

reveals that, for many, commitment to that alliance strongly conditions whatever commitment they have to civic nationalism. If they are willing to dampen their criticism of ethno-nationalists now, what hope is there for Quebec after a vote for independence when anglo migration and economic hardship increase the pressure to find scapegoats?

### THE RESPONSE FROM OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Strangely, much of that reaction has adopted a similarly simplistic and monolithic conception of Quebec. Parizeau's remarks are taken as representing the aspirations of all French-speaking Quebec, as revealing the ethno-nationalism supposedly present in all demands for cultural recognition. The only solution, then, is to hold the line, strongly resisting any concessions.

At the very least, this shows profound ignorance of the state of public opinion in Quebec. After all, a majority of Quebecers voted "no." Many who voted "yes" did so in order to signal their desire for constitutional reform. The clear majority of Quebecers, then, had no sympathy whatever with Parizeau's comments. But many Canadians were unable to see past him. For them, he was the voice of all Quebecers dissatisfied with the status quo.

This has created a regrettable and artificial polarization in which every proposal for change is treated as a concession to ethno-nationalism. It ignores the voices of federalists in Quebec. Indeed, it reveals a fundamental blindness of many Canadians to the relevance of culture in their own lives. Often, they care deeply about Canadian culture without believing that that makes them closed or intolerant. Why can they not see that the same holds true for many Quebecers, legitimately

concerned with affirming their own distinctiveness?

We should listen to what those Quebecers are telling us, rather than damning all as ethno-nationalists, open or disguised. I agree that we cannot appease ethno-nationalism. But we should not lose sight of the

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majority of Quebecers who are not in that camp. Too often, the reaction outside Quebec reminds me of the William Howard Taft approach to trade unions where one is so mesmerized by the fear of communism that one is incapable of responding constructively to the real demands of want and penury.

Most Quebecers support an accommodation within Canada. They do so precisely because they want to live within a multilingual and pluralistic state. That very framework constitutes an important check on ethnic nationalism. We should recognize that and attempt to find solutions within that framework. And any such solution has to speak to that great body of Quebecers, not play the ethno-nationalists' game by taking them as representative of the whole. ♦

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## PLEASE, LET US BREATHE

BY LOUIS BALTHAZAR

Nothing was more typical of the chronic misunderstanding between English Canada and Quebec than the pre-referendum Montreal rally. Those 1,000 Canadians who invaded the streets of Quebec's metropolis were undoubtedly inspired by genuine feelings of goodwill toward Quebecers, by a strong Canadian nationalism and a conviction that Canada must include Quebec if it is going to make any sense. The effect on French-speaking Quebecers, however, was minimal at best.

### KISSY, KISSY: THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

For those who thought of voting "yes," this last-minute demonstration of love was seen as condescending, superficial, and insignificant as long as it was not accompanied by any sign of recognition of Quebec for what it is or should be: an autonomous political entity. What kind of love is it that does not allow the partner to be itself, to be distinctive? For most Quebecers, this tight embrace was unbearably suffocating, hardly allowing us to breathe.

Sure, we are attached to Canada. Sure, we like English-speaking Canadians and want nothing more than to maintain our various relations and friendships with people all across the country. But there is such a thing as a distinct Quebec network. It includes all anglophones and allophones who live in Quebec and share in the distinctive mix of a common public culture while retaining their own particular features. Notwithstanding Premier Parizeau's unfortunate words and the misinterpreted occasional linguistic mishaps on the part of

some Quebec leaders, the dynamism of Quebec nationalism is definitely pluralistic, multi-ethnic, and faithful to the spirit of our 1975 *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.

