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Conrad Black: Dumont poised to be new Duplessis

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The largely negative reaction to the Quebec election in federalist Canada is astounding. Independentist sentiment in that province has collapsed to barely over a quarter of the vote, where it was 35 years ago. The ADQ leader, who is now the leader of the Opposition, Mario Dumont, represents at least the partial return of the Duplessis formula of getting non-separatist nationalists and conservatives to vote together, a delicate but useful operation. And this election is the beginning of a revival of fiscal and social conservatism in Quebec, after a lapse of 40 years.

The guardians and champions of the *bonne entente* movement in English Canada - - the advocates of French-English conciliation, often at exorbitant fiscal cost to Ontario and Alberta and jurisdictional cost to Ottawa -- seem heartbroken. They effectively promised to keep Quebec in Canada by giving it everything it asked except independence.

They never disputed the right of Quebec to secede because admission of that right preserved the apparent indispensability of the Liberal party to the integrality of Canada. They are now like ardent Cold Warriors, wandering around with the daze of acute cabin fever after the Berlin Wall came down and the USSR collapsed.

The separatists tormented Canada for decades. From the founding of the Union Nationale by Duplessis in 1935 through the Laurendeau-Dunton Report 30 years later, the authentic spokesmen for the culture and the state of Quebec promised that biculturalism would solve the country's problems; an effort by the English to learn French and give French an equal status, and not just the French clinging to a provincial corner of the continent.

As soon as this began to happen, the same leaders of Quebec -- Le Devoir, the leading Quebec historians, Rene Levesque, the Liberal education minister Paul Gerin-Lajoie and other equivalent worthies -- denounced biculturalism as an attempt to assimilate French Quebec, a Trojan Horse to produce English unilingualism via the halfway house of bilingualism.

The elites of Quebec were exposed in their hypocrisy and parochialism, in their desire to preserve a fiefdom of isolated French Canadians they could exploit. The federal Liberal party quickly adapted to this, and metamorphosed overnight from Mr. Pearson's biculturalists (Lester Pearson did not speak 100 words of French), to Pierre Trudeau's championship of heavy financial transfers to Quebec, universal charter rights that could be vacated by any province and were essentially window dressing, and an iron fist against any secessionist threat to the federal state. Trudeau bagged the rednecks who wanted to crack down on Quebec, the *bonne ententistes* who wanted to conciliate Quebec, and the conventional Quebec

federalists of convenience in the same net. Bob Stanfield and Joe Clark were completely implausible alternatives, and after Brian Mulroney's heartfelt effort at constitutional resolution at Meech Lake, the federal Progressive Conservatives conveniently (for the Liberals) cracked up.

Quebec's Quiet Revolution, starting in 1960, was really just the secularization of the elites. Duplessis maintained a priest-ridden society, while asserting the provincial government's authority over the Church, to maintain low public-sector salaries and devote most of Quebec's budget to highways, schools, hospitals, universities and the other instances of a modern state, which Quebec had never been before.

With Jean Lesage, Rene Levesque and the other leaders of the Quiet Revolution, we had the same people teaching the same students and caring for the same patients in the same schools and hospitals, at 10 times the cost to the taxpayers, as the clerical personnel left their religious orders, intermarried, unionized and created industrial relations chaos in the public sector. Quebec, so long the most socially conservative part of Canada, had an extravagant romance with "social democracy," not because the avaricious descendants of the Norman and Breton peasants who founded New France suddenly became socialistic, but because this was an intellectually presentable method of redistributing money from the English and Jewish upper income groups of Quebec to the new haut-fonctionnaire apparatus.

The frequently insulting treatment of the non-French minority in Quebec, endless fatuous debates about the "privilege" of speaking English in a province of a 75% English-speaking country and 98% English-speaking continent (north of the Rio Grande), drove out many. But they could not take their comfortable homes and commodious offices with them.

Duplessis knew that only an agile political personality could maintain his nationalist-conservative coalition. He had it arranged for his most talented followers, Paul Sauve and Daniel Johnson, to follow him. No one could foresee that those able premiers would die in their early fifties of cardiological problems, while just starting to build their governments. With the death of Johnson in 1968, nationalism in Quebec passed from the hands of the conservatives who had held it since Henri Bourassa, to the moderate left and Rene Levesque.

Where Duplessis and Johnson had promised "autonomy," enhanced provincial rights and jurisdiction, but not independence, Levesque promised the more egregious confidence trick of sovereignty and association. Quebec would eat its cake, and still retain it in its lap, it would exchange embassies with the world while receiving equalization payments. It was a complete fraud. Claude Morin, the chief architect of the program, was a closet federalist.

Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard gave the trick question one more try, and Jean Chretien, after panicking in the second referendum campaign, did finally produce the Clarity Act, requiring a strong majority on an unambiguous question.

Meanwhile, English Canada was satisfied it had made a sincere effort to redress any just grievances the Quebecers had had. They had had some and they were redressed. Demographic trends steadily diluted Quebec's ability to disrupt the country.

The rise in energy prices and international shortages of water, and surging economic growth rates across much of Asia have lifted Canada to an

unprecedented geopolitical prosperity and significance. The federal conservative opposition reunited and the Quebec nationalists seized the federal Quebec rotten borough in Quebec so Canada went from one-and-a-third party rule (the Liberals in government federally for 80 of the 110 years since the rise of Laurier in 1896), to two-party rule.

The Canadian dollar rose from US65\$ to US93?, the percentage of the Canadian gross domestic product that was comprised of trade with the U.S. declined from 43% to 36% and is continuing to diminish. Canada is becoming steadily more important in the world, and Quebec less important in Canada. This is becoming a greater country every year and the rights of the French will be absolutely respected as this process continues, as a matter of principle and respect for a founding people, not as a result of blackmail.

Of course most French Quebecers aren't much interested in Canada; they never were. They only joined Confederation, in 1867, over the opposition of many of their leaders, including A.A. Dorion, because they were afraid of being swallowed whole by the United States.

Having realized that they can't leave it, and that they are subsidized by approximately \$1,000 from Ontario and Alberta for every French Quebecer per year to remain in it, and that Canada is a country to be respected and even proud of, their pan-Canadian instincts will show green shoots any year now. Dumont will bring back Duplessist economics, the Liberals will get a "chef " like Tashereau or Lesage, or at least a local Mackenzie King like Robert Bourassa, and the Bloc and PQ will dissolve. They are anachronisms. What is wrong with all of that?

Canada's and Quebec's political institutions have shown maturity, subtlety, and have endured without recourse to repression. Why is there not unconfined rejoicing at The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, and the CBC? Cabin fever, I guess, after decades of overachieving appeasement, but they will get over it.

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