

STRESS AND COPING WITH QUEBEC'S IMPENDING REFERENDUM: A *REPATRIATION ACT*

Lawrence McDonough and Timothy Thomas

Canada as a nation is evolving socially, economically and politically. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, globalization, and the redistribution of federal and provincial responsibilities contribute to the ongoing changes in Canadian life. These changes have produced a palpable level of anxiety and stress. Canadian political institutions also are evolving as a response to new conflicts among different and overlapping groups. One of the most trying of these evolutions implicates the very unity of the nation. In this paper we examine the stresses being placed on Canadians, and particularly the anxiety being felt by Canadians in Quebec. We consider first some of the prognostications that have been made in the event of a referendum favouring the separation of Quebec from Canada. We also consider suggested institutional changes which have been offered as solutions to the unity issue. The paper discusses various strategic options such as "Plan A" (constitutional renewal) — tentatively initiated by the Calgary declaration of the provincial premiers — and the more "hardline" approach of "Plan B," which entails discussion of the serious consequences for all Canadians (especially Quebecers) in the event of Quebec secession. Such consequences include the potential revocation of Canadian citizenship of anyone electing to become a Quebec citizen, discussions about borders, the submission of debt questions to international arbitration, and the potential partitioning of the newly created nation-state to accommodate the citizenship desires of alienated groups contained within it who do not choose to alter their citizenship.

It is with the latter that this paper concerns itself. Ironically, a Southam-COMPAS poll conducted in May 1997 indicated that half of Quebecers — including 45 per cent of the province's francophones — agreed with the principle that if Canada is divisible, so too is Quebec. Strong majorities agreed that specific regions of Quebec, such as Montreal's West Island, the Eastern Townships and the Outaouais, have the right to remain part of Canada if other parts of Quebec decide to secede. Seventy-five per cent of Quebecers — including 72 per cent of francophone respondents — supported the right

of northern Quebec's Cree and Inuit to remain in Canada under the same circumstances.¹

In the event of Quebec secession, Quebec's Aboriginal concerns will differ considerably from those of the former province's anglophone and allophone communities. The bulk of Quebec's Aboriginal communities are contained within unique, specified geographical spaces that do not consist of many residents whose citizenship claims would differ from the local majority in the event of Quebec secession. The same cannot be said of Quebec's anglophone and allophone communities which are much more inter-connected with Quebec's francophone majority. Indeed, Montreal's west-island — long considered a bastion of anglo-Quebecers — is now over fifty per cent francophone. Other international examples of the partitioning of communities reveal that those of the culturally and geographically inter-connected variety often have resulted in unintended consequences such as violence, despite generous sentiments such as those made evident by the Southam-COMPAS poll. It is the consequences of such "inter-connectedness" that this paper intends to resolve and it is for this reason that the proposal contained within this paper — which involves the geographical relocation of citizens — is more relevant to Quebec's anglophone and allophone communities rather than its Aboriginal ones.

A defining characteristic of the literature concerning Quebec's potential secession is a multidimensional and possibly protracted period of uncertainty coupled with considerable institutional change. These uncertainties and institutional change can be expected to increase anxiety and stress felt by all Canadians but particularly by Quebecers. We argue, therefore, that some action can be taken at the political level which would serve to reduce the anxiety of Canadians in Quebec as well as the rest of Canada independently of political strategies of the

¹ P. Wells, "Quebecers divided on partition" *Montreal Gazette* (15 May 1997) A1.

federal or provincial governments in the unity debate. To this effect, we propose a repatriation act (our "Plan C") designed to provide a strategy-neutral response to the build-up of anxiety and stress which surrounds any referendum debate and the aftermath of the referendum. In the event of a secessionist referendum result and a failed "Plan A" — be it incremental or negotiated — we believe that our "Plan C" would minimize societal disruption and upheaval during the period dominated by the conflicts forecast under "Plan B."

PROGNOSTICATIONS

Prior to the Referendum of 1995

Prior to the Referendum of 1995 there was a discernible split between English-speaking and French-speaking academic perspectives with respect to the aftermath of a Yes vote.² The English-speaking authors tended to consider the cost of uncertainty sufficiently great to force rapid negotiations and, hence, inevitable secession. On the other hand, the French-speaking authors suggested that negotiations would be necessary, but extended, due to the uncertainties that would ensue regarding economic conditions as well as the leadership of the rest-of-Canada (ROC).

The striking theme in all of these perspectives is the role of uncertainty. There would be uncertainty regarding the legal structures and the rule of law which some suggest might precipitate sporadic violence. Uncertainty would surround a number of economic decisions at the national and provincial level as well as at the firm and individual levels. Uncertainty also would create political instability within Canada and within Quebec. From this perspective, prognostications about secession are simply views about the ways in which individuals within society and society as a whole might deal with very stressful events in which uncertainty plays a key role.

After the Referendum

Following the 1995 referendum many academic assessments ensued but the one overriding theme that permeated and continues to permeate all of the literature is that of uncertainty — both socially and institutionally. Robert Young concludes that "... in the end, there are many alternative futures open to Canadians and to Quebecers ... The political future and change in our institutional structures remain open."³ The relationship between institutional structures and the path ahead is crucial. These structures include virtually every facet of contemporary Canadian existence be it legal, social, economic or political. Charles Taylor has challenged the "rest-of-Canada" to come up with a formulation recognizing Quebec's distinctiveness, acceptable to both Quebec and the West; Tom Flanagan has suggested that the *quid pro quo* for the West may be to rework some or all of the status quo regarding the Senate, bilingualism and equalization; Tom Courchene has challenged Canadians to develop interprovincial mechanisms that can achieve positive social and economic integration; while Francois Rocher has issued a call to get away from what he terms "authoritarian drifting" and to rearrange a democratic dialogue about economic restructuring. All of this has led Robert Young to question whether our institutions are up to the task of defining subsidiarity and managing coordination. Linda Cardinal warns that national unity will not be realized if solutions are imposed on constituent groups, regions or communities in Canada, while Roger Gibbins suggests that the federally-legislated veto for Quebec and four other regions has added an unneeded burden to the difficult task of constitutional change.⁴

