

**THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION
2011 NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL MEETING
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA
OCTOBER 28-30, 2011**

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN CANADA

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Chair

André Pratte, Panelist

ANDRÉPRATTE: I must say that when I'm invited on such occasions to talk about Canadian politics, or more specifically Quebec politics, I usually try to find a larger topic.

First of all, I don't like to be identified as a Quebec politics specialist because I'm interested in much more than Quebec politics. I read Joseph Nye's books, for instance. I find myself always going back to talk about Quebec and separatists and so on, and Quebec is much more than separatism.

But I'm afraid today I feel like I do have to talk about this because something may be going on in Quebec that is quite interesting and novel, as Jeffrey said. In the last federal election there seems to have been something new going on. Just a few words to explain that over the last 40 years, there's been a quite strong separatist movement in Quebec, and it has been present both at the federal level, that is, at the House, the Canadian House of Commons, and at the Province of Quebec level.

You've had a Bloc Québécois, which has been the Provincial Separatist Party that had been in government for many years during long periods, organized two referendums on separation and has lost. Both won. The latest one in 1995 with a very close result. And the Separatist Movement has also been present at the Federal Parliament level, and for the last 20 years actually was, you know, the dominant Federal Party for Quebec.

And the last election, as Jeffrey mentioned, when the campaign started, everyone expected that the Bloc Québécois would win easily the huge majority of Quebec seats in the Federal Parliament. During the campaign somehow suddenly something happened. The NDP, which is a Socialist Federal Party, rose in the polls totally unexpected. No commentator had seen this coming. We all sort of predicted at the beginning of the campaign the Bloc would win easily. When this happened, as Jeffrey explained, we started looking at the candidates, including that lady working in a bar in Ontario, and we realized she was actually in Las Vegas instead of campaigning.

It was her birthday so she had decided to spend her birthday in Las Vegas. It was very strange because even during the campaign the reporters went from riding to riding, telling the people your candidate doesn't speak French or she's in Las Vegas or whatever. She's not campaigning. She doesn't have a

campaign office. And the reply came from the voters, well, whatever. She can't do worse than the present NDP.

And the other reply that came — the leader of the NDP at the time was Jack Layton, who was born in a suburb of Montreal but had left as a kid to Ontario — was, well, we don't mind, we're going to vote for Jack.

In Quebec, when a francophone talks about a politician and calls him or her by her first name, it means that he or she has become a member of the family. Very few politicians have this privilege of being called by his or her first name. It was Rene Le Vant or Lucien Bouchard. So when someone says, "Je voterai pour (phonetic) Jack" (I will vote for Jack), it means he's become a member of the family. Somehow it's difficult to explain how that happens, but Jack Layton had become a member of a Quebec family. That connection had been established. "Je voterai pour Jack." The result of the election was that the Bloc Quebecois had fallen from 47 or 48 MPs to four MPs, which meant they were wiped out. And the NDP had gone from one MP to 59 MPs out of 75. They had never done better than one MP, so the NDP was really wiped out. Wiped up the province and the Bloc nearly disappeared.

At the provincial level, the Liberals have been in power now eight years with Premier Jean Charest and the Liberals are at the present time extremely unpopular. For the last two years the media have inundated the province with reports about corruption in the construction industry. Many of those scandals are linked to the provincial government in the public works, financing of the Liberal Party. People are asking for a public inquiry in the construction industry. The government has really refused that inquiry until two weeks ago.

The government is extremely unpopular and yet the Parti Quebecois, who would be the natural alternative, still doesn't score well in the polls. The leader of the Parti Quebecois is extremely unpopular. Many of the militants in her party want her to go, so that's very unnatural. The Parti Quebecois would be the natural choice as an alternative. She doesn't score well in the polls. She probably won't last as a leader. There probably will be a leadership race. And if you look at the polls, sovereignty or separation, sovereignty is a word that the separatist invented to make their option more palatable, but separation in the polls is quite low.

Historically, sovereignty is always at 40 percent. That's a long-term trend. It's now at 34 or 33 percent, which is quite low historically, so there seems to be a lot of indications that separation is trending down and that separatist parties are less popular than they were.

So the question is, and that's where it becomes interesting, is whether this is simply short-term events that are simply the hazards of politics and that somehow events will bring the Bloc Quebecois back, that the NDP at the federal level will not do a good job to represent "Quebec's interests," quote unquote, that the Bloc Quebecois will come back with a new leader and at the next Federal election they will do better and the Bloc Quebecois will get a new leader and they will come back, or whether this is part of a longer-term trend and

that separation is really going down.

