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Social Change and Ethnic Nationalism: An Historical Analysis of the Separatist Movement in Quebec

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INTRODUCTION
Linguistic conflict between French and English-speaking Canadians has been an enduring feature of Canadian society since the British conquest of New France (Quebec) in 1759. This conflict has taken a variety of forms and revolved around a number of issues in the past two hundred years, ranging from the question of religious and linguistic civil rights to economic inequality and economic dominance. The latest and most significant manifestation of English-French conflict has been the emergence in the mid-1960s of a viable movement for political independence for the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec.

Movements for political independence, of course, are not unique to Canada. Such movements, which are generally viewed as outcomes of conflicts between communal (racial, ethnic, or cultural) groups, are found in many other industrialized states (e.g., Great Britain, Spain, Yugoslavia) as well as in the anticolonialist movements of Africa and Asia. These movements pose an interesting question for social science theory since they contradict traditional theoretical arguments predicting a decline in the significance of communal group ties for political behavior and arguments predicting the ever greater centralization of political functions and authority in the modern political state. However, since nationalist movements are seen as relatively recent phenomena, only in the past few years has there been much research on the nature and development of these movements. Moreover, most research has been concentrated on the communal conflicts that emerge in the early stages of industrialization and political centralization of Third World countries. With the exception of Michael Hechter’s work on Celtic nationalism in Great Britain,¹ little has been done to test various theoretical models of the development of nationalist movements in industrialized states.

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By attempting to analyze systematically the history of French-English conflict in Canada in the light of different theoretical perspectives, this analysis will attempt to present a model of the development of nationalist movements that will be applicable to other industrialized states confronted with such movements, such as Spain and Yugoslavia.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Two basic theoretical perspectives are presented in the literature on communal conflicts and nationalist movements. One is that of assimilation, which sees communal conflict as occurring at the earlier stages of intergroup contact. Communal nationalism is rooted in lingering communal group ties and will decline with increasing modernization. Robert Park and Louis Wirth, among others, have argued that as the processes of urbanization and industrialization break down the ecological segregation of communal groups in urban ghettos, intragroup ties break down and are replaced by ties with members of other communal groups. Cultural values and behavior patterns of the groups become more similar until they fuse. New social groups emerge which are based on different economic functions – occupational groups or social classes. These functionally based groups then replace communal groups as the basis of political cleavages in industrial society (e.g., communal conflict is replaced by class conflict).

By implication, the continuation of communal conflict in industrial society is due to the continuing lack of intergroup ties and contacts resulting from continued ecological segregation or institutional segmentation of the groups. Communal conflict, in other words, results from a lack of modernity on the part of the groups involved and on the part of the social structure.

Recent scholarship on communal conflict suggests a second perspective: that modernization and increasing ties and contacts between communal groups, rather than reducing conflict, may actually intensify it. This scholarship views communal conflict and nationalist movements as a product of the economic relationships between communal groups in industrial societies and not as a product of traditional primordial loyalties. Donald L. Horowitz, R. Melson, and H. Wolpe suggest that the level of communal conflict and support for nationalist movements is greatest not where intergroup contacts are minimal, but, indeed, where they are frequent, and among the most “modern” segments of the communal groups – the educated, urban, bureaucratic (“new”) middle classes.


contacts per se create conflict, but that these contacts make visible certain economic strains which are related to certain types of communal relations. In particular, communal conflicts and nationalist movements are seen as related to strains brought about by economic development in a multiethnic society. Economic development means the reorientation of a large number of individuals toward a new system of rewards. People's aspirations and expectations change as they are mobilized into an urban industrial economy. Individuals from different communal groups come to share a common set of rewards and paths to the rewards and thus compete for those rewards, such as jobs and housing. However, development often leads to a situation in which the demands for scarce rewards cannot keep up with their supply. The result is what Melson and Wolpe call "competitive communalism."  

This communal competition is compounded in a situation in which there has been a history of political and economic inequality between the communal groups, such as a situation of "internal colonialism." The major characteristic of internal colonialism which is of relevance here is that economic and political power in the society is based upon a "cultural division of labor"—that one communal group controls the economic system and the economic surplus, and uses political power, particularly control of the state, to maintain its power. Such a cultural division of labor places members of the subordinate communal group, and particularly the new middle class segment, at a competitive disadvantage. Even if they gain employment in public or private bureaucracies, as long as their communal group remains in subordinate economic and political positions (i.e., does not control the economic and political bureaucracies), they will never be able to advance into top management and administrative positions. The result, it is argued, will be increasing conflict between the groups for control of the economic and political bureaucracies and growing demands on the part of the subordinate group for economic and political autonomy.  

LINGUISTIC SEGMENTATION IN QUEBEC

Before examining the history of French-English relations in Quebec in light of these perspectives, it is necessary to examine the overall pattern of contempo-

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rary linguistic relations in the province. Quebec provides a significant example of the effects of linguistic segmentation and economic strains on the emergence of a viable nationalist movement. Quebec is overwhelmingly French-speaking (81 percent), while the rest of Canada is overwhelmingly English-speaking (90 percent). The coincidence of linguistic, religious (French Canadians are overwhelmingly Catholic, while English Canadians tend to be Protestant), and geographical boundaries since the British conquest has led to the segmentation of religious, political, economic, and educational institutions, the media, occupations, and residences, both in the province of Quebec and in the rest of Canada. While there are no exclusively "French" nor exclusively "English" political parties in the Canadian political system, the Quebec provincial government is often viewed as a champion of French Canadian interests, while the federal government is seen as a predominantly English institution.

