

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

"The Contingent State"

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Prince Edward Island

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Dear Peter,

There is a deep current of thought that wants to push history forward in an unbroken line, making one thing lead ineluctably to the next. In this frame of mind, the political independence of Quebec is the inevitable outcome of a slow, unsteady, but unstoppable process of social maturation. It is the culmination of repeated cycles of francophone nationalism and of a long-term trend toward autonomy. For a multitude of reasons, this penultimate stage in Quebec's political development (I avoid the word "final", since the last step of nations is into oblivion) has taken two hundred years to come to fruition. There have been several false starts, most notably a decade ago, when 60 percent of the Quebec electorate turned thumbs down on a proposal to negotiate a limited separation from Canada. Although the notion is at all times debatable, and attentive observers can just as easily argue one side as the other, the prospect of a sovereign Quebec state is as good now as it has ever been.

I am not predicting anything. I cannot wholly subscribe, in light of obvious circular patterns of progress and decline, to a linear theory of human events. Nothing is inevitable, least of all the disaggregation of a country that enjoys remarkable prosperity and extraordinary goodwill in a fractious and competitive world. In many ways, Canada is the envy of developed and developing states alike. Outsiders tend to view Canada as a political and economic success story plagued with endemic but non-fatal cultural lesions. Canadians themselves, including many Quebec nationalists, are justifiably proud of shared achievements in many fields of endeavor. But nothing lasts forever: people change their minds, countries wither, and new states sprout from old roots whenever the climate is conducive to a fresh start. In this case (and to leave the figurative garden for firmer abstractions), an authentic nation, Quebec, is again on the verge of splitting apart from an incipient one, Canada. Whether the fission will actually take place is not so much a question of historical momentum as it is a matter of contemporary contingencies.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

In his most recent provocative exposition of how evolution actually works, Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould invokes the historical and literary concept of contingency. Eschewing mechanistic dogma about randomness as a way of explaining natural selection processes, and of course dismissing the irrationalities of Bible-thumping creation scientists, Gould opts instead for analogies that will draw his readers into the believable wackiness of the great chain of arbitrary and conditional change. "We are especially moved," Gould writes in *Wonderful Life*, "by events that did not have to be, but that occurred for identifiable reasons subject to endless mulling and stewing." Contingency, he goes on to say, "is the affirmation of control by immediate events over destiny, the kingdom lost for want of a horseshoe nail" A more reasonable approach to Quebec's political evolution is hard to imagine. It all depends, you see, on a broad range of variables: a decision here, a maneuver there, purposefully ambiguous remarks, well-intentioned deceit, lurking deadlines, the timing of elections, external attitudes and events, the volatility of public opinion and the static cling of politicians to their own particular solutions to a constitutional dilemma.

The situation in Canada is akin to a steep slope of snow and ice that will, given the correct correlation of innumerable forces and conditions in the surrounding environment, sooner or later let go an avalanche. The resulting cascade of political consequences may cause a big noise and a big scare or it may not. We may have to wait for another decade if the intricate lattice of subsurface structures turns out to be not quite right, but the historical moment for Quebec's separation may come much sooner. Everything is contingent. Consider, for comparison, the snowballing character of change in Eastern Europe. Who can pinpoint the precise triggering action or event that tumbled several regimes and buried mountains of dour expectation in such dramatic short order? Conditions were ripe, the learned analysts are forced to conclude. In much the same way (although it is important to distinguish democratic conditions from totalitarian ones), Quebec independence is distinctly probable, but by no means certain.

Things are stacking up rather nicely just now for the proponents of separation. In the foreground of relevant events, the package of constitutional changes intended to end Quebec's quasi-legal (mostly symbolic) exclusion from the fold of federation is nearly kaput, which is to say it will shortly be shoved back in Quebecker's faces marked "return to sender." The contents of the Meech Lake accord are unacceptable to a growing number of Canadians. While well over half the population remains ignorant of the amendment's fairly simple details, the ones who know the accord inside and out are still vexed by its vagueness in some crucial areas. The country as a whole is feeling "Meeched-Out", and the fatigue serves nobody's political purposes better than it does *Parti Quebecois* (PQ) leader Jacques Parizeau, who takes the position that with or without the amendments the country is ungovernable, so Quebec ought to govern itself instead.

