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Separatism and Confederation

by

JACQUES PARIZEAU

Ce travail a été présenté par monsieur Jacques Parizeau à un colloque qui a eu lieu à l'Université de Windsor au début de 1965. Nous le reproduisons ici, avec l'autorisation de l'Université, non comme l'expression d'opinion de la Revue, mais comme une étude intéressante d'un sujet très controversé. Nous pensons que tout esprit curieux doit suivre l'évolution de la pensée dans notre pays. Le premier ministre de la province de Québec, monsieur Jean Lesage, n'a-t-il pas dit récemment à St. Catharines[1] : "I must state it very clearly : Canadians must either adapt themselves to this new fact or else accept that French Canada will evolve alone in a world entirely of its own making. Alas, there is no other choice."

Et de son côté, lors de la dernière session d'études de l'Union Nationale, son chef, monsieur Daniel Johnson, s'est exprimé ainsi[2]: "J'estime qu'on ne doit pas à priori rejeter la solution séparatiste. Car il pourrait arriver que l'indépendance totale du Québec soit la seule issue compatible avec la survie et le progrès de la nation canadienne-française. La Confédération n'est pas une fin en soi. Si, après avoir tout tenté pour la rendre également habitable à nos deux communautés culturelles, nous constatons un jour la vanité de nos efforts, elle ne nous paraîtra plus digne d'être sauvée."

"Mais il me paraît que nous pouvons en arriver à l'égalité par voie de négociation, sans passer nécessairement par l'étape de l'indépendance. Je crois encore à la possibilité du dialogue . . ."

La question est sérieuse. Elle mérite qu'on y réfléchisse, quelle que soit la conclusion à laquelle on arrive. C'est pourquoi nous avons pensé que nos lecteurs liraient avec intérêt l'étude de notre collaborateur. — Assurances.

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[1] Selon le "Montreal Star" du 13-3-65.

[2] *Le Devoir,* 20-3-65. Extrait d'un livre paru aux Editions Renaissance.

Separatism is a reaction; a deep, strong reaction against English Canada on the one hand and against previous generations of French Canadians on the other.

It is a reaction against English Canada as expressed in some of its most powerful elements, and more specifically against the structure of government and that of business. To realize that after a hundred years of Confederation, the Canadian government, its politicians and its civil service are still largely English speaking, to understand fully how this implies that a French Canadian must often cease to be one to climb the ladder that leads to real power, are shattering experiences. They largely explain the role played by some Federal French speaking civil servants in the early developments of separatist movements.

Similarly, the nearly total incapacity of English speaking business to absorb French Canadians in the upper echelons is an amazing phenomenon that, in some years from now, we may come to judge as one of the most extraordinary episodes of our history. During the 1950's, the big take-over of Canadian business by American capital developed. It has, as we know, now attained a degree quite unparalleled in any industrial country of the world. English Canadians have no more the rights and prestige of the owner, but their defence system is still as efficient as it was in by-gone days.

All of this is well known and does not need to be stressed to any length. That is has now become something of a cliché does not, however, reduce its importance in the least.

Separatism is also a reaction against French Canadian society as it was organized by previous generations. This reaction can and does take many forms. In its most extreme version, it becomes a steel-hard judgment on the role played by the ruling classes of French Canadians. According to

such views, the clergy comes to be judged as the expression of appeasement. To protect its rights and privileges, the clergy is seen as having sided with English Canada, whenever a crisis between the two national groups was emerging. Keeping French Canadians, and, particularly, the farmers and the workers, docile, became not only an important objective but a most essential tool. The uprising of 1837-38, the Riel affair, the conscription crisis of 1917, will thus often be given as examples of what is called the shameful role of the Church. Later, the alliance of a large part of the clergy with the Duplessis regime, the tension between the Church and the intellectuals, the anti-leftists campaigns, are seen as so many episodes of a continuing battle to maintain control over the French mind and over Quebec society.

Just as strong is the attack upon the lay ruling classes, second in command, foremen of English Canadian interests, satisfied to reap minute financial and flimsy political advantages, as long as they could convince the holders of real power, that they were the true pipe-lines to French Canadian consumers and French Canadian voters.

