

Quebec's international activity rests on idea of competence

Louis Sabourin

The Parti québécois victory in the November 15, 1976, elections, and the widespread reaction to this historic event both in Canada and abroad, have once again brought to light the special character of Quebec and the growing importance of its international activity. In addition to analysing the nature and the manifestations of this international activity, it is important to assess its basic significance and define the underlying strategies that motivate it.

Quebec's international activity is essentially a seeking and exercising of greater competence in order to assert Quebec's identity and to encourage its development and that of others through reciprocal and mutually-advantageous relations with other peoples, states and public and private institutions with which Quebec is attempting to establish exchanges of all kinds.

Beyond the events and the facts that, particularly since the beginning of the "Quiet Revolution" in 1960, have led to a distinctive Quebec presence and behaviour on the world scene, two strategies have gradually become established, often more as a result of spontaneous behaviour and reaction than through predetermined, long-standing plans. These two theories of development of *human competence* through a broader, but co-ordinated, effort of Quebec and federal institutions and resources, as opposed to a strictly Quebec *competence* in international relations — have grown to the point of being both the basis and the objective of the two schools of thought. These will inevitably continue to clash as long as Quebec remains a part of the Canadian confederation. In a word, Ottawa will continue to argue in favour of the exercising of competence by Quebec in international life with deference to Canada's international personality, while René Lévesque's government will seek in its international activities to confirm its own competence.

After reviewing Quebec's international activities, one can only conclude that they have been, and still are, a normal, legitimate and desirable phenomenon. The errors of procedure and the excesses of language should not obscure the fact that the basic, long-term interests of all the parties involved have been promoted to advantage. Any democratic society that wishes to make progress in today's world — particularly if it feels its culture threatened — cannot, as in the past, turn in on itself. In the era of closed societies, withdrawal could be considered a "positive defence". In the era of the post-industrial society and declining birth-rates, however, withdrawal would amount to a veritable withering away, which no *Franco-phone*, whatever his political or ideological allegiance, could seriously consider. Under such circumstances, a proliferation of international exchanges becomes not only desirable but necessary in all sectors, from economic affairs to exchanges of technology and culture, from sports and television to development co-operation. We cannot claim excellence in physical fitness, industrial management, food production or music without knowing what is happening abroad. This is the case for almost all areas of activity. It is important at this stage to develop an increasing degree of competence, not only at the political and administrative summit but in all fields and at all levels.

At the same time that Quebec, for its part, wishes to open its doors onto international perspectives, in order to obtain the many benefits to be had, it appears that more and more nations are becoming interested in Quebec, and value the skills

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Withdrawal no longer a positive defence