Various rationales for institutional change have been expressed eloquently by others, the most prominent of which emphasize the role played by our fragmented value system. Taylor highlights our great difficulty in sharing "identity space" while Alan Cairns warns of Canada's great divergence of identity. Louis Balthazar argues that the English Canadian tendency to make comparisons of itself relative to the traditions of Great Britain and the United States is alienating for most

² In S. Dion, "The Dynamic of Secessions: Scenarios after a Pro-Separatist Vote in a Quebec Referendum" (1995) 28 *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 533, five books published in the year preceding the October 1995 referendum are reviewed: M. Côté, *Le rêve de la terre promise: les coûts de l'indépendance* (Montréal: Stanké, 1995); J.P. Derriennic, *Nationalisme et démocratie: réflexion sur les illusions des indépendantistes québécois* (Montréal: Boréal, 1995); A. Freeman and P. Grady, *Dividing the House: Planning for a Canada Without Quebec* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1995); G. Gibson, *Pan B: The Future of the Rest of Canada* (Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 1994); and R. Young, *The Secession of Quebec and the Future of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

³ R. Young in J. Trent, R. Young, and G. Lachapelle, eds., *Quebec-Canada, What is the Path Ahead* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1996) at 356.

⁴ See C. Taylor, "Sharing Identity Space"; T. Flanagan, "Should a Supermajority be Required in Referendum on Separation?"; T.J. Courchene, "Revitalizing and Rebalancing Canadian Federalism: In Quest of a New 'National Policy'"; F. Rocher, "Économie désaxée et dérive autoritaire"; R.A. Young, "Political Economy: Interconnectedness and Questions Arising Therefrom"; R. Gibbins, "Western Canada in the Wake of the Events of 1995"; L. Cardinal, "Les minorités nationales ou linguistiques dans un nouveau rapport Québec-Canada" all in Trent *et al.*, *ibid.*

Quebec nationalists while Gérard Boismenu has pointed out the diametrically opposed views of English and French Canada regarding constitutional change and the meaning of a referendum. Sylvia Bashevkin has pinpointed an essential institution at play in the disarray with the following statement: "... Those of us who work with colleagues in Quebec have a greater duty than ever to keep the channels of communication open."⁵ Others suggest a crash program of bridge building and interaction between all Canadians.

The 1995 referendum has also created an international awareness of the unity issue as well. S. Neil MacFarlane addresses some of the issues involved in negotiation of secession, but more importantly raises issues which have only been touched upon lightly by many Canadian observers. Not only does he contemplate problems associated with NAFTA, NORAD, and NATO, but also the potential fragmentation of the rest of Canada.⁶ Thus, despite the constraint shown in Canadian discussions with respect to these issues, these sources of uncertainty remain real and a part of the set of concerns of individual Canadians.

The forces which lead to prescribing new or changed economic and political institutions, such as those listed above, emanate from the failure of social institutions to provide a cohesion of shared values and an identity for individuals with respect to the broader society. One result is that Canadians live in a perpetual state of heightened uncertainty. The pre- and post-referendum literature makes it clear that the issue of secession is very much alive and that the outcome of a further referendum is far from certain, both as concerns the vote as well as the repercussions. Also clear is the repeated importance of uncertainty to the issue. It is worth reviewing the major uncertainties which would be encountered after a Yes vote. These include political, legal, economic and social uncertainties.

Uncertainties

The political uncertainties include both domestic and international aspects. Internal to Quebec, the potential difficulties posed by partitionists as well as by Aboriginal peoples are well known. Partitionists argue that "Plan B" might also be a legal obligation for Canada under the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Articles 15(1) (everyone has the right to a nationality); 15(2) (no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality); and 17(2) (no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property) have relevance here.⁷ According to the *Montreal Gazette*:⁸

A well-designed "Plan B" would ensure that if nationalists succeed in gaining majority support among Quebecers, those opposed to that view that every effort will be made to ensure that they can remain Canadians and reside in their current communities with their current property.

Internal to Canada, the legitimacy of the current federal leadership certainly would be called into question following a secessionist referendum result in Quebec, much as uncertainty currently prevails surrounding the issue of constitutional reform prior to the referendum. As was the case with the Meech and Charlottetown accords, this uncertainty involves Aboriginal and Western Canadian concerns as well as Quebec's. The threat of a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) and concerns regarding the terms of debt repayment also generate uncertainty, especially vis-à-vis the potential for adversarial or cooperative relations between the (various) new sovereignties. Finally, political uncertainty will be generated by the response or responses of the international community. Those of the United States and France will be of particular concern and will have implications for world trade and defence through NAFTA, the WTO, and NATO.

In the event of a referendum in favour of some form of Quebec secession, economic uncertainties will most assuredly arise despite assurances to the contrary. These will include concern regarding Quebec's investment flows, its aggregate economic performance, unemployment, debt, trade rules, and monetary policy. Social services such as health and education are topics of major concern as will be the budgets and taxation designed to deal with them. In addition to the above

⁵ See A. Cairns, "Looking Back from the Future"; L. Balthazar, "Valeurs canadiennes en déperdition"; G. Boismenu, "Les valeurs sous-jacentes à la joute politique: De la conciliation raisonnable au combat final et désespéré"; S. Bashevkin, "Myths and Rebuttals," in Trent *et al.*, *ibid.*

⁶ S.N. MacFarlane, "Sovereignty and Stability: The Domestic and Regional Security Implications of Quebec Separation" (Dartmouth College-Hanover, New Hampshire: A Report of a seminar sponsored by the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding, 1997) at 47-63.

