

Partition

'Partition' means the geographical division of a territory, particularly for the purpose of separating national, ethnic or religious groups that are unable to accept the legitimacy of a common state. It has been used for this purpose in Ireland, India, and Palestine, all of which were under British rule at the time, and more recently in the former British colony of Cyprus.

In Canada the term usually refers to proposals for the 'partition' of Quebec as a response to French-Canadian or Quebec nationalism. As early as 1833 some anglophone merchants in Montreal proposed separating that city from Lower Canada (Quebec) and joining it with Upper Canada (Ontario). Lord Durham contemplated the idea of creating a third province that would include parts of both Upper and Lower Canada, but did not include it in the report he produced in 1839 (known as the Durham Report).

The modern partitionist movement in Quebec arose after the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976 and gained considerable support among Quebec Anglophones following the very narrow federalist victory in the referendum of 1995. Partitionists argue that if Quebec becomes a sovereign state, those areas of Quebec where most of the population wishes to remain part of Canada should be entitled to do so. In practice this is usually understood to mean the areas of southern and western Quebec where Anglophones are concentrated and the northern areas that are still populated mainly by Aboriginal peoples. The ethnic argument for partition is at times reinforced by other arguments, such as the claim that northern areas ceded to Quebec by the federal government in 1898 and 1912 would legally revert to Canada, or even the alleged requirement of a 'corridor' between Ontario and New Brunswick.

Although the federal government has never explicitly endorsed the idea of 'partition', it has occasionally hinted that 'partition' might accompany secession, as it did when Ireland gained its independence from the United Kingdom or when Virginia attempted to secede from the United States. The implication is that Quebec voters should contemplate this risk before voting for sovereignty. Quebec nationalists have responded by claiming that the territory of Quebec is indivisible and that the right of self-determination applies only to Quebec as a whole, not to areas or groups within the province.

Sources :

- C.G. Charron, *La Partition du Québec: de Lord Durham à Stéphane Dion* (Montreal: VLB, 1996).
- S. Reid, *Canada Remapped: How the Partition of Quebec Will Reshape the Nation* (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1992).
- W.F. Shaw & L. Albert, *Partition: The Price of Quebec's Independence: a realistic look at the possibility of Quebec separating from Canada and*

becoming an independent state (Montreal: Thornhill, 1980).

- G. Stevenson, *Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).