

A COMMON SENSE UNITY STRATEGY FOR ALL CANADIANS

Ton That Thien

One of the great dangers about the debate over Canadian unity is that it may deteriorate into an exchange of emotion charged mutual recriminations. Fortunately, after a period of confusion, two central ideas have emerged and, hopefully, will provide a common sense approach leading to solutions acceptable to all. The ideas come from Mr Leon Dion and Mr Bouchard.

Let us start with the stark fact that if Mr Bouchard wants to take Quebec out of Canada, he can do so any time. Mr Chretien can do nothing about it. Arguing that the present Canadian Constitution does not provide for such separation is a legalist approach. Mr Chretien is not only a lawyer, but also, and foremost, a politician. He ought to know better.

The only way Mr Chretien can stop Mr Bouchard from taking Quebec out of Canada is to use force, i.e., to resort to war. But to be able to this, he must have the support of an overwhelming majority of the English Canadians. He is not likely to get this support because it is hard to imagine that many English Canadians will be prepared to shed blood, especially their own blood, to prevent Quebec from separating. Besides, no Canadian wants a Bosnian-type war here. So, Mr Chretien will be struck.

Here Mr Dion has come to the rescue of Mr Chretien by putting forward a key thesis. However, because he did not elaborate on it, his utterance was denounced by a number of Quebecers as "scare tactics" and "provocation". But the Dion thesis is based on law as well as history and equity. The peoples constituting Canada, and the various peoples/nations constituting Quebec, are bound together by the British North America Act of 1867. If Quebec secedes from Canada, this Constitution is automatically terminated, and all the bonds binding the various peoples of Canada together, as well as all the bonds binding the peoples/nations of Quebec are dissolved.

Mr Chretien has been helped also by Mr Bouchard, who may have second thoughts about separation because he now realises that once he has won his battle with Mr Chretien and taken Quebec out of Canada, he will face the same problems in Quebec, for the dissolution of the B.N.A.A means that the bonds between Quebec and the peoples/nations constituting Quebec are automatically dissolved also. These peoples/nations will have three options: 1/ staying with Quebec, which means negotiating a new treaty with Quebec, and we can presume that they will demand from Quebec all the things that Quebec has wanted from Canada in regard to language, culture, immigration, finance, control over their natural resources, and the rest. Otherwise, they will separate. And Mr Bouchard won't be able to stop it, as he himself has forcefully defended the principle that democracy must be respected, and democracy means that 50 plus 1 per cent in a referendum is all it takes for a people to separate. The second option is for these nations/peoples to join another province, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Ontario, or even the United States. A third option is independence. So, if Mr Bouchard looks at a map of a broken up Quebec -- itself the result of his breaking up of Canada --, he will see that there will be little territory -- and resources -- left to a separated Quebec.

Mr Bouchard's argument that Quebec is indivisible will be just as worthless as Mr Chretien's argument that Canada is indivisible. Mr Bouchard will have to resort to war to

prevent any of the native nations/people from leaving Quebec.....He will have to ask the Quebecers whether they are prepared to say good bye to the James Bay complex, the Hudson Bay, and much else, or be prepared to shed their blood to preserve the unity of Quebec. The answer will very probably be an overwhelming No. So, just as Mr Chretien, he will be stuck.

To make the picture perfectly clear, Mr Chretien should have his officials draw up such a map and circulate it widely for all Quebecers to look at and ponder with cool heads over the true consequences of what they have been encouraged by their leaders to do. To make things stick more strongly, Mr Chretien should also make a formal declaration that the democratic principle of 50 plus 1 per cent will be respected fully in the case of Quebec's separation from Canada, but will apply also to the separation of the native peoples/nations from Quebec. Eventually, the Bouchard principle -- 50 plus one per cent is all that is needed for separation-- could be extended to predominantly non-Quebecois regions of Quebec as well.

All the above are common sense considerations. And common sense is what should dictate everybody's attitude at this moment. Everything that could be construed as pressure, scare, threats, deception, should be avoided.

800 words

Ton That Thien is a retired professor and a free lance journalist now living in Ottawa.

To: The Special contributors' page Editor
The Ottawa Citizen
1101 Baxter Road
Ottawa, Ont. K2C 4M4