

EXCURSUS 1

Richard O'Mara on QUEBEC AND OTHER DISSIDENTS

Echoing Freud's great exasperation with women, an English Canadian recently asked me: "What do Quebecers want?" That was thirty-five days before the referendum to give Quebec's provincial government the authority to negotiate sovereignty association with English Canada. It was cold in the Canadian capital, and rain raked the Ottawa River below the soaring gray tower of Parliament. The weather, dark and drear, suggested the imminence of momentous events.

Mr. René Lévesque, the provincial premier in Quebec, had appeared on television to set the date for the referendum which, he hoped, would be Quebec's first tentative step out of the Canadian federation. At that time, polls indicated such was Quebec's desire. Mr. Lévesque, by setting the referendum for May 20, was striking while the iron was hot. Came election day, however, most Quebecers showed that they did not want to set out on their own, preferring instead the quarrelsome comfort of their union with English Canada.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the sly and magnetic Canadian prime minister, had persuaded his fellow French Canadians to think twice before they leapt. They did, and most decided they were indeed Canadians first and Quebecers second. Mr. Trudeau impressed them largely by his own ability to hold two glittering ideals simultaneously, ideals that people like René Lévesque had come to believe were not only incompatible but actually mutually exclusive: the ideal of Canada as a nation and the ideal of

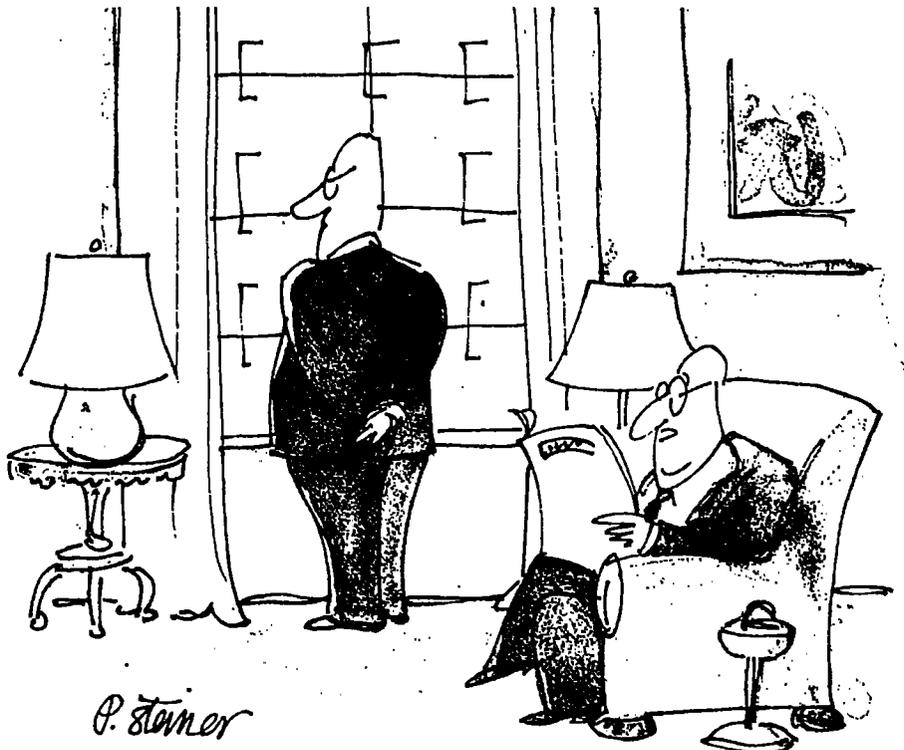
Quebec as the Zion of French culture in North America.

Indeed, Trudeau does join the best of both. He is probably the most ardent federalist among Canada's long list of prime ministers, and yet, when taunted by Lévesque about his English middle name, Trudeau responded, "*Mon nom is Québécois.*" No one could gainsay him. French Canadians were doubtless motivated to reject Lévesque by other considerations as well. Trudeau might be the perfect Canadian/Quebecker, but not all Quebecers can be so ideologically and culturally well put together. No, Quebecers also accepted certain promises from Trudeau, especially that Quebec would get a new deal within the Canadian federation. That is really what they want; their desires are quite specific after all. Mr. Trudeau and English Canada now have a moral obligation to meet those demands. If they don't, the fire of separatism, banked now, will flame up again.

According to Professor Luis Balthazar, head of the political science department of Laval University in Quebec City, Quebecers want three main things. First, that "all social affairs programs be in the hands of the provincial government." Second, they want "recognition and acceptance of the idea that Quebec and Quebec alone should have the responsibility for the care and preservation of French culture in Canada." Finally, the provincial government should exercise control over all manner of communications within the province—radio, television, and newspapers.

It is a tall order, almost a claim for independence itself.

The force behind these demands is what Professor Balthazar calls "a new idea of Quebec." In effect, the Québécois have been trying to get English Canada to realize that the French are not just another of Canada's many ethnic groups eager to form a part of the general mosaic but a



"You know, Winthrop, I feel sorry for the Fed."

distinct and viable French civilization in the heart of North America. More than one academic and governmental commission has been formed to study the sources of the French-English conflict, and they have all come to the same conclusion: The French in Canada will not melt, and to expect them to is to expect them to commit cultural suicide.

