

THE ROOTS OF FRENCH CANADIAN NATIONALISM AND
THE QUEBEC SEPARATIST MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Since Canada's colonial era, relations between its Francophones and its Anglophones have often been fraught with high tension. This tension has for the most part arisen from French discontent with what some deem a history of religious, social, and economic subjugation by the English Canadian majority. At the time of Confederation (1867), the French and the English were of almost-equal population; however, due to English dominance within the political and economic spheres, many settlers were assimilated into the English culture. Over time, the Francophones became isolated in the province of Quebec, creating a densely French mass in the midst of a burgeoning English society—this led to a Francophone passion for a distinct identity and unrelenting resistance to English assimilation. The path to separatism was a direct and intuitive one; it allowed French Canadians to assert their cultural identities and divergences from the ways of the English majority. A deeper split between French and English values was visible before the country's industrialization: agriculture, Ca-

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tholicism, and larger families were marked differences in French communities, which emphasized tradition and antimaterialism. These values were at odds with the more individualist, capitalist leanings of English Canada.

Instead of fading in the face of urbanization, French Canadian nationalism grew more ardent; Francophone tradition was the most threatened it had ever been. It was not until the Francophone majority began to take back the economy that separatism became prevalent in Quebec politics. The provincial Parti Québécois expressed a goal of “sovereignty-association”: essentially political separation with the maintenance of economic ties. The rise of separatist ideas culminated in the Quebec sovereignty referendums of 1980 and 1995—both resulted in relatively narrow victories for the anti-separatist side. In the 1995 referendum the “Non” side won by a margin of less than 1 percent.¹ While recent support for Quebec independence seems to have dwindled due to increased immigration,² the sovereigntist cause remains an important aspect of Quebec’s history and identity.

Pre-Confederation Francophone-Anglophone Relations

British/French colonial tension abounded in North America for almost a century leading up to a French defeat in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759. In the years that followed, French-English relations in Canadian New France were primarily shaped by two acts passed by the British parliament: the Quebec Act of 1774 and the Constitutional Act of 1791.³ The Quebec Act guaranteed the religious freedom of Roman Catholics in Quebec and prolonged the use of the French Civil Code as the colony’s code of civil law.⁴ The Constitutional Act divided the colony of Quebec into two separate colonies—French Catholic Lower Canada and English Protestant Upper Canada⁵—and created representative assemblies in these colonies.⁶ This new arrangement established a British settlement within the territory and strengthened it against the threat of annexation by the United States.⁷

The division of Quebec sparked greater political tension between the French and the English; however, there was also an

acknowledged need for cooperation. Many Canadians believed that the role of the British lay in law, government and commerce, while that of the French lay in the preservation of religion, culture, and tradition. As is natural in colonial climates, however, animosity gradually eclipsed a desire for partnership, and British political dominance led Louis-Joseph Papineau and his *patriote* followers to express their discontent in the Rebellions of 1837.⁸ Papineau was of the belief that the French Canadian Catholic agricultural society was highly endangered by the commercial, Protestant majority that commanded executive politics. The rebellions failed miserably, but the *patriotes*' battle cry would continue to resonate with French Canadian nationalists for a century.⁹

After the rebellions, the Earl of Durham was appointed Governor General and sent to investigate grievances in the colony. His main recommendations were a union of Upper and Lower Canada and a system of responsible government;¹⁰ in Durham's system, Upper and Lower Canada would share power equally.¹¹ Nevertheless, Durham showed a clear preference for English culture, as evidenced by several excerpts from his report:

I entertain no doubts as to the national character which must be given to Lower Canada; it must be that of the British Empire...There can hardly be conceived a nationality more destitute of all that can elevate and invigorate a people than that which is exhibited by the descendants of the French in Lower Canada, owing to their retaining their peculiar language and manners. They are a people with no history and no literature...I believe that tranquility can only be restored by subjecting the province to the vigorous rule of an English majority, and that the only efficacious government would be that formed by a legislative union...If the population of Upper Canada is rightly estimated at 400,000, the English inhabitants of Lower Canada at 150,000, and the French at 450,000, the union of the two Provinces would not only give a clear English majority, but one which would be increased every year by the influence of English emigration; and I have little doubt that the French, when once placed, by the legitimate course of events and the working of natural causes, in a minority, would abandon their vain hopes of nationality...¹²

The report worried Canadian leaders, igniting fear of assimilation by the British and causing a political deadlock that was not

broken until the creation of the province of Quebec in the 1867 Confederation.¹³

In 1840 the Act of Union was passed by the British Parliament, joining Upper and Lower Canada in a single, unified Province of Canada. The new province had one government and one legislature and, in keeping with Durham's belief in British character, Upper and Lower Canada were given an equal number of seats in the new parliament—even considering the lower population of British Upper Canada. However, despite French underrepresentation, the Province's two cultural entities remained virtually equal and separate parts of its political structure.¹⁴

Durham's vision of responsible government was not formally enacted until 1847:¹⁵ the executive government of the Province of Canada became responsible to the elected representatives in the House of Assembly.¹⁶ This system then spread to other eastern colonies—Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland—and was granted to the Western provinces as they materialized during Confederation.¹⁷

Responsible government was achieved by Francophone leaders L.H. LaFontaine and E. Parent, in cooperation with Upper Canadian reformers. Lafontaine and Parent led one of the two main political groups that emerged after the Act of Union; the group focused on the autonomy of French Canadian social, cultural and religious institutions. The other group, primarily comprised of young French Canadian nationalists, advocated the repeal of the Act of Union and the creation of a secular, autonomous and democratic Quebec nation-state. After responsible government was established, the group led by LaFontaine and Parent gradually evolved into the Parti Bleu, which in turn became Canada's Conservative Party.¹⁸

On July 1, 1867, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the Province of Canada (then divided into Ontario and Quebec) united to form the Dominion of Canada; soon after joined by Manitoba, the North-West Territory, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island.¹⁹ On the day of Confederation, *La Minerve*, a lead-

ing French-language newspaper, proclaimed the distinct identity of Quebec:²⁰

...we form a state within the state. We enjoy the full exercise of our rights and the formal recognition of our national independence as a distinct and separate nationality...²¹

While it is easy to assume that Confederation was a product of British interests meant to wipe out French culture, the Fathers of Confederation did not intend to create a culturally homogenous nation. The most iconic Father, John A. Macdonald, who would go on to become Canada's first Prime Minister, believed that a stable nation could only be achieved if the French and English cultures existed in harmony. Macdonald wanted French Canada to be considered a nation within the Canadian nation, and for the rights of the Francophone minority to be protected. Lord Durham's views were not to be institutionalized; George-Étienne Carrier, a French Canadian Father of Confederation, ensured that the new nation would be founded on basic principles of tolerance.²² In order for the new nation to achieve cultural duality, the union needed to be a federal one. Many French Canadians did not want to dispense with the secure representation they had attained after the Act of Union unless the new system would allow them effective means of preserving their culture.²³ During the years of the legislative union the two groups had been so tightly linked that clashes had inevitably occurred.²⁴ The basis of Confederation, then, was that the survival of both cultures would be more readily achieved within one federal state than within a legislative union or through separate states.²⁵

Around the time of Confederation, Quebec Francophone attitudes began to shift. With the renewal of Quebec's culture, religion and economy, and the increasing Francophone population even outside the province, came a new Quebecois confidence. This confidence, paired with widespread indignation over the struggles of Francophone minorities outside Quebec, triggered increased awareness and resentment of federal policies designed to stamp out French culture.²⁶

The Beginnings of French-Canadian Nationalism

French settlers in North America began calling themselves *canadiens* as early as the mid-18th century. They were not entirely French, nor were they North American—a new culture had been founded in the colony of New France. However, ties to the homeland were still strong, and as the French rose up in 1789, so did a wave of discontent among the settlers; the *canadiens* were not pleased with their nearly unconditional subjugation to the new British reign.²⁷ Catholic Church leaders scrambled to retain their followers despite the Church's having been annexed by an English Protestant empire in a process they called a *providentiel* conquest. The concept of this conquest and its effect of cutting the colony off from France became staples in French Canadian political thought.²⁸ Despite their sympathetic response to the French Revolution, most *canadiens* better identified with the conservative, pious side of France;²⁹ this divergence from the new values of their homeland suggests that their strict adherence to the Catholic Church was in part a method to distinguish themselves from British rule.

