

# "Canadian unity" — preserving the status quo?

by Michel Gagnon

For many, the debate over the Quebec national question will be resolved through a "yes" or "no" vote in the referendum. Political science and sociology students, divided into "yes" and "no" camps, play at deciding Quebec's political future. Politicians and organizations campaigning for "Canadian unity" are also keeping the debate on the "yes or no" level, but for very practical reasons. Their interest lies in preserving the status quo because they benefit from it.

It is not the intention of this article to choose sides in the debate, or to point out the advantages and disadvantages of the two positions. The decision to be made about Quebec's future must be made by the Quebecois. Whatever they decide is their business and they will have to live with the consequences of their decision.

## The right to self-determination

Our role as Albertans is not, however, to ignore the debate, but to ensure that the Quebecois are able to decide their political future freely, democratically, and without threats, intimidation, or repression. This means that we must defend Quebec's right to self-determination.

To understand the Quebec nation's right to self-determination, we must recognize that Quebec is indeed a nation, and not just another province of Canada. Quebec is the land of a nation that was established in North America in the 17th century. The Quebec people have developed as a stable community for almost 300 years. They share a common language, cultural heritage, and history. Unity of territory, of economic relations and of culture has always been a basic feature of the Quebec people. Perhaps most importantly, they possess a strong sense of their own national identity, and a growing political will to safeguard it. In short, this is what makes Quebec a nation.

It is also important to recognize how Quebec has been oppressed as a nation. Many groups promoting so-called "Canadian unity", such as the People to People petition, try to downplay the oppression of the Quebec nation. Rather than admitting national oppression, these groups will camouflage it by saying that some unidentified "rights and dignities have sometimes been neglected or offended." (As cited in the People to People Petition)

This "neglect" means that it is still harder for francophones than for non-francophones in Quebec to get to university or to attain superior-level jobs. The income of francophones is still considerably lower than that of non-

francophones in Quebec, and the death rate of francophones is higher than that of non-francophones. When unemployment, the percentage of slum housing (5% in Toronto, 19.8% in Montreal), the percentage of tenants (37.1% in Ontario, 52.6% in Quebec), and life expectancy (Quebec has the lowest life expectancy of all the provinces) are considered, talking of "neglect" rather than oppression is not only unjust but demagogic. (See chart)

Today, as in the past, the Quebec nation suffers different forms of national oppression. These include the denial of language rights (especially at work) and economic inequality, which have long been recognized and fought against. The Act of Union in 1840 gave Upper Canada privileges to ensure its political and legislative control over Lower Canada, despite Upper Canada's smaller population. Confederation was imposed on the Quebecois without their consent. Despite mass protests in Quebec, conscription was forced on the Quebecois during the two world wars, and the Canadian army occupied Quebec during the War Measures Act in 1970. All popular movements against national oppression have been met by threats, intimidation and brutal repression on the part of the Canadian State. These facts attest to real national oppression.

## Campaigning for "Unity"

Threats and intimidation are still evident today, and the possibility of more repression should not be dismissed lightly. A major campaign for Canadian unity is in the works, and politicians, organizations and corporations that until recently showed contempt for the national rights of the Quebecois and others, are proposing a conception of Canadian unity that is contrary to the interests of the Quebecois and Canadians.

A closer look at who finances and manages some of the organizations promoting "unity", which is actually national oppression, shows that this "unity" serves the interests of those who profit from the oppression.

The People to People Petition for Canadian Unity, launched by the Rotary Club of Prince Edward Island, is the main instrument of the movement for Canadian unity. It is backed by the national Chamber of Commerce, and bankrolled to the tune of \$48,000 by the federal government. Others work through organizations like "Canadians for One Canada", founded by prairie millionaire James Richardson in 1977. The "National Citizens Coalition" was created by bankers like Manning of the Bank of Commerce. Another outfit, the "Pro-Canada" foundation, has undertaken to raise funds for groups cam-

aigning for Canadian unity. It has already obtained \$75,000 from Bell Canada; \$75,000 from the Aluminum Company of Canada; \$60,000 from

	non-francophones	francophones
<b>Education</b>		
scholarship, 12 years of more		
in 1971	26.5%	15.2%
in 1978	31.5%	21.3%
access to university		
in 1971	23.6%	8.2%
in 1978	24.6%	11.8%
<b>Income</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Quebec</b>
average income in 1977	\$7,411	\$6,903
Quebecers with incomes below \$10,500		
in 1971	55.2%	64.5%
in 1978	41.4%	48.3%
Quebecers with incomes above \$16,500		
in 1971	41.4%	10.8%
in 1978	30.6%	21.0%
<b>Living conditions</b>		
death rate (from 35 to 64 yrs)	8.6/1000 inhab.	10.4/1000 inhab.
unemployment (1978-1979)	8.5%	11%
percentage of slum housing	<b>Toronto</b> 5%	<b>Montreal</b> 19.8%
percentage of tenants	<b>Ontario</b> 37.1%	<b>Quebec</b> 52.6%
<b>Jobs</b>		
superior level jobs		
in 1971	13.6%	8.2%
in 1978	12.5%	7.3%

Source: L'évolution de la situation socio-économique des francophones et des non-francophones au Québec (1971-1978) P. Remond, D. Grenier, J. Renaud.