The fate of Meech Lake is but one contingency, albeit a particularly important one because so much symbolism and sentiment have become attached to its substance. An expert on constitutional law who also serves as legal advisor to the Quebec government tried vainly to impress upon me that what the document actually says could hardly be found objectionable by reasonable people. He read parts of it out loud. He pointed to specific paragraphs. He stood up, and sat down. He shrugged and grimaced, and I understood him perfectly, and we were both wrong. The sad truth about politics (or so I am having to learn, as time goes by) is that facts on paper don't count as much as public perceptions. It is a fact that legitimate governments (federal and

provincial) representing over 90 percent of the Canadian electorate approved the Meech Lake accord. The perception, however, is that the agreement was negotiated behind closed doors without proper consultation with citizens' groups and that its supporters are using every trick in the book to pressure the holdout provinces to give in and let Meech pass unchanged. In the category of unseemly scare tactics, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark has even invoked the specter of the 1970 October Crisis, when federal troops occupied Montreal in response to kidnappings by pro-independence terrorists.

The truth about Meech Lake is not somewhere in the middle, but rather all over the place. Facts are facts, and how can there really be such a thing as "misperception"? People often misread, misconstrue, misinterpret and misunderstand both the express meaning and background intent of important legal texts, but they believe what they perceive, and in a democratic setting they command the authority to make their perceptions binding. It's like a jury. Most Canadians, no matter which of several dozen surveys one chooses to consult, find Quebec guilty of attempting a power grab. Those who do not have other reasons to condemn the accord. This may be a far cry from justice--certainly a lot of Quebecers see it this way--but without leaders who can successfully orchestrate constitutional change by bringing facts into harmony with perceptions, Canada is condemned to suffer the consequences of the latter. If the jury says NO to Meech Lake, Quebecers will perceive the decision as a rejection of Quebec; they will feel insulted, and they will tell the rest of Canada to go to hell.

Behind a mind-numbing whirl of crude gamesmanship and subtle duplicity in the Meech Lake debate, the potent reality of a nationalist consensus in Quebec has taken shape. It is matched by a contrary nationalist coalescence everywhere else. The traditionally federalist Quebec Liberal party and the now resolutely independentist PQ find themselves backed into a corner from which there are very few dignified exits, all leading in the same direction: sovereignty. The foundations for a political alliance between rival parties are well laid (here I must skip details), and economic viability of an independent Quebec is fast becoming a non-issue.

Key figures in the business community are joining the chorus of nationalist intellectuals who have argued all along that sovereignty is worth the risk of short-term disruptions in labor markets and the Montreal stock exchange. "Can Quebec survive alone?" asks the president of a medical electronics company, for example:

"No doubt about it...Its educational system produces world class engineers, scientists and business managers--people able to compete with the best anywhere. Once you disregard Britain, France, Germany and Italy, Quebec's economy is competitive with any country in Europe and considerably stronger than 100 other countries in the world."

This vote of confidence from a non-francophone executive is in perfect harmony with the recent remarks of an economic advisor to Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa. The surprisingly candid bureaucrat told a Carleton University audience in Ottawa that if Quebec were independent, its gross domestic product (\$120 billion in 1988) would exceed that of Denmark and Austria, and fall just short of Belgium. Not bad for a country of six million people. The Bank of Montreal and the Toronto Dominion Bank have both issued reports suggesting that separatism need not concern corporations

with large investments in Quebec: their capital is safe, and should continue to bring profitable returns. Interested (and presumably neutral) parties outside Canada take a similarly sanguine view. A Merrill Lynch study says independence might cause a slight economic downturn for a few years, but that the long-term prospects for a sovereign Quebec are good. What sweet music this must be to a nationalist's ears.

In the midst of clashing symbols in the constitutional debate and such unexpectedly gentle notes from the financial community, other events signal a profound lack of confidence in the durability of Canada's existing social and economic architecture. Over the past several months, forty-odd municipalities outside Quebec have passed resolutions declaring English as their "official" language. Early on, as in the case of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, the city council's stated intention was to send a strong signal to the provincial and federal governments that bilingualism had become too costly and burdensome at the local level. When other communities adopted similar (non-binding) measures in other provinces, and then several defiant towns passed opposite motions in favor of bilingualism, the cacophonous bandwagon started to roll. Most Quebec commentators interpret the "English only" resolutions as anti-French, and anti-Quebec. This is also the way the federal government has reacted. "Bigotry" has become an ugly key word in headlines and editorial columns as more and more town councils join in the fray. Facts and perceptions are melded into a mental confusion that continues to produce angry sneers and incoherent litanies of injustice wherever the media invites the public to comment on language policy and/or Meech Lake.