By establishing a representative assembly in Lower Canada, the constitution of 1791—written three months before a new French constitution—erected a platform for nationalism in the colony. The French minority prevailed over the elected assembly, while the Anglophone majority dominated the executive posts and executive councils. Clashes between the two cultures were suddenly institutionalized.³⁰

A concrete basis for nationalism was finally devised in the 1840s by Francois-Xavier Garneau. In his *Histoire du Canada* Garneau related the tale of French Canada's past: pitted against the Amerindians and the British, the *canadiens* had finally prevailed to construct a new nation whose culture it was necessary to defend and preserve.³¹ But Garneau and many of his compatriots differed on what in fact constituted the identity of this nation; while for many it was the Church, Garneau saw the Quebec character as fundamentally secular. Moreover, he disliked the clericalism that swept the land during this period—after 1840, the Church's influence began to spread into Quebec institutions. The clergy's

nationalists believed that the Church was crucial to nationalism and to the nation's defense.³² This brand of the ideology would remain dominant up until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s: it was nationalism founded on ethnicity and religion, with little bearing on political or economic matters.³³ The state was the Church's instrument, the Church raised high and mighty.³⁴

The Turn of the Twentieth Century

A predominant symbol of Francophone misfortune around the time of Confederation can be found in the persecution of the Métis leader Louis Riel. The Métis (the name given to those of mixed European and Aboriginal heritage, mainly Catholic francophones) settled in modern-day Manitoba during the days of the fur trade, and by the late 1860s the federal government began to resurvey this land without consideration for the settlement. Riel acted as spokesman for the grievances of the Métis people in 1869 and 1870, heading a Métis provisional government. In 1870, Ontario placed a \$5,000 bounty on Riel's head for his government's execution of the Orangeman Thomas Scott, and Riel fled to the United States. Riel returned to the settlement in 1884, and in 1885 led a rebellion against Canadian westward expansion. Upon his defeat, Riel was sent to Regina to be tried for treason; he was found guilty and was executed by hanging.³⁵ To this day the trial remains one of the most infamous events in Canadian history, and at the time of its occurrence it sparked great malice among Francophones who identified with the Métis' struggles, causing increased tension between French and English Canadians.

In 1896, Liberal leader Wilfrid Laurier was elected the first French-Canadian Prime Minister;³⁶ however, this was far from a remedy for all Francophone ills. Around this time, the Manitoba Schools Question was an event that caused many French Canadians to resent federal leaders. The 1870 Manitoba Act had established a system of both Protestant and Catholic schooling, but after much Anglophone settlement in Manitoba during the 1870s and 1880s, Premier Thomas Greenway abolished funding for denominational schools in the province and replaced them with an English-language

public schooling system. In 1896, Greenway and Laurier made a compromise: denominational schooling would not be renewed, but Catholic teachers could be employed in schools with 40 or more Catholic children, and, if enough families put in requests, religious teaching could be allowed for half an hour a day. Many French Canadians were displeased with this compromise; they felt that Laurier, as a French Canadian, had failed to protect the rights of his people.³⁷

The question of Canada's participation in the South African Boer War, which occurred between 1899 and 1902, was certainly one of the most contentious issues of this period. English Canadians were largely in support of Canadian participation, wanting to support Mother Britain in her time of need; French Canadians felt no such desire, and often disliked British imperialism. Henri Bourassa, grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau, emerged as the leader of Quebec opposition to the war.³⁸ Prime Minister Laurier eventually made yet another compromise by sending a battalion of volunteers to take part; this contributed to his disfavor among Francophones.³⁹

Bourassa returned to the spotlight during World War I when he headed the movement against conscription. Views regarding WWI participation ran quite parallel to those regarding participation in the Boer War; the Anglophones' feelings of duty to Britain far surpassed the Francophones' feelings of duty to France.⁴⁰ Bourassa originally expressed support for the war, but asserted soon after that the enemies of French Canadian culture were not the Germans but the "English-Canadian anglicisers, the Ontario intriguers, or Irish priests" who were endangering the future of French-language education in Anglophone provinces.⁴¹ Bourassa was referring to the Ontario Schools Question, another enormously polemical issue during the time period: the debate over Ontario's Regulation 17, which limited French-language instruction in the first two years of elementary school. This dispute added to the already fervid tension between Francophones and Anglophones that persisted during the War.⁴²

During the election of 1917, both Laurier and Conservative PM Robert Borden used Bourassa as a symbol of extreme French Canadian nationalism; Borden's government insisted that a Laurier government would truly be a Bourassa government, and because of this would withdraw all Canadian troops from the war.⁴³ In 1918, due to inadequate manpower on the battlefield, Borden was finally forced to apply conscription.⁴⁴

Henri Bourassa was in fact one of the most important figures in the development of French Canadian nationalism. He was a proponent of many classic French Catholic values, fearing industrialization and aspiring to prevent the Americanization of Canada. However, he opposed the sovereigntist ideas advocated by Lionel Groulx, preferring the concept of French autonomy under the Canadian roof.⁴⁵ He expressed a dualistic vision for the country's future, emphasizing the need for each group to respectfully share the territory. A devout Catholic, Bourassa believed that such respect was willed by divine providence.⁴⁶ However, Bourassa seemed less committed to his ideals of cohabitation when cultural groups other than French Canadians appeared to be receiving special treatment. During the controversy surrounding the Reciprocity Treaty with the U.S., he implied that Canada should not adopt the American standard of racial heterogeneity; he simply wanted a balance between the French and English populations. Bourassa called Canada's immigration policy "criminal": it allowed for "Galacians, Doukhobors, Scandinavians, Mormons, or Americans of all races" to settle in the prairies instead of French Canadians.⁴⁷

Despite such beliefs, it should be noted that Henri Bourassa was not aggressive in his nationalism—his anti-imperialist views stemmed from a distaste for forced cultural assimilation, and he strove not to exemplify the intolerant principles he so disliked.⁴⁸ Moreover, he firmly opposed nationalist extremism due to its similarity to imperialism.⁴⁹ Despite his strong opposition to British imperialist policies, Bourassa actually admired some aspects of the Empire: he believed that Britain was superior to the U.S.

in terms of cultural tolerance paired with political unity, pointing to the preservation of Irish culture.⁵⁰

Bourassa was the founding editor of *Le Devoir*, a highly influential newspaper that was responsible for much dissemination of nationalistic ideas among Quebec Francophones. In *Le Devoir* he declared his three primary aims: Canadian autonomy within the British Empire, provincial autonomy within Canada, and the equality of the nation's French and English cultures. Early on, the journal's overarching motives were always Catholic in nature, promoting the Church's role in health, education, and welfare.⁵¹ Bourassa consistently placed his Catholicism before his nationalism,⁵² but *Le Devoir* would eventually come to have a stance inverse to this.