⁷ D. Goodwin, "Planning for the worst makes a lot of sense" *Montreal Gazette* (2 May 1997) B2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

issues, individual citizens will have concerns about their property values and security of their savings.

The possibility of a referendum result in favour of some form of Quebec secession leads to many legal and jurisdictional uncertainties. There is a growing body of opinion, both outside and within Quebec, which argues that such referenda are themselves illegal according to Canada's law and constitution and according to international law as well. Therefore, should Quebec unilaterally declare independence, its territorial integrity would not necessarily be preserved. The most prominent advocates of this position are Quebec journalist William Johnson and lawyer and former Parti Québécois activist Guy Bertrand. Many supporters of the secessionist position argue that these points are moot and that it would be highly tenuous if not impossible to justify thwarting the popular will by resorting to the courts. Other debates in this domain revolve around the legitimacy of the referenda process in Quebec and include such topics as the clarity of the question or the size of majority required to legitimize the disbanding of a nation-state. Quebec's referendum law, which imposes spending limits on each side and who is to do the spending, also has been contested in the highest courts in the land.⁹

Even if there were a consensus to accept a referendum in favour of some form of Quebec secession, legal and jurisdictional uncertainties would exist regarding trade rules, citizenship and the role of many of Canada's shared institutions, especially parliament. Alan Cairns has written that there are no guarantees that the federal government — containing elected members from Quebec — would be able to establish itself as the legitimate voice for Canada in the event of a successful secessionist initiative.¹⁰

Nobody wants violence. Many caution about it. It is softly treaded ground. Nonetheless, a prevailing sense of uncertainty exists regarding its potential which is a distinct, if not unspoken, reality. Most English-speaking Canadians care deeply for their nation-state and such caring can be found in contemporary discourse as well as in a long tradition of artistic and intellectual endeavour to this effect. The strength of this caring should not be underestimated. Nor should the Cree or Mohawk attachments to their own definitions of sovereignty. The attachment of Québécois secessionists to the city of

Montreal and to the territorial integrity of Quebec should not be dismissed lightly either, regardless of Plan B or partitionist initiatives.

These uncertainties — be they political, economic, legal or social — create stress in many ways. Moreover, they create a state of anxiety which is anticipated, man-made, and prolonged.

STRESS AND COPING

Uncertainty, Stress and Anxiety

Anxiety and stress are often used interchangeably

with anxiety being a subset of stress. Stress is defined as the combination of a stressor and stress reactivity. Thus it includes both a stimulus (stressor) and a response (reactivity).¹¹ The analysis of stress considers a sequence of actions; an event or life situation followed by the perception of the event as stressful (cognitive appraisal), an emotional arousal, a physiological arousal and finally consequences. Coping with stress involves intervention in any or all of the steps in the sequence. Managing stress is a question of control; the control that a person can have over oneself. "Managing stress is really just exercising that control, rather than giving it up to others or the environment."¹²

State anxiety is a form of stress which is of particular interest for the purposes of this article. Anxiety in a formal sense refers "to any of a variety of potential reactions resulting from a threat to a person's sense of identity and worth."¹³ Anxiety as an emotional state can be traced to a "disintegration of cognitive systems" which may lead to a variety of other symptoms (phenomenal, physiological, and behavioral). The secondary symptoms may further exacerbate the cognitive disintegration.¹⁴ Averhill notes three biological determinants of anxiety. First, if this construct crumbles, there is "an inner experience of catastrophe."¹⁵ Fear of the unknown is a second determinant of anxiety because of its close association with the individual's intellectual functioning.¹⁶ In this case there is some anticipation of

⁹ *Libman v. Quebec*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 569.

¹⁰ See his "Dreams versus Reality in 'Our' Constitutional Future: How Many Communities?" in A.C. Cairns, *Reconfiguration: Canadian Citizenship and Constitutional Change*, ed. by D. C. Williams (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995) at 315-348.

¹¹ J. Greenberg, *Comprehensive Stress Management*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1987) at 10.

¹² *Ibid.* at 61.

¹³ J. Averhill, "Emotion and Anxiety, Sociocultural, Biological, and Psychological Determinants" in M. Zuckerman and C. Spielberger, eds., *Emotions and Fear* (Wiley, 1976) at 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* at 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* at 123.

¹⁶ Intellectual functioning refers to the conceptual relationship between an individual and their world. "Each man must make a world into which he can project himself" (*ibid.* at 123).

change. Attachment to friends, colleagues and close relations is a third determinant of anxiety to the extent that the meaning of one's actions is relative to these relationships. Disruption of the socially defined roles thus causes anxiety. In addition to these biological determinants, the main sociological determinant of anxiety is one's sense of attachment in a broader context. Individuals construct their personal identity as a relationship between themselves and society.¹⁷

Each of the above determinants of anxiety have been in play in Quebec for decades. The fundamental issue in the referendum is change; change which would alter in unknown ways Quebecers' relationships with their world, their immediate social community, and the broader social community.