Not all critics will go that far. But as French Canadians rediscover their history, after discarting the naive and often silly text books that were theirs for so long, there is no doubt at all that a powerful reaction spreads against the innocuity, the lack of real leadership, the docility of the traditional elite of Quebec. In the late 1950's, this sort of attitude was largely directed against the National Union party and was lead by a group of intellectuals. In a matter of a few years, it has widened considerably. It has become among large numbers of young people a reaction of shock against the inability of the traditional elites to organize themselves, to open up the doors that would have lead to a normal society.

Thus, faced with what they see as a country where the essential centers of decisions remain in the hands of English speaking Canadians, and where the French Canadian elite has been incapable to participate in these decisions and to organize the society that they lead so as to develop it properly, concluding, in effect, that the inaptitude of this elite is a necessary result of its absurb position in a federation that has never worked as it should, quite a few French Canadians have concluded that separatism was the only way out.

The separatist is usually a young man. Not only, as is often observed, because young men are prone, in any society, to put in question traditional principles and operations, but also because as I have stated previously, separatism is one of the main expressions of what is, by necessity, a conflict of generations. When they condemn the traditional elite of Quebec, the separatists are, in effect, condemning a generation of older people. These young men are also the product of a school system that has been, particularly in secondary and higher education, both considerably widened and profoundly changed in the last ten years. They are the product of an awakening largely due to a small band of intellectuals that acquired prominence in their fight against Duplessis and with the help of mass media have opened public opinion to the main streams of contemporary ideas and politics. But dormant societies can be dangerous when they awake and the sorcerer has lately been increasingly worried by what his apprentice has been doing.

Along the path to an independent Quebec, separatists have been faced with several objections, two of which I intend to analyse in some detail. The first is political and cultural in character, the other has to do with the economics of the projected new State.

It is often assumed — much too easily — that by seceeding, Quebec would not only reduce considerably the resistance of Canada to American influence and control, but also its own capacity to forestal the powerful impact of its southern neighbour. Thus, separatism would be self-defeating. An independent Quebec would be under critical danger of American assimilation. Confederation, thus, becomes an essential bulwark to preserve not only a Canadian identity but the characters of its component parts.

The political validity of the argument is, in part, related to economic factors which will be analysed later. But, it is also related, in part, to cultural factors and, in this latter instance, I think it can be shown that American influence in an independent Quebec is likely to be less acute than it is at present. For all federalists, this should be an object of serious consideration.

In effect, there is no doubt at all, that, in present circumstances, French Canadians are particularly vulnerable to an American culture that enters their society from all sides. As long as a man has to spend most of his working life in an English environment that has little resistance to American influence, it is bound to be so. From the reading of U.S. publications to advertising, from city development to post-graduate studies, there are little chances for the French Canadian to avoid the North American way of life and way of thinking. I do not suggest that this is to be frowned upon as such. Sixty years ago, it could have brought about the complete assimilation of French Canada in North American Society. Now, that the mere survival of French culture and language is assured and that there are no hopes for, or fears of assimilation, the situation becomes particularly unhealthy. French Canadians study in French, but often work in English. Their cultural development as far as the arts are concerned, is

spectacular, but their language is too often a bastardly mixture. They will never manage to be true Americans, but they find it very hard indeed to be proper expressions of French civilization.

In principle, at least, separatism might have a lot to offer so as to break the deadlock and help the French Canadian to avoid the fate of the cultural half breed. In an unilingual state, where the normal functions of life are conducted in French, where English would be a common but still foreign language, the development of a popular culture, of an homogenous outlook and mind could finally be achieved. It would, at last, be possible to convince students that a proper command of French is necessary even at board meetings. Reading *Newsweek,* or the *Saturday Evening Post,* would become what it should always have been, a way to understand what goes on in the United States, and not a vague, but persistant expression of this North American soul that French Canadians have at times tried so hard to acquire and never quite managed to seize.

Confederation has, as it worked until now, given just enough to French canadian society, so that it could consolidate and resist, but not enough for it to develop normally. A separate state of Quebec could have the means of cultural self-assertion that have not been available until now. On the North American continent, it could find far more stability and far more resistance to U.S. penetration than has been the case until now.

It is, in fact, impossible to convince a whole population that everything that is really important is American or American controlled, to put it to work eight hours a day in the English language, to educate it in French, and, then, to feel that it is well protected from U.S. influences. Of course, it cannot be.

A French State in Quebec would likely have a much smaller group of partisans of annexation to the U.S., than is presently the case.

