

Quebec's – separatism

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From the time of Confederation, there has always been tension between the French-speaking francophone and the English-speaking Anglophones of Canada. During the late 1960's, this tension developed into a nationalistic belief known as the Quebec Separatist movement, which became the main focus of Canada's arguable issues for decades to come. The movement was inspired by the belief that Quebec was a distinct society from the rest of Canada with different culture and different ambitions so it should separate from Canada to form its own sovereign nation.

Though it gained support initially and had valid arguments for separation, a lot has changed from the beginning of the movement to present time. “

Some of these changes include the promotion of equality between francophone and Anglophones by the Canadian Government, the declining public support for the separatist cause and Quebec economy's rising dependence on Canada. In present time, Quebec no longer has any justifiable reason to want to separate from Canada into a sovereign nation. ”

(WALKS 411-40)

Thirty years ago French-Canadians complained about the English business establishment, but today French-Canadian businessmen have themselves become the leaders. Since 1976, thousands of Quebecers and dozens of corporations have left for other Canadian cities or the United States. Those who left were primarily English speaking, and left because of their uncertain economic futures and because they did not see themselves as part of the larger vision of an independent, French-speaking Quebec. “ Another thing that instigated French and English segregation was some of Quebec's strict laws.

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It is precisely Quebec culture that is at the center of the debate for French-Canadians who continuously insist that an overpowering English-speaking continent endangers their unique way of life. " (SWYNGEDOUW 311-22)

While living in one city may allow us to learn about each other's cultures, cultures don't enhance each other because they don't interact. They build their own communities and live with each other, rather than assimilate with those that are not of their kind. We as Anglophones, react against intolerant ideas by rejecting French-Canadian language and culture.

In retrospect, it is a lost opportunity for everyone to learn about each other. Discussion The main reason for Quebec to separate from Canada would be the lack of equality for the francophone of Canada. French Canadians have always asked for Canada as a whole to accept francophone culture equally as the English speaking communities, mainly in the areas of language. Since this request has been mostly ignored throughout history, it served as a valid reason in late 1960's when the separatist idea was introduced.

However, since that time the Canadian government has taken various steps to promote and support equality. Some of these steps include the introduction of the Official Languages Act in 1969, recognizing bilingualism in Canada. This act was very significant because it ensured equality by making the French language just as equal a part of Canada as the English language. Another crucial measure by the Government was Bill 101 in 1977, which proclaimed French as the official language of Quebec in every facet of life, forcing all advertising and signs in Quebec to be in French alone.

This act was very effective in strengthening the use of the French language in Quebec and also assured the francophone public that the government was taking steps to protect their language. Lastly, the government put forth another 381.5 million in funding for more bilingual education rights over next 5 yrs as part of the Official Languages Action Plan released in March 2003. The goal of the action plan is to once again, let the Francophone know that the government continues to have the best interest for their people and culture, in mind.

It is notable from the previously stated acts passed by the Canadian government, that it has taken the appropriate measures to promote equality between the French and English and will continue to do so in the future.

Secondly, another reason to why Quebec should not separate is the lack of public support. Over the years, the support for the separatist movement has declined significantly from the peak of separatism in 1990. Polls published in Montreal newspaper La Presse on April 7, 1998 suggest public support for separatism has dropped to 40 percent compared to 60 percent in 1990.

This shows that approximately 20 percent of Quebec voters have changed their mind about separation in just 8 years, indicating that the Quebec public is slowly but surely losing interest in the movement. " (WOOD 163-76)

Furthermore, the 40 percent of the people who support the cause seem still somewhat unsure about their decision. Montreal Poll Leger and Leger found that even though the " Yes & No" side for separation is about even, only 68 percent of the people on the ' Yes' side are firm on their decision compared

to the 82 percent of the people on the ' No' side that vow to not change their mind.

This statistics show that 32 percent of the people in the ' Yes' side of separation are still unsure. In fact, even important politicians in the Parti Quebecois party are beginning to lose hope in a sovereign Quebec. In an interview, Guy Bertrand a PQ member states: " For me, the separatist movement is dead. We have to admit our people do not want to split country. " (Richie 25-37) Thirdly, many problems for the Quebec people could arise from this sovereign decision. Potential problems include whether or not an independent Quebec may receive the same trade benefits as Canada.

The United States Secretary of State, Warren Christopher states in an interview that: " a sovereign Quebec may not benefit from the same kind of ties with NAFTA. " (Zimmerman, 481-87) This shows that a sovereign Quebec is not guaranteed entry into the NAFTA free trade agreement. Also, it is expected that Quebec will lose its current two-tier healthcare system. The two-tier healthcare system is very crucial to Quebec's society as it allows its citizens to enjoy both public and private healthcare.

Furthermore, it is a benefit that only Quebec enjoys as opposed to the other provinces so it does not make sense to let it go. Another concerning issue for the Quebecois is that its Cree and Inuit communities, who claim the province's resource-rich north refuse to join a sovereign Quebec. Without this resource-rich land, Quebec economy will suffer dramatically. On the

other hand forcing the native communities to join may worsen the already tense relationship between the Native Indians and the Government.

Thus, it is evident that Quebec will indeed suffer significantly if it does become an independent nation. The most commonly accepted rule of democracy is that government should make decisions according to majority rule. However, under the plurality system, the Progressive Conservative Party was able to pass the Goods and Services tax (GST) while it's MP's was only representing 43% of Canadian voters. Another bias of the first past the post system is that some parties have promoted separatism and plurality gives them more power than the electoral support wants.

The Bloc Quebecois won 72% of the seats in the 1993 Quebec provincial election, with only 49.2% of the votes. Once again we see evidence of one of the plurality system's major flaws, inequity. It makes one person's vote count for less than another's. In the 1997 federal election, 886,000 voters in Ontario supported the Reform party; however, they did not earn one seat. Conversely, in Alberta 577,000 voters for Reform earned 24 seats which meant that a vote in Alberta is worth more than a vote in Ontario. (Richie, Rob and Steven 25-37)

Third party minorities are as important to a democratic society as are those who form the government because they represent the voices of the few being heard by the many. However, under plurality the small number of votes that a minority party may get is not sufficient to earn seats in the House. Therefore their potential supporters do not want to waste their vote on a sure loser, since they would be taking away votes from their "less of

two evils". Proportional representation would prevent people from having to vote for a party that they do not support in order to prevent a party that they feel strongly against from winning.

People would be sure that their vote for a minority party would make a difference in how many seats they get in the House and hence they would vote for the party whose principles they truly believe in. People would vote with their heart not fears. Proportional representation allows the public to be free to decide which values or principles they want represented in the House by giving the voters the power to decide. For example, " if 7 percent of Canadians support the Green parties approach to environmental issues, PR will give it 7 percent of the seats, no more and no less. (Zimmerman, 481-87)

Offering voters more choices would also encourage higher levels of voting. People would have more reason to vote because they could more easily find a candidate or party they could support enthusiastically. This would force political parties to define how they are distinct from others to attract votes. In order to compete effectively parties would need to develop clearer principles and to define their policy platforms. A multi-party system would also ensure that parliament represented the variety of political perspectives that exist in the electorate.

Our society is becoming more politically heterogeneous, and yet our government has been redundantly Liberal for the last hundred years with the odd Conservative win emerging every so often. We may be relieved of our ubiquitous political despair if we had a governing body that reflected the

diverse perspectives of the electorate. More representative legislatures would breed more exciting, creative and wide-ranging political debate and thrust new ideas and attitudes into the limelight.