

Feature:

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REFERENDUM GETTING OH SO CLOSE

by Christopher Michaud

With the Quebec referendum approaching rapidly, many Islanders seem concerned as to the possible consequences of a sovereign Quebec to Prince Edward Island. While the referendum itself is still two weeks away, emotions in Quebec are running high, and so are emotions on the Island.

This is supposed to be a news story, but news of the Quebec referendum is getting old. Parizeau said this, Bouchard said that, Chretien replied this, Johnson rebutted that. We've been bombarded with the question over and over again, and fuelled by more and more talk on behalf of politicians. The question remains, "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?"

Feelings just after the unveiling of the question were high and mixed. Jacques Parizeau declared it "giving yourself a country". Lucienne Robillard, the federal government's pointperson for the referendum called it "long and ambiguous". Guy Bertrand claimed the whole idea was "illegal and immoral". An advisor to the Prime Minister said "We already have a constitutional proposal. It's called the 'Option of Canada'" (*MacLean's*, September issue).

Parizeau's speech at the unveiling of the question drew a few tears from the crowd, apparently proud something was finally being done to save Quebec. It drew no tears from federalists, only a mix of concern, fear, and optimism that the separatist movement will lose again. Now, almost two months after the unveiling of the question, feelings are more of frustration, desperation and anger.

I took the opportunity to write this piece because it gave me a chance to say what I wanted on the whole thing. However, I've discovered that I needed a little more of an education on the whole question before passing judgement. Prof. Berardinelli of the Modern Languages Department, feels the same way. "Looking at it (the sovereignty question) while examining other countries who have declared their independence, like Portugal," says Prof. Berardinelli, "I would say 'Why not?'. But on another level, I can not say 'yes' or 'no' because I do not know enough about the history, economics or politics of Quebec."

Is that not the same for a large majority of us? I am from Quebec, lived

there all my life, and even I can't say whether sovereignty is a good idea or not. Feelings enter into account, clouding any other view which may arise.

Unfortunately, however, the sovereignty of Quebec is not about feelings, but money and economics. "Money is at the base of all things," says Prof. Blouin, Dean of the Department of Modern Languages. "As a member of the teaching profession, the transfer payments from Ottawa that educational institutions receive are a benefit, as UPEI has benefited, by way of Immersion classes," says Prof. Blouin, "But if Quebec separates, what will happen to the rights and privileges of minorities, of the anglophones of Quebec, who wish to learn to become bilingual? Will Canada as a whole abandon the idea of bilingualism?" Prof. Blouin also stated that "the people need to be explained why this is what is happening. I feel handcuffed by the whole situation, because I still have many good friends in Quebec, and it is also my home, and where I was born."

How many Canadians feel in the dark


on this whole thing? How do many Islanders feel? A number of students I talked to feel the whole idea is a farce, and that it is nothing but the talk of politicians, and not the talk of the people themselves. One concern is how it will affect the Island. UPEI student Lee Ellen Pottie said, "Economically, there should be no real effect to the Island. If Quebec separates and Canada agrees to an economic pact, more transfer payments will result, which will be a benefit to the Island."

As a former resident of Quebec, a Maritimer and Acadian, Ms. Pottie said, "I am disgusted -- they are fighting over the same old stuff over and over again. No matter if Quebec declares it's own state, they are distinct, but so is Canada as a whole. That's why people live here. Canada is distinct as a whole, not just any one province. They (the politicians) are being ridiculous, idealising an old dream that, hopefully, will never come true, especially where Canada is concerned."

We will have to wait a little while

until we know how the people of Quebec feel, and if the old dream becomes a reality or not.

I am proud to call Canada my home. It is the greatest country in the world, and I don't want some fast talking politician to mess it up. I remember someone saying once that George-Etienne Cartier brought the Province of Quebec into Confederation in the first place, and that he was to blame for Quebec wanting out now. However, I remember a quote from my Quebec History books where Cartier said, "Avant tout, je suis Canadien" -- "Before all else, I am Canadian." There are days when I would like to take the words of Charles de Gaulle and twist them from "Vive le Quebec Libre" to "Vive le Canada Unie" -- "Long Live a United Canada." I am a proud citizen of Canada, but I am also proud of my roots in Quebec. My only hope is that my Canada stays together, and that my children have the opportunity to live in a united Canada, a strong Canada with Quebec as one of its provinces, one of its children.



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