At the provincial level, there's a new party that will be announced, that will be created probably two or three weeks from now, as a leader a former Parti Québécois minister, a man called Francois Legault. His program, his platform is based on the idea of taking the whole constitutional and separation issue on the back burner and addressing more pressing issues like health care and education and so on. Of course this is all theory, but when they poll people and ask them, if this new party is part of a future election, who would you vote for, this theoretical party led by this man, Francois Legault or the present Liberal Party or the Parti Québécois, this new party dominates totally. That's another indication that people in Quebec really want to change totally. They want to get rid of this old issue of the political future of Quebec, independence, separation.

Again, the question is, is this part of a long-term trend or is this simply a short-term issue? Now recently there was a poll published by a think tank that I'm part of, and when you look at the data, there are some interesting data that seem to indicate that it is part of a more, a longer-term trend. I'll give you just a few numbers that are quite interesting.

The Canadian Constitution was renewed, adopted, in 1982, and since then Quebecers have thought that this Constitution is not totally satisfactory for them. For instance, they would like the Canadian Constitution to recognize that Quebec is a different society, distinct society or a nation and so on.

When we ask Quebecers today, do you still wish that this Constitution would be amended so that Quebec is recognized in some way, you can see that Quebecers would like the Constitution to be amended in this way. But if you ask them, is this urgent? Do you feel that it's a pressing need? Then it changes. Quebecers do not feel that it is urgent. If you had asked them that question ten years ago, the answer would have been different.

If you ask them, do you feel that the issue of separation is outmoded? The answer is, yes.

If you ask them, do you see yourself as a sovereignist, a Federalist, a Nationalist? These are sort of the categories where most Quebecers would have seen themselves for the last 40 years. Today, the largest category where Quebecers see themselves is none of the above, 40 percent. And if you're a young Quebecer, that is, 25 years old or less, it's even more so.

That's an indication that Quebecers want to take that whole debate away. They just don't see themselves as part of this debate any more. That doesn't mean that they don't feel proud to be Quebecer or they don't think that, for instance, the French language or the French culture is not important. It's just that this debate that has dominated Quebec politics for so long, it seems to indicate that Quebecers are tired of it and that they think that other things are much more important, either more concrete problems like the state of the health care system, for instance, or the state of the education system.

But also that they, especially young people, are much more concerned about other issues, like

climate change, for instance, as Jeffrey has indicated, or also international questions like the situation in poor countries or foreign affairs or things like that.

Another thing that is very interesting is that for many, many years the state of the Quebec economy was pretty bad compared to other provinces or other countries, especially the United States, and very close provinces like Ontario. Now, of course, in many, many countries nationalist movements were driven in big part by economic issues. Now if you look at the state of Quebec's economy right now, and of course it's also the case for the Canadian economy, Quebec's economy in particular is in pretty great shape.

The unemployment rate in Quebec today is about seven percent. It's a little better than Ontario's, which is quite extraordinary because for years and years and years the unemployment rate in Ontario was at least two points, if not three points or four points, lower than Quebec's. Quebec's now is a bit better than Ontario's and, of course, it's much lower than in the U.S., which is quite extraordinary.

Quebec's economy is doing extraordinarily well. Recession was less deep in Quebec than in North America in general and it came out much faster and is now doing much better. Part of that is sheer luck. The Quebec Government decided to begin a large infrastructure program, not because of the recession, but because our infrastructures were in a terrible state, and it happened just at the right moment.

But Quebec's economy is very dynamic now, and so why would you feel disadvantaged? Why would you want to separate? Why would you feel that you're at a disadvantage when your economy is doing great? Young Quebecers today, young French-speaking Quebecers are very confident. They don't feel disadvantaged. They want to travel across the world. They want to learn one, two, three languages. They don't feel disadvantaged. So why would you want to separate? Why would you feel disadvantaged? And you feel that today in Quebec.

The only very strange thing, and I will leave you with this, is that when you talk to young Quebecers today, you feel that they're not very much interested in separation any more. That's not the interesting movement for them. But yet, they don't feel much interested in Canada. Their vision of the world is Quebec, the world, and Canada is not part of the equation.

I feel personally that there's a great opportunity to get them interested in Canada, so there may be something there, some work to get them more engaged with the rest of the country, and maybe more opportunity exists for that today than at any period in the last 50 years. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN NYE: Andre, let me ask about change in Quebec in the following sense. We talked about generational change, and I'd mentioned that my friends in Montreal had told me that their children just weren't interested in separatism because, as you put it, they wanted to be part of the world. It wasn't Canada that was attracting them. It was the world that was attracting them, and separatism sort of cooped them up into a smaller compartment than they wanted to be.