I hope it is painfully obvious by now that contingency is a fool's paradise. Too bad that such a complex network of crossed signals also passes for the real world.

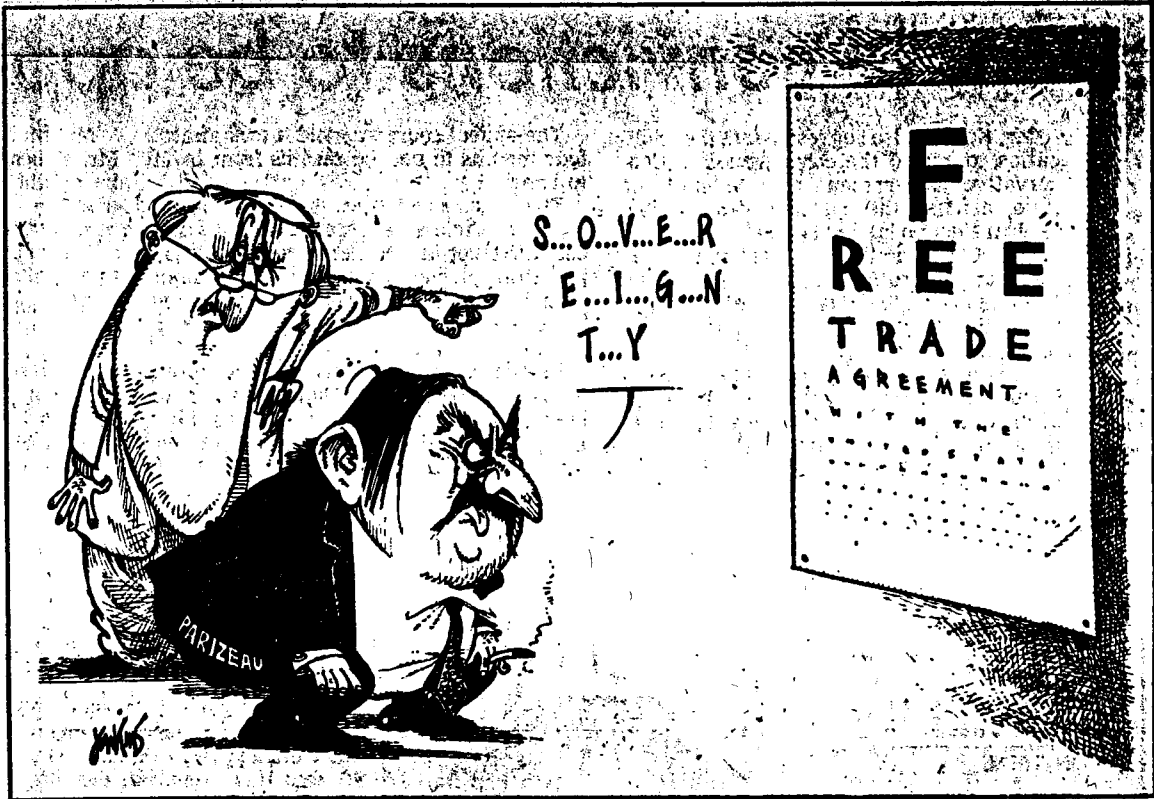
Let me return to present conditions that make independence a plausible and for many a desirable option for Quebec. Canada is going broke. With a federal deficit of about \$250 billion, the per capita debt load is roughly seven times that in the United States, no paragon itself of fiscal responsibility. About thirty cents of every federal tax dollar is devoted to interest payments on previous borrowing. The Canadian Minister of Finance, Michael Wilson, recently announced substantial cutbacks in the amount of federal disbursements to the provinces as a way of cutting spending. This is serious business, because the inability of the central government to uphold with hard cash the principles of equality and universality raises doubts about the viability of Canadian-style federalism. Quebec is not the hardest hit by austerity measures, but it stands to lose approximately \$250 million in anticipated income now and even more later. Moreover, provincial officials have projected that Quebec will be paying more to Ottawa than it receives within the next decade. This not only suggests that federalism will soon cease to be profitable, but that Quebec will have ceased to be a "have-not" province, meaning its economy has developed to the point where Canada needs its contributions more than Quebec needs Canada. Things have changed rather dramatically since 1980, when approximately 30 percent of public spending in Quebec was subsidized by the federal government.