**HISTORY OF SEGMENTATION IN QUEBEC: CONFLICT AND ACCOMMODATION**

The roots of linguistic segmentation in Canada go back to the British conquest of Quebec in 1759. Three aspects of the segmentation system that arose out of the conquest contributed to the relative historic stability of French-English relations – i.e., the holding together of Canada – until the 1960s. First, there was a system of institutional “self-segregation” or physical separation between English and French. Second, there were cultural and value differences between English and French which helped justify the institutional segregation. Most observers view the thrust of British institutions and values in Canada as expansionist, both economically and politically. In contrast, French Canadian institutions and values have been viewed as inward-looking, exalting economic and political conservatism and the preservation of French Canadian rights, and, thus, not as a challenge to Anglo-Canadian economic and political power. Third, based on this institutional segregation and difference in values, a system of political accommodation between English and French elites developed to mediate relations between the two groups.

From the French Canadian standpoint, the key institution that developed

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7 Besides the 81 percent of Quebec’s approximately six million people for whom French is the mother tongue, 13 percent listed English and 6 percent listed another language as their mother tongue. Outside Montreal the proportion of the population claiming French ancestry rises to well over 90 percent, and 77 percent speak only French. In the rest of Canada these percentages are reversed. French is the mother tongue of only 6.6 percent of the people. These figures are from the 1971 census of Canada.


after the conquest was the Roman Catholic Church. It was around the Church that the segmented institutions of French Canada were constructed. It was the Church which articulated the values and dominated the culture of French Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it was the Church that helped provide the elite which mediated relations between French Canadians and the anglophone economic and political elite.10

The historical importance of the Church in Quebec was directly attributable to the conquest. While the Church was somewhat influential before the conquest, it was not the dominant institution; it shared influence with commercial and governmental institutions in Quebec. Two consequences of the conquest led to the ascendancy of the Church in Quebec. First, the conquest destroyed the French colonial administrators and most of the bourgeoisie returned to France and their places in Quebec were taken by English administrators and an English bourgeoisie. Second, the British policy of "indirect rule" of colonies - or rule through indigenous elites - reinforced and sanctioned the power of these elites. Since the Church was the one institution which remained almost totally intact after the conquest, it benefited most from British indirect rule.11

The Quebec Act of 1774 formalized the relationship between the British and the Church in Quebec and established the basis for the system of segmentation and accommodation between English and French that developed in Canada. The Act granted the Church a virtual hegemony over the lives of French Canadians. It provided for periodic and compulsory payment of tithes to the Church, and granted the Church the right to build and staff educational and welfare institutions.12 In addition, the Act added to the power of the Church indirectly by strengthening the position of the remains of the feudal "Ancient Regime" in Quebec. Seigneurs (large landowners) were granted power to conscript habitants (those who worked the land) for military service in the defense of the British crown and seigneurial estates. The seigneurs also were granted the power to conscript habitants for unpaid labor in the development of estates and public works projects. In addition, property ownership was required by the Act in order to participate in political activities. Since the Church was the largest landowner in Quebec at the time of the Act, it was the primary benefactor of these provisions.13


From the time of the Conquest until the middle of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church became the "unit of ethnic organization" in French Canada. It provided French Canadians with most of their leadership, local organization, and the means of preserving their identity, as, over the years, anglophone governors, traders, and settlers arrived in Canada, assumed economic and political control, and eventually became a majority. Through the rights granted to it in the Quebec Act and through the system of powerful local parishes, the Church exercised strong legal, social, and moral control over the French population in Quebec. The avowed purpose of these controls was "to preserve two mutually supporting communities," adherents of the Catholic faith and people of French descent, within the context of an increasingly English-speaking country and continent, and to create an "alliance of religion and nationalism" (i.e., French ethnic identity).  

To this end, the Church joined with the British merchant class and, later, a rising governmental elite in a system of elite accommodation: the Church and others (mostly wealthy seigneurs) in the French elite agreed to respect English economic and political prerogatives, and, in effect, become a political minority in Canada, while the English-speaking elite agreed to guarantee the "French" and "Catholic" fact in Quebec, and to respect the rights and prerogatives that the Church gained in the Quebec Act. This accommodation evolved into what William Ormsby views as an example of "consociational democracy" after political reforms in the 1830s and 1840s opened up political participation to more and more of the masses and provided for elected legislative assemblies, both in Quebec (then known also as Lower Canada) and Ontario (Upper Canada). As with European examples of consociational democracy, there was segmentation of institutions and organizations along communal group lines, and political representation at the federal level was based on communal group membership in a system of proportional representation (proportional vis-à-vis Quebec and Upper Canada). This system of elite accommodation set the precedent for future relations between French Catholics and English Protestants in Canada.  