But I think I learned this from you, that Quebec is also changed enormously and becoming more European rather than North American. In other words, if you look at politics in Quebec, it's probably more like politics in Europe with a social democratic base and orientation toward environment and so forth, even more than the rest of Canada.

And if that's true, then maybe that explains why the NDP was so attractive even though it wasn't appealing to the linguistic constituency, but it's a social democratic, a European type of party, whereas Harper, with his Alberta roots, was really a Midwest American type of party. In that sense, in this tension within Canada, Quebec still represents something very different, which is a European thing. And if the NDP doesn't represent Quebec adequately and the voting was that shallow, they might swing just dramatically to the new party. I was just curious whether this sort of the Europeanization of Quebec explains some of this and does that also set the scene for a big swing back?

MR. PRATTE: The voting trends in Quebec right now are very volatile, so many things can happen. I think right now, if you poll, for instance, Quebecers tend to think that Quebec is very different. Values in Quebec are very different from values in the rest of the country.

But still, by voting for the NDP, they've affirmed or seen that, in fact, they could have things in common with the rest of Canada because, in fact, they voted for the NDP because they did see that with the NDP at least they had things in common.

For instance, young Quebecers don't have much in common with Stephen Harper's government. That's for sure. And not because, and it doesn't have anything to do with what Harper does relative to Quebec, it's because Harper, what he does with the environment, they don't agree with. Harper's stand on many issues concerning Israel, for instance, or foreign affairs, they don't agree with. If the NDP was in power, they probably would find that they had much more in common with what they think is Canada.

That would be a very, I think, interesting experience. If the NDP would come in power, what effect would that have with how Quebecers see themselves relative to the rest of Canada? And, in fact, what is very interesting is that there are two levels where Quebecers see themselves relative to Canada. There's how the federal government manages its relationship with Quebec. That is, what the federal government does relative to a sharing of powers with the provinces. It's how it manages things relative to the French language, more the relationship with the provinces. And then how the federal government manages things that are really in the realm of federal powers, foreign affairs, environment, things like that.

The problem is, for instance, that the Liberal Party has always had a so-called hard line relative to its relationships with provinces and then its policies relative to more national issues are closest to Quebec's values. So Quebecers never find one national party that does exactly all they want. They're a difficult people, really.

CHAIRMAN NYE: And finally before we turn to the audience, André, let me ask you a Canada question, not a Quebec question, which is, what's happening to environmental politics?

You mentioned that the younger Quebecois are interested in green. Jeff mentioned the new Green Party now in the Parliament.

If you look at the United States, what's most dramatic, I think, is in 2009 everybody was talking about the great steps that we were going to take. You had the Waxman-Markey bill that was going to create a new framework for carbon emissions in the U.S., so forth. That's totally off the agenda now. It's almost as though within two years it's two different political systems.

John Deutch was mentioning this yesterday. Tell us a little bit of where is the environmental issue in Canada today?

MR. PRATTE: Well, to me that's the great Canadian failure, especially with the oilsands, which is a great and extraordinary resource.

Maybe it results from the fact that the Obama Administration has not been able to have its own policy, and the Harper government has never really felt any need to do anything and has waited for the Obama administration to do something. Now that the Obama administration has not been able to do anything, the Harper government has the perfect excuse to say, well, since Obama has not been doing anything, we won't do anything.

We are privileged to have this extraordinary resource of the oilsands, and I certainly think, and I think many Canadians believe, that we certainly have to exploit that resource, but we also have a responsibility to ourselves and to the world to find the best way to exploit that resource but also to do it as cleanly as possible.

Anyone who has been there and seen this knows how huge a challenge it is to do it cleanly. Both the government of Alberta and the companies put some money to try to do it, but obviously it is not enough and we don't sense any real will to do what is needed. Personally, and I know Jeffrey has written extensively about it, I think it's a tragedy that there is no will. Jeffrey has mentioned that the leader of the Green Party has been elected, but it is still one person, and with the recession now the environment is way down the preoccupations of the electorate except for maybe the young people.

There's no really political push on the government to have that as a number one priority, and so it is a tragedy. The environmental cost of this will be huge in the future. It is a great Canadian failure, I think.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., University Distinguished Service Professor and former Dean, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge; former Chair, National Intelligence Council and

former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; North American Chairman,
Trilateral Commission

André Pratte is Editor of *La Presse*, Montreal.