Professor Balthazar's "new idea" is actually a very old one, one that has been rejected time after time by the English Canadian majority. It has not been simply English intransigence that has made generation after generation of Anglo Canadians dismiss the Frenchness of French Canada: It has been policy. The French were in North America long before coming under the dominion of the English. The Act of Union of Canada in 1840, an attempt to fuse the two cultural groups, failed miserably. The current constitution, the British North America Act of 1867, formally recognized the existence of the two language groups. But in the 113 intervening years only the letter of the constitution has been served, never the spirit. Assimilation was always the policy, the goal of English Canada.

Although nominally and legally a bilingual country, the French outside Quebec have by and large been made to feel strangers in their own country, and the more distant from Quebec the more alien the environment to them. Schools for French children have been provided in Alberta and Saskatchewan and even in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, but they are mere gestures. Speakers of French grow fewer and fewer the farther west one moves, and to add insult to indifference the great majority of English Canadians living in Quebec are blatantly monolingual.

ENGLISH CANADA WORRIES TOO

The intention, it ought to be said, was never wholly malicious. The English, even in England and during the salad days of their empire, have always been ignorant of languages other than their own and scornful of other cultures. The English in Canada, absorbed as they were in their own sense of superiority, simply assumed the Francophones would soon recognize that superiority and surrender themselves, language and all. Obviously, they never did, but the attempt at absorption left the French in Quebec with not a few scars.

Until a few years ago most people who thought about Canada as a nation, both from outside and inside the country, generally shared the image held by English Canadians. The majority of Canadians have always regarded themselves as progressive, enlightened, and modern, and have looked on the Quebecers as regressive, obdurate, and entirely too Catholic. While the English produced engineers, entrepreneurs, bankers, and men of affairs, the French produced doctors, lawyers, farmers, and priests. English Canada was rich, French Canada was poor.

The picture, though overdrawn, is well understood, even by many foreigners. What is not understood is that it has changed dramatically. Quebec is no longer the orphan province of Canada; it is the second richest in the federation of ten provinces and two territories. Quebec produces 37 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product. Its economy is well balanced, with a manufacturing sector of 23 per cent and about 64 per cent of its work force in services. It produces 70 per cent of its own food. Though it has no oil, it has abundant hydroelectricity, some of which it sells in the United States.

But more important, according to a number of economists, French Quebecers have become much more active in the economy. A management revolution has

swept the province. In the past ten years the number of businesses in Quebec grew from 63,000 to 170,000. Though Quebecers still study law and medicine and agronomy, more than a third of university students seeking business degrees in all of Canada are Quebecers.

Today things are more even in Canada than ever before, and some of the psychological elements of the ancient conflict have been ameliorated. Even the English-speaking Canadians have lost much of their self-assurance as they have seen their Anglophile society diluted by immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and Europe. Now, according to an interpretation popular among some Canadians, it is the English Canadian who worries about being assimilated—by the Americans.

All great events have their ironic dimension. The Quebec referendum was no less a great event because Quebecers voted to stay with Canada, if only because the vote was not a vote for the status quo but for change within the framework of the federation. The irony has to do with intention. The prime minister no doubt intends to do right by his home province, but to do so—to make the kinds of changes Quebecers demand—will require that the Canadian constitution be amended.

It is one of the eternal embarrassments of Canada that it does not have possession of its own constitution. The document, the British North America Act, sits in London, and there is a strong and widespread sentiment throughout Canada to bring it home. Everybody is in favor of "patriating" the constitution, but everyone also agrees that bringing it back and opening it up to the amendment process would let loose the sort of centrifugal forces that ever threaten the Canadian federation.

Quebec is not the only dissident among Canada's ten provinces. There are strong forces for disunion in wealthy Alberta, and many people in far west British Columbia feel a tighter kinship with the states of Washington, Oregon, and Montana than they do with Ontario, much less with Quebec. Thus the dilemma is evident: Quebec needs more autonomy, but how to grant it while denying special treatment to those other provinces so eager to exercise greater self-control? If all the provinces have their way, Canada could become just a word to describe an ideal that once was.

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EXCURSUS 2

June Bingham on IMPRESSIONS OF THE NEW NEW CHINA

"Women hold up half the sky," says *The Little Red Book* of Chairman Mao. The quotation struck me as useful to remember before our congressional group embarked this spring on an eight-day trip to China. Once in Peking I could hardly wait to trot out my tiny item of one-woman diplomacy. I had learned to avoid saying "women hold up half the *heaven*" lest, in a Marxist country that had closed down its churches and temples, any such reference to religion be the opposite of diplomatic.

As part of what the Chinese call their "Window to the West" (some call it China's "American Card"), several leaders of the All China Women's Federation had recently spent eighteen days in the U.S. At a meeting with them in Peking they told us how impressed they had been by