

LE PARTI QUEBÉCOIS : A PARTY-MOVEMENT

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The **Parti Québécois** (PQ) is a social movement which is presently manifested as a political party. One must make this classification if one is to properly understand this "party-movement" and contemporary Quebec politics ; a task which has become particularly important since the Quebec general elections of November 1976 when the PQ, which is dedicated to the independence of Quebec, won control of the Quebec parliament in a landslide victory. Not only does one gain historical perspective by classifying the PQ in this manner but also an increased analytical capacity since a political party which is the spearhead of a social movement is an entirely different type of political structure from a "pure" political party with correspondingly different types of behavioral patterns. Social movements intend to perform sweeping political and social change. Political parties, on the other hand, intend to win elections and control of the government. Although movements sometimes take the form of political parties and may act as political parties in the electoral arena, the winning of elections is clearly secondary to their aim of performing significant social change (1).

The wide goals of the PQ, as accepted by the delegates to its national congresses, are the best indication that the PQ is not simply a political party but a social movement as well. The major goal of most members and leaders of the PQ is the independence of Quebec. For most **péquistes** this is the starting point from which all else follows. They feel that only through independence can an "island" of five million Francophones on an Anglophone continent properly safeguard and develop its own distinctive Québécois culture and its essential element, the French language. They are well aware that according to demographic data, the percentage of the Francophone portion of the province is steadily decreasing. They also witness for themselves that the province's major city, Montreal, is losing its French character and increasingly becoming a polyglot city with Italian, Greek, and other minority sections. They are both angered and frightened when they meet Canadians from other provinces with French names but who do not know a word of French. The word "Louisiana" is a magic word in the Quebec political culture ; they don't want to have the same fate. It is thus not surprising to find listed as the first objective in the official party program of the

Parti Québécois the following : "Achieve the political sovereignty of Quebec by democratic means and propose to Canada a mutually advantageous economic association" (2).

A second fundamental goal of the PQ is a just distribution of the wealth of the collectivity. This goal was first clearly promoted in a 1972 watershed manifesto of the party executive council entitled **Quand nous serons vraiment chez nous** which was intended to considerably expand the social and economic goals of the party (3). The authors explain that the inequality of profit and success is not close to disappearing among men, but they feel that in an independent Quebec they could at least change the structures which congeal changes. Following the lead of their party's executive council as expressed in this manifesto, the delegates to the party's fourth national congress passed the following resolution which clearly made this goal part of the official party program : "Seek the establishment of a social justice based on a just distribution of the wealth and the complete elimination of poverty" (4).

The third major goal of the PQ is an improved participation of the citizen in both the economic and political life of the nation. In their manifesto the executive council proposed a situation in which one would strive to give all men the opportunity of knowing a fruitful and satisfying life by assuming a fuller role in the society's decision-making process. More specifically the authors suggested that collective forms of organization should be favored in order to assure the participation of the workers in economic decision-making. With respect to improving the participation of the individual in the political life of the new nation, it suggested a massive decentralisation of governmental institutions in order to bring government closer to the citizen. These and other related suggestions were accepted into the party program by the PQ's fourth national congress.

In addition to its broad goals, another indication that the PQ is a party-movement rather than a pure political party is the belief of the party militants that the PQ is much more than a political party. They consider that they are working for a cause or ideal which makes the PQ vastly different from the "old parties" in Quebec. No one has ever made an empirical study of this phenomenon by means of public opinion polls or survey research but this becomes evident when talking with PQ militants and when attending PQ meetings.

There is a certain excitement and electricity in the air at PQ gatherings which contrasts with the drab, official atmosphere of the meetings of other political parties. This is especially evident when one of the

heroes of the movement such as party president (and now Quebec Prime Minister) René Lévesque enters the auditorium. As one French-Canadian journalist tried to explain this phenomenon several years ago, their enthusiasm is due to the fact that for PQ militants, Lévesque "does not only represent a potential prime minister but the defender of a dream as well" (5).