The first point of intervention in order to cope with potential stressors occurs during the evaluation stage. The cognitive appraisal of a potential event will be different for different individuals and, for events which are known, there are many interventions possible. However, little is known about how individuals cope with uncertainty. Lazarus and Folkman highlight the importance of uncertainty. "We are inclined to believe, however, that in naturalistic circumstances conditions of maximum uncertainty are highly if not maximally stressful."¹⁸

The case of Montreal allows us some insight into this issue because it provides an opportunity to examine the effects of uncertainty in naturalistic circumstances. The most widely discussed manner in which Montreal has suffered has been the loss of head offices and employment supposedly as the result of language policies and the desire for political sovereignty on the part of various provincial governments of Quebec. Accompanying the bankruptcies, layoffs, and the exodus of head offices during the 1970s was a simultaneous exodus of much of the city's English-speaking community as a result of fears first aroused by the October Crisis of 1970, compounded by the Bourassa government's Bill 22 passed in 1974 (the precursor to Bill 101), and then solidified by the election of the Parti Québécois (PQ). In the weeks following the 1976 Quebec provincial election, many westward-bound moving vans made their way along the 401 (otherwise known as the Macdonald-Cartier freeway between Montreal and Toronto) across the Quebec-Ontario border:

Following the 1970 October Crisis and the election of the Parti Québécois Government in 1976, more than 140 corporate head offices left the province. They took with them 14,000 jobs and precipitated the exodus of more than 100,000 mostly English-speaking Montrealers.¹⁹

The PQ's Bill 101, with its sign law provisions, its limiting of access to English schooling, and its overall hardening of Bill 22, propelled the exodus and ensured that it would not subside during the 1980s.

Speaking to an audience in the fall of 1983 at the University of Montreal's business school, the École des Hautes Études Commerciales, Quebec's future premier and then PQ Finance Minister, Jacques Parizeau, expressed what was slowly becoming accepted wisdom when he argued that people who had blamed the PQ policies for the economic decline of Montreal had ignored the fact that the decline dated back to a much earlier period. He agreed that Parti Québécois policies probably had some impact, but insisted that "it was happening before."²⁰ Parizeau claimed that the debate on language of education in Quebec had been exaggerated to the point where it was made to seem as though "the economic recovery of the province hung in the balance."²¹

There is some truth in Parizeau's words and, by this time (1983), many analysts of the Montreal situation agreed that the westward movement of economic centres of decision caused some of the city's decline and had contributed to the rise of separatism in the late 1960s, a development which accelerated adverse trends.²² However many also noted that, although the PQ did not deserve to be blamed for all of Montreal's woes, it was proving itself incapable of coming to terms with the many proposed solutions for the city's predicament because of its fears that the city would eventually dissociate itself economically and culturally from the rest of the province. By confining Montreal to the role of a regional centre, critics argued that the PQ was denying Montreal the ability to reestablish itself as an international centre in a world that increasingly stressed the interdependence of economies.²³ Currently, Quebec

¹⁷ *Ibid.* at 124.

¹⁸ R. Lazarus and S. Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer, 1984).

¹⁹ A. Bruce, "Montreal's economy blooming again" *The Globe & Mail* (9 January 1988) A15.

²⁰ "Parizeau at U of M: Don't blame the PQ for Montreal decline" *Montreal Gazette* (18 November 1983) E8.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² D. Clift, "Montreal's future hangs in balance as culture vies with commerce" *Montreal Gazette* (7 February 1983) 7.

²³ *Ibid.*

Premier Lucien Bouchard and the PQ are continuing to perpetuate such uncertainty with the promise of another referendum and by reigniting the language issue.²⁴

For some, however, Montreal's situation contained a silver lining. In a speech delivered to the Toronto Board of Trade Club in 1991, Guy J. Desmarais, president of La Chambre de commerce du district de Montréal, noted that although the loss of at least 100,000 anglophones had hurt the Montreal economy:²⁵

Some of those who left had been very negative about Montreal, and were a major factor in the negative perception of Montreal in other areas of Canada. It is impossible for any community to build with people whose heart is somewhere else. These people no longer live in Montreal, and that alone has resulted in a more positive atmosphere.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Montreal's loss of head offices, economic and administrative activity, and a sizable portion of its anglophone population had what some might term a positive impact by "freeing-up" space for economic activity on the part of Quebec francophones. Such interpretations may be less persuasive in the event of future out-migration. A CROP poll conducted in March, 1995 found that, of the 23 per cent who said they were likely to leave Quebec in the event of sovereignty, 59 per cent of non-francophones and 15 per cent of francophones would leave. Translated into population statistics, that would represent 528,000 non-francophones and 639,000 francophones. It is not so much the cultural characteristics of these would-be emigrants that are important, it is their potential numbers, and the impact such an exodus might have upon Montreal's population base, upon its ability to tax and provide services, and upon the relative strength of its economy that is of continuing concern.²⁶

It has become apparent to all Montrealers that, just as the city cannot afford to endure the population exodus it experienced in the earlier period, it also cannot afford to lose even one more head office, let alone the numerous losses that it endured in the post-1976 period. Nevertheless, there is much talk of Calgary displacing Montreal as the city of choice for head offices wishing to

locate elsewhere than Toronto. The same point also can be made regarding investment losses resulting from the political uncertainty generated by the prospect of another referendum. Sovereignists deny this possibility as vociferously today as they did in the earlier period of PQ rule, but some developments are undeniable. For example, according to a study published by the Bureau de la statistique du Québec in the fall of 1996, industrial investors planned to pump 4.9 per cent less money into the Montreal area this year than in 1995. As Montreal declines, much of the rest of Canada grows.²⁷ By October, 1996, private investment levels in Quebec had fallen to a low of 17.4 per cent of investment in Canada, well below Quebec's 24.9 per cent population share. While investment levels in Ontario rise, Quebec's continue to fall.²⁸

Ironically, most Quebecers and even many sovereignists are now convinced of the negative economic impacts of political uncertainty in the province of Quebec and especially in the city of Montreal. This became readily apparent just prior to Mr. Bouchard's economic summit in October, 1996.²⁹

Not surprisingly, the committees set up by the government — headed by reputable businessmen and community leaders — are having trouble coming up with new private-industry investments or concrete job-creation ideas that do not involve massive public spending. The reasons are not complicated. As long as the prospect of independence hangs over Quebec, as long as uncertainty dominates the economic and political climate here, investors will continue to avoid Quebec. Until that changes, repairing the economy will not be possible. More and more people are beginning to publicly recognize that simple truth. A *Action Démocratique* leader Mario Dumont urged the government to put off plans for a referendum for a decade at least. A weekend poll shows that more than half of all Quebecers agree. Last week, Mayor Bourque said political uncertainty is killing the city.