There are additional financial indicators that strongly suggest to Quebec industries and taxpayers that the price of staying in Canada is going up fast. Not least of these is the impending imposition of a 7 percent federal sales tax that will make nearly everyone angry without even putting a dent in the deficit. Now may be the optimal time to bail out of the country. It wouldn't be easy and it wouldn't be cheap. PQ leaders acknowledge a

responsibility to assume a fair share of Canada's debt--between 20-25 percent, or \$5-7 billion, although the negotiations over the actual amount would probably be robust and protracted. Separatists also admit the technical difficulty of creating a new currency, and instilling external confidence in its stability. Quebec already has debts and deficits of its own to manage. In addition, as a result of unexpected shortfalls in revenue from export sales (drought has lowered water levels behind Hydro Quebec's dams, reducing the amount of electricity available for firm deliveries to U.S. markets) the Quebec government has authorized utility rate increases and will probably have to raise taxes as well. But the main point is that members of the managerial classes appear to see no serious problem in adjusting to independence. Technical difficulties are not insurmountable problems. Opposition leader Jacques Parizeau is an experienced economist, and he is not alone in viewing Canada as an enormously inefficient system, burdened with waste, bureaucracy and irrational priorities. Quebec could do better on its own.

All of this money talk about what is supposed to be unthinkable is bolstered by the assumption that a sovereign Quebec would find it easy to quickly negotiate a free trade agreement between itself and the United States, patterned (if not identical to) the one reached between Canada and the U.S. in 1988. There are few reasons to expect such a deal would not be struck. Refusing to treat Quebec any less favorably than it does already, under the existing bilateral trade pact, would serve no legitimate U.S. interest. Quebec is a valued customer (\$11 billion worth of cars and trucks, aircraft engines, business machines, electronic components, etc. in 1988) and a reliable supplier of newsprint, aluminum, lumber, hydroelectricity, automobiles, and a wide range of manufactured goods, all amounting to \$16 billion. Between 75 and 80 percent of Quebec's foreign trade is with the United States. Quebec nationalists are therefore necessarily crazy about maintaining access to the American market and not taking measures that would alienate American investors.

The political strength of the federal Conservative party in Quebec is partly a reflection of Brian Mulroney's favorite son status, but it more importantly hinges on the Conservatives' pushing forward the Canada-U.S. trade accord, which gives Quebecers unaccustomed confidence in their economic future. A spiteful Canadian government (probably Liberal, definitely post-Mulroney) would sooner be the spoiler for Quebec than the United States in the realm of trade and finance. Left-leaning intellectuals in English Canada are still seething over what they view as blatant cultural betrayal when their Quebec counterparts voted in favor of closer integration with the states. In addition, the trade agreement is still a sensitive issue in many parts of Canada, and it may turn out to be far less durable than expected. That is a whole other set of contingencies, and so is the current race for the leadership of the federal Liberal Party (some contenders accept free trade, and support Meech Lake, but not the front runner Jean Chretien.) Let's steer clear of these knots for now, but not forget how crucial an open trade arrangement with the United States is for Quebec.



GLOBE AND MAIL

I have asked American, Quebec and Ottawa officials--separately--whether they can conceive of scenarios wherein the U.S. would take sides with a Canadian government determined to stymie separation. Such involvement would not take the form of overt intervention, of course, but could entail well-timed trade measures such as a countervailing duty action against a "subsidized" and important export industry, like aluminum. This sort of thing might give Quebecers pause, and additional time for Canada to tighten other economic screws. The suggestion was all-too Machiavellian and incongruent with American self-interest for the experts to countenance, but I cannot help but recall the decided and ultimately decisive tilt we Americans took toward our anglophone allies in Britain when Argentina, a highly valued Latin American customer and "friend" in strategic matters, tried to reclaim the Falkland Islands.

