island, with about 140,000 citizens, is guaranteed four seats—a ratio of one seat to 35,246 Islanders.

In any normal country, this sort of accumulated unfairness would be remedied after each census, simply by reshuffling the seats among the provinces. In Canada, the process is hamstrung by a variety of constitutional and quasi-constitutional grandfather clauses, the upshot of which is that no province can see any reduction in its current seat count.

If no province can have fewer seats than it has now, then the only way to achieve greater parity is by adding seats to the disenfranchised, that is by expanding the House. Still, the arithmetic is tricky. To bring Ontario, B.C., and Alberta up to their proportionate share, you'd have to add 64 seats overall. And even if no province is worse off in absolute terms, that doesn't mean the others won't squawk at seeing their share of the total decline. To be sure, in most cases they would only see a reduction in the unfair advantage they currently enjoy. But in the case of one province, it would actually be put at an unfair disadvantage. Unhappily, that province is Quebec—currently slightly overrepresented, it would be slightly under-represented in a reformed House.

So the bill the Tories are preparing is, necessarily, a compromise: it would not move the three provinces all the way to parity, but more nearly so. Even so, it's nervy. It would appear the Tories are prepared to brave the inevitable backlash in Quebec, in anticipation of electoral gains elsewhere.

Which brings us back to the Liberals. If the Grits think they are going to rebuild out of their old stronghold of Quebec, they are delusional. The population, the money, and the power are all shifting west, and will continue to do so, in all likelihood, for decades to come. Where are the Grits in the West? Nowhere, that's where.

Time was when Liberal governments won power with a healthy number of seats from the West. But that hasn't been the case for, well, decades: the last Liberal government to carry the West was Mackenzie King's, in 1949. In the 60 years since then, the Grits have rarely won more than a handful of seats in the West—even in the Trudeaumania election of 1968, they took just 27 of 68. Once, they could get by on the strength of their historic dominance of Quebec, or latterly Ontario. But Quebec is lost to them now. And Ontario, increasingly, is looking West, aligning its interests and values, not with Quebec, but with the western provinces.

What is the Liberal strategy for rebuilding in the West? Do they have one? Has it even occurred to them, obsessed as they are with retaking Outremont? Is this party for real? M

ON THE WEB: For more Andrew Coyne, visit his blog at www.macleans.ca/andrewcoyne

Memorial to a very, very oppressive something



ANDREW POTTER

It may seem hard to believe now, but until 1989 the museum at Auschwitz basically ignored the former concentration camp's central role in the Holocaust; for years it was merely a monument to the struggle against fascism. Only after the victory of the Solidarity movement and the collapse of Communism was the place turned into a proper memorial to Jewish suffering.

Disgusting, yes, but hardly surprising. Plaques, monuments, museums—all are political devices aimed at serving one version of the past over the rest. But, however twisted the nature of the Auschwitz memorial under the Soviets may have been, at least you get the sense there wasn't a lot of pussyfooting around about it. Stalin probably gave an order and it was carried out (or, given his famously opaque management style, his underlings

probably just assumed that was what he wanted). Say what you want about Communism under Stalin, at least it had an efficient decision-making procedure.

Of course, another thing you might want to say about Communists is that they ran murderous regimes that terrorized half the world for half a century—an assertion that a few weeks ago seemed almost beyond the capacities of the National Capital Commission's board of directors. At issue was a proposal to establish in Ottawa a monument to the "victims of totalitarian Communism," a \$1.5-million project, to be funded by private donations, that has been under way for three years. At a meeting on Sept. 10, the board finally passed a motion supporting the concept of the memorial, but only after concerns about its title were raised by almost every member.

Originally it was to be called the "monument to the victims of Communism." But some NCC experts suggested that was too broad. They proposed adding the word "totalitarian," so as not to offend the sensibilities of those Canadians who still affiliate themselves with the science of historical materialism. But this didn't sit well with some board members, and in the course of the recent debate, it was suggested that the monument's focus was actually too narrow, and ought to be against totalitarianism in all its forms. Still others thought the project should highlight Canada's long-standing service as refuge for victims of oppressive regimes, to which one board member objected, saying Canada was hardly on the side of the angels, given our treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

The last meeting ended with the board approving a monument, though everyone was left wondering of what sort. News reports of the proceedings drew international attention, most of it mocking, and Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney stood up in the House of Commons to affirm his ongoing support for a monument to the victims of Communism.

The NCC has since moved with unusual dispatch and quickly approved the title, "A Memorial to Victims of Totalitarian Communism—Canada, a Land of Refuge." The two groups leading the project put out a press release thanking the NCC for its efforts, though Charles Coffey, honorary chair of the initiative, couldn't resist in a dig: "Probably the board members at the NCC, like so many Canadians, are simply unaware of the scope

and scale of Communism. This monument will help to change that."

In many ways, this is the perfect confluence of political correctness, bureaucratic buffoonery, and Canadian narcissism—a source of no end of glee for right-wingers and red-baiters. It also fits with past NCC behaviour—in 2007, the steward of federal lands and buildings in the capital removed a portrait of Lord Durham from Sparks Street Mall on the grounds that a panel beneath it failed to mention that in addition to bringing responsible government to the colonies, he advocated the assimilation of French Canadians.

But the truth is, in a democracy, any public monument of any seriousness is going to have to deal with contending stakeholders with contradictory and equally legitimate interpretations of the past. Canada is a pluralistic country populated by successive waves of immigrants and refugees, many of whom fled some sort of

hardship or oppression and carry with them a particular sense of grievance. Trying to navigate these competing viewpoints is difficult at the best of times, and far more fraught when what is at issue are claims of oppression, murder, and genocide. Sometimes it leads to things like the Communist monument absurdity, or the more general fiasco over the Plains of Abraham re-enactment last summer—although the ongoing wrangling over the 9/11 memorial in New York City shows that no country, and no tragedy, is immune from controversy.

So, instead of lamenting this, perhaps we should celebrate the fact that, unlike Stalin's hijacking of Auschwitz, our governments can't merely press the past into whatever ideological shapes they desire. We may have cartoonishly sensitive bureaucrats who fall over themselves trying to ensure no one takes offence, but that may not be a flaw of our system but a benefit. Or, as programmers like to say, it's not a bug but a feature.

In fact, the actual name of the museum, or its presence, may not be as important as the valiant if amusing debate that preceded it. Really, monuments of this sort are best left to the totalitarians. Who needs a slab of stone reminding of Communism's horrors when you have democracy? To twist a line from Bertolt Brecht: don't pity the country that has no memorials. Pity the country that needs them. M

ON THE WEB: For more Andrew Potter, visit his blog at macleans.ca/andrewpotter