The second argument often raised against separatism is far more serious in character and far more difficult to handle. It has to do with the economic conditions that would prevail in any independent Quebec. In many ways, this has always been seen as the most formidable obstacle to the spread of separatism in Quebec. Time and again warnings have been served that secession would spell a collapse of the standard of living of Quebecers. Some went so far as to state that a fall of 50 per cent in per capita income was unavoidable. Reducing considerably the market for Quebec firms, would not only limit the field of business expansion, it would raise costs, create difficult balance of payments problems and call for controls and barriers that would not only stifle growth but would not even allow to maintain present incomes.

As an economist, I cannot avoid feeling that such conclusions are far too simple. Technically the problem is one of extraordinary complexity. All the required data necessary to deal with it is not available, but already some aspects can be referred to as being particularly relevant.

Quebec has now 5.6 million people, in other words, about the same number as Switzerland, more than Austria, Norway, Danemark or Findland, more than twice as many as New Zealand, all countries with a high standard of living, in some cases higher than that of Quebec itself. The rate of natural increase of the population is about 2 per cent a year. In view of present population trends, Quebec would reach the population of Sweden within twenty years, sooner if immigration on some scale was forthcoming.

The economy of Quebec like that of several other provinces has a high component of primary extractive industries, or of manufacturing closely based on natural resources. For such industries, the Canadian market has usually been of small significance, most of the products being exported to the United States and to Western Europe. Whether Quebec is part of Canada, or part of a large North American political unit, or independent, is largely immaterial. As long as foreign capital is left to operate with a minimum of constraints, as long as natural resources are properly managed, politics are unlikely to affect the income flows that originate in these sectors of the economy.

Secondary manufacturing is in an altogether different situation. Several decades ago, Montreal was in more ways than one, a large supplier for the West. Prosperity of a number of industries in Quebec was closely linked to the rise of population in the Western provinces and to the development of the railway network.

There seems to be little doubt that this situation has changed. Ontario seems now to have outdistanced Quebec in supplying the Western market in industrial goods. If this is true, a large number of industries, in Quebec, would be essentially based on the local market and particularly on that of the Montreal metropolitan area.

It is easy to understand how important it is to check such a rough conclusion, or rather, in view of the data presently available, such a hypothesis. What is needed is a detailed survey of how the production of secondary industries is shared between the Quebec market, the markets of other Canadian provinces and the rest of the World. Within a few months, national accounts and input-output tables will be available for the Quebec economy and it will be finally possible to know to what extent manufacturing is likely to be

affected by possible changes in the political structure of the country.

In a somewhat different direction, the present setting up in Quebec of important tools of economic intervention under the sponsorship or the direct control of the government is already having some effect upon the orientation of the economy. Partly because of the role played by foreign investment, partly because of the very small role played by French Canadians in the economic life of their province, indigenous entreprenorship and the creation of pools of industrial capital have always been lacking on a sufficient scale. In the occurrence of secession, this situation would have been serious indeed. But new business structures are emerging in Quebec under the general inspiration of the government. Let us consider in this respect that according to the projects that are now ready and approved, the General Investment Corporation will by 1968, have been totally, or mainly, responsible for the investment of nearly 300 million dollars in new manufacturing establishments, over a period of six years of operations.

The development, side by side, of a public or semi-public sector of the economy, and of a private, largely foreign, sector is no doubt something quite new in our country. It would, assuming the secession of Quebec, be rather well suited to a balanced development of its economy. It would have, probably, the right kind of flexibility to avoid serious trouble at the outset. It might even be used to reduce the reliance upon an excessive degree of protectionism that, in our days, relatively small economic units cannot afford without ill-effects upon their standard of living.

As I stated previously, I do not feel that we have, as yet, all the information that is required to understand the economic effects of secession. Enough has been said, how-

ever, to understand why a priori I cannot conclude that the economics of an independent Quebec are necessarily a kin to downright madness. Given certain conditions, particularly with respect to the markets of manufacturing industries, an independent Quebec does not need to be the absolute catastrophy that, somewhat hastily, a number of people assume.