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Our pluralism is different from Canadian multiculturalism. This is why the great majority of Quebecers have repudiated for quite some time the all-inclusive Canadian nationalism that was cultivated by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and espoused by many Canadians outside Quebec. It is sad to say to our good friends across the country that we cannot respond to their invitation to belong to a symmetric and indissoluble Canada. We have to repeat again and again: "We want to be with you, but we don't want to be part of you." Fortunately, there are some Canadians who understand this message. William Thorsell, editor-in-chief of *The Globe and Mail*, has shown himself to be more enlightened than many of his colleagues when he wrote beautifully:

The fact that our solitudes come to "protect and touch and

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greet each other" (in the words of R.M. Rilke) made for a wonderful country. Solitudes cannot do this by living in each other's faces or by pretending that they share each other's essence. They cannot do this by denying each other's distinctiveness.

—The Globe and Mail,  
October 28

This is equivalent to saying that it is about time to get rid of the phony, unrealistic, and unfair pretention that Canada is a homogeneous nation consisting of 10 equal provinces. When one Canadian province votes for its own sovereignty in the proportion of 49.4 percent, should we not wake up to the obvious reality of asymmetry?

#### WE ARE DIFFERENT TOO

Once that asymmetry were recognized, accepted, and operationalized (which, I admit, would require a good deal of imagination and subtlety), we could go a long way together toward maintaining a Canadian union, intensifying economic integration, and pooling many of our resources.

As far as Quebec is concerned, there are two unmistakable elements of a valid equation for the future. A majority of Quebecers are committed federalists. Not only do they remain attached to Canada (let us never forget that Quebecers were the first to call themselves "Canadiens"), but they have repeatedly demonstrated that they are open to federalist formulas, Pepin-Robarts and Meech Lake being the most prominent, both of which would have reduced the sovereigntist movement to marginality.

But at the same time, a solid

majority of Quebecers are profoundly conscious of forming a distinct people, of belonging to a sui generis network of communication. If you are not persuaded, just turn on your television and tune in to Radio-Canada. They are also aware that Canada's Constitution does not recognize this fact and consequently does not allow Quebec to behave as a people. Quebecers are concerned with unemployment, economic security, and social welfare as much as other Canadians. But they believe these matters ought to be dealt with by their own Quebec government rather than by a distant so-called federal Department of Human Resources.

If Canada can one day reconcile these two views, so much the better; Quebecers will be the most loyal Canadians. They will gladly give up the prospect of a sovereign Quebec nation-state in exchange for the renunciation of a Canadian all-inclusive nation-state. If, on the other hand, this tradeoff does not prove possible, another referendum will, of course, be on the agenda. And let us not be mistaken, the question will remain basically the same. It will include sovereignty and a desire for association or partnership.

#### FLEX POLITICS: PARTNERSHIPS

Another manifestation of Canadian misunderstanding is the fact that the referendum question was seen as clear and fair by most Quebecers, while most Canadians outside Quebec (and some within, undoubtedly) saw it as fuzzy, convoluted, and even dishonest. There were two elements to the question. First, there is the element of sovereignty — the expression of autonomy and collective identity made necessary by the deadlock of Canadian

federalism. Sovereignty is a flexible word that allows for limitation (especially in our contemporary world), much more than "independence" (which appears as the opposite of interdependence). "Separation" is a negative word that will never be used to express an as-

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piration toward a very positive project. Canadians should understand that more than any other people. They have never subscribed to "separation" from the British Empire, and Canadian sovereignty was acquired very gradually, indeed. We did not have a Department of Foreign Affairs before 1993.

The other element of the question was "a formal offer of partnership." This corresponds to a deep-rooted willingness on the part of Quebecers to share with other Canadians. Perhaps some Quebecers took their wishes for reality when they thought they could still send members to a Canadian parliament (conceivably on the model of the European parliament) even though Quebec

would be a sovereign nation. But they were happy with "an offer of partnership." It was and will always be important for them, were it only for the record, to express this kind of openness to the rest of Canada, even if other Canadians would insist on thorough separation. For if ever Quebec and Canada become completely separated, Canadians outside Quebec should bear their part of responsibility for such an unfortunate turn of events.

In the meantime, let us all hope it will be possible to share and be united while respecting each other for what we are in a flexible and multinational federation. Let us be together but, please, let us breathe! ♦

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