This sentiment that they are members of both a party and a movement is also shared by the party leaders as implied or stated in their declarations and writings. Nevertheless I specifically asked René Lévesque his thoughts on this matter in March 1976. Is the **Parti Québécois** of which he is the principal founder and the only president in its history at the same time a political party in that it wants to take power and a social movement in that it wants to perform change? His answer was unequivocal :

Yes, it's true. The only thing that I work at as much as I can with others is that the social movement has to be subordinated to the political party or else we get nowhere. In other words, don't forget you're a social movement. You want change. You want even profound changes. But the way to implement them is to bring the party to power not just to be half one half the other all the time (6).

Still another indication that the PQ is a social movement is the extreme diversity of its adherents who are held together by the general goal of independence. The PQ was born when the **Mouvement Souveraineté-Association** "merged" with the **Ralliement National** (in reality the former organization absorbed the latter) in October 1968. This was followed by the dissolution of a third separatist organization two weeks later, the **Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale**, which instructed its members to join the new PQ. Each of these three organizations had vastly different types of members. The **Mouvement Souveraineté-Association** was a moderate social democratic group consisting largely of former members and cadres of the **Parti Libéral du Québec** who followed their hero René Lévesque out of that pro-federalist party in October 1967, three months after the visit to Quebec of General De Gaulle. The **Ralliement National** was a populist reactionary group. The **Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale** changed its ideological stance several times during its eight year existence between 1960 and 1968 but it could be classified as a left-wing organization tainted by the aroma of violence at the time of its dissolution. Why would the militants and leaders of the **Ralliement National**

and the **Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale** sacrifice their organizations and leadership positions to the benefit of the PQ ? For the same reason that radical right elements who want to return Quebec to the period when the province was controlled by the powerful Quebec Catholic Church as well as radical left elements who would like to institute a "People's Republic of Quebec" militate within the ranks of the same social democratic party : because the goal of independence is so basic that for the moment it overrides all other differences.

The predominance of the goal of independence was especially made clear to me in early 1976 when I conducted interviews with the three most important Quebec separatist leaders preceding René Lévesque : Raymond Barbeau, Marcel Chaput, and Pierre Bourgault. Barbeau's name is unfamiliar to the general Quebec population but if there is any one individual to whom the title "the father of the modern Quebec separatist movement" could be designated, it's Barbeau. He almost single-handedly resurrected separatism as a serious topic of discussion in the late 1950's and early 1960's by utilizing an organization which he founded, the **Alliance Laurentienne**, as a center of successful propaganda activities. Chaput carried on Barbeau's initial success by using the **Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale** and his short-lived **Parti Républicain du Québec** as propaganda bases from which he helped transform the separatist issue from a simple topic of discussion to one of the most discussed and critical issues of Quebec politics. Bourgault continued the propaganda activities of his two predecessors throughout the mid- and late 1960's while president of the **Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale**. He also laid the groundwork for the more distant future by entering candidates from this organization in the 1966 Quebec general elections, thereby creating separatist electoral structures and giving separatists electoral experience.

All three of these leaders par excellence of the Quebec separatist movement expressed to me their severe discontent with the PQ. Not only do they have their respective ideological, strategic, and tactical differences with the PQ (all three are especially angered by the PQ pledge to hold a referendum before declaring independence), but they also feel personally affronted by the PQ leadership which they feel wants to keep them in the background regardless of their past personal sacrifices and accomplishments. Yet all three are supporters of the PQ in varying degrees because they know very well that they simply don't have the choice. If they want to see the goal to which they dedicated their lives accomplished, they must let the polished politicians, public relations

specialists, and other "newcomers" to the movement take over ; and they are resigned to accept any policy or personal difference in the process. Chaput directly stated the case on behalf of himself and other veteran separatists :

What do you want that we do, found another party ? No, obviously we can't found another party. You see, that which makes the strength of René Lévesque, it's this, one must never forget it : He says to himself the following : "The old independentists, they're going to vote for me no matter what I do to them". Unfortunately, he's right. Regardless of all that he does with respect to us, the only thing we can do is not to vote at all. But then one realizes that after all the years that we are independentists, we want to vote for the cause of independence (7).