Lionel Groulx is yet another crucial name to the nationalist cause. Groulx, a prominent Quebec priest and historian, was greatly angered by the Ontario Schools Question and Canada's participation in WWI, and worried that the French language was gradually disappearing along with the rise of industry. While his views are often characterized as separatist, Groulx disliked using the word "separatism" and denied all his life that he held such an ideology; he did, however, consider the idea of an autonomous French Canadian nation-state.⁵³ Groulx believed strongly in the upholding of French Catholic religious values, and, like Bourassa, spent his life advocating their preservation. Groulx saw religion as interwoven into the fabric of nationalism—ironically, this doctrine was integral to the eventual dilution of the ideology's religious mission. When its traditional pious constraints were abandoned, nationalism became secular, giving rise to a new outlook that took intellectual precedence around the time of the Quiet Revolution (explained later).⁵⁴

From 1920 to 1928, Groulx edited the monthly journal *L'Action française*, and led a nationalist group of the same name. In *L'Action française*, Groulx emphasized the survival of French Catholic culture in an urban, industrial, mainly Anglo-Saxon nation. In the 1930s, *L'Action française* progressed into the journal *L'Action nationale*—this new journal's contributors believed that the

Great Depression was a direct result of excessive industry fostered by American capitalism and encouraged by an overly-generous Quebec government.⁵⁵ This view found support in many young intellectuals living in the province's cities who witnessed firsthand the Francophones' socioeconomic subjugation—it would play an integral role in the spawning of the neo-nationalist movement.⁵⁶

Indeed, WWI had created closer economic ties between Canada and the United States, and by the start of the Jazz Age Quebec was well on its way to becoming an entirely urban, industrial province. However, the Quebecois' cultural identity was still rooted in agriculture, and as the province's natural resources became more and more tightly controlled by the mainly-English Montreal business elite, the Francophones were further alienated from not only the Anglophones but also the country as a whole.⁵⁷

The Duplessis Era

The Great Depression hit the province hard—by 1933, 33 percent of Montreal's population was unemployed⁵⁸—and exponentially increased the fervor of Francophone hatred for English business domination. The Depression brought out great desire for reform in Quebec Francophones: many advocated governmental support for French-speaking entrepreneurs, the establishment of co-operatives, corporate regulation, and the nationalization of Anglophone hydroelectric companies, among other things. It was becoming very clear that the English-speaking population was calling the socioeconomic shots within the mainly-Francophone province; many Francophones believed that immediate measures were necessary to allow Quebec's French-speaking population to reclaim its own economy and tradition.⁵⁹

It was then that Maurice Duplessis took the reins, seizing the opportunity that the dismal economy allowed. Duplessis, the leader and founder of the *Union Nationale*, was elected Premier in 1936, making scores of spectacular promises: he would preserve the French language and the Roman Catholic Church, he would improve factory working conditions, he would find great new markets for the farmers' products...of course one man could

not, and did not, achieve such a wide range of accomplishments. Instead, Duplessis began his incumbency by enacting the “Padlock Law,” which was created to combat “subversive groups” such as the Communist Party and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and effectively gave Duplessis the power to override any group that opposed his leadership. While many despised the Duplessis era (left-leaning groups termed it “*le grand noirceur*,” or “the great darkness”), his strong alliance with the Catholic Church allowed him to spend two decades in power.⁶⁰

At the start of World War II, Canada’s Liberal prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, promised that he would not implement overseas conscription.⁶¹ His French Canadian lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, made the same promise⁶²—this won French Canadian support, however begrudging, for participation in WWII. During Quebec’s 1939 election, Lapointe made a threat to Quebec Francophones: if they failed to oust Duplessis, he and his French Canadian co-workers would resign and leave federal power in the hands of the conscriptionist Conservative Party.⁶³ In this way, Lapointe won the 1939 provincial election, and long after his win Quebec remained a stronghold for the federal Liberals.⁶⁴

By 1940, there was a pressing need for manpower—France had fallen and Canada was running low on troops. No doubt afraid of the Francophone wrath, PM King decided to hold a plebiscite in which Canadians would respond to the question of conscription. In preparation for the plebiscite, a great movement spawned within French Canadian nationalist groups; through *La Ligue pour la Défense du Canada*, they campaigned for a vote against conscription.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that this group was called The League for the Defense of Canada, not The League for the Defense of *French* Canada. They chose to avoid the temptation of citing Francophone subjugation, instead stressing the benefits of their cause for the whole country.⁶⁶ The results of the 1942 plebiscite can therefore be viewed either positively, as 80 percent of Francophones voted “No”; or negatively, as almost an equal percentage of Anglophones voted “Yes.” Canada was yet again divided. After the country’s split decision, King famously proclaimed that there

would be “conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.” He was able to avoid employing conscription until late 1944, when numerous Cabinet ministers and military officers goaded him into consenting to send out 16,000 conscripts. French Canada was livid, and riots broke out in Quebec; many Francophones felt this was a sign of their gross underrepresentation.⁶⁷

Maurice Duplessis regained power in 1944 and retained it until his death in 1959. During this time, he focused on abetting American investment in the Quebec economy and rejecting all aspects of federalism in an attempt to create a more autonomous province.⁶⁸ In the postwar period, the federal government undertook the creation of a welfare state; the mainly-Anglophone federal politicians insisted that the government needed to entirely control taxation in order to protect economic development and provide for the cost of social programs. Quebec’s French nationalist contingent pressured Duplessis to reject such ideas, refusing to accept the federalist system of centralized wealth.⁶⁹

The *Citélibristes* and a New Nationalism

A younger generation of French Canadian nationalists was not at all satisfied with Duplessis’ measures against the welfare state. These widely secular, middle-class “neo-nationalists” believed that French Canada’s natural resources needed to be developed for the benefit of French Canada itself, which would instigate the development of a sound Francophone bourgeoisie. The neo-nationalists proposed that Quebec fully revamp its education system and create its own independent social programs.⁷⁰ They stressed the preservation of provincial autonomy, and, in pursuit of this, rejected the rise of federal welfare.

The neo-nationalists were to find rivals in the founders of a new movement. The periodical *Cité libre* was established in 1950 by a group of young Francophones led by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Gerard Pelletier.⁷¹ A main point in its founders’ ideology was a rejection of clericalism, which at the time manifested itself both institutionally and culturally in Quebec. Intellectual life in the province was heavily influenced by religious dogmatism, and many

secular institutions were directly controlled by the church.⁷² The reason for the institutional aspect of the Church's domination was its incredible wealth of resources, both human and monetary: it possessed much of Quebec's real estate, as well as many universities, churches, hospitals, and other crucial establishments. Because it held such immense capital, the Catholic Church provided a great deal of the province's social and educational welfare.⁷³ It was in fact argued by the *Citélibristes* that the industrialization of the province had only augmented the clergy's influence, as its members constituted the only educated group able to provide such funding, which was increasingly necessary.⁷⁴ The *Citélibristes* were not in opposition to the Catholic Church; rather, they sought to address its declining adherence to the religious mission and its threatening effects on social democracy. They advocated the sociological casting-off of fear- and guilt-based ecclesiastical conceptions in favor of a belief system based on that of the French Catholic personalists—a humanistic devotion to individual liberty.⁷⁵ Encouraged by its historical power, the Catholic Church censored all secular commentary on the institutions it managed,⁷⁶ and Catholic laymen were treated as irrelevant to its decision-making processes⁷⁷—the *Citélibristes* rejected such behavior, believing that the province's institutions belonged to all of its people⁷⁸ and the Church belonged to all of its adherents.⁷⁹ Non-Catholic French Canadians were shunned by their Catholic counterparts; the Church was such a deep-seated element of Quebec's identity that it was also seen as fundamental to the personal identities of its people.⁸⁰ This was one of the central issues that prompted the founders of *Cité libre* to call for greater religious freedom in the province.