Granted, a number of other points should be made here. One should study the situation of agriculture and the considerable drain that imports of foodstuffs would mean for the balance of payments. Similarly, all sort of observations would be needed with respect to the modernisation of so many oldish, stagnant industries. But my purpose here is not to develop in front of you, a balanced picture of what the economics of Quebec could be. My purpose will have been served to show that, in my view, the assumption of an independent Quebec implies a number of highly complex economic consequences that warrant a pretty serious examination. When a number of separatists, who have no particular knowledge in economics, conclude that secession is possible, they may be wrong, but there is also a possibility that, in view of the facts, they may be right. In any case, they must be taken seriously.

As it exists, at the present time, the separatist movement represents a challange both to the Quebec government and to the Federal authorities.

The Quebec government is embarked upon an ambitious, in fact a very ambitious program. In so doing, it reflects two fundamental facts. Firstly, it has become the focus of energies and attention of a generation of French Canadian technicians and intellectuals who play a considerable role in the life of Quebec, and turn to its government as a channel for their projects, ideas and aspirations. At last, French Canadians are

coming to see their provincial government as a mean to achieve the degree of responsibility and initiative that the more advanced or the better trained among them had often not found until then.

Secondly, the Quebec government must move very quickly. In the establishment of its economic policies, in the implementation of a new educational system, more generally in redifining its role towards society at large, it cannot afford to waste time. Quebec is living, in its relatively calm way, through a revolutionary atmosphere. In so far as old values are reconsidered, old authorities attacked from all sides, old habits destroyed, the government must show flexibility, leadership and a quickness of reaction to maintain its grip on the social changes that take place.

In so far as society is itself torn between very different options, in so far as the positions of conservatism remain powerful and as the forces for change are remarkably varied, the government, whatever the party in power, must manage to reflect at the same time numerous different forces, strike a balance between them and remember that time is of the essence.

Indeed, the present situation, in Quebec, reflects a rather extraordinary ambiguity. Separatists, of the realistic kind, cannot but understand that the French community still lacks the most elementary tools of self-assertion. This is true in the economic or financial field. But it is just as true in cultural and intellectual activities. They cannot but consider that a number of the present policies are making available the instruments on which an independent Quebec would rely most heavily. At the same time, the Federalists feel that in so far as they move fast enough and with sufficient energy, they are, in fact, taking the fire away from the separatists and hasten the disappearance of their movement.

Indeed, by building new tools, by setting up new policies, the government not only contributes in changing the life of the Province, but is in more ways than one changing the mentality of its inhabitants. Showing the French Canadians that they *also* can participate in major decisions, that they *also* can hope for a place under the sun, that to be a foreman or a district sales manager is not the quasi-necessary ending of a carreer, that they achieve self-respect through the importance of what they do rather than through the observance of ancestral values, can bring about a profound upheaval in the political outlook of the younger generation. Whether or not Mr. Donald Gordon actually said that he could not find a French Canadian competent enough to sit on the board of the C.N.R. is immaterial. As reported by newspapers, his remarks may have fanned one of the most acute nationalist waves of this century. They must also be judged against the background of the impressive development of massive economic tools devised and manipulated by French Canadians that are one of the main outcome of the Quiet Revolution.

Obviously, both sides — the separatists and the government — cannot be right. We will know, eventually, whether present tools will have actually prepared separation, or whether the government was right in assuming that it was taking the fire away from the separatists. In the meantime, of course, a peculiar unanimity exists among a number of people in Quebec with respect to the policies to be followed and the steps to be taken. A consensus exists that may still last for some time yet, but the underlying political forces behind this are wholly unreconciliable. It is not the least of the paradoxes of the present state of Quebec.

For the Federal authorities to adjust to the present situation is not easy. After all the Central government has

been hit by far more than the emergence of a separatist movement or an activated Quebec government.

For the last ten years, the sheer size of the Central government has steadily decreased in the Canadian economy. An affluent society which insisted in having better roads, hospitals, schools and city planning, finally realized that all these tasks fell within the realm of what had been called traditionally the junior governments. Faced with a gigantic rise of their financial requirements, the Provinces had to make an inroad into Federal resources. In the process of enlarging the scope of their activities and their sheer economic weight, these junior governments have been involved in policies and projects that represented so many centrifugal forces, in the strongly centralized federation that emerged from the War.

Gone are the days of the glorified Keynesian principles according to which the government could handle the broad aggregates of effective demand without paying too much attention to the regional repercussions of its policies. The break in post-war growth and development that occurred in 1957 and lasted until 1961, laid bare the considerable structural malformations that had developed in the Canadian economy. It showed glaringly the regional differences in growth and standards of living. It induced several Provincial governments to engage in policies of their own, somewhat in reaction against the previous Federal rules of the game. They had both the means and the urge to implement them.

