

It's Time to Determine Once and for All if Canada Wishes to Be One Nation or Two

By Conrad Black

Last week's threat by Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet to withdraw support from the government has attracted more publicity than it deserves. He declared that the Bloc would try to bring down the Liberal government in Parliament if it did not [back the Bloc's bills](#) to increase pension benefits for those between 65 and 74 years old by 10 percent, and guarantee that the supply-managed farm sectors—dairy, poultry, and eggs, would be exempted from any future trade negotiations.



Quebec's National Assembly is seen in Quebec City on June 5, 2024. The Canadian Press/Jacques Boissinot

The full absurdity of these demands requires a moment of reflection to be fully appreciated. What the Bloc does has no bearing whatever on the status of the government, since no Liberal government has failed to bribe the New Democrats and

its precedent organization, [the CCF](#), into sustaining it in government over nearly 100 years, other than [when Pierre Trudeau](#) wished the NDP to vote against it to justify an election in 1974, that he correctly believed his party would win.

The Bloc's parliamentary votes are of no importance and neither should they be, given the ludicrous anomaly of a provincial separatist party in the federal Parliament. This only occurred when [Lucien Bouchard resigned](#) from the Mulroney government in 1991, taking a number of Quebec MPs with him, and set up shop as an outright separatist party. The raison d'être of the Bloc Québécois is to try to obstruct the functioning of the federal government. It has never succeeded in doing this, though for one term Bouchard was the leader of the federal official opposition.

Blanchet got off to a good start as a federal party leader in 2017, as he was somewhat reminiscent of the witty and capable Quebec Premier [Daniel Johnson Sr.](#) (1966–1968). His build, glasses, facial hair, and quick repartee somewhat resembled Johnson's, and his dapper appearance and vivacity of mind were refreshing and even slightly nostalgic.

As time has elapsed, it is becoming steadily more clear that there is no purpose at all to this federal party, and all that can be said of Blanchet now is that he has considerably more weight than his predecessor, Gilles Duceppe. The highlight of Duceppe's 15 years as Bloc leader was his po-faced assertion that the [Roman Catholic church](#) was merely a subversive organization whose purpose was to dispute women's right to abortion. The fact that French Canada owes its cultural survival and that of the French language in North America, as well as 150 years of education and medical care to that church, or that Roman Catholicism is the espoused faith of over one billion people and was the principal facilitator of the Renaissance of the West, seemed to elude his recognition.

Blanchet has not embarrassed himself with anything so asinine as that, but his latest policy proposals and his packing them up into a threat against the government do remind us of the redundancy of his political party. The government raised all pensions two years ago, and while it is responsible for completely unacceptable rates of inflation, we cannot justify pouring more gasoline onto the fire of inflation with a

premature increase in pensions, especially one inexplicably confined to the youngest pensioners. Blanchet would have been better off proposing a 5 percent increase for all pensioners since it may be fairly assumed that the more elderly the pensioners are, the less able they are to fend for themselves financially.

The supply-managed farm sector is the most egregious instance of protectionism in this country and dooms all of Canada to nonsensically expensive dairy products. This is a subsidy so great that it is routinely mocked by former U.S. President Trump as illustrative of Canada's extreme trade protection system.

Both these proposals on the part of the Bloc are pre-election vote buying and posturing of the most obvious kind. Even I, well short of being a fleur-de-lys flag-waving Quebec nationalist as I am, would have expected something a little more subtle and ingenious from the Quebec separatists' agents in Ottawa.

Since these initiatives are not going anywhere, this is a good time to make the point that some kind of showdown is coming with Quebec. It will not be precipitated by separatist MPs in the federal Parliament, but we are finally approaching the time—deferred by the two Quebec sovereignty referendums, and by the patriation of the amendment of the Constitution and the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—to determine if this country wishes to be one nation or two.

Most English Canadians have historically felt a greater affinity for the United States than for a Quebec that was constantly agitating over its condition in Canada and threatening to leave Confederation. The rise in violence and corruption in America and the general decline in the quality of its national leadership, as well as Canada's growth into a population large enough to be relatively self-confident, have somewhat simplified the political scenarios in the event that

Quebec asserts its right to secede.

With the profound secularization of Quebec society, the legendary birth rate collapsed, and in order to retain a strategic mass within Canada sufficient to assure that it retains some influence, Quebec has been obliged to seek substantial numbers of immigrants from Haiti, North Africa, and Lebanon, almost none of whom have the slightest interest in Quebec nationalism. This assures that the ability of the nationalists to win a referendum on independence is less promising than at any time since before the first referendum 45 years ago. Instead, Quebec continues to [discriminate against](#) the English language, and, with the complicity of federal politicians, effectively to abolish the English language even in federally chartered corporations such as [banks](#). This is not acceptable.

As a jurisdiction with no energy resources except abundant hydroelectricity (where it possesses considerable expertise), Quebec also advances the most nonsensical ecological views imaginable, including [adherence](#) to the long-abandoned Kyoto Accord. It has such an aversion to pipelines that although Canada is one of the world's greatest potential sources of oil and natural gas, the obduracy of Quebec requires us to import oil in the eastern provinces of the country. This is not acceptable either.

John A. Macdonald was the chief architect of the only transcontinental, bicultural, parliamentary, Confederation in the history of the world and, except for the United Kingdom and the United States, the senior political arrangements of any large country in the world. The core of this Confederation is that in matters of great importance, there must be a majority of both English and French Canadians. Ignoring this in the imposition of conscription in World War I was what chiefly consigned the federal Conservatives to only 12 years in power between 1921 and the election of Brian Mulroney in 1984.

The time is coming when Canada really should decide if this is a permanent arrangement or not. English and French Canada could certainly survive without the other, and there is no

shortage of people in either camp who would be happy to give it a try. It is time that we stop dodging and deferring this question, and with cool heads on both sides, determine the way forward. I believe a renewed Confederation will result, but it is time to resolve the question.

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