The periodical's creators adamantly opposed the traditional ideology of French Canadian nationalism, believing it anachronistic—a temporal rift had formed between the province's social and cultural realities and the bourgeois, idealistic nationalist ideology that had reigned for centuries both under and within the province's clergy.⁸¹ Contributors to *Cité libre* were of the opinion that French Canadian nationalism had created an image of French Canada based mainly on comparison with other cultures, and that this had caused lags in the group's intellectual and democratic

development.⁸² The ideology placed too much emphasis on collective values—undermining the crucial freedoms of belief and expression—and overlooked the interests of vulnerable groups. The Duplessis government perfectly embodied the detrimental aspects of nationalistic ideas.⁸³

While the neo-nationalists advocated an interventionist system in order to ensure the Francophones' economic survival,⁸⁴ the *Citélíbristes* championed the same cause for the benefit of all ethnic groups.⁸⁵ The *Citélíbristes* did hold as a final goal the heightened representation of the Francophone majority, but this was out of democratic spirit, not nationalistic pride; they believed that the nationalists were gravely wrong to overlook the primacy of the individual.⁸⁶ In opposition to both ideals were, of course, the traditional nationalists, who espoused the notion that new levels of economic intervention would only produce undesirable similarities to the secular materialism of the Anglophone provinces.⁸⁷ The Duplessis government created the Tremblay Commission to assess Quebec's role in constitutional matters; the commission's 1956 report returned a prescription that federal welfare be limited.⁸⁸

Changing Values

As Quebec became more urban and industrial, Allophones (native speakers of neither French nor English) poured into the province, and along with these drastic socioeconomic changes came the Francophones' acknowledgment that their rural, Catholic past had vanished permanently.⁸⁹ Post-World War II economic growth gave way to a new elite that called for a departure from the traditional Catholic values still prevalent among the populace. Many of Quebec's citizens disparaged government involvement in social and educational issues and minimized the value of scientific and economic progress—they even continued to reject birth control. As members of the new secular elite, a group of professors at the Université de Montréal embarked on a mission of historical revisionism; Maurice Séguin, Guy Frégault, and Michel Brunet set out to challenge the popular conception that the Church had been integral to New France and its defense after the British conquest.⁹⁰

They instead suggested that New France had been dominated by its bourgeoisie, which was destroyed in the British conquest when British merchants took over the colony's commerce. This meant that the *canadiens* were forced into rural life, that they had not chosen the lifestyle in accordance with Catholic values.⁹¹ The professors argued that what protected the French Canadians' distinction after the conquest, was not the Church, but the seigneurial system⁹² and a high birth rate. The Church had actually further contributed to British economic dominance by praising ruralism while denouncing commerce and state intervention. Séguin, Frégault, and Brunet were among the many who wanted government policy to promote the establishment of a new Francophone business class. They also wanted Quebec to be granted a "special status"—this implied a desire for independence, and Séguin explicitly stated this in a book called *L'idée de l'indépendance au Québec* (1968), in which he expounded his theory of "associate states," a precursor to sovereignty-association.⁹³

As Canada swelled with national pride due to its achievements in World War II, French Canadian society was striving for a new, yet still distinct identity marked by autonomy and self-sufficiency; this created a milieu in which resource- and job-related conflict flourished. In addition, new immigrants were being immediately assimilated into the English-speaking world instead of that of the French-speaking majority, and so the issue of language was inevitably contentious.⁹⁴

In February of 1949, Duplessis sent police to break an illegal strike in Asbestos, Quebec, by 5,000 asbestos miners, members of the Canadian Catholic Association of Labour. When the strike spread to other mines, ultimately cutting off Quebec's asbestos industry for four months, Duplessis and his government gave the strikers such labels as "communists" and "saboteurs"; the premier referred to the strike as "an admitted attempt, encouraged from outside, to challenge and break the State's authority." Opposing Duplessis was a group of intellectuals and progressive Catholics, including union leader Jean Marchand, Archbishop of Montreal Joseph Charbonneau, and a young Pierre Trudeau. In retaliation

against these opponents, Duplessis used his influence within the Catholic Church to have Charbonneau removed from office. Trudeau, in *Cité Libre*, denounced Duplessis and spoke out in support of the strikers;⁹⁵ this strike triggered much of the journal's decrying of nationalist values.⁹⁶

The asbestos miners went on strike demanding a 15-cent-an-hour raise, two weeks of paid holidays, paid statutory holidays, a grievance system, and the implementation of a method to suppress the mine's asbestos dust (lung-related death and infant mortality were twice the national average). In response, the John-Mansville Company gave its employees a 5-cent-an-hour raise, two more paid holidays and a slightly-improved vacation package.⁹⁷

The miners, of course, were almost all Francophones, and for many the strike came to represent the widening economic chasm between Quebec's French and English Canadian communities.⁹⁸ Miriam Chapin provides a compelling description of this chasm in her 1955 book *Quebec Now*:

About a fifth of Quebec is English-speaking...In Montreal, English Canadians live in their own towns, encysted within the great French city, diving into it each morning to earn their bread and Scotch, returning at night to the lawns and pure-bred dogs, the tree-lined streets and bridge-tables of Suburbia. French and English...have lived side by side for 300 years without knowing each other, and have now arrived at a reasonably comfortable co-existence by remaining as ignorant as possible of each other's thoughts.

...*les Anglais* are strangers in the land, strangers who own the industry, who hold the best jobs, who control the government, who think they are being democratic if they bestow an occasional pat on a French artist, or take a wealthy French Canadian on some committee or board of directors.⁹⁹

By this time, it was clear that a dramatic shift had taken place in Quebec's human geography; in the 1880s, 73 percent of the province's population had resided in the countryside, and by 1951 67 percent lived in cities, with 34 percent of the total population condensed in Montreal. In 1971, the census would indicate even further industrialization, describing the province's population as

follows: rural farm, 6 percent, rural non-farm, 16 percent, urban, 78 percent.¹⁰⁰

Jean Drapeau, who served as mayor of Montreal from 1954 to 1957 and again from 1960 to 1986,¹⁰¹ said in 1959 that the areas available to Francophone workers were limited to “agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, a small portion of banking, of retail trade and of construction.” The rest of the French Canadians, he stated, were “more and more employees...of large English-Canadian, English and American companies.”¹⁰²

As the 1960s approached, the tension between Quebec Francophones and Quebec Anglophones reached its boiling point—as the rise of industry caused widespread assimilation of French language and culture into those of the English, dissent grew within the Francophone population.

The most common explanation for the coming of the Quiet Revolution is the emergence of a new Francophone middle class borne of the province’s modernization—members of this class dismissed the traditional French Canadian professions in medicine, law, and the Church, opting instead for careers in business, engineering, and the social sciences. The constituents of the new urban middle class, as well as many in the traditional fields, found that to climb the career ladder it was necessary to adopt Anglophone customs; the higher they climbed, the more they were forced to abandon their Frenchness. It was discontent with this phenomenon that spawned the movement for greater state intervention; the provincial government was the only entity both capable of exercising and willing to exercise Francophone control over the changing society. Members of the new middle class often believed that this control would be most easily attained through increased social welfare, new educational opportunities, and improved labor laws.¹⁰³

French Canadians had traditionally viewed the state with suspicion; they associated it with English dominance and saw it as a threat to the Catholic Church. But as the Church’s role became increasingly concentrated in the secular field and the economy was annexed by the Anglophone business elite, it was no longer possible

to protect Francophone culture merely through the preservation of the French language and the Catholic religion—the problem was deeply entrenched in the province’s rigid socioeconomic structure. The 1960 election saw the emergence of a leader whose policies drew from the shift in Francophone attitude; the Liberal Party’s Jean Lesage came into power intending to take back the social and economic autonomy of the French-speaking majority.¹⁰⁴

The Quiet Revolution

The Lesage government made changes that echoed the neo-nationalists’ vision; it expanded the public education system as well as the public economic sector, and cleaned up corrupt policies left over from *le grand noirceur*. René Lévesque, Lesage’s minister of natural resources and a soon-to-be-formidable public figure in the eyes of Quebec’s citizens, oversaw one of the province’s most pivotal developments: the creation of Hydro-Québec. Hydro-Québec was created in order to nationalize the province’s electrical power; the largest privately-owned electric utility companies were bought out in order to do this, and for many the new corporation symbolized French Canada’s control of its own economy. It became one of the largest Crown corporations in North America and an immense source of pride for many French Canadians—within the new corporation, Francophones could speak entirely in French and develop their scientific and technical skills.¹⁰⁵

In 1962, Lesage campaigned using the slogan “*Maîtres chez nous*” (Masters in our own house). This approach was highly successful, illustrating that while Duplessis had brought nationalism into disrepute among intellectuals, he had not killed it in the general population. Lesage appealed to Quebec’s citizens using the same ideological tactics once employed by Duplessis; the survival of French Canada was to be ensured at all costs. The difference was one of means; the end remained intact.¹⁰⁶

In the same year an editorial entitled “*Pour une Enquête sur le Bilinguisme*” was published in *Le Devoir*. The editorial was signed by a prominent journalist named André Laurendeau, and proposed three courses of action to research a bilingualism policy

for Canada. The investigation would set out to discover policies of bilingualism in other countries, examine the prevalence of bilingualism in the federal public service, and determine Canadians' take on the issue.¹⁰⁷ This proposal appeared in a turbulent context: the province had reached new levels of unrest. Starting in 1963, bombs were set off in Montreal mail boxes by the separatist *Front de la Libération du Québec*, which was drawing support from university students.¹⁰⁸ It is therefore not shocking that the federal Liberal Party seized the opportunity to appeal to the Quebec population.