Irrespective of the Quebec situation, or of the role played or not played by French Canadians, a swift shift of the pendulum away from centralizing policies was inevitable that had to reduce appreciably the importance of the central authorities. No doubt the emergence of the separatist movement, the active and often unorthodox policies of the Quebec

government in its dealings with Ottawa, have added vivid colours to what in any case would have developed into a period of stress and tensions.

Be that as it may, the situation of the Federal government is not an easy one. It cannot relinquish too many of its financial resources or of its economic responsibilities, for fear that its efficiency as a Central government be impaired. In fact, it is faced by two vocal and articulated views: according to some, taking more powers away from Ottawa is a sure way to wreck Confederation. According to others, keeping too stiff a position towards the Provinces and mainly towards Quebec is just as certain a way to reach the same result. Caught in between the devil and the deep blue sea, and sometime wavering between two possible courses, the Federal government is then accused of indecision.

At this juncture, two distinct problems must be envisaged; they are related with the Constitution on the one hand and with what for lack of better words I will call the rules of the game.

By this expression are designated the internal rules according to which our Federation is run and which cannot easily be explicitly defined in a Constitution. The field they cover is very wide indeed. It stretches from the role and working conditions of French Canadian civil servants to, say, the federal-provincial coordination of fiscal policies or debt management.

Whenever part of the population feels that the rules of the game are such that if not the letter at least the spirit of the Constitution is not respected, if it feels that irrespective of constitutional provisions the rules of the game are systematically biased, strong pressures are likely to develop in three directions. The first is separatism for those who think

that federal operations have become hopeless. The second has to do with a drastic and systematic change of the constitution along, say, the lines of the separate states project. The third implies that we first try to change the rules of the game.

I have on previous occasions expressed some doubts as to the present usefulness of a formal redrafting of the
30 Constitution. Fluid as the situation is, it would seem to be a premature although a popular exercise. The B.N.A. act has shown far more flexibility over the years than is often admitted. It may be that specific points of the constitution have to be changed from time to time. But there is no doubt in my mind that the main efforts at the present time should be towards changing the rules of the game. It is indeed a very flexible approach. It may allow the Federal government to adjust without crisis to the various problems that all seem to emerge at the same time.

I recognize that there is a certain risk in proceeding in this way. Many obstacles may be forthcoming. It is possible that important segments of the Federal administration will look back with nostalgia to the old days of centralization. It is possible that it will become difficult to negotiate with provinces some of which ask for a great deal of autonomy, and others for very little.

But I am still convinced that there are important advantages to start along these lines. Once new rules have been established, whatever changes are necessary in the Constitution are likely to be accepted more easily.

In this respect, the sort of results that may arise from the Tax Structure Committee, that was recently established by Federal Provincial conference, could go a long way, at least in the financial and fiscal field, to clarify the at-

mosphere, to produce new working rules and to reduce present tensions.

Be that as it may, I have tried to show that separatism does not appear to be the foolish, foggy, unrealistic option that a number of people often think it is. To wave it aside lightly as the sort of thing a young man indulges in before he acquires a wife, three kids and a mortgage, may be both unrealistic and dangerous. Against it, federalism must be a most serious and well studied political structure and not just the result of past habits. Canadians have somewhat been too prone to accept the idea that a confederation is difficult to run smoothly and that built-in tensions and crisis must be accepted. This is too easy a solution. Problems must be solved even though we may feel that others will soon appear.

L'assurance obligatoire a sept ans. Dans "L'Argus" du 14 mars 1965, Paris.

Comme l'Angleterre et la Suisse, la France connaît l'assurance automobile obligatoire. C'est l'étude de ses caractéristiques et de son fonctionnement que fait, dans l'Argus, l'auteur d'un livre consacré au sujet sous le titre de "L'Assurance obligatoire des véhicules terrestres à moteur". Celle-ci est possible dans un pays de centralisation administrative; elle serait incomplète et bien difficile à appliquer dans un pays où l'autorité se divise entre des gouvernements. Malgré cela, il est intéressant de voir ce qu'on en a fait ailleurs. Et c'est pourquoi nous signalons l'article et le livre à nos lecteurs.

J. H.