16 William Ormsby, "The Providence of Canada: The Emergence of Consociational Politics," in Consociational Democracy: Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies, Kenneth McRae, ed. (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 269-74. See also S. J. R. Noel, "Consociational Democracy and Canadian Federalism," in the same volume. It should not be implied by this discussion, however, that all French Canadians at all times accepted this system of elite accommodations or that this system was always successful in reducing conflict. As Bonenfaut and Falardeau point out, the system of accommodations led to a gradual identification of the
The cleavage between Protestants and Catholics remained the most significant line of political conflict after Confederation in 1867, and this religious conflict negatively affected anglophone-francophone relations. It would have been difficult for a French Canadian Catholic not to perceive that a threat to Catholics in Canada was a potential threat to the French Canadian community, or for an English Canadian Protestant not to view a challenge to Protestantism as well as a challenge to English Canada. These perceptions were encouraged by the elites of the respective communities, in particular by the Catholic Church in Quebec and by Protestant churches in English Canada. The strength of the Catholic Church in Quebec depended upon the preservation of a relatively homogeneous French-speaking population. Any threat to the homogeneity of the French Canadian community, such as assimilation, was perceived as a threat to the position of the Church. By the same token, Protestant churches viewed assimilation of French Canadians to English-speakers as a way of making them Protestants, and thus forcefully encouraged it.\(^{17}\)

From Confederation through World War II, a number of crises involving religiolinguistic issues placed increasing pressure on the system of accommodations that had developed in Canada. The first major crisis was the Riel rebellion in 1885, in which a force of Metis (half French and half Indians) attempted to gain independence for the territory of Manitoba in response to increasing anglophone migration into the territory. Government troops were sent in and the rebellion was put down. The leader of the rebellion, Louis Riel, was later hanged for his activities, and in the process became a hero for French Canadians and a traitor for English Canadians.\(^{18}\) The Riel crisis was followed shortly by the Manitoba school crisis. In 1890, the Manitoba Legislative Assembly abolished public aid for Catholic schools and restricted the use of French in any school in the territory. Provincial governments in other parts of English Canada followed suit in abolishing or limiting French and Catholic educational rights: New Brunswick, Alberta, and Saskatchewan in 1905 and Ontario in 1913.\(^{19}\)

French Canadian elite (at least those outside the Church) with the British ruling group, which meant an ever-widening gap between the French Canadian rural and urban masses and their leaders. It was partly in response to this collaboration between English and French Canadian elites that the Papineau rebellions broke out in 1837–1838. To the extent that these rebellions had a focused target, it was not only British rule, but also the French Canadian elite. Though the rebellions failed to destroy the French-English elite accommodation system, they were responsible for the Lord Durham Report, which in turn led to political reforms and eventually to Confederation. See Yves Bonenfant and Jean C. Falardeau, “Cultural and Political Implications of French Canadian Nationalism,” in *French Canadian Nationalism*, Ramsey Cook, ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 20–21. See also Ossenberg, “The Conquest Revisited,” p. 127.

\(^{17}\) Van Loon and Whittington, *Canadian Political System*, p. 60; Jean C. Falardeau, “The Role and Importance of the Church in French Canada,” in *French Canadian Society*, Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964); Rioux, *Quebec in Question*.

\(^{18}\) Van Loon and Whittington, *Canadian Political System*, p. 65.

The system of accommodation came closest to breaking down during the conscription crises of World Wars I and II. In particular, the conscription crisis of World War I came close to precipitating civil war between English and French Canada. More than the crisis that preceded them, the conscription crises involved conflicts between language groups rather than religious groups. Both crises arose out of the willingness of the English Canadian community to fight for the British Empire and the reluctance of French Canadians to do so. And both came about after the Canadian Parliament had approved conscription over the strong and sometimes violent protests of French Canadians.\textsuperscript{20}

These crises illustrate certain facts about English-French relations in Canada through World War II. First, they point to the willingness of anglophone Canadians to limit or abolish the rights of francophone and Catholic Canadians outside of Quebec, and the struggle of francophone and Catholic Canadians to maintain these rights – to survive as a group. They also demonstrate the imperfection of the accommodation system. When conflict became too intense, elites were unable to negotiate a settlement, and when issues came down to power, English Canadians would rely on their numerical majority to achieve their goal. The crises always had the same outcome: the French lost. Finally, their net effect was to weaken the position of French Canadians outside Quebec and increase the geographical isolation between the language groups.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN QUEBEC}

Those social changes which mark all modern societies – economic development or industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization – began to take hold in Quebec in the last years of the nineteenth century. The rate of industrial and economic growth in Quebec since that period has not differed significantly from that of the rest of Canada. However, the capital for this economic growth has not come from within Quebec itself. It has largely been imported, most of it coming from English Canada, the United States, and Britain. Nor has ownership of Quebec industry been indigenous. Throughout the twentieth century, the proportion of industrial manufacturing owned by Quebecers has been estimated at being between 5 and 20 percent. In 1961 it was estimated at 15 percent, with the overwhelming majority being owned by anglophones.\textsuperscript{22}

These social changes had profound effects on the system of religiolinguistic segmentation and accommodation that had developed in Canada. Urbanization transformed the rural masses of Quebec into urban masses, and industri-