In 1963, a royal commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established to encourage cultural dualism in Canada as a whole, and, in Quebec, to address the grievances of many Francophones regarding their facilities of cultural expression.¹⁰⁹ André Laurendeau was appointed co-chairman.¹¹⁰

Laurendeau was an active player in Quebec's political and intellectual scenes; in addition to his work with *Le Devoir*, he had also written for *L'Action nationale*, led *La Ligue pour la Défense du Canada*, and formed a nationalist party called the *Bloc Populaire*.¹¹¹ As an editor for *Le Devoir* around the time of the Quiet Revolution, he had provided staunch opposition to Duplessis' *Union Nationale*, underlining Quebec's lack of political autonomy; his philosophy was often reflected in the reforms brought forward by Jean Lesage's Liberal Party.¹¹²

The B and B Commission investigated bilingualism in the areas previously mentioned, as well as in other aspects including the existing opportunities for bilingualism in English and French and the role of public and private organizations in improving cultural relations.¹¹³ Among other things, it recommended the creation of a federal civil service and widespread French-language education throughout the country.¹¹⁴ Despite what seemed like a step in their preferred direction, many Francophones were dissatisfied with the commission, believing that it was being used to brush off more pressing political issues. Anglophones all over the country were dissatisfied for a different reason: they thought that the French language was being forced on Canada's Anglophone citizens. In spite of such protests, the commission was responsible

for a momentous, if only symbolic, decision regarding the preservation of Canadian biculturalism: in 1969 the Official Languages Act established French and English as the country's two official languages.¹¹⁵

After the 1965 federal election, PM Lester Pearson invited a group of prominent federalist intellectuals, including Pierre Trudeau, to join his Liberal government; after Pearson's resignation in 1968, Trudeau was chosen as his successor.¹¹⁶ The Canadian population reacted rapturously to Pierre Trudeau—something in his public image prompted a general excitement that gave him great longevity as a prime minister.¹¹⁷ Despite Trudeau's French Canadian heritage, he was a firm opponent of Quebec separatism, and throughout his career he strove unrelentingly to preserve Canada's unified status.¹¹⁸

In the same year Trudeau was elected, René Lévesque consolidated all of the province's non-violent separatist parties to form the *Parti Québécois*.¹¹⁹ Lévesque and Trudeau would soon be the leading figures in the conflict between separatism and federalism. There were some areas in which the two politicians agreed: they both acknowledged that Quebec's future status needed to be decided through democratic means, and that the time for the decision was fast approaching. Neither leader attached much importance to the concept of Quebec's "special status"—it was simply a question of whether the province would achieve equality within Canada or through the founding of a sovereign state.¹²⁰

Pierre Trudeau envisaged a pluralistic nation in which French and English Canada would cooperate to honor and protect both of their cultures.¹²¹ The Asbestos strike, as mentioned earlier, augmented his disdain for nationalism and his support for the union movement—he was known as one of the harshest critics of nationalist thinking.¹²² In Trudeau's view, French Canadian nationalism had come as a result of an unaccommodating federal system; the answer was a federalism revamped to better sustain the Francophone minority. He opposed the nationalist ideology because it glorified ethnic homogeneity, instead preferring a model in which each ethnic group remained distinct and

of equal value. This was the most fundamental area in which he and Lévesque differed.¹²³

When Lévesque worked with the Lesage government, he was greatly dissatisfied by the overwhelming dominance of the Anglophone business elite and the stringency of the federal structure. During these years, he became convinced that Quebec would be able to govern itself more effectively than would its federal representatives. Lévesque, however, chose to call himself not a nationalist or a separatist but a *souverainiste*—this implies a certain level of moderation in his beliefs.¹²⁴ Unlike many neo-nationalists, he granted that Francophones were not oppressed in a colonial manner,¹²⁵ and in 1976 went so far as to say that “undoubtedly French Quebec was (and remains to this day) the least ill-treated of all colonies in the world.”¹²⁶ Lévesque was also a supporter of the Anglophone right to use English, although he did not feel that in Quebec this right was equal to the Francophone right to use French.¹²⁷

Trudeau and Lévesque were both crusaders for French Canadian rights, but they chose to go about their crusades in very different ways. Their conflicting viewpoints established a political basis for decades of conflict over the question of Quebec independence.

The 1970s–1980s

By the Quebec provincial election in April of 1970, the issues of language and a foundering economy were at the forefront of voters’ minds. Liberal leader Robert Bourassa (no relation to Henri) won the election by promising the creation of thousands of jobs and augmenting workers’ fears of a win for the *Parti Québécois*. The PQ won only six of 108 seats in the National Assembly—for many, this illustrated that separatism was not feasible in the world of politics.¹²⁸

On October 5, 1970, one of the gravest crises in Quebec’s history began to unfold. Members of the *Front de la Libération du Québec* (FLQ) kidnapped the British diplomat James Cross, issuing a manifesto and a list of demands.¹²⁹ The FLQ’s central demand

was the creation of a sovereign Quebec; other demands included the publishing of the manifesto, the name of an informer, \$500,000 in gold, the release of their previously-jailed members, and the transport of themselves (the kidnappers) and the released members to Cuba. After the kidnapping of Cross, another FLQ group kidnapped Quebec's Labour Minister, Pierre Laporte.¹³⁰

Trudeau initially responded to the crisis by summoning the army to patrol the streets of Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. On October 16, he invoked the War Measures Act, thereby suspending the civil liberties of any and all suspicious individuals.¹³¹ *Parti Québécois* leaders opposed this federal intervention, wanting instead a solution decided by the province itself. In rejecting all outside interference, the PQ reintroduced the common theme of Ottawa vs. Quebec, going so far as to object to Ontario Premier John Robarts' condemnation of the FLQ's terrorist strategies. Though the PQ renounced all federal influence, the federal government was constitutionally obligated to play a part in judicial matters such as the release of prisoners or the invoking of the War Measures Act. It could be argued that the PQ's morphing of the crisis into an Ottawa/Quebec war only served the FLQ's wishes—their main theme, after all, was subversion of the federal powers that be. In fact, the PQ never criticized the FLQ outright—this was likely because many of the students promoting the FLQ were PQ members or supporters. The PQ did not fully advise the FLQ to release Cross and Laporte until October 16, 11 days after Cross's kidnapping and six days after Laporte's.¹³²

On October 17, Pierre Laporte's body was discovered,¹³³ and months later James Cross was finally released.¹³⁴ The province was shocked by this sudden outburst of violent separatism; at the same time, many Quebec nationalists disliked the measures taken by the federal government, believing them too extreme.¹³⁵

The FLQ was mainly composed of young, socially-marginalized citizens seeking political acknowledgement.¹³⁶ Their tactics were in many ways clumsy and juvenile, and their manifesto carried more shock value than real political meaning.¹³⁷ The FLQ's slogan, "*L'indépendance ou la mort*," seemed to be thrown out the

window when its members were in real danger—instead of fleeing to Cuba or the U.S., they remained in Montreal, and when captured they chose to be tried under the same Canadian justice system that they had previously claimed to despise.¹³⁸ The FLQ did not focus on the preservation of French language or culture in the province;¹³⁹ they preferred their own brand of belligerent, reckless separatism. They seemed to believe that their methods allowed them to assert their opinions to an extent that could not be achieved without violence, and these opinions often led back to a desire for assertion in itself. In many ways, the FLQ illustrates the patterns of separatist ideological development during the period, and, some may say, common patterns of separatist thinking in general. While not all separatism has violent aspirations, the ideology does stem from a desire for recognition that is often more rooted in passion than in political logic.

