



Chrétien's book revives spectre of house divided

Pollster says former prime minister's memoir could undermine Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion

October 16, 2007

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OTTAWA—Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion could find that his old boss, Jean Chrétien, is more trouble than any Conservative attack ads, according to pollster Nik Nanos.

By reigniting his old feud with Paul Martin, his successor, in his new book, Chrétien could do some serious damage to the Liberals, Nanos says.

"The Liberal brand has been able to effectively weather the image storm outside of Quebec," Nanos said yesterday. "Even with Stéphane Dion's rough ride, the Grits are still very competitive in Ontario and urban Canada. However, if a narrative emerges that the Liberals are a house divided, that would be potentially more damaging than any attack ad on Dion."

Chrétien describes Dion in glowing terms in his book, titled *My Years as Prime Minister*. Chrétien says that while he tried not to play favourites with cabinet, "Dion proved an exception" and the two ended up spending a lot of time together. Chrétien's book, laced with multiple attacks on Martin, exploded into the news this weekend, just as Liberals are bracing to have their mettle tested with today's throne speech in Parliament.

Chrétien lashes out in the book at Martin's disloyalty, his supporters – called "self-serving goons" – and says he regrets that he didn't fire him in 2000.

One of the most damning accusations is Chrétien's charge that Martin is to blame for Canadian soldiers being sent to the more dangerous area of Afghanistan – Kandahar – in 2004, because Martin took too long to make a decision on where they'd be assigned.

Senator Jim Munson, a former communications director for Chrétien who was fielding questions on his behalf yesterday, said Chrétien isn't backing away from any of it.

"He just feels as far as history is concerned, this is the way it was and he wants to make sure it's in black and white," Munson said.

Martin has indicated, through a spokesperson, that he won't be responding beyond calling it unfortunate that old divisions are being dredged up again.

No one in Dion's circle wanted to talk on the record yesterday about the book.

"You've got to be kidding," said Bob Rae, former leadership contender and now the newly named

foreign affairs critic for the Liberals, when asked if he wanted to wade into the debate.

But in informal chatter yesterday, several Liberals were saying that the Afghanistan attack on Martin was probably below the belt.

At a breakfast meeting yesterday of Liberal staffers, it was suggested that it was fair game for Chrétien to talk about how he saw things while he was prime minister, but not appropriate for him to attack the way the decision-making unfolded after he'd retired and Martin took over.

Indeed, by coincidence, there's another new book out on the shelves this month that is at odds with Chrétien's reading of how Canadian troops ended up in Kandahar. Co-written by Eugene Lang, a former chief of staff to two Liberal defence ministers, and University of Toronto academic Janice Gross Stein, *The Unexpected War* recounts how Kandahar was chosen on the recommendation of several experts – including chief of defence staff Rick Hillier and Canada's ambassador to Afghanistan at the time, Chris Alexander.