

**Post-
Referendary
Positions:
A Dossier
Will Straw**

FOR MANY ANGLOPHONE INTELLECTUALS, living in Québec during the most recent referendary campaign or following it from outside, the most noble moment came during that brief interim when the *Oui* side seemed to run against Mike Harris and the Ontario Tory government. Pro-sovereignty advertisements in English language newspapers urged readers to vote Yes in order to perpetuate some semblance of social democracy, and one could almost see, taking shape, the attitudinal preconditions for a *Oui* breakthrough in the anglophone community. Sovereignist Daniel Latouche, the author of the question in the previous sovereignty referendum, spoke of how uniformly the Québec left supported the Yes option this time, in contrast to the situation in 1980. Then, socialists and social-democrats had been badly split over the national question, with major unions refusing to take a stand and denunciations of “bourgeois nationalism” common within meetings of groups on the left. Now, in an age of less strident class rhetoric, a broad range of social sectors encompassing social service workers, unions and the intelligentsia was far more likely to support the sovereignty option with significant majorities.

The anglo-Canadian left intelligentsia’s relationship to the Québec sovereignty movement has long alternated between vicarious over-identification and a sense of betrayal, between accepting that movement’s own self-identification (3 decades ago) as indigenous anti-colonial revolutionary force and (more recently) presuming to instruct it on the need to “rethink” nationhood. Parizeau’s horrendous speech on the eve of the referendum, blaming the Yes loss on “money and the ethnics,” allowed most anglophones to quickly swap a fragile electoral victory for a more nourishing (albeit, in my view, mostly unearned) moral one. While many, in the aftermath of the referendum, saw the preconditions for a vital debate over the character of Québécois identity, this has been too quickly displaced by a series of sideshows, at least within the anglophone press. The most noteworthy of these has been the emergence of a partitionist movement devoted to the secession of Montréal and other parts of Québec with majority federalist populations. Jokes about a wall along St. Laurent boulevard have pushed out of public discourse the more fundamental question of whether native groups would be allowed to decide their own allegiances in negotiations over Québec sovereignty.

One positive effect of the partition debate has been the emergence of new positions within anglophone political discourse in Québec. The most prominent of these is that of Forum-Québec, a group of younger anglophones with strong roots in Montréal’s student population. Their acceptance of French as Québec’s official language, and of the right of Quebecers to decide their political status in a referendum, show an important departure from many of the bottom-line positions within anglo-Québec politics. Some of their positions are echoed in petitions by groups of prominent anglophone Quebecers, such as Gretta Chambers or Desmond Morton, who oppose consideration of partition as a serious political option.

The following texts and extracts were published in the Montréal press in the months which preceded or followed the referendum on Québec sovereignty in October of 1995. They are meant as examples of some of the positions which have emerged in a set of interlocking debates. All translations from the French are my own, and may differ from official translations of which I am unaware. All texts reproduced in full were open letters published within several newspapers. Research assistance in preparing this dossier was provided by Gary Kennedy.

(Will Straw)



I. Projects

Extract from the “Declaration of Sovereignty,” read aloud at the Grand Théâtre de Québec by the poet Gilles Vigneault and the playwright Marie Laberge, September, 1995.

Independent, and thus fully present in the world, we intend to work for cooperation, humanitarian action, tolerance and peace. We subscribe to the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Man and other international instruments for the protection of rights. While never renouncing our own values, we will set about weaving, through agreements and treaties, mutually beneficial links with the peoples of the earth. In particular, we would like to invent, with the Canadian people, our historical partner, new relations enabling us to maintain our economic links and to redefine our political exchanges. We will also deploy a singular effort towards tightening our links with the peoples of the United States, France, and other countries of the Americas and the Francophonie.

To accomplish this project, to maintain the fervour which lives within us and moves us, and inasmuch as the time has finally come to set in motion the vast enterprise which is this project. We, the people of Québec, by the voice of our National Assembly, proclaim the following: Québec is a sovereign country.

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Gerald Larose, Président, Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), “Le Québec qu’il nous faut,” *Le Devoir*, 16 October, 1995, A9.

There is no question, then, of building a sovereign Québec which would be turned in upon itself, lifelessly clinging to the values of the past. The CSN’s nationalism is in no way nourished by xenophobic currents and the struggle against all forms of racism is an integral part of our engagement. What is at stake is our collective capacity to put in place all the conditions necessary to build a country where we can live in the manner we want. In this light, the achievement of sovereignty has become a necessary condition if we are to advance further in building a society able to fulfill our aspirations.

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Louise Beaudoin, Québec Minister of Culture and Communications, “Québec’s size: an advantage in new global economy,” *The Gazette*, 17 October, 1995, pg. B3

Markets [like NAFTA] are continuing to grow for all countries and are guaranteeing trade outlets for those entities which, like us, belong to open, integrated and unified economies.

This is an advantage that, for all intents and purposes, did not exist in 1980 and which, today, gives new meaning to the sovereignty of Québec. That is why sovereignists supported the Canada-U.S.-free-trade agreement and NAFTA (asking, however, for complementary measures that the federal government refused to agree to) and why we are proposing a partnership with Canada.