This, however, did not keep the secessionists from entering government. The *Parti Québécois* was elected in 1976, still led by René Lévesque, and immediately got to work on its plans for achieving independence. The party also focused on language legislation; there was great pressure on the PQ to make French the dominant language in the workplace, but of course this was no small feat.¹⁴⁰

In 1974 Bourassa's Liberal government had implemented Bill 22, which designated French as the province's official language and declared that all immigrants were to be enrolled in French-language schools. Anglophones and Allophones were angered by this impediment to their freedom of choice; at the same time, to many Francophones the bill was too replete with loopholes that allowed citizens to avoid use of the French language.¹⁴¹

In 1977 the PQ passed Bill 101, called the Charter of the French Language; this bill made French Quebec's sole official language, planned the spread of French as the dominant language of work, and proclaimed that all immigrants entering Quebec from other parts of Canada would be obligated to enroll their children in French-language schools.¹⁴² The bill declared French the only visible language of Quebec—not only would French be

dominant in the workplace, but it would be used on all billboards, menus, and business signs. Bill 101 was one of the largest sources of Francophone-Anglophone tension in decades; in fact, after its implementation much of Quebec's Anglophone population began to move west.¹⁴³ The bill was not phased out entirely until 1988.¹⁴⁴

The PQ had promised that any decision regarding the province's separation would not be unilateral—a referendum would first be conducted to assess popular wishes. On May 20, 1980, a referendum was held asking Quebec's citizens for a mandate to negotiate sovereignty-association with the federal government.¹⁴⁵

The Government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish relations abroad—in other words, sovereignty—and at the same time to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency; any change in political status resulting from these negotiations will only be implemented with popular approval through another referendum; on these terms, do you give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?¹⁴⁶

The concept of sovereignty-association is best illustrated by a White Paper introduced by the National Assembly in 1979. In the event of a sovereign Quebec, the paper proposed a customs union and a monetary union between Quebec and Canada—the two nations would enforce identical customs duties and Quebec would keep the Canadian dollar. The two nations would align their economic policies to meet each other's interests; Quebecers working for Canada's civil service would be given similar work in Quebec; and all Quebecers who were Canadian citizens would become those of Quebec, with the option to keep their Canadian citizenships if Canada allowed it.¹⁴⁷

One issue important in deciding the province's future was that of oil prices—in 1979 the price of crude oil doubled within weeks, and Quebec was among the provinces being subsidized to even out the prices across Canada. Therefore, during the 1980 referendum campaign it was a known fact that if Quebec separated it would be saddled with higher oil prices.¹⁴⁸

The voting turnout was the largest for any political vote in Quebec's history;¹⁴⁹ emotions ran high as the province faced a crucial decision. Despite huge gains for the separatists during this period, 59.56 percent of voters were on the *Non* side;¹⁵⁰ this was partly due to Prime Minister Trudeau's statement six days before the referendum that a win for the *Nons* would result in a renewal of the Constitution.¹⁵¹

Another crucial reason for the PQ's failure to achieve support for independence was its great success in modernizing the Quebec economy. Jacques Parizeau, the PQ's Minister of Finance, had brought enough economic stability to calm the unions and assuage the fears of the business elite—or so the party thought.¹⁵² Instead, the policies' effectiveness backfired by making the drastic change of sovereignty seem increasingly unnecessary and destabilizing. Francophones received more advanced education, went into business, and drew in larger incomes—Quebec's French-speaking citizens had finally taken back the province's economy.¹⁵³

To maintain some control over the promised constitutional amendments, Quebec's National Assembly passed a resolution outlining its conditions for the new provisions that would come as a result of constitutional patriation. The amending formula, in order to be accepted by the province, needed either to maintain Quebec's right of veto or to uphold the provision in the 1981 Constitutional Accord whereby the province's powers or rights would be diminished, but it would be entitled to "reasonable and obligatory compensation." Because Quebec already had a Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the National Assembly wanted to limit the content of the federal Charter to the following points: democratic rights; the use of both French and English in government; gender equality and fundamental freedoms "provided the National Assembly retain[ed] the power to legislate in matters under its own jurisdiction"; and guarantees for the education of English and French minorities provided Quebec was able to comply voluntarily. The new constitution would also need to recognize the equality of Canada's founding peoples and Quebec's status as a "distinct society." In addition, the National Assembly requested

that the provinces receive the right to equalization and greater control over their own natural resources.¹⁵⁴

In 1982, the Trudeau government succeeded in patriating the Constitution from Great Britain. The Constitution Act of 1982 was approved by all of Canada's provinces besides Quebec¹⁵⁵—both the Supreme Court of Canada and Quebec's Court of Appeal had ruled that the province had no right to a veto, and Quebec's veto power was seen as vital to the preservation of its French Canadian culture.¹⁵⁶ Quebec's refusal to sign the document intensified French-English animosity within Quebec and throughout all of Canada.

Robert Bourassa's Liberal government was re-elected in 1985 with plans to discuss Quebec's signing the Constitution Act under new conditions. Bourassa had five demands: recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society," a veto over all constitutional amendments, the right to opt out of certain federal programs, input into the appointment of Supreme Court judges, and increased power over immigration. Brian Mulroney, Canada's new Conservative Prime Minister, began to negotiate a federal accord in an attempt to reconcile with the Quebec leadership.¹⁵⁷

The Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords

The Meech Lake Accord was discussed by Canada's premiers at the Prime Minister's official cottage residence on Meech Lake.¹⁵⁸ Since Quebec's proposal mentioned benefits for all provinces, all of the provinces initially agreed to this proposal, citing measures of "juridical equality." However, as time progressed the Accord would fail to meet the country's universal standards.

The Meech Lake Accord recognized Quebec as a "distinct society" within Canada¹⁵⁹ but, in addition, acknowledged the province's Anglophone minority as fundamental to the country.¹⁶⁰ The Accord also recognized as fundamental the Francophone minority outside Quebec. It declared that the provinces could opt out of social programs that fell under provincial jurisdiction, provided they established independent goals compatible with those of the whole country. This was relevant because for years the federal

government, which funded such programs, had been placing conditions on this funding, sparking provincial grievances. The Accord allowed the provinces joint jurisdiction over immigration and constitutionalized annual First Ministers' meetings (conferences among the premiers and the Prime Minister). It also established a new list of special constitutional matters for which amendments could only be made with the unanimous consent of Parliament and all provincial legislatures.¹⁶¹

Under the Constitution Act of 1982, in order to become law the Meech Lake Accord needed to be ratified by Parliament and the legislatures of all the provinces. Quebec's National Assembly was the first provincial legislature to approve the Accord, passing its resolution on June 23, 1987; the Accord needed unanimous approval on or before June 23, 1990. All first ministers agreed to ratify the Accord in early June of 1990, on the promise that further discussion would occur regarding the Constitution. On the final date, the Accord's ratification process fell apart: one member of Manitoba's legislature, Elijah Harper, did not consent to the Accord and the province never conducted a vote on the issue. To give Manitoba time, the federal minister concerned with federal-provincial relations suggested that the date be extended by three months, which would require Quebec to re-ratify. The premier of Newfoundland was unhappy with this suggestion, and did not bring the Accord to a vote in his province's legislature—this struck the final blow to defeat the Accord.¹⁶²

When the Accord was defeated, an immense crisis broke out in Quebec, with French Canadian nationalists using Canada's Anglophone population as a scapegoat for the Accord's demise. The tension only increased when Mulroney and Bourassa decided to use this notion of Anglophone betrayal in order to persuade Canada to accept a new version of the Accord.¹⁶³