Clearly the stress levels being felt currently by Montrealers may be even more severe than that of earlier periods. Especially revealing in this regard are the comments of British Columbia academic and former

²⁴ A. Sandborn, "Team play needed to save Montreal" *Montreal Gazette* (20 October 1996) A6.

²⁵ "Chamber chief finds Montreal is showing renewed confidence" *The Globe & Mail* (18 March 1991) B2.

²⁶ T. Thomas, "The Opposition of Quebec's English-speaking community to Sovereignty: Misconceptions of Identity" in G. Lachapelle *et al.*, eds., *L'Impact Référendaire* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1995) at 132.

²⁷ "Montreal deserves better from PQ" *Montreal Gazette* (10 October 1996) B2.

²⁸ "Separatist agenda is killing economy" *Montreal Gazette* (12 October 1996) B4.

²⁹ "Political uncertainty is the real issue" *Montreal Gazette* (30 September 1996) B2.

Montrealer, André Gerolymatos. Gerolymatos' comments are interesting because they reflect the impressions of someone who endured the Montreal experience during a previous period and who, after a return visit to the city, made the following observations regarding the current Montreal experience.³⁰

Montrealers have become experts at adjusting themselves to the atmosphere of political speculation and uncertainty that have characterized the city since the Quiet Revolution. We have endured the War Measures Act, the election of the Parti Québécois, Bill 101, the 1980 referendum, the debates leading up to the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional accords, the 1995 referendum and the countless constitutional and linguistic crises. As have most Montrealers, I grew acclimatized to the political uncertainty that defines life in Quebec and, like many Montrealers, I left the province ... So many have moved, are planning to move or hope for the opportunity to leave Quebec. Within a few days, I became aware of the degree of apprehension and helplessness that had become part of the social fabric of this great city.

The case of Montrealers is consistent with the Lazarus and Folkman view that event uncertainty has an immobilizing effect on the coping process of anticipation; event occurrence may require strategies incompatible with nonoccurrence — to move or not to move. Single or multiple potential outcomes may lead to multiple strategies which lead to mental confusion, anxiety, fear, and excessive worrying. These interfere with cognitive functioning and might allow for strategies that would be unimaginable under normal circumstances. These latter suggestions of Lazarus and Folkman help us glean a greater understanding of the current Montreal experience. Some Montrealers would like a return to the Meech Lake solution, others prefer Quebec secession, some — such as Howard Galganov — advocate “rights-oriented” political protest, while others still, advocate partition. Clearly, the existence of potential outcomes has led to multiple strategies that might interfere with the cognitive functioning of Quebecers and especially Montrealers. This, in turn, might lead to undesired consequences such as those which occurred outside the city hall of Verdun (a district of southern Montreal) on November 27, 1997. Following a meeting with the city council, Canadian unity activists (partitionists) including some seniors, were physically attacked by a group of

masked individuals who had been organized by former convicted FLQ terrorist Raymond Villeneuve. A Canadian flag was also trampled and then burned. Moreover, this occurred while the Verdun police looked on refusing to accord the unity activists the full protection of the law.³¹

The referendum issue spans two decades. Lazarus and Folkman caution that the duration of stressful events is a two-edged sword. On the one hand it allows for some degree of adaptation and the creation of coping strategies. On the other hand, chronic stressors can wear the person down psychologically and physically. Gerolymatos' analysis of Montrealers is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman once again. The preceding quote suggests some degree of adaptation on the part of Montrealers but he goes on to note that chronic stressors appear to have worn down many Montrealers:³²

There were years in Montreal when people

argued and fought over the referendum, the constitution, signs, schools and Quebec sovereignty and these were interesting and stimulating times ... I look forward to resuming these debates even for a short while, but I discovered that few wished to talk about the political situation and those who did expressed fear and despondency. This was unlike the 1970s and 1980s, when the major issues that affected Quebec were debated in style and with substance. Coming back, I soon discovered they had been reduced to petty squabbles, in an atmosphere of mean-spiritedness ... When I first arrived in Vancouver, I found it a wonderful place, prosperous with friendly people. However, I believed it lacked the political intensity that permeated Montreal. Upon reflection, the political vibrancy I had come to know as part of Quebec has been reduced to fear of the unknown. On the West Coast, people are no more or less interested in politics, but have the luxury to put it in perspective. They can afford to do so; the constitution and Quebec sovereignty have little impact on the residents of Vancouver. But Montrealers must gauge their future according to these issues. It can be exhausting.

Lazarus and Folkman suggest that hassles, the daily interactions with the environment which are negative, can take a significant toll on a person's mental or

³⁰ A. Gerolymatos, “Embittered city” *Montreal Gazette* (3 March 1997) B3.

³¹ D. MacPherson, “Villeneuve won't go away” *Montreal Gazette* (29 November 1997) B-5.