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Guindon, “Two Cultures,” p. 90.
alization created a new middle class of bureaucrats to service the urban masses. This creation of an urban industrial working class and a bureaucratic class changed the nature of concerns with which communal elites had to cope; concerns over minority rights were replaced by concerns over economic power and inequality. And since access to economic power and equality in the new industrial order came to be determined more along linguistic lines than religious lines, language replaced religion as the primary line of communal cleavage in Canada.\(^{23}\)

Industrialization and urbanization also increased the geographical isolation of French and English language groups by “dooming” French communities outside Quebec. Guindon argues that these French communities, overwhelmingly small town farming communities or communities with labor intensive industries which involved extraction of natural resources (i.e., mining, lumbering, and fishing communities), had been able to survive and even to grow remarkably well before urbanization and industrialization – despite efforts by English Canadians to force assimilation. What made these communities viable was their isolation and the self-sufficient nature of their economies. However, industrialization and urbanization reduced their usefulness to the overall national economy. Increasing productivity in farming has increased the need for capital, not farm hands. Likewise, technological improvements in extractive industries also have contributed to a dwindling need for labor in mining, lumbering, and fishing communities.\(^{24}\)

The consequence of the decline of economic self-sufficiency of French communities outside Quebec has been the assimilation of French Canadians to English-speakers. Industrialization and urbanization increased the ties to the outside economy and made ability to speak English increasingly necessary. French-speakers became bilingual and their children became unilingual English-speakers. This trend has meant the inevitable decline of the population speaking French outside Quebec.\(^{25}\) This, in turn, has meant a redefinition of communal conflict along more geographical lines: Quebec versus the rest of Canada (i.e., English Canada).

These social changes had their most profound effects, however, on the communal elites, both French and English. Partly because of the rise of economic issues, and partly because the basis of communal segmentation shifted from religion to language, urbanization and industrialization signifi-

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\(^{23}\) McRae, “‘Consciociationalism and the Canadian Political System,’” p. 243; Van Loon and Whittington, *Canadian Political System*; Kwavnick, “‘The Roots of French Canadian Discontent’”; Guindon, “‘Two Cultures’”; Spry, “‘Canada: Notes on Two Ideas of Nation in Confrontation.’”


cantly weakened the power of the traditional elite in Quebec, especially the Catholic Church, to speak for the interests of French Canadians. The authority of the Church in Quebec depended upon tight social controls over the population. The most effective way for the Church to exert these social controls was through its system of rural parishes. The migration of rural workers to urban areas and their transformation to industrial workers significantly reduced the ability of the Church to exercise social control.26

Furthermore, the primary concerns of the Church, the protection of minority rights, and the preservation of traditional French Canadian, Catholic, rural culture, increasingly came to be out of tune with the economic concerns of the Quebec urban populace. The Church continued to view communal conflict in Canada in terms of cultural conflict between French Canadian Catholics and English Canadian Protestants rather than in terms of conflict over jobs, economic equality, and economic power. Although the Church created syndicate labor unions and educational and welfare institutions to deal with these concerns, they were neither as effective nor as supported as more secular organizations and institutions which also developed to meet these needs.27

The development of a new urban middle class also challenged English Canadian control of Quebec’s economy. This new middle class – bureaucrats, administrators, white collar workers, and professionals within economic organizations – no longer shared the concerns of the old elite in preserving traditional French Canadian culture. According to Donald V. Smiley, this was a class “committed both by ideology and class interest to the rationalization and modernization of Quebec society. Their frame of reference was secular, materialistic, and democratic.”28 Their individual goals were occupational mobility. However, because corporate business was largely an anglophone preserve, occupational mobility in the private sector was fairly restricted. Therefore, members of the new francophone middle class turned to public institutions, primarily to the government of Quebec, for employment. This development inevitably brought about conflict between this new French middle class seeking more economic power and the centers of government and business dominated by anglophone Canadians trying to preserve their economic power – an example of what Melson and Wolpe call “competitive communalism.”29

26 Pious, “Canada and the Crisis of Quebec,” pp. 55–56; Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System.

27 Guindon, “Two Cultures”; Pious, “Canada and the Crisis of Quebec”; Falarneau, “The Role and Importance of the Church”; Smiley, Canada in Question; Fernand Dumont, The Vigil of Quebec (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

28 Smiley, Canada in Question, p. 146.

Industrialization and urbanization also increased the power of the provincial government in Quebec. The traditional French Canadian elite had always been suspicious of public authority and had tried to keep it to a minimum. In particular, because the Church saw a strong provincial government as a threat to its privileges, it created a system of social and religious thought which was both authoritarian and antistatist. Smiley writes that "although successive Quebec governments mounted a stubborn defense of provincial autonomy... there was little disposition to use these provincial powers imaginatively."

This doctrinaire adherence to antistatist values became a justification for French Canadian political and religious leaders to cooperate in the economic domination of Quebec by anglophone capital.

Industrialization and urbanization eventually forced the provincial government to take a more active role in Quebec society, especially when the institutions set up by the Church proved inadequate. These social changes also provided for government with a large clientele – the new middle class. The interests of this class lay in the expansion of the public sector and in the bureaucratization of public and private institutions: the larger the public sector bureaucracies, the more of these jobs were available. The more activist role of the provincial government, in turn, further weakened the Church and led inevitably to its displacement from its dominant role in health, education, and welfare – as well as to the bureaucratization of the Church itself and to the declining political influence of its leaders. The expansion of the public sector also led to more intervention than before in the English-dominated private sector by provincial authorities.