Bourassa told the Quebec Liberals' constitutional committee to create a new constitutional plan—this plan, called the Allaire Report, called for a great re-delegation of powers that would put more weight on the provinces. In addition, he established the bipartisan Bélanger-Campeau commission; however,

this commission was swiftly dominated by separatist forces such as the *Parti Québécois*. The commission recommended that a referendum be held immediately regarding Quebec's possible future as a sovereign nation; Bourassa allowed the National Assembly to pass Bill 150, which set the referendum date for October 1992. The referendum would either ask the question of independence outright or propose the idea of new constitutional amendments. There was a period in which the federal government established various committees to assess public opinion and propose reform, ultimately resulting in the creation of a federal document called "A Renewed Canada."¹⁶⁴

In 1992 a proposal package was discussed by the provinces (not including Quebec), the federal government, the territories, and the Aboriginal leaders; afterwards, the package was sent to Quebec. Later in the year, Quebec entered negotiations at a national conference in Ottawa, and eventually all of the leaders agreed on a set of constitutional amendments known as the Charlottetown Accord. Like the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord was constitutionally required to be ratified by Parliament and all provincial legislatures; also, in accordance with Bill 150 a national referendum was held on the subject. The referendum question was as follows: "Do you agree that the Constitution of Canada should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992?"¹⁶⁵

To achieve approval, the Accord needed both a majority of national votes and a majority of votes in each province. During the referendum campaign, a clear split became visible: the "Yes" side was supported by the federal Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party, while the "No" side was supported by the *Parti Québécois*, Quebec separatists, the federal *Bloc Québécois*, and the federal West-oriented Reform Party. All provincial and territorial leaders joined the "Yes" group, as did many women's, business, and First Nations leaders. Public opinion on the Charlottetown deal started out favorable, but as the referendum date approached, the "Yes" side began to lose ground.¹⁶⁶ The Quebec secessionist leaders on the "No" side, Lucien

Bouchard and Jacques Parizeau, turned the tides in their favor by contending that the Charlottetown Accord offered less benefits to citizens than did Meech Lake, and that Aboriginal groups were being allowed a type of sovereignty-association—the same system Quebec was continually denied.¹⁶⁷ Another driving force behind “No” support may have been the fact of PM Mulroney’s general unpopularity. Moreover, many critics denounced the Accord as elitist, and Pierre Trudeau spoke out against it, saying that it would cause the disintegration of Canada’s federal powers.¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, the requirements for the Charlottetown Accord’s approval were far from reached; 54.4 percent voted “No,” as did a majority in six of the 10 provinces. After this shattering defeat, Mulroney was forced to step down and Bourassa left politics permanently. English and French Canadians were more divided than they had ever been since the WWI conscription crisis. The *Bloc Québécois*, led by Bouchard, won 54 of Quebec’s 75 seats, trouncing the Tories as well as the province’s Liberal past.¹⁶⁹

The 1995 Referendum

In 1994, Parizeau’s *Parti Québécois* defeated the Quebec Liberals, even using the campaign promise of a new sovereignty referendum within a year. Despite this, it became evident that Quebec would not take well to a blunt question on secession, and Bouchard convinced Parizeau to instead hold a referendum on sovereignty-association. It was decided that if a majority was found to be in support of the agreement and Canada simply refused to negotiate, Quebec would unilaterally declare independence.¹⁷⁰

The 1995 referendum campaign, though executed in Quebec, was truly a concern of the country as a whole. The “No” campaign was headed by Daniel Johnson and Jean Charest, but these leaders were under the watchful eye of Prime Minister Chrétien, and Ottawa was holding its breath. Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard led the “Yes” side; initially, Parizeau carried most of the campaign’s weight. As politicians and as people, opponents Parizeau and Chrétien were vastly different; Chrétien was a passionate leader with a lower-class background, while the

affluent Parizeau, in contrast with historical conceptions of separatism, was more strategic than he was passionate. Parizeau had no intention of remaining Premier of Quebec, and did not seem to feel any particular connection to the province itself; he simply wanted to lead the sovereign nation whose birth he believed was possible. And he was dedicated: at one point during the campaign, he cancelled a \$13 billion Hydro-Québec project in order to pacify Quebec's Cree tribe and gain popular support.¹⁷¹

Perhaps the thesis most commonly expounded by separatists was that of Quebec's newfound economic independence due to the free trade agreement signed by Canada and the United States in 1988. Their arguments were a far cry from those of Papineau's *patriotes*: trade between Quebec and the United States was burgeoning, Canada's national debt was increasing, and the new sovereign government would more effectively manage financial and administrative affairs. These statements certainly did not incite the same passion as did those of sovereignty supporters in the last referendum.¹⁷²

Anglophones, on the other hand, were beginning to develop the idea of partition in the case of political sovereignty—this would allow predominantly-Anglophone regions of Quebec to remain in Canada. Even after the referendum two conferences were held to discuss the suggestion, and a majority of Anglophones polled was in favor.¹⁷³

When the votes were finally cast, the results were truly shocking—the “No” side had won by less than 1 percent.¹⁷⁴ Parizeau, in abject distress, attested that “money and the ethnic vote” were to blame for the “Yes” defeat; he then resigned as Premier and was promptly replaced by Bouchard.¹⁷⁵

In the wake of its narrow victory, Chrétien's government got to work on placating Quebec secessionists by passing a bill that gave all five regions of the country, including Quebec, a veto over constitutional amendments. In addition, the government passed a resolution that supported the age-old “distinct society” concept, and Chrétien incited the premiers to pass the Calgary Declaration, which would declare Quebec a unique society. Wishing to preserve

their equality, the premiers agreed but tacked on the contingency that, since all provinces are equal, whatever Quebec received from the unique society clause, the other provinces should receive as well.¹⁷⁶ In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper would replace Quebec's "distinct" status with that of a "nation within Canada."¹⁷⁷

Before the 1995 referendum, Quebec's National Assembly had introduced Bill 1, which would have allowed the province's government to unilaterally secede a year after the vote. A Quebec lawyer by the name of Guy Bertrand resolved to halt the referendum, calling Bill 1 a "virtual constitutional *coup d'état*." In Quebec's Superior Court, Bertrand argued that the bill threatened his Charter rights; the Superior Court agreed that this was true, but nonetheless allowed the referendum out of due respect for democracy. After the referendum Bertrand returned to the Superior Court, wanting assurance that Quebec could not unilaterally secede; the Court ruled that a full hearing would take place on the issue. The Chrétien government then stepped in, referring the bill to the Supreme Court of Canada. Quebec's government refused to take part in the hearing, proclaiming that the federal Supreme Court was biased towards the federal government. Despite this, the Court appointed André Joli-Coeur to represent the interests of Quebec separatists. As well, a diverse group of interveners participated in the case, such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the territories, several First Nations groups, and Guy Bertrand himself.¹⁷⁸

The Court asked three questions: one, is it legal in domestic law for Quebec to secede unilaterally; two, is it legal in international law for Quebec to secede unilaterally; and three, if domestic and international law conflict, which takes precedence? Regarding domestic law, the "democratic principle" was considered—this principle is not directly outlined in the Constitution, but the Court nevertheless used it to gauge the significance of the referendum results. It was declared that according to the democratic principle, the results of a referendum must be given "considerable weight" as long as there is a "clear majority" and a "clear question"; the politicians were left to determine the meaning of the word "clear." However, Canada's tradition lay in the system of federalism, and

the Court ruled that negotiation between provinces was an integral part of this system; if one province rejected secession through a referendum, this would need to be considered by the country as a whole.¹⁷⁹

It was found that international law emphasized the need for federal determination regarding the secession of an entity within a country. In international law, there are two types of self-determination: internal and external. Internal self-determination is more common, and occurs through negotiation with the state. There are two conditions under which an entity has the right to external self-determination: when it constitutes a colonial people wishing to break free from “imperial power,” and when its constituents are “subject to alien subjugation, domination or exploitation outside a colonial context.” Since Quebec’s situation did not fall into either of these categories, the Court evaluated a third, disputable, circumstance: “when a people is blocked from the meaningful exercise of its right to self-determination internally.” This did not apply to Quebec—the province had great influence within the federal government.¹⁸⁰