³² A. Gerolymatos, “Embittered city” *Montreal Gazette* (3 March 1997) B3.

physical health. Indeed hassles may be a more important indicator of stress than life events: "It is best to view hassles and life events as supplementing each other."³³ Thus for many, the question of a referendum has become a hassle; a hassle which generates anxiety day in and day out.

While different social sciences study aggression and violence in differing contexts, perspectives and terminology, one major theme prevails. Violence is a result of a process; there is a situation, an individual's perception and evaluation, and a choice to be made. Central to evaluation and choice is a cost-benefit appraisal.³⁴ Although there are competing theories relating stress to aggression, these are focused primarily on the individual rather than the society. Nonetheless, some investigation has been made into the relationship between stress at a societal level and aggression.

Linsky, Bachman and Strauss have developed a Social Stress index.³⁵ Social stress can be viewed as a manifestation of community to community differences in the occurrence of stressful life events. Social stress arises from problems in coping with change — the greater the number of changes, the higher the proportion of people who will have difficulty coping. Cultural principles guide how individuals behave under stress. In a recent multivariate analysis which includes both individual and social stress indexes, they show that social stress is significantly related to aggression. These results are consistent with some of their earlier work and together tend to support a positive relationship between increases in social stress and aggression.³⁶

Fear of an unknown future, the possibility of great changes in the relationship between individuals and their world, individuals and their immediate social group, and the relationship between individuals and the broader society have been causing anxiety and other forms of stress in Quebec for decades. The observed results, flight from the region, a myriad of proposed partial solutions, confusion over what might or might not occur, aggressive words, flag burning, and sporadic violence were predictable. They remain predictable.

Coping and a Referendum

A sovereignty referendum generates four distinct stress events; the campaigning leading up to the referendum and the referendum vote itself, the political responses to the referendum, the settlement of the secession issue and, eventually, institutional changes. The duration of this train of events might be as little as six or seven months (for those predicting inevitable secession) to some period exceeding a year and possibly much longer depending upon the nature of the institutional changes to be implemented. These events would follow either a Yes or a No vote, but the concern of this study is with a Yes vote.

The key feature of these events are great uncertainty of considerable duration, lack of direct individual control over unfolding circumstances, and a possibility of considerable change in social, economic and political institutions. These features serve only to aggravate and amplify the anxiety existing before the call for the referendum. What was a significant hassle transforms into a series of important life events as referendum events unfold.

The uncertainties and the expectation of greatly changing self-identity have been identified as causes of anxiety. The duration and lack of individual control over circumstances compound the anxiety and stress created. Thus, in addition to the individual stressors that would be present in a Yes vote, there also are strong social stressors which emanate from the disruption of self-identity. All of this is anticipated by Derriennic, who observes that it is not the predisposition of the population which causes violence but the specific conditions which that population faces.³⁷ Moreover, to the extent that secessionists and non-secessionists view each other as foreigners, there is a degree of "de-humanizing" with respect to each other.³⁸ Thus the perceived costs of violent behaviour are reduced by this additional scope for self-justification.

Derriennic suggests that the potential for violence is between Quebecers rather than between Canada and Quebec. While we agree with this view, there remains an important interaction between the two in terms of non-violent but provocative actions. These actions can be perpetrated by small groups of individuals (flag stomping) or may take the form of strident comments from political leaders.³⁹ The importance of these types of behaviour should not be underestimated. Disagreement

³³ Lazarus and Folkman, *supra* note 18 at 312.

³⁴ See for example, A. Campbell and J.J. Gibbus, eds., *Violent Transactions* (Basil Blackwell, 1986) and R.B. Felon and J.T. Tedeschi, eds., *Aggression and Violence: Social Interactionist Perspectives* (Washington: Am. Psychological Ass., 1993).

³⁵ A. S. Linsky, R. Bachman and M. A. Strauss, *Stress Culture and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

³⁶ *Ibid.* and A.S. Linsky and M. A. Strauss, *Social Stress in the United States: Links to Regional Patterns in Crime and Illness* (Dover, Mass: Auburn House, 1986).

³⁷ Derriennic, *supra* note 2.

³⁸ R. Johnson, "Institutions and the Promotion of Violence" in Campbell and Gibbus, *supra* note 35 at 181-205.

³⁹ Cairns in Trent *et al. supra* note 5 at 79.

during negotiations provide a setting for a Prisoner's Dilemma game. The best strategy in a Prisoner's Dilemma is characterized by cooperation and forgiveness. Thus a tit-for-two-tats strategy is superior to the tit-for-tat strategy.⁴⁰ But if leading politicians were quick to react before a referendum, what is to be expected after a Yes vote? More competitive strategies lead to increased defections (strident comments) and the game can degenerate into constant defections.

Canadians are averse to violence. This is expressed communally through gun laws, the Somalia Commission, the response to Montreal's recent gang violence, the status of the death penalty and a host of other everyday actions. Thus sporadic acts of violence of any kind — either physical (such as those of Villeneuve and his group) or verbal conflict or verbal threats (empty or not) — will lead to considerably heightened anxiety and stress more generally.

Since these problems will be faced by a large number of individuals, there may be room for some social planning to alleviate some of the stresses. The primary objective of coping strategies is to impart to the individual a greater sense of control over oneself. In many cases, such strategies would include different relaxation techniques, appropriate exercise and nutrition regimes, and modification of lifestyles and behaviours. Such strategies are personal in nature and are beyond the scope of political intervention.

One coping strategy which we can presume has existed for some time is inoculation, or sensitization. In this technique, one imagines or experiences an anxiety-provoking event and practices an appropriate response. Since Canada has been actively engaged in the unity issue for three decades, including two referendums, there have been many opportunities to adjust to the tensions created. However, a Yes vote has not yet occurred.