We have noted above that among the disparate adherence to the PQ who are held together by the common goal of independence one finds elements of the radical right and left. Does their presence (which is not major) make the PQ a party prone to violence ? The answer is clear : No. The unfounded charge of violence, direct or implied, is a fear tactic used by opponents of the independentist movement in order to scare the Quebec population away from supporting the PQ. For example the late Réal Caouette, one of the best known names in post-World War II Quebec politics, once made the following charge during a Quebec election campaign : "If you don't want a bloody revolution in Quebec, don't go and vote for the PQ. Vote for your future, not for socialism, communism, revolution or blood in the streets of Quebec" (8). However the PQ leadership is very well aware that violence is the worst possible strategy for a political party to take and keep power and they are uncompromising in their rejection of this method. For example, the PQ leadership severely vilified the **Front de Libération du Québec** (FLQ) and its violent activities from the beginning of the "October Crisis" of 1970 during which the Quebec Minister of Labor and Immigration, Pierre Laporte, was kidnapped and eventually assassinated. Similarly, in October 1971 the PQ executive council voted at the last minute that the PQ would abstain from participating in a labor-organized demonstration in support of the striking workers of the Montreal newspaper, **La Presse**, since there were strong indications (which later proved to be correct) that the demonstration would result in violence.

If the radical elements want to militate within the PQ, they

must do it on the PQ terms--peacefully. And they have. The most prominent example of this occurred in December 1971 when Pierre Vallières, the most important theoretician ever produced by the **Front de Libération du Québec**, surprisingly announced his disavowal of the FLO and violent action, his intention to join the PQ, and his request that all FLO members and sympathizers follow his lead. Vallières, who was living underground at the time, made known his decision by sending a letter and a manuscript of a chapter from his new book (9) to Claude Ryan, the editor of the Montreal daily **Le Devoir**. In this work, Vallières argues that the action of the FLO, as exemplified in the October 1970 crisis, has become a pretext and occasion for the regime to crush the genuine forces of liberation : the PQ, the unions, and citizens' committees. In these circumstances it is against the interest of the Quebec people for the FLO to continue its violent activities. It has to choose between scuttling itself or unintentionally aiding the strategy of the present regime ; the former is the only valid choice. Surely the PQ leadership would have preferred that Vallières had never joined their organization since, regardless of his change in thinking over the years, he will always be remembered as a former FLO leader and the author of the pro-violence classic, **Nègres blancs d'Amérique** (10). But they did not refuse his membership once he renounced violence. Thus the independentists of the radical right and left can differ with the moderate social democratic goals of the official party program and still militate within the party. They cannot differ, however, with the PQ rejection of violence.

The victory of the party in the November 1976 election was also a victory of the movement. After all, the groundwork for the victory was laid by independentists since the late 1950's, over a decade before the very existence of the PQ. Furthermore, the party was aided by the electoral work of a flood of young members dedicated to the ideal of the movement. However being a party-movement also has one overwhelming disadvantage which has hurt this particular party-movement in the past and is likely to play havoc in the future : the tensions between the demands of the party and the ethic of the movement. Lévesque made this clear with respect to the PQ in the quote above when he admitted that he has to spend considerable time dealing with this problem with PQ militants.

The most clear-cut case where this tension has disrupted the PQ during its short history was over the question of whether to include in the party program a pledge to hold and abide by a referendum on independence a couple of years after the PQ is elected to power.