With the exception, of course, of culture. In this sector, our partners, our natural allies, the first countries with which we will form a common front, are European countries. Our interests in the cultural sphere differ greatly from those of English Canada, which is less and less present in its own market and which, to all intents and purposes, has yielded to the American onslaught.

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Lise Bissonnette, “La souveraineté, pour la suite du Québec,” *Le Devoir*, October 26, 1995, A10.

Québec, if only it wanted it, could find within sovereignty the energy for a second Quiet Revolution, that shopworn term but powerful motor which created, without major upsets and within confederation, before Trudeau put a stop to it, a quasi-nation. Small countries, the kind our short-sighted economic elites have shown so much contempt for in their recent public statements, need not be left behind in processes of globalization if they are able to integrate themselves within larger groups, as Québec clearly wants to do and has done by joining NAFTA. After a moment of hyperbole — it was the end of the nation-state, we were told — we recognize clearly today that globalization depends on the dynamism of societies of belonging, identity zones in which individuals group together, to face new global challenges without getting lost within

these. Québécois artists, who have renounced traditional nationalism but not their own belonging, say it so much better than business people. From *Refus global* through the present, they have always foreshadowed our greatest transformations.

II. The Parizeau Speech and its Aftermath

Marco Micone, "Allophones have double standard in citing Parizeau's ethnic focus," *The Gazette*, 16 December, 1996.

Taking their cue from the anglophone and allophone communities, minority groups tend to reinforce their cohesion when they feel threatened. Parizeau's "we" is that of a minority francophone within Canada. On referendum night, despite the disappointment of some and the shrieks of others, the premier merely expressed an ethnic consciousness that conditions all of society.

Other factors reinforce ethnic consciousness. For allophones, there is, of course, the multiculturalist ideology, which enhances the value of ethnicity and difference, along with the monoethnic schools and the employment ghettos of immigrants — in short, a fragmentation of society along ethnic lines.

(...)

The ethnic consciousness of francophones can be explained by historic reasons, their status as a minority within the Canadian federation and also by mistrust and, at times, resentment toward allophones and anglophones. Parizeau's "we" is only an exacerbated form of the ethnicism that demographers continue to express when they declare that in several years there may no longer be enough francophone Quebecers for French to be spoken in Montréal.

Yet with more than 80 per cent of young allophones attending French schools (the figure was 20 per cent two decades ago), francophones of future generations will have names like Gutierrez, Nguyen and Adamopoulos along with all the Tremblays and Dubois.

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Extract from a letter by Jacques Parizeau, Premier of Québec, to Claudel Toussaint, president of the Parti Québécois Comité national des relations ethnoculturelles, reprinted in *Le Devoir*, 28 November, 1995.

In your letter, you rightly note the encouraging level of participation of members of our cultural communities in the Commissions on the Future of Québec last winter. In the spring, as I weighed the results of these Commissions, I personally took note of this new development, and drew the conclusion that the bridges we had built over the last few years had become even more solid. We allowed ourselves modest but real hope.

Nevertheless, the results on October 30th did not confirm this progress, and the break-down of the referendum vote has raised an issue that it would be unhealthy to overlook. It should be noted as well that our adversaries have actively worked to provoke, feed and expand the divisions before us, to distort our statements and our intentions, and to arouse distrust wherever possible. They are now engaged in an operation aimed essentially at perpetuating these divisions and in alleviating themselves of any responsibility.

All that having been said, and all of it true, you are right, Mr. Toussaint, to note that my statements of October 30th might have hurt many citizens of Québec. I agree: it is not the place of the premier of Québec to define Quebecers other than in their totality, and in their status as citizens. This is, in fact, the reason why I accepted, without hesitation, the result of the referendum for what it was, the expression of the will of the majority of Quebecers. It seems to me that, on the evening of October 30th, it was the leader of the yes camp who spoke. However, even in this capacity, as I indicated from the next day onward, I regret that my words were too strong and wish they had been better chosen.

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Extract from Josée Légault, "Anglos' Winter of discontent," *The Gazette*, 2 February, 1996, pg. B3.

These accusations of xenophobia are nurtured by federalists whenever a nationalist makes a statement they deem unacceptable and from which droves of francophones run frantically to dissociate themselves. Because this vicious circle has been poisoning our social climate long enough, francophones must clear the air on this issue directly with anglophones.

III. Anglo Partition Wars

Extract from Robert Libman and Tommy Schnurmacher, "Partition offers hope to those who wish to stay," *The Gazette*, 26 January, 1996, pg. B3.

If residents of the geographic entity of Québec, based on the commonality of language, history and culture could democratically and peacefully be consulted in a referendum about forming a new nation, why can't other "collectivities" within Québec do the same?

(. . .)

If Québec has this political right to self-determination, other important collectivities within Québec have the same right and could follow the same procedures.

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Reed Scowen, "Partition perfectly acceptable as matter of principle." *The Gazette*, 17 February, 1996, G3.