In case you're wondering, the Parti Quebecois platform does not call for radical change as regards contributions to NATO (not that they matter much anymore), participation in continental air defense systems (e.g. NORAD), or obligations to jointly manage the Saint Lawrence Seaway with the United States. The view from Quebec is that in functional terms things would stay pretty much the same for the foreseeable future. The difference would be largely symbolic: the fleur de lys would fly over military installations in Quebec instead of the maple leaf. Whether or not this would also be the view in Washington, D.C. is worthy of discussion at a later date. For now, just to be nasty and negative, let us set aside this tangle of contingencies with a few lines from a 1980 analysis by R.B. Byers and D. Leyton-Brown on "The Strategic and Economic Implications for the United States of a Sovereign Quebec:"

"Faced with two, rather than one, independent countries north of the 49th parallel, the underlying strategic assumptions regarding continental security would have to be seriously re-examined in American military and political circles...The heated debate over the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty suggests that the same range of opinion could emerge over security considerations posed by an autonomous Quebec."

I have to add that besides a welcoming attitude toward American visitors and American capital, Quebecers exhibit a surprising naivete about U.S. foreign policy. They think we're good guys. This is nice, but is it realistic? Notwithstanding all the bickering over bilingualism and assimilationist pressures in Canada, why do Quebecers think Americans would be at all respectful of their French language and culture? Why do they think we care about them at all?

One reason for Quebecers' generous and optimistic outlook on the United States, as Professor Louis Balthazar has pointed out in one of the few books on the subject of Quebec-U.S. relations, is that they share with us the better parts of the American dream and never cease to contrast the dynamism of our culture with what they see as a dreary monochrome in English Canada. Another interesting and less obvious reason is that Quebecers rely for the most part on European news sources for reporting on the U.S. political scene. Recall for a moment the surprising warmth of relations between Mitterand's France and the Reaganista regime, and how rosiely things must have sounded in *Le Monde*. Since only a relatively small group of Quebec officials maintain regular cross-border contact with the American power elite, there has been a tendency "encouraged by wishful thinking," in Balthazar's words, "of even intelligent and influential Quebecois to exaggerate U.S. interest in Quebec and the degree of acceptance, or even neutrality, their U.S. equivalents accord to their side of Canadian controversies." Amen. What would a proud Quebecois nationalist make, for example, of a clever, off-hand remark by an American consular official that "French Canadians are sort of like pats of butter melting into the popcorn of English North America?"

Despite the pressing need to forge a stable, friendly trade and defense relationship with the United States, Quebec does have other important external connections, particularly in Europe. Premier Bourassa has made several trips overseas in recent years, and he always returns with announcements of freshly minted export contracts and joint ventures. Hungary is Bourassa's latest plum. France, interestingly enough, is presently Quebec's sixth-ranked trading partner. The volume and intensity of bilateral commerce might increase if Quebec were to become independent, but the economic relationship is not driven by political considerations.

French companies have invested in the aluminum industry because Quebec has an abundance of cheap hydroelectric energy. Quebecers buy a lot of French wine and perfume with francs earned from the sale of furs. There are long-standing cultural exchange programs between Quebec and France, but mutual affections do not run very deep. The French complain about Quebec's distortions of the language, for example, and Quebecers launch similar criticisms in the opposite direction. The relative stuffiness and legendary arrogance of the governing elite in France drives Quebec officials batty, I am told. They would much rather deal with Americans, or Brazilians, or sometimes even the British. There is also some fear that France might

attempt to exploit Quebec, not only for its natural resources, but for its geopolitical location in North America. Along this vein, contingency thinking can get pretty wild. A soon-to-be published book by Jean-Francois Lisee asserts that the CIA believed that KGB infiltrators were behind Charles de Gaulle's infamous "Vive le Quebec libre!" speech in 1967.