The decline in the power of the Church in Quebec, the rise to political power of the growing urban, bureaucratic middle class, and the ascendancy of the provincial government culminated with the initiation in 1960 of what has been called the Quiet Revolution. Although these changes had been occurring for some time, 1960 marks a most significant point in the transformation of Quebec society and its institutions and in language group relations in Canada. In 1960 the traditional political elite, the Union Nationale, was defeated in the provincial elections by the Liberal Party. Since coming to power under Maurice Duplessis in the 1930s, the Union Nationale had been the advocate of the conservative antistatist philosophy of the traditional politico-religious elite. The party had cooperated with English Canadian business interests in the province and, while advocating greater provincial autonomy, had limited the role of the provincial government in Quebec's society and economy. In con-

30 Smiley, Canada in Question.
31 Ibid., p. 145; Guindon, "Two Cultures"; Kwavnick, "The Roots of French Canadian Discontent."
32 Smiley, Canada in Question; Guindon, "Social Unrest"; idem, "Two Cultures"; Pious, "Canada and the Crisis of Quebec."
trast, the Liberals had been the advocates of a more active and secular provincial government, and in their election struggle had been supported by elements of Quebec's bureaucratic middle class. Although it is questionable how much this philosophical debate over the role of the provincial government in Quebec society had to do with the outcome of the election as compared with such other issues as corruption and patronage within the Union Nationale, the important point is that the Liberals won the election and were able to initiate the Quiet Revolution.

The Quiet Revolution was an attempt on the part of the new Liberal government to modernize the institutions in Quebec in order to make them more relevant to an industrialized economy. To the extent that the Quiet Revolution had a goal it was to obtain a larger share of Quebec's economic growth for Quebecers. In order to modernize Quebec's institutions and achieve more economic equality, the Liberal government instituted a series of reforms, the most significant of which was the secularization of educational and welfare institutions in the province. Control over education was taken away from the Church and placed in a newly created ministry of education, and a comprehensive program of educational reform was undertaken from kindergarten through university levels. A system of provincially financed junior colleges, or CEGEPs, replaced the old system of Church-controlled "college classiques." Health and welfare systems were also taken out of the hands of the Church and were rationalized and bureaucratized.

The Liberal government also took a more active role in the provincial economy, establishing an office of economic planning and regional development, and challenged English Canadian control of the private sector of Quebec's economy. The most significant act in this direction was the nationalization of eleven privately owned power corporations and their merger with the smaller but publicly owned Hydro Quebec in 1962. This action furthered the interests of the French middle class in that it increased the opportunities for francophone Quebecers, particularly in the professional and management categories.

Despite these reforms, the Quiet Revolution failed to achieve its overall


35 Spry, "Canada: Notes on Two Ideas of Nation in Confrontation," p. 185; Smiley, Canada in Question, pp. 147-58; Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System.

36 Smiley, Canada in Question, pp. 147-48; Spry, "Canada: Notes on Two Ideas of Nation in Confrontation," p. 185; Guindon, "Two Cultures"; Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System.
goal of economic equality and power for francophone Quebecers. In 1965, the federal government commissioned the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (the “Bi and Bi” Commission) to examine the problems in English-French relations in Canada. The Commission’s report, first published in 1969, saw the root of English-French conflict in the economic inequality between the groups and the lack of French control over economic institutions in Quebec. These conclusions were based in large part on data collected in the 1961 Canadian census, which showed notable disparities in income between Canadians of French and British origin. Those of British origin earned 110 percent of the average national income in 1961, but those of French origin earned only 86 percent of the average. In no province was the inequality between English and French greater than in Quebec; in that province, those of British origin earned 140 percent of the provincial average, while those of French origin earned 91 percent – a difference of 49 percent. In fact, of all ethnic groups in Quebec, only those of Italian origin had lower average incomes than the French.37

In addition to the economic inequality pointed out in the “Bi and Bi” Commission Report, statistics on unemployment show that, aside from the Atlantic provinces, Quebec consistently has had the highest levels of unemployment in Canada – and it is safe to argue that it is not the high-income anglophones who have been the unemployed. Moreover, aside from the one or two years before the Expo ’67 World’s Fair, when major construction took place in the province, Quebec’s unemployment picture has worsened relative to the rest of Canada throughout most of the years since World War II.38

While the data in the “Bi and Bi” Commission Report are mostly for a year (1961) before the reforms of the Quiet Revolution began to have an impact on Quebec society, nonetheless they are significant. For the first time the depth of the inequality between English and French Canadians was quantified. These data provided “lessons” and conclusions for those who looked at them, especially the political elite in Quebec. For some the data demonstrated the very real economic effects of the minority status of French language and culture in Canada. That economic inequality was greatest in Quebec – the predominantly French province – was especially shocking. And for some the data led to an additional conclusion: that political and social reforms undertaken by the provincial government would have little impact on the economic position of French Quebecers without achieving greater autonomy for Quebec, either within or outside Confederation. In turn, these conclusions had

an effect on the way in which Quebec’s political elite was to deal with problems in French-English relations during the 1960s and early 1970s.