As a practical matter, the case for partition of Québec's northern territories seems very strong. I take it as given that these regions would not be granted to an independent Québec against the will of the native majority that lives there. It also seems possible that a strong majority of federalists in the counties near Ottawa could arrange to stay in Canada on some basis.

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Open letter from the anglophone group which became Forum-Québec, 5 February, 1996.

For well more than two centuries, English and French-speaking Quebeckers have lived and worked side-by-side in peace. Despite political differences that have sometimes arisen throughout our shared history, this peaceful co-existence has been an underlying principle of our relationship and partnership.

Despite numerous examples of other societies around the world that have resorted to violent conflict to overcome their divisions, Quebeckers have always relied upon their democratic institutions to settle political differences.

Our collective history is replete with examples of peaceful collaboration; it is also marred with instances of cultural, economic and political inequity. We believe our common commitment to democratic principles has, above all, allowed us to overcome these inequities and build the strong, prosperous, open society that Québec is today.

For many years, the question of Québec's political and constitutional future has been a source of vigorous debate between competing and equally legitimate visions of our society. We are committed to its democratic, peaceful resolution.

As this debate continues, we wish to state our explicit support for certain basic principles that, regardless of the eventual outcome, must be respected.

Our future will be decided by Quebeckers through a referendum called by Québec's National Assembly, on a question that reflects the political will of the Assembly. In a democratic society, these issues are resolved by the judgment of its citizens.

In accordance with democratic principles, we believe that regardless of the future Quebeckers choose, Québec is indivisible without the consent of the National Assembly.

We call on the Canadian government to respect the territorial integrity of Québec and discourage attempts to redefine its borders. We firmly disagree with advocates of partition. Their words and actions only sanction intolerance by promoting cultural and linguistic division between us.

We abhor all forms of prejudice. There is no place in Québec or the English-speaking community for those who promote division to achieve their political ends. The rhetoric of intolerance must be avidly rejected by all Quebeckers.

Québec is a French-speaking society. As such, French is Québec's official language. This is a fact we accept, respect and support.

Québec's National Assembly must have the powers necessary to protect and promote Québec's language and culture within the legislative means normally available within a modern, democratic society.

As English-speaking Quebecers, we condemn those who continue to reject the democratic measures taken by Québec to build a strong and vibrant, French society and culture.

Like many societies around the world, Québec is a diverse society comprising people from different cultural backgrounds. Since 1971, more than 300,000 immigrants have chosen Québec for its distinctiveness and quality of life. This diversity is our strength.

We believe the integration of immigrants into Québec's French-speaking society is a positive means towards the social and economic empowerment of all Quebecers. Furthermore, we believe in respecting the diversity of Québec society.

Together, we have demonstrated to the world that Québec is an open, tolerant society. As English-speaking Quebecers, we are committed to ensuring that Québec stays this way.

Those who exploit the current political uncertainty to destabilize our society and deter economic growth must be denounced. All Quebecers have a moral and social duty to promote the best interests of Québec, locally and internationally.

Regardless of our future course, Québec's best insurance for the future is to ensure that we live in a dynamic, prosperous society and leave a flourishing Québec for our children.

We call upon all Quebecers to endorse this statement and build common ground for the unfolding of our future, to join together in a respectful dialogue, to engage on another in their visions for the future, respecting old differences but never forgetting our common interests, so that together we can build a strong, modern Québec.

As English-speaking Quebecers, we are committed to working collectively to promote the interests of our community, in the Québec context, now and in the future.

[signed by 60 English-speaking Quebecers.
Organized by Desmond Travis. Released on
February 5, 1996]

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The Gazette, 10 February, 1996

Open Letter:

We are deeply concerned that, since the recent statements by Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion and Prime Minister Chrétien, the legitimization of the idea of partitioning a sovereign Québec has led to a dangerous polarization of public debate about the future of Québec and Canada.

We believe it imperative to counter the growing and fallacious impression that statements supporting partition accurately reflect the voice of non-francophone Quebecers.

As strong opponents of the idea that Québec could be carved into bits and pieces, we are also convinced that the coming months will require that our best energies be devoted to strengthening the democratic processes that will determine the future of Québec and relations between its majority and minority communities. If the current obsession with doomsday scenarios continues, inflexibility will prevail and stand in the way of constructive solutions.

A move forward to improve the prospects of a democratic resolution and to ensure that the future of anglo-Quebeckers is better protected will only occur when there is an end to the misrepresentation reflected in recent media reports suggesting that the idea of partitioning Québec has overwhelming support within the anglophone community. As anglo-Quebeckers committed to living in a pluralistic Québec, we recognize our responsibility to participate in the search for solutions. We will not stand back and allow others, including those in the rest of Canada, to speak in our name.

—Neil Bissoondath, Marion Dove, Jane Jenson,
Andrew F. Johnson, Antonia Maioni, Margie
Mendell, Desmond Morton, Alex Patterson, F.
Leslie Seidle, Charles Taylor

