

## Correspondence

### Québec's Politics

To the Editors: May I suggest that Bernard Murchland's article on the Québec-Canada debate ("The Politics of Vengeance," January-February) is a little bit too dramatic? The facts are right (although I doubt his proportions on the asbestos workers) and the background sensitively presented. But some sober thoughts are missing.

The "united" Canada that is gone was united because the two linguistic groups were pursuing different paths. But now both groups are competing for the same jobs in Montreal and elsewhere and federal parties cannot any longer have different platforms depending on the language of the audience. Economic development and modern media have been integrating Canada and thereby creating tensions that did not arise in a condition of mere juxtaposition.

Also, a party that got into power with 42 per cent of the popular vote on the promise of good government after a government that piled up more mistakes than governments usually do, will have difficulty carrying 51 per cent on the road to independent sovereignty. There has always been in Québec a tension between those who wanted to keep the culture pure and those who sought association with some anglophones to succeed on the Continent. The pendulum swung farther one way this time, and one can expect it to swing back, although of course not as far as previously.

Anti-French racism has been a constant in English Canada, but one should not overlook the proved ability of English Canadian politicians to take the road of compromise. And one should not be too apocalyptic in forecasting a collapse of the nine provinces without Québec. After all, anglophone Canadians have remained themselves for practically two centuries in spite of the proximity to another culture that has always been more powerful and frequently very attractive. It seems to me

that it is the vulnerability of the new Québec to "americanisation" that is generally underestimated. Let me add also that Alaska is "cut off" from the forty-eight states. Ontario and the Maritimes could very well communicate through another Alaskan highway, this time through northern New England. There is a nice reciprocity in the situation that would make it secure.

It still remains the case, however, that the present situation has, in my opinion, the makings of deep change rather than of catastrophe. I even believe that a Québec securely French, just as Ontario is securely English, is less of a threat to my idea of Canada—and more likely to pull its own weight in confederation—than a Québec constantly angered by an extremely powerful Québec anglophone minority.

While I grant that not all in René Lévesque's worldview is morally lovable, the label "politics of vengeance" seems to me a little unfair.

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Bernard Murchland Responds:

Mr. Despland and I don't have much to argue about. Whether or not I was too dramatic seems a matter of taste. I do agree with him that the P.Q. will encounter difficulties along the road to independent sovereignty. Recent polls indicate as much. And if Claude Ryan, former editor of the influential *Le Devoir*, becomes head of Québec's Liberal party (and it seems certain he will), then the opposition will be stiff indeed. I agree too that the prognosis is for deep change rather than catastrophe. This, however, is predicated upon an eventual defeat of the P.Q.'s policies. They clearly want independence and, indeed, act in many ways as if they already had it. Vengeance is the name of the game. I'll stick by that term. I think we can write off the Alaskan highway analogy as a bit of fanciful thinking on Mr. Despland's part. If Québec becomes independent, I can imagine no way in which the Atlantic Provinces will remain an integral part of the Dominion. But, of course, I can't be too sure about the rest of the country.

## WORLDVIEW

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Philip A. Johnson, *Publisher*

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