**Changes in Federal-Provincial Financial Relationships**

The costs of the reforms of the Quiet Revolution led the Liberal government of Quebec to impose heavy economic demands on federal authorities. The most significant of these demands was far greater financial autonomy for Quebec in what, by the early 1960s, had become a highly centralized taxing structure dominated by the federal government.\(^{39}\)

The centralization of the tax structure arose out of the fiscal crisis created by the depression of the 1930s and World War II. The near bankruptcy of many provinces during the 1930s required that the federal government take over much of the responsibility for welfare and old age benefits. The outbreak of war in 1939 gave federal authorities moral justification and legal authority to take over all remaining governmental spending initiatives from the provinces. The federal government occupied much of the field of direct taxation to the exclusion of the provinces, and, in lieu of this lost revenue, paid the provinces direct compensation or “tax rentals.”\(^{40}\)

After the war Ottawa sought to perpetuate the centralized tax structure through a series of share-cost programs funded jointly by provincial revenues and federal grants. The catch for the provinces was that the federal grants were conditional; to receive these grants, the provinces had to join in programs, such as unemployment insurance or health care, which had been established at the initiative of the federal government. This highly centralized tax structure lasted until the early 1960s. Ottawa’s attitude during this period was that the ability to tax was an important power and that if the federal government could convince the provinces to give up at least some of their authority in this area, it would enhance its own role in the economy, and it would further national integration of what, for the most part, had been a series of regional economies. However, the economic slowdown in 1960–1961 and the seeming inability of the federal government to deal effectively with economic problems increased the pressure for some kind of decentralization of the tax structure. The Conservative government in power during the late 1950s and early 1960s was more receptive to decentralization than the Liberal governments which had preceded it.\(^{41}\)

The greatest pressure for decentralization, however, came from the provinces, and especially from Quebec, which had never been happy with the

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\(^{39}\) Smiley, *Canada in Question*, p. 149.


centralized tax structure. The Quebec government had never joined in any of the shared cost programs nor accepted any conditional grants from the federal government. Quebec viewed such conditional grants as unconstitutional intrusions into provincial prerogatives. The Quiet Revolution and expanding social programs in Quebec during the 1960s placed the provincial Liberal government in a dilemma: it needed more revenue to finance these social programs, and the only source for these revenues was the conditional grants from the federal government; however, to accept these grants would be politically unpopular both with the more traditional political elite and with the left wing of the Liberal party. The Liberal government attempted to solve this dilemma through compromise; it would accept certain conditional grants, while pushing even more vigorously for decentralization of the tax structure.\footnote{McKinsey, “Dimensions of National Political Integration,” pp. 342–44; Smiley, Canada in Question, pp. 113–14; Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System.}

This pressure from Quebec, with the support of the other provinces, led Ottawa in 1962 to undertake to withdraw partially from the taxes that it had previously shared with the provinces. In 1965, Quebec won an even greater victory when the federal government agreed to allow provinces to “opt out” of any shared cost programs without fiscal penalty. Only Quebec chose to opt out of all shared cost programs.\footnote{Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System, p. 221; Smiley, Canada in Question, p. 343.}

By 1965, then, Quebec had attained a substantial degree of fiscal autonomy or special status. It had secured over 50 percent of all income tax collected in the province and it used revenues to create its own programs in such areas as hospital insurance, old age assistance, unemployment assistance, and youth allowances. These provincial programs were similar to programs created under federal conditional grants but, for Quebec’s provincial governments, the symbolic effect of Quebec sponsorship was the important element.\footnote{McKinsey, “Dimensions of National Political Integration,” p. 344.}

However, the expansion of these social programs required Quebec to seek more sources of revenue. Again, the provincial government made demands on Ottawa for concessions in taxing powers, including the termination of all federal conditional grant programs and the unconditional return of all taxes collected in Quebec. On these points the federal government refused, arguing that its own fiscal requirements dictated that it make no more concessions to the provinces in terms of tax revenue. The federal government was apprehensive that any more concessions would impair critically its capacity to undertake effective economic stabilization policies, and, after 1966, it became a federal rule of thumb that it required at least 50 percent of the personal tax field throughout Canada to carry out these policies effectively.\footnote{Smiley, Canada in Question, p. 119; McKinsey, “Dimensions of National Political Integration,” p. 343; Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System.}

There has been no recentralization of the federal government’s taxing au-
authority since 1966. Nonetheless, the refusal of the federal government to grant any more tax concessions to the provinces created economic problems for provincial governments. It has meant that expanding provincial responsibilities and programs had to be met with the existing proportion of federal tax credits.\(^{46}\) This, in turn, has meant that the provinces either would have to increase provincial taxes or cut back on social programs. Such a dilemma was especially difficult for the Quebec government since it was politically committed to an expanding role for the public sector in the province. If new social programs had to be cut back because of a lack of new revenue, it meant not only that the goals of the Quiet Revolution likely would go unfulfilled but also, in more immediate terms, that limits would have to be placed on the growth of public bureaucracies and thus on the creation of new bureaucratic jobs. For the new political elite in Quebec, and especially for the left wing of the Liberal Party, federal fiscal policies after 1966 came to be seen as another unwarranted intrusion of the federal government into provincial affairs and an attempt to interfere with provincial priorities. For some political leaders in Quebec this led to the conclusion that as long as Quebec remained within Confederation and had to share fiscal authority with another government, it would lack the ability to make its own economic decisions and carry through with them.

