

Why do a substantial number of Quebecers favour sovereignty- association, sovereignty-partnership or independence for Quebec? There are perhaps many reasons.

Professor Watts in *Comparing Federal Systems*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999, thinks that there are two motives: the desire for large political units that facilitate economic and social progress, and the desire for smaller self-governing political units that give expression [...] to historical traditions and social practices.

It is undeniable that the attachment to community is strong in Quebec. The sense of community is strengthened by the shared history of a small and tightly knit population, a common and distinctive language, the experience of an extraordinarily active church in domestic and institutional life and its dramatic, recent decline through a process of deconfessionalisation, a lively oral, written and visual culture and many unique, common traditions. The attachment to community beats on the pulses of many people resident in Quebec as a strong attachment to Quebec -- as nationalism. But for many of these same Quebec residents, the attachment to community is felt equally strong as an attachment to Canada, an identification as "French-Canadians" or "Quebecois" within Canada. Many Quebecers share a profound "rêve d'une nation", as well as the dream of being one of the two founding people of a great Canadian state.

Quebec's political leaders have consistently voiced the idea of Canada as an association of equals, as a bi-national state. For example, Premier Daniel Johnson addressed the Federal Provincial Conference in Ottawa, in 1968 in this way:

The object of the Constitution must not solely be to federate territories, but also to associate as equals two linguistic and cultural communities, two founding peoples, two societies, two nations in the sociological sense of the term. A Canadian Constitution must be the product of an agreement between the two nations that make up the people of Canada, and must recognize the principle of the legal equality of the two cultural communities

This idea has worked its way deep into the French Canadian mind. It is associated with a bundle of grievances which French Canadians have been encouraged by their political and intellectual leaders to bear against the federal government in Ottawa. The core idea of these grievances is that the federal infrastructure is chipping away at the autonomy of Quebec, and eroding the community of equals which confederation is supposed to represent. Therefore, proponents of the sovereignty idea have been able to generate a sizable political following behind the following grievances articulated over the years:

Canadian Identity has not Developed under Federalism

: Quebec separatists allege that federalism has been incapable of resolving Canada's identity

problem. It united

the East and West although both the East and West have more North-South interactions. It unites the French and English yet the institutions are British, the British monarch is the head of state. The country is officially bilingual and multicultural and gives no respect to the founding people or aboriginals. In short, Canadian federalism has failed to “give birth to one united people”. [Jean Louis Bourque, *Demain, la république: Le projet du Québec profond* (Sainte-Foy, PQ: Les Editions La Liberté, 1992), pp.17-18].

The Federal Government Retains the Key Instruments of Government Policy [Pierre Renaud, “Il nous fait tous les pouvoirs,” in A. Feretti and G. Miron (eds.), *Les grands textes indépendantistes* (Montreal: Editions de l'Hexagone, 1992), pp. 359.]: Objectives, priorities, and norms for Quebec's economy are determined by that

level of government that controls the great economic levers: money, credit, customs, and most taxes. This is the federal government, and the federal government will never let go of these powers. In effect, Premier Lucien Bouchard argues, English speaking Canada has a veto on the future development of Quebec within the federation. [*Debates of the House of Commons* (June 7, 1994), p. 4917].

Quebecers Do Not Believe in the Equality Inherent in Canadian Federalism: Quebecers do not accept guarantees of equality in the same way that the rest of Canada does. Former Premier Jacques Parizeau suggests that “it is not that rights and obligations are any less important than in Canada, but there must be a place for differences” [Jacques Parizeau, “Who's Afraid of Sovereignty Association?” *Canadian Speeches*, January 1991]. Therefore the equality guarantees in the Charter, calls for a Triple-E senate, and other things held dearly by the Rest of Canada are antithetical to Quebec's aspirations.

Federalism Creates Overlap and Duplication:

Beyond the waste involved in intergovernmental conflict, federalism creates too much government. Overlapping jurisdictions are “naturally very costly” [Gouvernement de Québec, *Conseil Exécutif, Québec-Canada: A New Deal* (Québec, Editeur officiel du Québec, 1979), pp. 24-25]. It is a “waste of money and energy that is difficult to measure accurately” [Ibid.]. In order to eliminate this overlap and duplication, the federal government would have to transfer virtually all of its powers to Quebec.

Quebec Cannot Develop Economically, Culturally, Socially and Politically under Canadian Federalism: These areas are still controlled, in a large part, by the financial resources of the

federal government that seeks to create a concept of Canada against the desire of Quebecers in a parliament where Quebec has a minority voice. [Parti Québécois, *La souveraineté: des réponses à vos questions* (Québec: Service des communications du Parti Québécois, 1995)].

Multiple Levels of Government Authority in Canadian Federalism is Bad for Quebec Business: Businesses do not understand which level of government has jurisdiction and usually has to negotiate with both, and this hinders the development of Quebec business. [Jean Campeau, "L'indépendance du Québec pour bâtir deux pays à leur image," *Action Nationale* 82(7) (Spring 1992), pp.846-851].

Quebec is Getting More Cuts than the Rest of Canada:

Deficit-cutting in Canada is felt harder in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. Reduction of transfer payments means that Quebec will receive 32 percent less in 1997-1998 than it did in 1994-1995. Between 1982 and 1993, Quebecers paid 143% more in tax. Meanwhile, regional development has increased by only 50 percent in Quebec while they increased by 250% in Maritimes and 300% in Western Canada. [Gaston Leroux (BQ), *Debates of the House of Commons* (May 2, 1995)].

