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Strategy Paper on Quebec

In determining overall strategy for constitutional negotiations between now and September 12 and in determining the options to be examined for the period after September 12, it is essential to assess the reaction of the Parti Québécois government and of Mr. Ryan and also to attempt to assess what may be valuable to the people of Quebec.

These are five elements which must be examined:

- 1) The expectations raised by the Prime Minister in the weeks preceding the referendum;
- 2) The National Assembly Committee which will meet on August 14-15;
- 3) The position Premier Levesque will put forward at the First Ministers Conference;
- 4) The probability of a fall election especially if Levesque can find a good issue;
- 5) The role of Claude Ryan.

I. Expectation

It is best to begin with the expectations raised by the Prime Minister during the referendum campaign and expressed clearly by him in the House of Commons on May 21, 1980:



CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

"Altogether, what Quebecers expressed yesterday was a massive support for change within the federal framework. We cannot venture to ignore this will to change which reflects that of all other areas in the country and to fall short of the expectations of Canadians. This is why, on May 14, I solemnly undertook to launch the constitutional renewal and never stop working at it until Canada finally has a new constitution.

However, we would be deceiving ourselves if we were to believe that it will be easy to keep this commitment. We shall need the constant support of the Canadian people and their representatives within this Parliament. We are also counting on the support of all provincial governments, including that of Quebec. We shall all have to agree on the basic principles underlying our efforts. We have to be receptive to the needs and aspirations of all Canadians, to seek together for methods and mechanisms more effective than those used until now and to be willing to make every effort required to achieve success. As for us, our only prerequisites for change are the two which I outlined in Quebec as early as January 1977.

First, that Canada continue to be a real federation, a state whose constitution establishes a federal Parliament with real powers applying to the country as a whole



CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

and provincial legislatures with powers just as real applying to the territory of each province. Second, that a charter of fundamental rights and freedoms be entrenched in the new constitution and that it extend to the collective aspect of these rights, such as language rights.

I had said at the time and I say again today that we consider everything else to be negotiable. What we want is to give Canada a new, modern and functional federal constitution which will enable our governments to better meet the needs and aspirations of all Canadians. This new constitution could include, if the people so wish, several provisions in our present organic laws, but, it will also have to contain new elements reflecting the most innovative proposals emerging from our consultations or from the numerous analyses and considered opinions that have flowed in the last few years from the will to change of Canadians. I am referring, of course, to the many proposals made by the Canadian government since 1968, but also to the Pepin-Robarts report, to the policy papers issued by the governments of British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta and by almost every province but Quebec, to the constitutional proposals of the Liberal party of Quebec, many elements of which could orient the renewal of our constitution if they were ever put forward by the political authorities of that province.

.../4



CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

Having said that, we must look into the possibility of making progress in this direction without the cooperation of the Quebec government. This is why I asked Premier Levesque during the referendum campaign what he would do if the no should win and until now his response has been that he would accept crumbs of autonomy but with some grumbling. But Quebecers do not want crumbs of autonomy or anything else. They have rejected independence, rejected sovereignty-association while massively calling for changes in Canadian federalism. In other words, Quebecers will not be satisfied with crumbs because they want a brand new constitution and all other Canadians, through their political leaders, federal as well as provincial, have indicated that they also want a new constitution."

It is very clear that by renewal the Prime Minister meant more than just repatriation and a Charter of Rights. Change involves "new elements reflecting the most innovative proposals emerging from our consultations..." In addition, "Quebecers will not be satisfied with crumbs because they want a brand new Constitution". Therefore, to meet the expectations raised by the Prime Minister, it would seem self evident that the peoples package is at best a very small first step, but is not in itself sufficient.

.../5



II. The National Assembly Committee

A special Committee of the National Assembly is to meet in Quebec City on August 14-15 to debate the position the government of Quebec should take at the First Ministers Conference in September. It is clearly the goal of the Parti Québécois to achieve a "common front" of all political parties on the so-called traditional demands of Quebec i.e. powers plus a recognition of Quebec's special role in Canada.

It is extremely important that such a common front not be achieved. This can only be done by ensuring that Mr. Ryan and selected members of his caucus are thoroughly briefed on the position of the Federal government especially as there are many issues where our position is not very different from the Beige paper.

III. The Position of Premier Levesque

Premier Levesque has concentrated since June 9 on attacking the Federal government for not recognizing the principle of duality as well as the special position of Quebec as a distinct society in Canada. It appears evident that he will continue on this tack and will approach the First Ministers Conference as the defender of Quebec's special place in Canada against an arrogant Federal government which sees French Canada as a sociological nation no different in kind from Indians or Eskimos. The symbolism to which Mr. Levesque attaches so much importance makes for good news coverage in the Quebec press.



CONFIDENTIAL

- 6 -

We must consider whether it would not be good tactics for the Prime Minister in his opening statement in September to borrow from Bill C-60, from Pepin-Robarts and from the Beige Paper and to recognize the fact that Quebec is the principal home of French Canadians, that it has therefore always played a special role in Canada and will continue to do so. By adopting these tactics and by using a carefully worded statement, it might be possible, without giving anything up at all, to blunt the anticipated attack of Mr. Levesque at least in the area of symbols.

Beyond the area of symbols, the position of Quebec will be that it has no mandate and no intention to give up any provincial powers. Mr. Levesque will present a traditionalist autonomist function in which he will accept all offers of devolution while complaining that they do not go far enough and will oppose anything that in anyway restricts the powers of the National Assembly.

There is no possible approach which will meet the impossible requirements of Mr. Levesque. However, we must keep in mind the political reality that the Parti Québécois cannot afford to be seen to be isolated once again on the issue of the constitution. There is a broad consensus of nine provinces and the Federal government, it may be impossible for Levesque not to sign and still win his election.

.../7



Therefore, the best approach at this stage is probably to ignore the arguments of Levesque on powers items and to concentrate on achieving agreement with the other provinces as broad an area as possible so as to force Quebec to come along.

IV. A Fall Election

The Parti Québécois government will soon have to decide whether to call an election the fall or whether to run the risk of going into the fifth year of its mandate. We must presume for the purposes of this paper that a fall election is likely. The question to be asked is the effect of the various scenarios which are possible after the First Ministers Conference.

An agreement at the First Ministers Conference would probably be very useful for Mr. Levesque as he could argue that he accepted the verdict of May 20 and then negotiated successfully in good faith and is prepared to give renewed federalism a chance.

A scenario where Quebec is isolated after the Conference would be very useful for Mr. Ryan who would argue that Levesque cannot be