All speculative intrigue aside, the evidence is clearly mounting that Quebec can afford to quit Canada and handle its own affairs. Sovereignty is a viable option. How, then, will the Quebec nation go about attaining independence? And what do they want to do with it? The Parti Quebecois plan is to hold a series of referenda, to secede in stages. The details about each step are not clear, but the overall intent is democratic to a fault. There is no precedent in Canadian history or law to help guide the process of secession. Newfoundland held a referendum in 1948, but that was to join, not leave, the federation. Even the 1980 Quebec referendum was a preliminary and equivocal measure; had it passed, extensive further negotiations would have been required. Moreover, if we suppose that a convincing majority (whatever that proportion may be) of Quebecers will vote in favor of separation, would the government of Canada recognize the exercise as valid? (The Lithuanian Parliament is faced with a similar problem, as President Gorbachev considers its declaration of independence illegal, even though the Soviet constitution includes the right of secession.)

Canadians have by and large avoided serious attention to the practical matter of legal separation. It is understandably easy, but nevertheless dangerous, not to think openly about things generally considered to be beyond the pale. Consider what a different world this would be if nuclear war had continued to be thought of as "unthinkable" and hence not worthy of technical and scientific analysis. The analogy is an extreme one, but contingency can be catastrophic. "The [U.S.] Civil War is an especially poignant tragedy," writes Stephen Jay Gould, "because a replay of the tape might have saved a half million lives for a thousand different reasons." Candid discussion of the divorce procedures are in order, if only to allay people's worst fears.

There are some external cases to draw from, such as the way France and Algeria engineered their final (1962) disengagement (after much unfortunate bloodshed), and how Norway split apart from Sweden in 1905 (a noisy but nonviolent affair.) Borrowing a lesson from De Gaulle, Ottawa might reach an agreement with Quebec and then put it to a countrywide vote subsequent to one (or several) in Quebec itself. This sort of process would surely have a legitimizing effect, and avoid bitter feelings and defeat such as occurred in Western Australia when it failed to procure autonomy in 1933. There is no good reason to doubt that a peaceful secession formula could be worked out, but it is also worth noting that international law does not require an orderly transition for the change to be considered valid. A *fait accompli* would do. At the moment, polls indicate growing disaffection with Quebec and, as I have reported before, surprising levels of indifference toward the breakup of Canada. But now we are talking about the real thing, and resistance could be fierce, not just in general terms, but with specific regard to property settlements and territorial claims. Who will get title to all those newish federal buildings and other valuable government-owned real estate across the Ottawa River in Hull, Quebec? What about the repeated insistence of self-styled editorialists that Quebec would have to cede a corridor of territory along the south shore of the St. Lawrence so as to provide a land "bridge" between Ontario and the Maritime provinces? That will never happen--Quebec would unquestionably provide free transit rights instead--but a gut issue like the territorial imperative can make dangerous



dreamers out of lame brains nonetheless.

The losers in the sovereignty gamble must also be factored-in as important contingencies. Quebec independence would undermine the rights and aspirations of the 955 thousand francophones living elsewhere in Canada. Some would choose to leave jobs and communities in the Maritimes, Ontario, and the West for their ancestral home in Quebec, others would be left hanging out to dry up and wither away in the English-only wind of a dismembered Canadian state. A number of anglophones would no doubt pack up and move out of West Montreal and the Eastern Townships and other enclaves, depleting Quebec's economic potential to some extent, and leaving the remainder of English Quebecers, such as those who have married into francophone families, to fend for themselves.

The rest of Canada has a whole lot to lose if Quebec bolts. It is not just the mortal fear that some Canadians have of piecemeal absorption by the United States, but the loss of respect, prestige, and bargaining power in the world at large. "Without Quebec," an economist lamented to me, sourly, over a proper English lunch, "we would have to settle for the international clout of a Holland." Canada would lose its place in the ranks of the Group of Seven western industrialized powers and much of its political leverage at the GATT and other multilateral forums at the same time that Quebec is being welcomed into the United Nations and feted by its many cultural compatriots in la Francophonie, an association of 40 French-speaking countries showing all sorts of economic and diplomatic promise. Quebec independence is the pits for Canadians just now ready to stand tall and assert the "national" interest in defiance of the Yanks and in competition with the heavy hitters in Europe and the Far East. How far will they go to protect this interest from being undermined by Quebec?