Broader coping strategies which might be considered are social support, the reduction of the number of possible outcomes (uncertainty reduction), and an increase in the control that an individual can realize. According to Greenbury, "[s]ocial support is belonging, being accepted, being loved, or being needed all for oneself and not for what one can do."⁴¹ Reducing the number of possible outcomes reduces the set of strategies to be considered, thus reducing mental confusion. This, in turn, increases cognitive functioning and reduces the potential for unanticipated behaviour.

⁴⁰ R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Competition* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) at 22-54.

⁴¹ J. Greenberg, *supra* note 11 at 60.

Finally, introducing one certain event over which an individual has control and which is independent of all other uncertain events, creates a benchmark strategy against which other strategies can be compared. In the next section we examine a broad social policy which contains these coping strategies.

THE REPATRIATION ACT

A social coping plan which is independent of political strategies is necessary. A rally will not suffice. A more convincing statement could take the form of a promise of welcome to Quebecers, together with some financial assistance for relocation in the event of a Yes vote. The promise would be unconditional; individuals wishing to belong to Canada could so choose regardless of their individual characteristics. This promise would establish at least one well defined and attainable option. To ensure that this option is attainable, some sort of financial compensation to defray relocation costs must be available.

To give substance to such a commitment we consider it to take the form of an Act of Parliament (whether this must be the form is discussed below). The defining characteristics of the Act can be listed as follows:

1. The provisions of the Act must come into force six months from the day following a referendum or other political act which would give democratic authority to the Government of Quebec (as viewed by the National Assembly) to negotiate a succession agreement with Canada. The eligibility provisions of the Act must include all Canadian citizens who are resident in Quebec as well as residents of Quebec with valid immigrant status but not yet Canadian citizens. The provisions of the act would be in force for a minimum of two years after a Yes vote.

A six month waiting period is based upon two factors noted by Stéphane Dion. First, there is some consensus that much will be learned within six months of a vote; negotiations will be quick or protracted. Second, it serves as a "cooling off" period for citizens, rather than politicians, as suggested by Gibson.⁴² The Act reassures Quebecers that they need not rush into decisions which are irrevocable or costly.

The Act should not be contingent on the state of negotiations. Individuals will take these conditions into account before acting. Dion's survey suggests that sporadic violence is a possibility as a result of the

⁴² Dion, *supra* note 2 at 550.

emotional charges which would be felt by many following a Yes vote. The Act must allow citizens to act in response to the fear of potential physical or psychological violence. The "reservation state" created by the Act allows individual citizens to weigh these costs of uncertainty as well as others, be they economic or political, against the cost of repatriation.

Since the role of the act is to mitigate the effects of anxiety and stress following a Yes vote, some limit must be placed on its effective horizon. During the 1995 referendum, the Parti Québécois suggested that they expected negotiations to take a minimum of one year. Allowing some time for the consequent institutional changes to unfold requires a longer horizon.

2. The Act must provide financial assistance to defray some of the expenses of repatriation. Such assistance must be pre-defined and quickly accessible. The basic financial assistance rate is \$10,000 per adult, and \$5,000 per non-adult. Abuse of the Act must be traceable, hence the assistance should be a formal loan agreement, possibly through private financial institutions in the Canada that might remain (as per student loans). Interest would be calculated at the prime rate but re-payments would be required only 36 months after the loan was made. Upon proof of resident status in Canada at that time, the loan would be forgiven. The Act would provide for the safe and secure transportation of all repatriating Canadians and their effects.

The cost of repatriation to individuals can be very high. These transition costs include the cost of relocation, loss of income and job security, and labour market search costs. While it is impossible to compensate for the loss of one's home and community, it is possible to offset some of the financial costs. Anyone who wishes to be repatriated will suffer transitional costs. This is not a program to reduce income inequalities, thus, there is no need to screen applicants by income. An address in Canada outside of Quebec with a notarized letter from a landlord or other official to ensure that the move will be or has been undertaken, would be sufficient proof of intent. Benefits must be predefined otherwise the reservation state is itself uncertain. The reservation state must be clear and unequivocal.

The rate of assistance of \$10,000 or \$5,000 is largely arbitrary but some numbers must be established both to define the reservation state as well as to measure anticipated program costs. This financial assistance does not preclude any other forms of assistance made available through this Act or the benefits which might be proffered by Canadians or communities on their own initiative.

3. The Act must ensure that repatriated Canadians are treated as local residents with respect to access to all social services. Those who left employment would be treated as newly unemployed for the purposes of employment insurance.

Additional consideration should be made for some groups of individuals, in particular, post-secondary students, and senior citizens. The Act must allow post-secondary students enrolled in full time programs to transfer to appropriate Canadian institutions without academic penalty. The Act must ensure that senior citizens who wish to repatriate will be given appropriate assistance in finding suitable accommodation.

4. The Act must not restrict the locational choice of repatriating Canadians.

Even though different locational choices imply different costs, the right of all Canadians to freedom of movement must be respected. Moreover, the positive social support which is desired by the act requires this freedom.

Neutrality of the Act

The Act does not address issues which might arise in any negotiations about the Quebec-Canada relationship either before or after a referendum and is thus neutral with respect to political strategies which might arise in this regard. The Act is marginally non-neutral with respect to individual choices after a referendum result favouring secession.

The provisions of the Act reduce the cost of relocation only for a subset of "No" voters; namely, those who perceive the offered state as a potentially acceptable state. Within this subset, there are those who might relocate regardless of the Act. The Act merely relaxes the binding financial constraints of those who would wish to relocate but could not do so otherwise. Thus the degree of repatriation which might occur is only partially related to the Act. Moreover those most affected by the Act are those who are least mobile, a group which includes, in general, those with lesser assets, lesser income, and less mobile human capital. This is precisely the case in which the Act has its most beneficial effects for it is this group which faces the anxiety and loss of control over events without any clear potential coping strategy. The alternative coping strategies include the potential for violence, increased alcohol and drug abuse, and behaviours which lead to family strife.