**SOCIAL CHANGES, CHANGES IN POLITICAL ELITES, AND THE EMERGENCE OF SEPARATISM**

Questions of economic inequality and fiscal authority are issues that by their very nature have been less amenable to solution within the old system of accommodations than were such issues as minority rights. The old French Canadian elite, especially the Catholic Church, saw as its constituency all French Canadians, inside and outside Quebec. As long as minority rights – i.e., the rights of Catholic and French speakers outside Quebec – was an important basis for communal conflict, the existence of Canada as a nation was never seriously questioned. The rights of French Canadians outside Quebec could not be guaranteed by Quebec leaving Confederation.

However, the assimilation to English of French Canadians outside Quebec meant a decline in the salience of the issues of minority rights. As opposed to minority rights, economic inequality and fiscal authority are issues that do lend themselves to solutions which bring Quebec’s place in Confederation into question. And because the Quebec provincial government became the chief institution for making economic and fiscal demands on behalf of French Canadians, the new political elite in Quebec represented in the Liberal Party was less likely to perceive a constituency outside of Quebec and conflicts were put in terms of Quebec versus Canada.\(^{47}\)


\(^{47}\) Guindon, *Modernization of Quebec: Joy, Languages in Conflict.*
The assimilation of French Canadians outside Quebec also brought into question the position of French Canadians within Quebec. Concern increased on the part of Quebec's political leaders during the 1960s that French Canadians would eventually become a numerical minority within Quebec itself. These concerns were occasioned by two demographic trends in Quebec: a decline in the birthrate of French Canadians and an increase in the number of nonfrancophone immigrants, most of whom were opting for English rather than French. For a century before 1960 the proportion of francophones in Quebec had held at about 80 percent, their higher birthrate overcoming the effects of immigration and migration of nonfrancophones from other provinces. The high birthrate was encouraged by French Canadian leaders as a way to guarantee against assimilation and was known as the "Revenge of the Cradle." During the 1950s and early 1960s, however, the francophone birth rate was about 30 percent lower than that of other Quebecers. It was estimated by some demographers that by the year 2000 the francophone proportion of the Quebec population would decline to about 70 percent for the province, and to no more than about 50 percent for Montreal.48

There also has been concern among the French Canadian elite that it was losing much of its clientele in Quebec as more French-speakers were forced to learn English to compete in the industrial labor market. While there is little evidence that the retention rate of the French language among those with French ethnic origin in Quebec is declining, there is evidence that more francophones are becoming bilingual.49 Because becoming bilingual has been the first step in assimilating to English in other provinces and because in Quebec bilingual French ethnic have higher incomes than unilingual French ethnic, the fears of the French Canadian elite are based on a rational perception of the situation. The alternatives are clear. Seek greater guarantees for the French language in Quebec by making French the only official language of the province and forcing industry to adapt, or separate Quebec from Canada to preserve French Canadian language and culture. The alternative is to lose French Canadian language and culture and hence a role for the French Canadian elite.50

These concerns of the French Canadian elite suggest that, in addition to the rise of new economic issues and the increasing convergence of language and geographical boundaries, the increasing political, economic, and social inte-

48 Herbert Charbonneau, Jacques Henripin, and Jacques Legare, Le Devoir (Montreal), 4 November 1969, cited in Smiley, Canada in Question. Such estimates were based on the assumption of equal birthrates between francophones and anglophones in Quebec and a net immigration of 30,000 per year into the province, of which 15 percent were francophones. If such assumptions were to hold, the percentage of francophones in Quebec would decline to 71.6 percent, and in the Montreal areas to 52.7 percent by the year 2000.
49 Lieberson, Language and Ethnic Relations: Joy, Languages in Conflict.
50 Van Loon and Whittington, Canadian Political System, pp. 73–74.
gration of Quebec has made elite accommodations more difficult. The more integration there is between Quebec and the rest of Canada, the more French and English cultures will converge and the more unnecessary will the old system of elite accommodations become. Since one of the primary roles of the French Canadian elite has been to find methods of accommodation with English Canadian elites, the less necessary elite accommodation becomes the more unnecessary the French Canadian elite becomes. Van Loon and Whittington suggest, accordingly, that it is actually to the advantage of the French Canadian elite to maintain the French-English cleavage to a certain degree.51

The system of elite accommodations was further strained during the 1960s by the fact that the new French Canadian elite did not enjoy the hegemony that was enjoyed by the traditional French Canadian elite. This new elite could not say with any degree of confidence that it spoke for all segments of French Canadian society in Quebec as did the traditional elite before 1960. Indeed, the traditional elite, as represented in the Union Nationale, remained strong during the 1960s and even regained political power in Quebec from 1966 to 1970. Also, the left wing of the Liberal Party criticized the language and economic policies of the party, demanding that it go further in strengthening the French language in Quebec and institute more radical social and economic reforms.52