Gulf; \$150,000 from Northern Telecom, Canadian International Paper, Dominion Textile, Pratt and Whitney, Dominion Bridge, Kraft, Simpsons-Sears, Milton, Mercantile Bank, Robin Hood, DuPont; \$125,000 from four of the Bronfmann family's companies; \$50,000 from Abitibi-Price; \$34,000 from three subsidiaries of Power Corporation; as well as funds from companies like Rio Algom (subsidiary of a British company), the Bank Canadian National, and so on (details from *La Presse*, Oct. 4, 1979). And they would like us to believe that these big capitalists and financiers finance the campaign for Canadian unity out of the goodness of their democratic hearts...

But the "unity" campaign's activities concern more than just these organizations. They are reaching into nearly every sphere of Canadian life. The mayors of Kitchener and London, Ont., have decided to spend \$20,000 in public funds to mail out the People to

People Petition with municipal tax bills. In this, they were simply following the example set by B.C. Hydro, which used \$8,500 of the taxpayers' money for the same purpose. School boards have been circulating similar petitions among teachers and encouraging them to read them to the pupils.

The same thing has been happening here in Alberta, where tens of thousands of people have signed the People to People Petition. Public utilities companies distributed the petition, and Premier Lougheed gave it official backing when he declared February 3 to 9 "Canadian Unity Week" in Alberta. Mayor Purves of Edmonton followed suit.

Another unity group, "Contact Canada", has as honorary chairmen former Governors-General Jules Léger and Roland Michener, and its funding comes from the business community.

On the federal level, none of the parties recognizes that Quebec has the right to decide its political future. Trudeau has always been quite clear on this score; his proposal of a Canadian referendum was simply another blatant illustration of this. Clark stated that Quebec could not decide on its own to pull out of Confederation. Broadbent hummed the same refrain, saying that Quebec had the right to decide its political future "freely" but that it could not unilaterally decide to separate. Moreover, all of them have thrown themselves into the battle for "Canadian unity".

The groups behind the various organizations for Canadian unity have an interest in preserving the kind of political "unity" brought about by Confederation in 1867. This political "unity" was brought about by the forcible integration of the Quebec nation into the Canadian State. It also involves molding public opinion so that, when the time comes, the Canadian State will be able to use the repression it deems necessary to stifle Quebec's national demands, as well as similar demands from the Native people and ethnic minorities.

*Freedom to unite or not to unite is the only real guarantee of equality, and is the only solid foundation for the unity of nations in a single country. The right to self-determination means recognizing a given nation's right to choose its own political future — nothing more and nothing less.*

*We as Albertans don't have any interest in taking a side in the "yes" or "no" campaign. Our interest lies in defending the basic democratic right of the Quebec nation to self-determination. Our defense of this right will reinforce the struggle of other peoples in Canada, and will be a step forward in the defense of minority and linguistic rights.*

## Inventory Reduction Sale

of selected sizes & types of summer tires

# VIVARADIAL

Here's a top value radial that cushions your ride, gives you long-lasting performance at great low prices!

**45.90** each  
P185/75R13 (BR78-13) Whitewall  
Low prices on other sizes, too.

Fiberglass belts combine with polyester body to give you riding comfort, long mileage and handling benefits of radial design.

ER78/14 195/14 BLACKWALL 49.85	ER78/14 WHITEWALL 57.75	FR78/14 WHITEWALL 59.85	GR78/15 WHITEWALL 67.75	HR78/15 WHITEWALL 69.85
---	-------------------------------	-------------------------------	-------------------------------	-------------------------------

# GOOD YEAR

THE TIRE WAREHOUSE  
9625 - 63 AVE (Argyll Rd) 437-4555 24 Hour Secretary

## CAREER OPPORTUNITY



### RADIOTHERAPY TECHNOLOGIST

Administer radiation treatment to cancer patients. This is a 27 month, in hospital, training program, with monthly stipends.

**Contact:**  
Marilynn Davis RT (T)  
Radiotherapy Department  
Cross Cancer Institute  
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 1Z2  
Phone 432-8518

"COME FOR THE FUN OF IT"

# INTERCOLLEGIATE RODEO



FRIDAY, APRIL 11 7:30  
SATURDAY, APRIL 12 1:30

SPRUCE GROVE ARENA  
\$3.00 AT THE DOOR

YOUNGERS 12 & UNDER \$1.00

SPONSORED BY U of A RODEO CLUB