

Hypocrisy update: Deal with the Devil

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Bloc part of secret coalition plot in 2000 with Canadian Alliance

A document obtained by The Globe and Mail shows that the scheme would have propelled then Alliance leader Stockwell Day to power in the coalition. A lawyer who was described then as being close to Day, says he didn't discuss the matter with the MPs

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OTTAWA — The separatist Bloc Québécois was part of secret plotting in 2000 to join a formal coalition with the two parties that now make up Stephen Harper's government, according to documents obtained by The Globe and Mail.

The scheme, designed to propel current Conservative minister Stockwell Day to power, undermines the Harper government's line this week that it would never sign a deal like the current one between the Liberal Party, the NDP and the Bloc.

Bloc officials said that well-known Calgary lawyer Gerry Chipeur sent a written offer before the votes were counted on election day on Nov. 27, 2000.

According to prominent sovereigntist lawyer Eric Bédard, who received the proposal, Mr. Chipeur identified himself as being close to Mr. Day, the leader of the Canadian Alliance at the time.

“I never had the impression that I was involved in theoretical constitutional discussions,” Mr. Bédard said, adding he had never met Mr. Chipeur before.

A Bloc official said the link between Mr. Chipeur and Mr. Bédard was facilitated by Rodrigue Biron, a former Parti Québécois minister who was part of the unite-the-right movement in the late 1990s.

In addition to his discussions with Mr. Bédard, Mr. Chipeur said he also approached the chief of staff to Joe Clark, who was the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

The discussions were held about a two-page document entitled "Consensus Leadership for a New Century," as well as a two-page proposal for a Speech from the Throne.

In an interview, Mr. Chipeur played down the importance of the offer, saying he never discussed the matter with Mr. Day or other MPs, and was simply getting ready in the event of a minority government.

"I was preparing for what might happen," Mr. Chipeur said.

Still, the agreement included room at the bottom for the signatures of Mr. Day, Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe and Mr. Clark, to be signed the day after the election.

At the time, the Alliance was ready to fly Mr. Day from his BC riding to Calgary to pick up Mr. Clark on the way to Ottawa, where the deal was to be presented to the Governor-General in the event of a minority Parliament.

The Alliance government promised in the event of a coalition to "respect the legitimate jurisdictions of Canada's provinces, including Quebec."

"We agree that we will support Stockwell Day as Prime Minister of Canada," said the draft agreement, which would have hinged on Bloc support.

The plan fell apart as the final result of the election in 2000 saw the Liberals win a clear majority with 172 seats. By comparison, the Alliance, Bloc and PC Party only had a total of 116 seats. The NDP won 13 seats.

However, the draft agreement raises questions about statements this week from senior Conservative ministers who are blasting a Liberal-NDP coalition with Bloc support as a "deal with the devil."

"The brutal fact here is that something has happened that has never

happened before in Canadian history," Mr. Day, the current Conservative Minister of Trade, said on CTV Newsnet on Tuesday. "And that is two federal leaders have actually signed a deal with a separatist party whose goal it is to destroy the country."

Mr. Day was replaced at the helm of the Alliance in 2002 by Mr. Harper, who went on to oversee a merger of the Alliance and the PC Party.

Mr. Harper, now Leader of the Conservative Party and a minority Prime Minister, is waging an all-out fight against the proposed Liberal-NPD coalition, which includes Bloc support on confidence votes until June, 2010.

The Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc hope to defeat the Harper government on Monday, but the Conservatives will likely attempt to shut down Parliament in a bid to survive until January.

As Mr. Harper defended his government during Question Period on Tuesday, his Conservative caucus gave him repeated standing ovations and pointed to opposition benches with cries of "Shame! Shame! Shame!"

"We will have [in a coalition] a mechanism of permanent consultation empowering the Bloc Québécois on every question of importance, notably concerning the adoption of the budget. This Prime Minister, this government, this party has never and will never sign a document like that," Mr. Harper said.

While in opposition, however, Mr. Harper asked then-Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson in 2004 to turn to him if Paul Martin's newly elected Liberal government were defeated in the Commons.

"We respectfully point out that the opposition parties, who together constitute a majority in the House, have been in close consultation. We believe that, should a request for dissolution arise this should give you cause, as constitutional practice has determined, to consult the opposition leaders and consider all of your options before exercising your constitutional authority," Mr. Harper said at the time.

The release of the 2000 draft agreement from the Canadian Alliance is likely to bolster the coalition's arguments that the Conservatives are engaged in double-speak.

Mr. Chipeur was a prominent lawyer in Alliance circles and an official member of the legal committee of the United Alternative, a key element of the unite-the-right movement. He went on to represent the Alliance in legal cases after the 2000 election.

A Bloc supporter, who was informed about the talks with him at the time, said the Alliance was willing to provide increased transfers, as well as the management of the long-gun registry, to the provinces.

The Bloc official added that the discussions with Mr. Chipeur included compromises on contentious issues, such as a promise to respect a straight majority of 50-per cent plus one in the event of a future referendum on Quebec sovereignty. The move would have gone against the Liberal Clarity Act, which calls for a stronger majority.

But Mr. Chipeur said he simply looked at the public positions of the various parties in drafting his proposal and conducting the informal talks.

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