The Act may be non-neutral in its effect on referendum voting. However there is no way to assess which way the vote might be biased. Some might argue

that our plan's potential to facilitate events after secession might encourage Quebec voters to consider secession as an option. We believe that such thinking would be discouraged by the potential depopulation of Quebec, the splitting of its families, the loss of human and financial capital, and the diminished ability to tax and provide services that would result from our relocation package.

An Act agreed to by all provinces and enacted by the provinces may have greater appeal to neutrality since it would separate the role of the federal government in post-referendum negotiations from supervising the provisions of the Act. However, pan-provincial success in this undertaking would suggest the appropriateness of an Act created by the Government of Canada. Moreover, enacting such legislation at the provincial level could give rise to questions regarding the legitimacy of the federal government after a referendum. Thus the Act would have a strong claim to neutrality if enacted by the Federal Government.

An important feature of this proposal is that the Act would enhance the prestige and viability of some form of Canadian state both before and after a referendum. By offering tangible help to distressed friends and fellow citizens, Canadians would no longer experience the guilt and powerlessness resulting from the complaints of abandonment that have emanated from Quebec (and English-speaking Quebecers in particular) in the past. At the same time, the compassion and cooperation embodied by the Act reflects the very qualities which serve as the building blocks of Canadian identity in the evolving national project.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the stresses being placed on Canadians, and particularly the anxiety being felt by Canadians in Quebec as a result of the impending Quebec referendum. A brief examination of some of the political science literature on the subject considered some of the prognostications that have been made in the event of a referendum result favouring the separation of Quebec from Canada. Also considered were suggested institutional changes which have been offered as solutions to the unity issue including "Plan B" and threats of partition.

A defining characteristic of the literature is multidimensional uncertainty and possibly a very protracted period of uncertainty coupled with considerable institutional change. These uncertainties (be they political, economic or legal) and ongoing institutional change can be expected to increase anxiety

and stress felt by all Canadians, but particularly by Quebecers. The effects can be seen in the current attitudes of many Montrealers and, in some instances, has led to control-seeking mechanisms such as the declarations of many Montreal municipalities that they would remain part of Canada regardless of any referendum result in favour of some form of secession.

There are a number of mechanisms designed to deal with anxiety and stress. Broader coping strategies include social support, the reduction of the number of possible outcomes (uncertainty reduction), and an increase in the control that an individual can realize over events. Reducing the number of possible outcomes reduces the set of strategies to be considered thus reducing mental confusion. This, in turn, increases cognitive functioning and reduces the potential for irrational, unanticipated behaviour.

Plan B is an attempt to control events, but it in no way reduces the number of possible outcomes. Indeed, considerable anxiety would ensue as a result of partition and examples of similar partition in other parts of the world reveal that there would be a distinct possibility for violence. How would the newly sovereign Quebec react? How would the rest of Canada react? How would the international community react? Clearly, anxiety, stress, and uncertainty are not alleviated.

The argument presented here is that some action can be taken at the political level which would serve to reduce the anxiety of Canadians in Quebec as well as the rest of Canada independently of political strategies of the federal or provincial governments in the unity debate. To this effect, we propose a repatriation act designed to provide a strategy neutral response to the build-up of anxiety and stress which surrounds any referendum debate and the aftermath of the referendum. The act is designed for those individuals least able to relocate themselves geographically despite feeling alienated and unjustly trapped in a newly created sovereign state. It is these very individuals who would be most likely to disrupt or be disrupted by their new society. Indeed, we would encourage the government of the newly sovereign Quebec to offer a similar package to individuals living outside of the new state who would like to settle there despite lacking the resources to do so.

Advocates of "Plan B" argue that to lose a significant portion of its population and of its territory would represent a crisis for any country. These advocates also argue that "Plan B" would be a legal obligation for Canada under the United Nations Universal Declaration

of Human Rights.⁴³ To have such a crisis loom for years without any plan to limit the damage and safeguard those who dissent from such revolutionary change, would be the height of irresponsibility which “Plan C” attempts to address.

The proposed Repatriation Act answers the need for some form of plan to exist to reassure and calm some of those feeling alienated and dislocated in the face of a potential secessionist vote. Furthermore, the Act will be able to achieve this goal without raising the anxiety-generating uncertainties or the potential for violence inherent in “Plan B.” Our “Plan C” could be criticized for its potential to generate delusion. Indeed some might argue that our plan’s potential to smooth events after a Yes vote might encourage Quebec voters to consider secession as an option. On the other hand such voters might be dissuaded by the economic and social costs predicted to occur after a secessionist vote. Furthermore, it is irresponsible for there to be no consideration of strategies in the event that “Plan A” or “Plan B” fail, however discomfiting the thought of such a result.

It should not be expected that the relocation allowances will be sufficient to placate the concerns of Quebec federalists. Nor is it expected that the allowances could eliminate desires for partition in the event of Quebec secession. At the very least, the Act will help alleviate some of the worry, frustration, even anger on the part of those with the fewest resources and, therefore, least able to relocate geographically, who could become partitionists by default. If nothing else, surely we as Canadians can offer tangible help to distressed friends and family. For these reasons, we have proposed this small step; an Act of repatriation. □

Lawrence McDonough

Department of Politics and Economics, Royal Military College of Canada.

Timothy Thomas

Department of Politics and Economics, Royal Military College of Canada.

⁴³ Goodwin, *supra* note 7.