As for what Quebecers will do with their sovereignty--a basic question indeed--there are different sorts of projects being advanced by different groups of idealists. Cultural nationalists are preoccupied with safeguarding the French language. "It is the development of inviolable vital space for all of Francophonie," writes Marcel Couture in the Quebec journal *Forces*

"that will engender real hope that our original contribution will soon gain a voice in the chorus of nations--that of countries, peoples and societies conjoined by a language and culture enriched by their past, prestigious in the modern age and resolutely turned towards the twenty-first century."

Independence would make Quebec's vital spaces out-of-bounds to Ottawa and the federal courts, but it would not automatically grant exceptional powers to the guardians of culture. There are obvious ideological and technological limits to the state's ability to control the flow of ideas and influences, particularly in North America. Those in charge of drafting a Quebec constitution would have to take into consideration the rights of linguistic minorities, and economic planners would have to take a pragmatic view toward bilingualism if they are serious about an export-led development strategy. It is not inconceivable that the government of an independent Quebec would permit and even encourage the use of English, especially in business. The irony is rich, but the more important fact about sovereignty is that Quebecers will do what they want, without having to justify their policy choices to a higher authority.

Like anything of substance held under the harsh light of intense scrutiny, Quebec nationalism has a dark side. I do not wish to dwell on accusations of deep-rooted racism, latent anti-Semitism and the old bugaboo of a collectivist mentality at odds with individual freedom, not because there is not some truth in them, but because the arguments are so unfair. These illiberal forces are the attributes of almost every nationalist movement, and they are certainly no more pronounced in Quebec than in other parts of Canada or in other democratic countries, such as the United States.

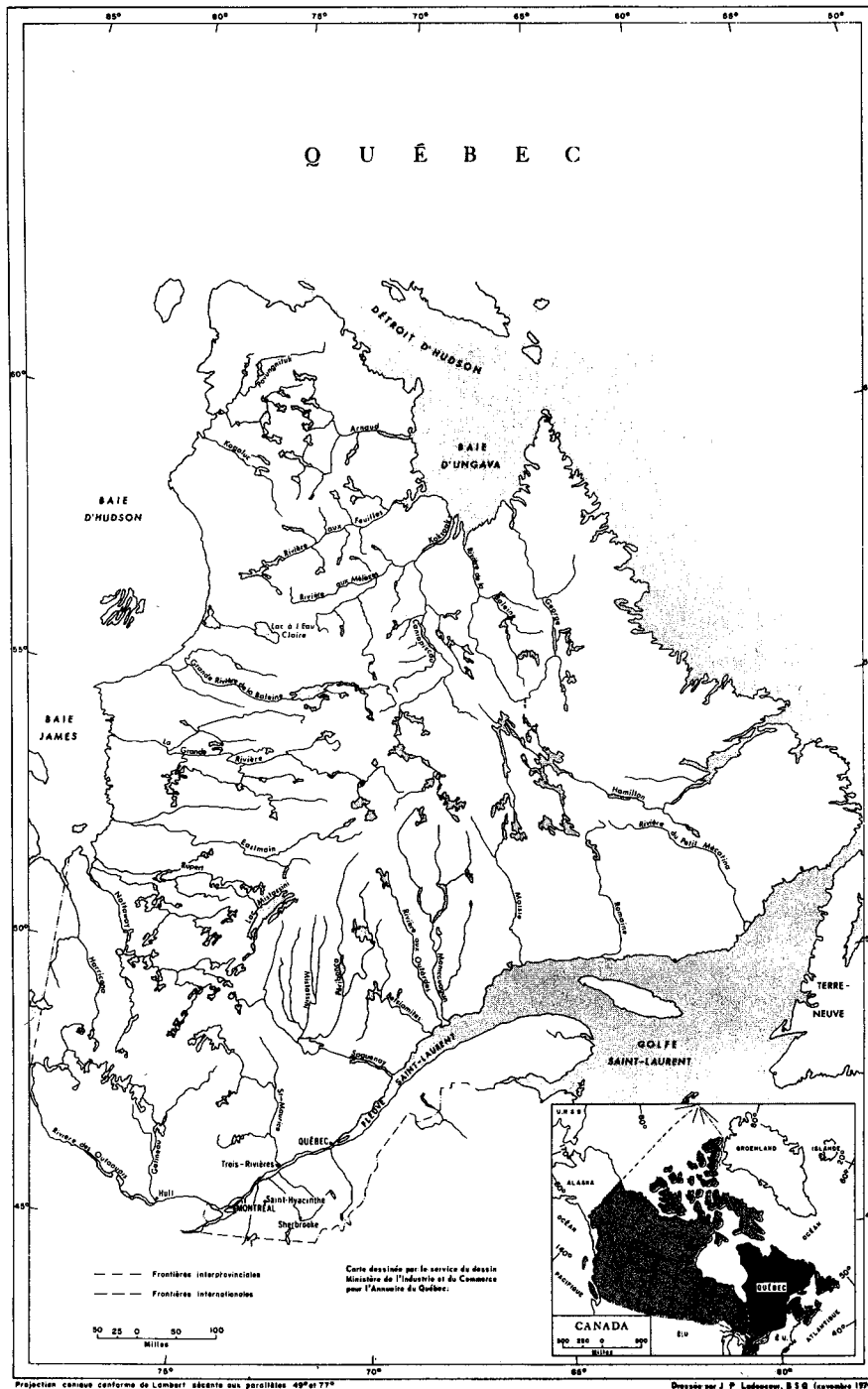
Quebeckers are not unaware of the risks of becoming a prejudiced and inward-looking society rather than an egalitarian and extroverted one. Those who are on the brink of giving up on Canadian federalism are still remorseful about shucking off the protections a layered system of government can provide against petty abuses of power and gross tyranny. The cynical view of independence is that it will provide a narrow elite already contemptuous of ordinary Quebeckers with more power, wealth and prestige. This, too, is a possible outcome to any process of self-determination. Beyond all that, there is a peculiar irony in the oft-laid charges that Quebec is the most vain and selfish of the Canadian provinces. The phrase *Quebec d'abord!* (Quebec first!) is sometimes hurled against Quebeckers as an insult, when in fact (or so I perceive) the people of Quebec are just intensely devoted to their nation. If British Columbia were a nation, its citizens would probably be a bit more strident in asserting their interests too--it's only natural. Quebeckers are tired of being chastised for being good and being themselves. One lesson here for would-be framers of a world federation is that the layering of loyalties can have the problematic effect of making patriotic virtues look like craven conceit.