The grievances which French Canadians are encouraged to bear against Ottawa have a certain traditional or mythical cast about them, and nationalism is a traditional or mythical response to the perceptions of French Canadians that they are not getting a fair deal out of Confederation. But there is a separate sense in which the grievances of French Canadians against Ottawa are not misconceived ideology a sense in which the grievances of French Canada are real and quantifiable. Prior to the quiet revolution the two nations inhabiting the Canadian state did so on the basis of inequality. The English Canadian nation dominated the civil service and the private economy, and did so with the quiet concurrence of the Catholic church, the dominant voice in French Canada. After the quiet revolution, French Canada rapidly de-confessionalised. As it did so, the new French Canadian intellectuals rejected the domination of English Ottawa and the English corporations. While the inequality of incomes and the unequal participation of French Canadians in the Federal civil service has been largely eradicated in the past thirty years, the legacy of domination lives on in certain minds and hearts.

To a certain extent, the problems of Canada resemble those of all large polities. All large political systems engender economic and political competition between regional subdivisions. However, in Canada, regional competition is exacerbated by five additional factors: (1) Canada's regions have distinctive linguistic identities. In Canada, therefore, regional economic competition is superimposed over a division of linguistic identities. This makes it possible to perceive commonplace regional competitions as contests of English against French. This

makes regional economic competition in Canada at times supercharged; the competition of English against French tends to be perceived as intensely political and all-pervasive. The feelings generated by this competition become fierce. Canadians are capable of carrying on this imagined rivalry between English and French everywhere in their political life, even where it has little rational application, as, for example, in majority-minority relations in the overwhelmingly English-speaking provinces. The competition is perceived as a zero-sum game one community wins; the other community loses.

(2) Canadian demography places the English and French languages in contact. The sociology of language well understands that when diverse languages come into contact, unique effects are produced. The most important of these effects is language shift, which may be defined as the switching from the language habitually used by a speaker to the language better understood by that speaker's audience. Language shift occurs as a result of the need to communicate in a commonly understood language. Over time, language shift leads to assimilation of weaker languages by stronger languages. Canadian history offers a potent illustration of how this works. Outside of Quebec, the weaker French language has been assimilated by the stronger English language for over one-hundred-twenty-five years, to the point where most provincial French-speaking communities are diminished and some provincial French-speaking communities have ceased to exist. More recently, a similar process has been eclipsing the weaker English language inside of Quebec.

Canada's political system does not have the institutional strength to manage this competition well. (3) The design of the Upper Chamber does not allow it to broker regional economic interests effectively (as do Upper Houses in other federations). (4) Canada's extensive use of executive federalism as to rationalize and accommodate regional interests has democratic deficits which obscure the brokerage process. This tempts regional actors to attack the regime, as well as the process, for brokerage failures; (5) From the perspective of all major actors, Canada's Constitution is incomplete. Proposals to complete it generate strenuous political competition between Canada's regions.

The presence in Canada of all these factors simultaneously exaggerates regional and linguistic competition to unusually severe levels. Regional economic competition (which is superimposed over competition between the language communities) plays out repeatedly to enlarge local incidents involving minority linguistic communities. Local linguistic clashes all progress basically the same. The conflicts emerge seemingly out of nowhere: at a school board meeting, in an exchange between a speeding motorist and a police officer, in a hospital restructuring exercise. The arena of contest is overwhelmingly controlled by the linguistic majority. The majority uses its power in a seemingly injurious spirit. The local minority has inadequate constitutional weight in the balance of power. Local actors have incentives to fan the flames. National actors appear to give the incident weighty national significance, but no forum for national resolution. Nor does

the constitutional and institutional machinery meant to control linguistic conflict work well. Counter-intuitively, in many instances the machinery amplifies local conflicts: by drawing them out over time, by failing to provide clear, unambiguous outcomes, by failing to insulate linguistic minorities from aggressive provincial majorities, by under-weighting minorities in the balance of constitutional power and by expanding the stage to national debate without resolution machinery that operates in the national interest. The repeated flare-up of these local firestorms throughout Canadian history have made for difficult relations between the linguistic communities, and in Quebec, it has deepened suspicion of English Canada and Canada's federal system.

In light of these grievances, perceived or real, it is worth asking why a substantial number of Quebecers favour sovereignty-association, sovereignty- partnership, or independence as an antidote to these grievances. Sovereignists find fertile ground in merchandising nationalism to the Quebec polity. They find ready consumers of the idea in various quarters: older Quebecers, particularly in rural areas, still smarting from the domination by an exclusively English managerial and entrepreneurial class, French business people competing with rivals in English Canada, old time clerics longing for the ancien regime of church supremacy, provincial bureaucrats and workers in the para-public sector (schools, municipalities, hospitals, universities) who associate their upward mobility with the almost exclusively French provincial government and resist any encroachment on their jurisdictions by Ottawa.

There is a large body of literature concerning Quebec's grievances with federalism. It is interesting to visit the web-sites of the Bloc Québécois and Parti Québécois. One finds there the themes that motivate the desire for sovereignty in Quebec. Distilled down to the core ideas, this literature amounts to assertions that federalism:

- pays insufficient respect to the Quebec people as a distinctive national community;
- makes vulnerable Quebec's institutions, language, culture, and national identity;
- devolves insufficient power to Quebec's governing institutions, and
- provides the Federal government in Ottawa with too much control over Quebec's economy.

The desirability of sovereignty as a solution to Quebec's grievances about Canada's federal system is also advanced by certain political thinkers in Quebec. The Parti Québécois stated in a 1994 pamphlet what a sovereign Quebec would look like. This was developed by the Comité National pour OUI for the 1995 Referendum. As well, the PQ published another document in 1995 that purported to explain the reasons why Quebecers should vote for sovereignty. This was the PQ's answer to the charge, "Why would sovereignty be better than federalism?"