

But this is not the only reason, nor even, perhaps, the most important. To be convinced of this, one has only to consult the opinion polls that are proliferating in Quebec on the eve of the referendum, as you can well imagine. With a few small differences, they all reveal the same trends. To cite only the most recent, Quebecers are apparently divided equally between the "yes" and the "no", with an undecided margin varying between 12 and 25 per cent. What can we conclude but that the secessionist proposal is far from bringing unanimity in Quebec, and that its promoters have always known this. At the beginning of the referendum campaign, the Premier of Quebec stated that a "yes" vote of 40 per cent would be enough to give him the courage to continue the venture.

The ambition of this figure will appear very modest to those who do not know the Canadian situation very well. But when one looks closely at it, one can easily understand the modesty.

If the aim were to break the chains of a people in slavery, victims of a dictatorship, prey to an arbitrary and oppressive system, it would be hard to understand why its liberators were not more impatient. And certainly, the rhetoric of certain Quebec nationalists could lead one to believe that this was exactly the situation. "Slow genocide", "colonialist spoliation", threats to the survival of French-speaking people and many other things have been mentioned. But this was all, as I have said, so much rhetoric. The Quebec Government's White Paper, which started off the referendum campaign, and which is the official manifesto of the secessionists, deals swift justice on these lyrical exaggerations. Here is how the White Paper describes contemporary Quebec:

"We are a young and educated people. In less than a generation, we have completely transformed our educational system; among the least educated twenty years ago, we are now in the front ranks of the industrialized countries. Today, our colleges and universities produce graduates by the thousands."

"Our work force is competent and efficient. Various studies have shown that the Quebec worker is often prouder and more industrious than other North Americans."