The late 1960s also witnessed polarization of the stands taken by Ottawa and Quebec on issues concerning Quebec’s place in Confederation. Both the federal and Quebec governments became more disposed to state the issues in doctrinaire and symbolic terms. When the Union Nationale returned to power in 1966, it shifted the focus of federal-provincial conflict to more symbolic matters of constitutional reform (i.e., granting permanent special status to Quebec) and the role of Quebec in international affairs.53

In 1968 the federal strategy for dealing with Quebec’s demands also changed with the ascension of Pierre Trudeau to the Prime Ministership. Trudeau, himself a French Quebecer, believed in strong federalism and was concerned that any form of special status for Quebec was a threat to a strong federal system in Canada. Therefore, the policy of the federal government shifted to opposition to further Quebec demands for special status and a reduction of those elements of special status that Quebec had already acquired. The change can be seen in the shift from subsidizing Quebec’s ability to speak for French Canada to promoting the federal government’s responsibility to guarantee the rights of French Canadians anywhere in Canada. Another indication of this change was the federal government’s preoccupation

51 Ibid., p. 73.
52 Smiley, Canada in Question; Guindon, “Two Cultures”; idem, Modernization of Quebec; Kwawnick, “The Roots of French Canadian Discontent.”
53 Smiley, Canada in Question, pp. 152, 156.
with the reports of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, which emphasized the rights of French Canadians more than the rights of Quebec.54

In this milieu of competition among the segments of Quebec’s political elites and increasing polarization between Quebec and Ottawa, political independence was proposed seriously as a solution for the economic and cultural problems of Francophones in Quebec. Independence was proposed as a means of ensuring the survival of the French language and culture in Quebec and of providing Quebec with the fiscal autonomy many felt necessary to carry out political and economic changes. Although political independence had been proposed from time to time since the British Conquest, it was not until the 1960s that it became a significant intellectual and political force in Quebec. Small separatist parties began to appear in the early 1960s, but only after 1968, when these small parites were united into the Parti Quebecois under the leadership of René Leveque, did the separatist movement have a significant place in Quebec electoral politics.55

The Parti Quebecois first competed in the 1970 provincial election and it received approximately a quarter of the votes cast. In each succeeding election (1973, 1976) it increased its share of the vote, and in November 1976 it won the provincial election with approximately 40 percent of the vote. However, this victory of the Parti Quebecois may have been decided less on the issue of separatism than on issues of the provincial economy and corruption in the incumbent Liberal government. The Parti Quebecois itself emphasized the economy and corruption over separatism and vowed that the question of political independence would be settled in a later referendum.56

The separatist movement also has manifested itself in nonelectoral politics. Some groups of separatists, such as the Front for the Liberation of Quebec (FLQ), have favored independence through the use of terrorism. Although terrorism never enjoyed widespread popular support in Quebec, it was occasionally disruptive. The terrorist movement culminated in October 1970 in the FLQ crisis, when terrorists kidnapped and murdered a minister in the provincial government and federal troops were called into Quebec. After this incident, what support there had been for terrorist tactics quickly disappeared.57

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented tends to support the competitive-communalism perspective on nationalist movements—that modernization, industrialization, and increasing economic integration promote the likelihood that nationalist movements will develop among minority communal groups in the social system. In the case of Quebec, these changes led to the development of an urban francophone bureaucratic middle class. The interests of this class have been in obtaining occupational mobility and in gaining economic power in an economic structure where speaking English historically has been an advantage. To segments of this class, a politically independent Quebec would provide a comparative advantage in their competition for economic power and mobility: an independent Quebec would be a unilingual French state and, thus, speaking French would become a competitive edge. An independent Quebec also would not have to share its tax revenues with the federal government. Thus, theoretically, more tax money would be available within Quebec to finance new social services, new public bureaucracies, and thus more jobs for the new middle class.

Economic development and integration have also meant competitive communalism at another level—that of the elites. These social changes have had profound effects on the nature of segmentation and communal accommodation in Canada. The relevant communal groups changed from religious to linguistic groups, which in turn led to a decline in the power of traditional elites, particularly the power of the Catholic Church in Quebec. The new francophone elite is more oriented toward economic concerns—power, inequality—and less interested in purely cultural concerns than was the old elite. Thus, while the old francophone elite could reach agreement with anglophones on the preservation of a French Catholic society in Quebec, the new francophone elite competes with the federal government over the division of tax revenues and other governmental powers between federal and provincial levels. The result is that the new francophone elite (even outside the Parti Quebecois) views increased Quebec autonomy favorably as a means of attaining greater financial resources.

Finally, the evidence indicates that structural integration between English and French Canada has not reduced the amount of segmentation between individual anglophones and francophones, as would be suggested by the assimilationist perspective. Economic development has reduced the number of French communities outside of Quebec, thus actually increasing the geographical concentration of the language groups. Within Quebec, economic development has not reduced the ecological segregation of anglophone and francophone residents, nor has it led to a universalistic allocation of economic roles. Rather, economic roles continue to be allocated on the basis of membership in a particular language group. Thus, economic inequality has been
superimposed on traditional cultural cleavages, as is suggested in the internal colonialism perspective. It would appear, then, that as long as this cultural division of labor continues and as long as structural integration between English and French Canada is not translated into integration between individual anglophones and francophones, nationalism will remain a strong political force in Quebec.