

## Duceppe raises benchmark

### Wants to break the 50 per cent plus one barrier Bloc leader woos minorities, female voters

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MONTREAL—Gilles Duceppe is setting out to do what no sovereigntist leader has ever done before. He wants to break the symbolic barrier of 50 per cent support for a sovereigntist party in Quebec.

"Much more than the number of seats, it is the symbol of 50 per cent plus one he is seeking, considering that sovereigntists have never achieved that level," Université de Sherbrooke political scientist Jean-Herman Guay told the *Toronto Star*.

"This election has great symbolic importance for him," Guay said.

René Lévesque, Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard never managed it — although they came very close. Lévesque got 49 per cent of the vote in the 1981 election, and Parizeau and Bouchard took the Yes vote to 49 per cent in the 1995 referendum.

Duceppe himself led the Bloc Québécois to 48.9 per cent and 54 seats in 2004 — matching Bouchard's total in 1993.

Prime Minister Paul Martin accentuated this dynamic when he said on Friday this is "really a referendum election" and "Quebecers have a choice between a party determined to destroy Canada and us."

Now, Duceppe has a series of reasons to try to beat his own record, and establish a new benchmark.

Every vote is now worth \$1.75 to the party under the federal finance law, and every additional MP means additional staff and research capacity to work towards Quebec sovereignty.

And Quebec sovereigntists have also believed — despite some evidence to the contrary — that once a voter chooses the Bloc or the Parti Québécois, they will never vote for a federalist party again.

Voting Bloc is easier than voting Yes in a referendum — it cannot produce rupture in the short-term — but it is a gesture of protest and disengagement.

An Ekos poll published in the *Saturday Star* gives the Bloc 58 per cent in Quebec versus 21 per cent for the Liberals.

Duceppe never talks about his strategy in public, but a number of strategic approaches can be inferred from what he has done during the first week of the campaign for the Jan. 23 election and over the last two years.



JACQUES BOISSINOT/CP PHOTO

Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe gestures to members of the youth wing at a Bloc Québécois general council meeting Sunday. Duceppe is hoping to crack the 50 per cent support barrier in the upcoming election.

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- Target Quebec's minorities. On the first day of the campaign, Duceppe went to the nomination meeting of Maka Kotto, the charismatic actor originally from Cameroon, who was elected for the Bloc in the last election.

Duceppe used the occasion to stress, as he has done in every speech, that Kotto represents the new Quebec of the future, a Quebec which includes people of every race, colour and origin.

It is a theme Duceppe has been quietly working on over the last few years, organizing conferences on immigration and cultural diversity, and seeking out candidates like Vivian Barbot, the feminist activist from the Haitian community who is running against Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew.

- Draw together the various sovereigntist leaders at the beginning of the campaign.

In the past, when the Bloc campaign was faltering, as it did in 1997, the party organized rallies with key sovereigntist leaders at the end of the campaign to rally hardline loyalists.

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### **Party leader uses sponsorship scandal to hammer Liberals**

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This time, Duceppe did this at the beginning with a joint appearance with Parti Québécois leader André Boisclair at the nationalist Société Saint-Jean Baptiste on the second day of the campaign.

- Hit the Liberals where they hurt.

On Friday, Duceppe campaigned in Liberal minister Liza Frulla's riding, which she won by only 72 votes — and hammered away on the sponsorship scandal, citing the names of those who had been involved, like Jean Brault, Jacques Corriveau and Claude Boulay, who had contributed to Frulla's by-election campaign in 2002.

Duceppe moves smoothly from his attacks on sponsorship to his argument that Canadian federalism is unfair to Quebec, resulting in surpluses in Ottawa while Quebec does not have the money it needs for health and education.

On Tuesday, Duceppe takes off for a six-day tour of the province where he will try to inspire party workers to get out the vote.

When asked about any of this, Duceppe argues that this is not a vote on sovereignty, but a vote of confidence in sovereigntists.

The difference is that this year, Martin has upped the stakes for federalism by calling this a "referendum election."

Duceppe made clear he will use Martin's statement in the future.

"If he believes that this is a referendum election, what will he say the day after a Bloc victory?" he asked.

When asked about the early co-operation with the Parti Québécois, Duceppe insisted there has always been a "B tour" of PQ figures touring schools, colleges and universities that the media have not followed.

Duceppe yesterday vowed to give the Liberals one of their toughest challenges yet.

"There's no question of giving up one single riding to the Liberal Party of Canada," he told the 600 delegates at a Bloc special general council meeting.

To this end the Bloc will target women voters and the elderly to help it boost its total of Quebec seats past the 54 it now holds, a party meeting was told yesterday.

However, in a news conference afterward, Duceppe admitted it was unlikely that his party would take all of Quebec's 75 seats, Canadian Press reports.

The Liberals under Pierre Trudeau were the closest to achieving that miracle when they won 74 of Quebec's 75 seats in February 1980 during Canada's last winter election campaign.

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