

# The most Canadian province

Quebecers have a distinct passion for embracing the new national values



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I want Québec to be a country," said André Boisclair, during the campaign that gave him the leadership of the separatist Parti Québécois, "and a country in our image, capable of satisfying our legitimate aspirations."

The last part of this sentence is meaningless. Unless all Quebecers have exactly the same preferences and the same aspirations, it can only mean that the new country will be run in the image of the rulers or the ruling classes,

who will impose their aspirations by force.

Or perhaps this grandiloquent sentence was metaphorical, meaning that the Quebec state will reflect the so-called "distinct society." The problem is that there is not much of a distinct society in Quebec.

There used to be. Until the 1960s, Quebec differed from the rest of the country because of its French-Canadian and Catholic population. As peasants, men of the woods, and family women, the French-Canadians were suspicious of political power, and probably more so than other Canadians. Alexandre Taschereau, Quebec's Liberal premier from 1920 to 1936, rightly thought that Roosevelt's New Deal was "a Socialistic venture bordering on communism."

The Quebec church did have much authority, but it was moral authority more than political power.

Although the French-Canadian (as opposed to the French French) *joie de vivre* has been exaggerated, it did contrast with North American puritanism. French-Canadians were an unruly crowd, as were their *coureurs des bois* ancestors. They were strong, adventurous, self-reliant and free.

Over the past few decades, and probably starting with Maurice Duplessis, who defeated Taschereau, Quebec has imitated, with shorter and shorter time lags, all the statist practices that have appeared elsewhere in Canada and in the western world. Language laws, for example, were the local version of Canadian cultural protectionism.

Quebecers have caught all political viruses, from feminism and politically correct speech to gun control, ID papers and the surveillance-state mentality. Smoking is perhaps the emblematic case: the province of the supposed *joie de vivre* and the unruly crowd has become one of the most restrictive jurisdictions in Canada, and

the mimicking is not over yet.

The old church's authority was still easier to evade than today's state coercion, and the Catholic dogma was not as regimenting as are the environmental and egalitarian religions. The fact that the former Quebec Securities Commission was recently renamed the "Authority" (*Autorité des marchés financiers*), and that nobody laughs (or shoots), is significant.

Something does remain of the distinct society. French-Canadians are extremely tolerant; "live and let live" could be their motto. Even Duplessis, as Conrad Black reminds us in his monumental biography of the premier, "was anything but a puritan," and "felt that the Attorney-General's department, and the police in particular, had better things to do than being the custodians of national morality." Similarly, today's French-Canadians don't care that Boisclair has taken cocaine, as was recently revealed.

However, French-Canadians are tolerant to the point of absurdity: they tolerate restrictions of their liberties by anybody with a bigger mouth and a bigger stick. They

ignore the fact that Boisclair bought his coke with his taxpayer-paid salary, and will accept with resignation that his future government continues to enforce drug bans against them. Instead of resisting, they retreat into the underground economy, keep their guns illegally, and so forth, just as their ancestors retreated to the woods.

Even the traditional French-Canadian tolerance has rapidly receded with the imposition of artificial and

coerced diversity, the regimentation of the younger generations, and the immigration of people coming from worse tyrannies and ignorant of our traditional liberties.

The problem, then, is not that the average Quebecer is different than the typical Ontarian or British Columbian; the problem is that he is more Canadian—that is, more naively statist—than anybody in the country. Quebecers are Canadians with a vengeance. The very fact that "French-Canadian" is now considered a taboo term confirms that the new Quebecers who have replaced the ancient French-Canadians are just obedient Canadians who speak bad French.

Quebec "sovereignty" would mean exactly what "sovereign" means: an all-powerful state. The only hope, perhaps, is that the Quebec state would become an inefficient banana republic, where escaping the visible fist of the state wouldn't be too difficult. At least for some people. **WS**

*The land of the supposed joie de vivre is now one of the most restrictive parts of the country*