The Court ruled that neither domestic nor international law gave Quebec the right to unilaterally secede; therefore, it did not need to consider the question of precedence between the two.¹⁸¹

In 1998, Bouchard set out to renew the mandate for his *Parti Québécois* government. The PQ, in a divided post-referendum climate, won 77 seats with 43 percent of the vote; the Liberal party, led by Jean Charest, won 47 seats with over 44 percent of the vote. Mario Dumont’s *Action Démocratique* party amassed 12 percent of the vote, winning only the seat of Dumont himself. Bouchard, still crestfallen, declared that a new referendum would not occur for at least two years, and focused instead on balancing the budget and funding social programs.¹⁸² He retired soon afterwards, leaving the post to Bernard Landry, who did not see a referendum any sooner. The number of Quebec’s citizens anticipating separation was in rapid decline. Months after the 1995 referendum, polls showed 62 percent expecting independence within 10 years—in 2001, only 20 percent. In 2003 the Liberals came to power in the province,

led by Jean Charest. Federally, Jean Chrétien went into retirement and was succeeded by Paul Martin, his former Minister of Finance. Martin was an Anglophone businessman from Ontario who then resided in Montreal;¹⁸³ he was not opposed to allowing Quebec a measure of distinction in his policies, but much of popular opinion outside Quebec was vociferously opposed to such a concept. The Francophone community had made huge gains in socioeconomic status since the Quiet Revolution, but independence was not approaching; in fact, it seemed to be speeding away.¹⁸⁴

The “clear question, clear majority” issue raised by the Court was broached in 2000 when the House of Commons introduced Bill C-20, also known as the Clarity Act. Bill C-20 gave the House of Commons the sole power to determine the clarity of the question and the majority; however, this exclusion of the Senate seemed to override the constitutional principle of the two-chamber system. Also, Bill C-20 failed to acknowledge the constitutional right of Aboriginal peoples to participate in negotiations on division of territory—the Quebec Cree expressed intention to challenge it on this basis.¹⁸⁵

In response to the Clarity Act, Quebec’s government established Bill 99, which states that a “clear majority” is constituted by a vote of at least 50 percent + 1.¹⁸⁶ During the referendum campaign, Preston Manning, leader of the federal Reform Party, had emphasized the same principle.¹⁸⁷ However, in 2007 Bill 99 was referred to Quebec’s Court of Appeal, and most of its preeminent sections were ruled unconstitutional.¹⁸⁸

Present-Day Quebec

With more than 3.7 million immigrants having entered Quebec since 1995, the question of sovereignty has become less prominent in the mind of the average Quebecer. The new immigrants largely do not identify with Quebec’s tradition or past grievances, and this has caused popular support for independence to wane quickly—a 2012 poll showed that only 28 percent of residents would vote yes if a referendum were held that day. Another poll from the same year reported that 49 percent of Canadians

outside Quebec “don’t really care” if Quebec secedes; converse to the Canada of 1995, non-Quebecers seem to be feeling increasingly alienated from Quebec. In general, the vision of a sovereign Quebec has lost much of its purchase among the province’s citizens, and as Canada becomes more and more culturally diverse, the trend seems to point further downhill.¹⁸⁹

The *Parti Québécois* currently holds office in Quebec, led by Pauline Marois. Marois served as Minister of Labor under Lévesque, and was elected in 2012 as the province’s first female Premier.¹⁹⁰ Despite campaign promises of social democratic policy and strict opposition to Ottawa, since taking office Marois has become fiscally austere, attempting to balance the budget by cutting back on social welfare and funding for education. Language protection is seemingly not a priority, and an upcoming evaluation of the French Language Charter is likely to result in dilution of its provisions. The province’s remaining sovereigntists are beginning to perceive a decline in their cause even within the PQ leadership.¹⁹¹

Stephen Harper, Canada’s current Conservative Prime Minister, sees Quebec separation as a deadly threat to big business and the Canadian economy; his 2006 motion to ordain Quebec “a nation within Canada” was a strategy of placation. According to Harper, in electing Marois Quebecers were voting for “change,” not sovereignty.¹⁹²

Conclusions

The Quebec separatist movement draws its roots from a conflict between two of the world’s foremost colonial powers. In Canada’s pre-Confederation *dramatis personae*, the industrial, self-reliant English Canadians were the perfect foils to the rural, somewhat ascetic French, and the two groups continued to war on the stage of a single state. British dominance was at its crudest around the turn of the 20th century as the newly-formed federal government attempted to take full control of the territory’s collective culture; however, French Canada did not lack federal representation, and this fact was cemented by the election of Prime Minister Laurier in 1896.

Despite this, it was clear that Quebec's acceleration into industrial development was leaving its Francophone majority in the socioeconomic margins. The age of Duplessis highlighted the anachronistic culture that had been allowed to stagnate in Quebec for a century, producing an immense gap between citizens' values and universal economic realities. It was the province's industrialization that gave rise to the abrupt spike in separatist sentiment, which emerged during the Quiet Revolution, and it was the October Crisis that made visible the dangers of such conceptions.

The 1970s and 80s were the decades that truly instituted Quebec separatism; with the advent of the *Parti Québécois*, sovereignty seemed closer than ever before. However, as soon as the ideology appeared in government, it was doomed to be swamped with federal legislation; the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords illustrate attempts by the federal government to win over popular opinion in the province. The 1995 referendum was what some consider Quebec's last and best chance to gain independence; separatism was well-established in the province's government, and for this reason seemed more feasible. Nevertheless, it had been a long time since the Quiet Revolution, and the separatist cause proved *un peu* too low on passion to quash national pride.

The basis of early French nationalism was very different from that of modern Quebec separatism; it arose from a desire to preserve the French language and culture within an English state, often pointing to the importance of Catholic values in achieving this preservation. Quiet Revolution separatism, by contrast, had little to do with tradition and more to do with lack of opportunity. As the ideology was transferred into government, its rhetoric latched on to a sort of feeble grudge intermingled with popular pride and self-assertion—Quebec would secede to prove that, in spite of the past, it now could. Jacques Parizeau, for example, did not feel any strong attachment to the Francophone history of his province—he believed in Quebec sovereignty simply because he thought it was possible.

The federalist-separatist split sometimes fell along socioeconomic lines; *Citélibristes* were often educated in a manner unat-

tainable to most members of the *Front de la Libération du Québec*. Moreover, it should be noted that people from younger age groups have, historically, approached the topic of Quebec independence in ways less related to cultural or religious preservation: even in uber-traditional 1840s Lower Canada, young nationalists were bent on a secular Quebec nation-state. They perhaps had similar motivation to many young Quiet Revolution separatists—a simple desire for political recognition in the face of their past losses. This illustrates a certain stalwart presence in the separatist ideology that remains intact even after decades of economic and political flux.

Quebec federalists and Quebec separatists shared the same vision of cultural preservation; their differences often lay in the way they approached ethnicity. While the ideal sovereign Quebec was often envisaged as ethnically homogenous, the federalists saw cultural pluralism as essential if French Canada were to attain equality. In the federalist view, the two founding cultures needed to prop each other up; in the separatist view, French Canada needed to become freestanding. The very definition of a secure culture was under dispute; to many separatists, a nation needed to assert its values through an independent state, and without this state the nation remained a colony.¹⁹³ Federalists, on the other hand, saw no reason why the French Canadian “nation” could not be ensconced within a larger one.

From the history of the Quebec sovereigntist movement we can draw conclusions about the natural human desire for distinction and the way it manifests in different social settings—from rural to urban, religious to secular. Despite Canada’s volatile sociopolitical climate, and resulting changes in the country’s cultural values over time, Francophones will always remember the Battle of Montcalm and the weight of its long-lasting consequences.

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