

Quebec and Canada: unwilling bedmates

I consider myself a Canadian before an Ontarian. But most residents in Quebec would admit they're Quebeckers before Canadians. This diametric opposition is at the crux of Canada's current political crisis.

How to reconcile this difference without denouncing the importance of each view? It's simple, at least in theory: reverse each group's priorities. English Canada must understand Quebec's pride as a "distinct society" within and without Canada. And Quebec must realize the anger and intolerance of English Canadians toward their status as a specially-privileged province.

Quebec's insistence on remaining a "distinct society", however, is not an artificial construct, it does reflect reality. And Quebeckers cling to this all-important clause out of a desperation that their very culture may ultimately rest on its inclusion in the Canadian Constitution. This single clause has held up ratification of the Meech Lake accord as the premiers of Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Manitoba worry about Quebec's power as a "distinct society" to supersede constitutional rights guaranteed in the Charter of Rights. Quebec politicians have informally assured Canadians that they would not tread on the Charter, but it's hard to forget Bill 101, the French-only sign law which restricted English freedom of expression.

Many English Canadians believe Quebec has extorted them with bilingualism and French culture as the price for its continued participation in Canada. Conversely, Quebec feels the pressure of a flourishing English culture engulfing it from all sides and tramping into its own streets and businesses. Quebec wants to assure its continued existence as a French province in Canada.

Quebeckers are not rallying around economics and politics, but rather their emotions and gut feelings. Having suffered years of what they see as political isolation and humiliation from the rest of Canada, they harbour a battered self-esteem. And although many Canadians are upset with Quebec for threatening the entire nation's stability, French nationalism is thriving. The reason is simple. Quebec is finally able to return the favour by giving Canadians what they have endured for so many years: the fear of being left out in the cold.

Meanwhile, the threat of a divided country looms on the horizon as the Meech Lake accord struggles in its death throes before the final ratification deadline of June 23.

Much of the panic that has seized Canadians is due in large part to the media's presentation of events, specifically its manufacture of powerful symbols. Consider thousands of Quebeckers bombarded daily by the sight of anti-francophone demonstrators stomping on their symbol, the fleur de lis. Quebeckers were angered and humiliated. Likewise, the media blitz that the resignation of Lucien Bouchard received in the news made him a symbol of the spirit of separation. Quebeckers were justified and encouraged.

Quebec separatists favour becoming a "sovereign association" which would maintain economic and parliamentary ties with the rest of Canada, but would have a unilateral political agenda. Would Canada really be willing to support Quebec during its entrance into nationhood after being abandoned? For example, what would happen to the federal capital that was largely responsible for transforming Montreal and Quebec City into world-class cities? Certainly, the remainder of Canada would be loathe to let such investments walk away without any return.

There is no doubt that Quebec nationalism is bristling. But the patriots are long on idealism and short on pragmatism. Can Quebec truly survive as a sovereign nation without the benefit of Canada's national finances and international expertise? It's hard to say for certain, but both parties would be worse off apart than they have been together. There is strength in unity.

Bouchard has suggested returning to 1867 and working from our origins to consolidate Canada in the light of modern events. This presupposes the failure of Meech Lake and assumes the best way to negotiate is as independent nations.

Regardless of the June 23 deadline, Quebec and English Canada must meet at the bargaining table as equals, proud and dignified, sharing one common interest: to form a strong nation. They can no longer pretend to be willing bedmates. To avoid a national divorce, both parties must be honest with each other and deal based on their people's aspirations and gut feelings and overlook the snares of legal jargon and bureaucracy.

EDITORIAL



The Meech Lake Accordion

LETTERS

The opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of *Excalibur* staff or directors. However, letters judged to be racist, sexist or libellous by the editor will be refused. All material is subject to editing. All submissions must be addressed to the Editor-in-Chief, Room 111, Central Square.

New Excalibur fights racism

To the editor,

Congratulations on an excellent two-page article on race relations and racism on campus in your first edition of the 1990-1991 *Excalibur*. Ira Nayman's piece explicitly addressed the important contemporary problem of overt and institutional racism at York, and at universities across Canada.

In the case of York, there is particularly an interesting paradox that emerges around the issue of race relations. While we boast the most multi-racial campus in the country — and with it an image of tolerance and accessibility to different cultural groups — a great number of incidents of overt racism are reported each year (such as racist graffiti or physical confrontations). Moreover, institutional racism is also deeply entrenched on our campus: the students of York, not unlike other universities across Canada, are the consumers of a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum.

Excalibur welcomes letters to the editor on all topics. We will publish, space permitting, letters up to 500 words in length. They must be typed, double spaced, and accompanied by the writer's name, signature and telephone number.

I believe that it is the responsibility of the 1990-1991 York Student Federation to create awareness around the issue of race relations on our campus, and to champion ways of overcoming racial barriers in the future. I hope that we may share this task with various campus and community groups — including those who have already done extensive work in this area — to ensure utmost efficacy.

It is certainly pleasing to see the "new" *Excalibur* devoting generous space to fighting racism. Hopefully, this will continue throughout the year. Cheers!

Jean Ghomeshi
President
York Student Federation

Marriott leave the kitchen

To the editor,

I hope Harry Arthurs can help me understand. Why do residence students subsidize the Marriott Corporation?

First his administration wanted to force students to purchase a \$2,100 meal plan and now we have to pay a \$200 cafeteria user's fee. As I understand it, we are paying this because Marriott cannot make money at this university.

Presently, there is a student centre and a mall under construction on this campus; both will have food courts. Why would such ambitious plans be made if there is no money to be made at York?

Marriott is not losing money because of students. Poor facilities, staff problems, food quality, etc., are the responsibilities of the caterer not the student. If Marriott cannot compete, they should get out of the kitchen.

It appears that a large corporation is taking advantage of the students who live on this campus. Is this a correct assumption?

Brett Lamb
former editor
Vandoo

Thank God for softball

To the editor,

As an avid participant in many of the extra curricular events that are organized at York, and as a contributor of time and money towards York University, I noted with interest the new softball field which was provided for the York University softball league, after a new parking lot replaced Vanier Field.

Among other things, I organized a softball team at York. When

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EXCALIBUR

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