This project was almost the single-handed work of Claude Morin, a member of the PQ executive council and since the PQ electoral victory the Quebec Minister of Inter-Governmental Affairs. Morin strived for several years to convince his party's strategists and militants that for the PQ to win power, it was imperative to dissociate in the minds of the voters the accession to power of the PQ and the proclamation of independence, a subject which was not clearly defined in the PQ program. Morin finally had his way when the resolution pledging a referendum was accepted into the party program by the delegates to the PQ's fifth national congress in November 1974. However the issue caused a serious dispute in the party which has still not healed (A dispute which ironically might have aided the PQ at the last elections since each time those **péquistes** who opposed the referendum resolution attacked it, they also reinforced in the public's mind the moderation of the party program). This dispute really involved the proper balance between the "party" and "movement" aspects of the PQ. Those members who wanted to stress the "party" aspect demanded that such a resolution be passed since this would make the party more electorally attractive. Those members who wanted to stress the "movement" aspect urged that the resolution be rejected since they did not want to be in the frustrating position whereby the party takes and perhaps keeps power without achieving the primary goal of the movement, independence. In trying to explain and predict the behavior of the PQ now that it has taken power, one should take into consideration the tension between the demands of the party and the ethic of the movement in the various manifestations which it might take in the future.

By classifying the PQ as a political party which is the manifestation of a social movement not only does one better understand the behavior of this organization, but comparison with movements in other political systems becomes more appropriate. For example, at the level of **separatist** movement one can not make a valid comparison between the Quebec separatist movement and the French regional movements, such as those in Brittany and Corsica, because the French movements are not separatist, regardless of the vocabulary of some of the organizations. At the level of **social** movement, such a comparison becomes possible since both the Quebec and French movements are not restricted to their particular systems but rather constitute an international phenomenon: ethnic group social movements within ethnically heterogeneous states. In fact the comparison between the Quebec and French ethnic movements is more appropriate than between many other political systems because both the

Canadian and French states condone non-violent dissent (11). Interestingly enough, in both systems the movements have taken an open, non-violent form (e.g., the **Parti Québécois**, the **Union Démocratique Bretonne**, and the **Association des Patriotes Corses**) and a clandestine, violent form (e.g., the **Front de Libération du Québec**, the **Front de Libération de Bretagne**, and the **Front National de Libération de la Corse**). In those states where dissent is completely prohibited the movement must remain underground and take the form of a secret society as exemplified by the Basque and Catalan movements under Franco Spain.

NOTES

- (1) *The best conceptual study distinguishing social movements from political parties remains Rudolf Heberle, **Social Movements : An Introduction to Political Sociology**, New York : Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951.*
- (2) *Le Parti Québécois, "Le Programme, l'Action politique, Les Statuts et Règlements ; édition 1975", p. 5.*
- (3) *Le Parti Québécois, **Quand nous serons vraiment chez nous**, Montreal : Éditions du Parti Québécois, 1973. For the context under which this crucial document was written, see my "Internal Conflits within the **Parti Québécois**", *Dalhousie Review*, forthcoming.*
- (4) *Le Parti Québécois, "Le Programme, l'Action politique, Les Statuts et Règlements ; édition 1973", p. 17.*
- (5) *Gérald Le Blanc, "C'est en la chiffrant . . . que le PQ a voulu désamorcer son option", "Le Devoir", 27 octobre 1973, p. 2.*
- (6) *Interview with René Lévesque, Montréal, March 1, 1976.*
- (7) *Interview with Marcel Chaput, Montréal, March 10, 1976.*
- (8) *Quoted in François Aubin, **René Lévesque : tel quel**, Montréal : Editions du Boréal Express, 1973, p. 154.*

- (9) *The book was later published. See Pierre Vallières, **L'Urgence de choisir**, Montreal : Editions Parti-pris, 1971 .*
- (10) *Vallières, **Nègres blancs d'Amérique**, Montreal : Editions Parti-pris, 1968.*
- (11) *For the influence of the type of regime upon the form which dissent takes within a system, see especially Robert A. Dahl, **Political Opposition in Western Democracies**, New Haven : Yale University Press, 1966, chap. 11.*