Protecting the language and conserving related cultural values and escaping the economic strictures of federation are not the only motivations for sovereignty. The Green Party (Parti Vert) of Quebec views independence as a golden opportunity to transform a growth and consumption-oriented society into an ecologically sensible one. Environmentalism is not very much in evidence in Quebec right now, but the Greens fielded an astounding 40 candidates in the last provincial election and won about 5 percent of the popular vote. They have yet to win a seat in the National Assembly, but growing public outcry over chemical spills and toxic waste dumps and lax environmental assessment rules will undoubtedly help propel a greening of Quebec's political landscape. More to the point, the Greens believe that sovereignty will unleash a burst of reconstructive energy.

The Parti Vert president, Jean Quimet, is a man of boundless enthusiasm. He rode his bike all over the province last fall, campaigning for a cleaner way of life. My wife Alice and I met him earlier this month in the party's spartan, green-tinted (really!) office on St. Denis Street in Montreal. At lunch, we watched his heaping plate of vegetarian delicacies go stone cold as we ate and he just talked and talked and talked about how Quebeckers will welcome a 30-hour work week and wire themselves into an ongoing province-wide dialogue via home computer terminals. He made me feel old and tired. A carrot juice cocktail perked me right up again. It was Quimet, by the way, who gave me the image of an avalanche about to happen.

What IS going to happen? This is the question put to Pierre Trudeau last week in a televised interview. Trudeau is on a civilized and erudite rampage against the Meech Lake accord. He believes in one Canada, but admits that Quebec could go it alone. He said "I don't know." Ditto from your entranced and befuddled correspondent.

*Stephen Maly*



This map, from a 1980 Parti Québécois booklet, does not show the boundary between Québec and Labrador. In 1927 an international arbitration panel awarded jurisdiction over the coastal region (check your atlas for coordinates) to the province of Newfoundland. Rich in mineral and hydropower resources, and adjacent to important Atlantic fisheries, Labrador could be a territory worth fighting over if a sovereign Québec decides to disavow the earlier settlement and press historic claims.